Women, Body and Eating: A Social Representational Study in British and Tobagonian Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore women's engagement with body, weight and eating from a socio-cultural perspective. I discuss the limitations of current research on body dissatisfaction and propose that women's negative appraisal of their body needs to be understood as an active engagement with their social context. Research that focuses on the interaction of ethnic/cultural differences and body dissatisfaction seeks to clarify the interrelationship between femininity, gender and culture and suggests that women's dissatisfaction with their body is linked to levels of global Westernisation. My criticism of this research is that it conceptualises culture and social knowledge in a simplistic way. I propose social representations theory and the principles of dialogicality as an alternative research paradigm and argue that such an approach can overcome the dichotomy of individual and social, inner and outer. In order to explore the interaction of the subjective with the social in relation to the negative and positive appraisal of the body an interview study was conducted in two distinct cultural contexts. In depth interviews were conducted with 14 women in the UK and 12 women in Tobago, WI. The thema recognition/disrespect was used as an interpretative frame. The results show that the meanings that were assigned to the body interlinked with socially enacted representations of self, other and femininity. While the thema recognition/disrespect could be seen to be problematised through contradictory conditions of worth in the UK, it was the notion of 'disrespect' in interrelation with representations of others that was foregrounded in women's reflections in Tobago. In both research locations women negotiated constraining or contradictory demands of femininity and 're-presented' themselves through the construction of alternative identities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES

Acknowledgments

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To Maria, Babua, and Ulla

Chapter 1

1. Women, Body and Eating: An Individualised Problem in a Social Context

1.1. Social Representations of Body and Eating: Central Aim and Focus of the Study

The focus of this thesis is on the representations of 'body' and 'eating' in the context of femininity. It aims at the exploration of these concepts from a socio-cultural perspective, namely that of social representations theory, laying particular emphasis on the dialogicality of social realities, i.e. on the interdependence of human phenomena, their cultural-embeddedness, multidimensionality, dynamics and change.

The body and eating as a bodily practice are conceived as being essential dimensions of who we are and how we relate to others. The rigid dichotomy of mental representation versus objective reality is substituted with the notion of embodied experience and a conception of the body as a means of establishing meaning connections (Johnson, 1987). Thus 'body' and 'eating' will be studied as social objects whose contents, or Gestalt[1], is the result of a triadic interaction between self, other and object in socio-cultural space in dialogue. In the same vein , 'representation' will not be used here to refer to a static

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[1] The German word Gestalt is used here to mean the way a thing has been gestellt; i.e., placed or put together. It refers to the object's pattern or configuration.

concept in the minds of people[2] that corresponds to something already existing in the external world of physical objects. It will be used in the sense of 'social representation', meaning it will stand for dynamic and mutually constructed systems of meanings, images and values with the context as a whole giving meaning to its parts.

The starting point of this study is the acknowledgement that women's relationship to body and eating is at the same time idiosyncratic as it is socially situated. Yet the problem of 'disordered' eating and weight concern amongst a large number of women who live in late modern societies has predominately been studied from a positivist and individualistic perspective. Within psychology, a particular type of individualism has been of pervasive and lasting influence, namely that of Cartesian dualism. This is a paradigm which psychology inherited from its parent discipline, philosophy, where Cartesianism marked the beginning of the modern era (Farr, 1991). The Cartesian paradigm is a paradigm of contraries, first and foremost of the body and the mind, and presupposes the existence of distinct entities, i.e. entities defined by separateness, which are immutable and timeless (Sampson, 1985, Marková, 1987).

In mainstream psychology, the prevalence of this paradigm has led to the search for stable underlying regularities located within the physiological, cognitive individual and a neglect of cultural and social constituents (Marková, 1982; Harding and Hintikka, 1983; Hollway, 1989; Hermans and Kempen, 1993). The Cartesian framework in fact excludes, by virtue of its presuppositions, an understanding of the individual mind as a dialogical entity, i.e. an entity defined by its interaction with the environment, which then has a contextualised, mutable and dynamic existence. Within social psychology social representations theory,

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[2] This would be the case in representational theories of mind (RTM), where the concept of mental representation links to the thesis that meaning is information and thinking computation (Fodor, 1998).

however, constitutes an approach, which transgresses this dichotomy of individual and social, as it sees the two as inextricably intertwined as complements of the same whole. Just as the communitarian in philosophy and political science, social representations theory is amongst those socio-cultural theories in psychology, which argue that the individualistic image of the individual is ontologically false. In this thesis I will draw on the ontological presupposition that the genesis of mind can only be understood as a function of the interrelationship of individual and environment, of 'I' and 'Other', a point that has repeatedly been made by G. H. Mead (1934). The presupposition for 'mind', according to Mead, is the social environment, and it is through social interaction that 'mind' can develop and come into existence. As such 'mind' is essentially social, i.e. it is a "product" of social processes (Mead, 1934, p.224). This position is also supported by the research of such developmental psychologists as Trevarthen (1993) and Tomasello (1993, 1999), who argue that the ontogeny of self-concept is intimately related to interpersonal perspective taking and that intersubjectivity is innate.

Although the answer to the question 'what makes social presentations theory a 'theory' may be far from straight forward (see Mosocvici's [2001] more recent contemplation), we may claim that the concept of social representation first and foremost offers a framework from which questions about the social nature of knowledge, common sense, and the shared constitution of social realities can be addressed. Further, social representations, may be understood to refer to a mutual sharing of assumptions and beliefs, in other words presuppositions, that together form a holistic structure in which "the meaning of the 'whole'" is "a function of the meaning of its parts" (Moscovici, 1994, p.169). For the realm of social phenomena this implies also that meaning is a function of the inseparability of the symbolic and the real. As shared knowledge, social representations fulfil two main

functions: they guide sense making in an ongoing process of experiencing and meaning production; and secondly, they function as a relational meaning context through which communication can take place. As Valsiner (2003a) has pointed out, social representations while providing stability through their structure are always "in the making" (Moscovici and Marková, 1998, p.394) the emphasis is therefore on process and change.

It is in relation to this latter aspect that I see the concept of social representations resonating most clearly with a dialogical perspective. Moscovici's analysis of the relation between minority and majority views in a society did begin with the question of how change comes about in a social system. He has shown that a minority, through its consistent behavioural style and the negotiation of conflicting knowledge contents, can not only resist dominant forms of knowledge but also significantly change the majority view (Moscovici, 1976). Dialogue as well as social change, it has to be understood, is driven by a difference in points of view. Subjectivity is therefore not constituted through the dependence of the individual on the group (as for example in Festinger's [1950] theory of social influence) or a merging of minds in uniformity (Marková, 2003). Subjective sense making comprises a negotiation of tensions between meanings including asymmetries at different levels. Within the dialogic exchange of ideas, judgements, and values that defines the social reality in which we are located, individuals are actively engaged in the negotiation of meanings and re-construct their positions in a struggle to maintain a positive sense of self. In taking a dialogical perspective, the emphasis is on the agentic role of the individual, the relation of self and other as co-authors (Bakhtin, 1986).

In the light of these theoretical presuppositions the aim of my study can be declared to be threefold. The intention of this thesis is firstly to provide a reading of women's

4

engagement with, and reflections on the body that is oriented to the interdependence of self, other and object. Secondly, by providing an exploration of the meanings of the 'thin' and 'fat' body, eating and not eating in two culturally distinct societies, I wish to demonstrate that women's problematic relationships to body and eating have to be understood as being situated in particular socio-cultural contexts and cannot be reduced to individual differences. Furthermore, my analysis aims to demonstrate that women are not passive adherents of social messages but draw on meanings of the body to actively position themselves in response to paradoxical demands of social recognition.

1.2   Body and Eating: the 'Problem'

In his analysis of the self in the history of Western thought and culture Yi-Fu Tuan (1982) reminds us that pre-modern societies maintain their social bonds through bodily contact. A lack of bodily contact in modern societies, he argues, is the reason for a lack of cohesiveness of these societies. It is giving rise to the sense of insubstantiality and isolation, which moves increasingly to the forefront of consciousness of modern man and woman. Besides their direct impact on cohesiveness or the human nature in general, bodily practices have had an impact on human societies through the symbolic. Throughout history and across all cultures the body and the conduct that revolves around it have been laden with symbolic significance. Symbolic meaning is implicit in, for example, rules of distance that are delimiting the possibilities of remoteness and nearness of bodies, in what is considered edible and what is not, in upright posture as opposed to bent or kneeling animal-like posture, or in the taboo of sexual nakedness which is linked to the weakness of the flesh, the body as a symbol of pure evil.

Bodily manipulation - one of the means of manipulation being eating - can be seen throughout history to have functioned to express social forms. Bodily manipulation can be viewed as a means to circumscribe social roles and their boundaries and to position us not only within the social hierarchy but within the cosmology of the universe as a whole - to formalise our existence, to confine confusion and chaos. Continuing in the thought of Marcel Mauss, the first sociologist interested in the study of bodily techniques as symbolic systems, Mary Douglas contemplates the body as a microcosm of society:

> "Any culture is a series of related structures which comprise social forms, values, cosmology, the whole of knowledge and through which all experience is mediated. Certain cultural themes are expressed by rites of bodily manipulation...The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know their own society. The rituals work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body."(Mary Douglas, 1966, p. 128)

What are the cultural themes expressed by rites of bodily manipulation in the 21st century Western society? In the course of the last century, changes in the availability of resources, the medical and health spheres, consumption, leisure activity, and the emergence of mass media, particularly visual media, have led to a transformation of the relationship we have to our body (Jodelet, 1984). Transformed has not only been the way we display, exercise and treat the body, but also the ideas that are connected to it. Body maintenance and appearance have gained considerable importance in the Western world, with the management of bodily neediness being commonly advertised as a key to pleasure and success, to moral virtue and health. While the latter are desires that constitute trans-historical human longings, the forms within which they are represented have become

distorted (Featherstone, 1991). 21st century consumer culture is marked by a gap between the promises of its imagery and the exigencies of everyday life, making the realisation of these desires a fallacious endeavour. The contradiction of values of consumer culture imagery has been elaborately demonstrated by the work of Bordo (1993), for example, or Featherstone (1991). It is a contradiction that is embedded in the controversial ideological and cultural demands of our time.

The messages revolving around eating, and food can be taken as an illustration of this contradiction. Eating is still one of the central activities of human beings in the 21st century but has become a controversial act of management and indulging, one that is not without detrimental impact on the quality of life, the physiological and psychological health of individuals. This incongruity is reflected in the messages that are displayed in Western societies around the issue of food. For example, 'eating' appears to stand for 'having a life-style', for comfort, luxury, and satisfaction. On the other hand however, it also seems to stand for 'letting yourself go', a lack of control, excess, and over-indulgence. Eating, as Rozin (1989) remarks, is considered by many as almost as dangerous as not eating.

The controversial Western attitude towards food is especially problematic for the Western woman who has been prescribed the ideal of thinness. However, it is the concept of femininity as such which is controversial. A 'woman' in twentieth-century Western societies is expected to be both successful, in control and liberated from her gender in the career-oriented industrialised society, yet also thin, fragile, an object of lust and provider of emotional sustenance to men and children. The current concerns about food which in fact can be called an epidemic of food worrying (Becker, 1986) are further accompanied by a

high prevalence of disordered and harmful relationships towards food and eating amongst the female population of consumer societies. Eating disorders have been said to have become the most common psychiatric disorders to affect young women in the West (Hsu, 1996). With the prevalence of eating disorders or disordered eating approaching epidemic proportions, research on the aetiology, course and predictive factors of the outcome of eating disorders has greatly increased over he past three decades. The existing body of literature is vast, yet it is dominated by a biomedical, cognitive approach classifying eating disorders as individual pathologies. The search is for abnormalities in the central nervous system, the individual pathological gene, and individual personality traits or family histories as universalistic causal explanations for women's unhealthy relationship to weight and food. Although it has been widely acknowledged that eating disorders are significantly culture-bound (Bruch, 1978; Garner and Garfinkel, 1980; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, and Rodin, 1986; Pilovy and Herman, 2002) - having emerged predominantly in the twentieth century in Western societies and amongst the female population - the sociocultural dimension of eating disorders and its complexity is often neglected in mainstream psychological research. Research in this vein often focuses exclusively on the role of idealised slimness and normative dietary behaviours in triggering and maintaining disordered eating patterns. This focus is reductionist.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter I will critically review current trends in the study of body image disturbance and eating disorder risk factors. I will argue that an exclusive focus on the media or the general process of Westernisation/globalisation neglects the complex interrelation of distinct local perspectives with the social in the production of women's weight concerns. Furthermore, I will argue that current health models reflect a bias towards an individualist conceptualisation of health behaviour. As a result, an

exaggerated focus on the risks of obesity can be seen to contribute to the stigmatisation of the overweight and the legitimisation of the use of unhealthy dieting practises for weight control. Finally, I will draw on and critically discuss post-structuralist and feminist approaches to the study of the body that have rejected a conceptualisation of eating disorders as individual pathologies and demonstrated that gender and the body are multiply produced in sociocultural contexts.

1.2.1 Body Image Disturbance and Dysfunctional Eating Attitudes: Does the Mind Work Like That?

Over the recent decades it has regularly been asserted that the prevalence of eating disorders in women, as well as the number of preadolescent girls who engage in active weight loss, is increasing (e.g Gelder, Gath, Mayou, & Cowen, 1996; Turnbull, Ward, Treasure, Jick, & Derby, 1996; Fombonne, 1998; Lucas, Crowson, O'Fallon & Melton, 1999). The research conducted in this field, as I have already pointed out above, is consequently vast[3], yet maintains a perspective that is framed by a positivist and largely cognitive-behavioural model of individual pathologies. Here, I will focus on the concept of 'body image disturbance' that together with the notion of 'dysfunctional eating attitudes' emerged as a core concept in both prevention and treatment oriented work. Body image dysfunction has often been proposed to be the central antecedent of eating disorders (e.g. Rosen, 1992; Thompson, Heinberg and Altabe, 1999; British Medical Association, 2000; Thompson and Smolak, 2001; Castle and Phillips, 2002). A large number of studies have therefore aimed at the measurement of body image disturbance in the general population.

Research on body image dysfunction has its beginnings in Hilde Bruch's early work on anorexia nervosa (Bruch, 1962). Having observed 12 patients over a ten year period Bruch noted the following three psychological characteristics: "disturbances in body image of delusional proportions; disturbance in the accuracy of the perception or recognition of bodily states e.g., nutritional needs; and an all pervading sense of ineffectiveness" (Bruch, 1962, p. 187). While Bruch's observations were informed by both a medical and psychodynamic model of mental health, her choice of the term 'disturbance' may already reveal that a psychodynamic perspective prevailed in her subsequent work on eating disorders. Constructed as part of a psychodynamic problem the more obvious symptoms of body image disturbance and disturbed eating habits were interpreted in terms of a pseudo-solution to underlying conflicts that were seen to have their roots in unresolved family dynamics, particularly the mother-child relationship (Malson, 1998). However, Bruch's early remarks can be said to have led to an increasingly rigorous investigation into the 'eating disordered' person's perceptions of body image (Van Deusen, 1993). Early studies continued to focus on determining whether or not eating disorders can be linked to a disorder of body image where body size is either overestimated or underestimated (e.g. Slade and Russel, 1973; Crisp and Kalucy, 1974; Garner, Garfinkel, Stancer, and Moldofsky, 1976). The focus then shifted to a determination of the causal factors that may underlie the widespread occurrence of body image disturbance amongst women and the meaning of 'disturbance' became increasingly linked to the notion of cognitive 'dysfunction' (e.g. Powers, Schulman, Gleghorn, and Prange, 1987; Mizes, 1988; Clark, Feldman, and Channon, 1989).

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[3] Four specialised academic journals are currently dedicated to the problem area (i.e. The International Journal of Eating Disorders, The European Eating Disorders Review, Eating Disorders: The Journal of

Embedded in a cognitive framework, body image disturbance was now conceived as a problem of cognitive distortions and maladaptive beliefs. The focus of attention moved to the occurrence of dysfunctional body schemas or biases in information processing that did not translate reality into an accurate mental representation, on the basis of which normal behaviour could otherwise be executed. The underlying assumption of this perspective is that an individual predisposition to a cognitive maladjustment in conjunction with a social trigger, e.g. idealised thinness or the physical effects of dieting, results in the development of the disorder.

While the cognitive approach attends to the content of beliefs and is thus less reductive than a model of disease that focuses on bio-chemical or genetic aberrations, as Malson has pointed out previously (Malson, 1998), the content of individual beliefs is seen to be a function of a mechanistic relation between individual processing and socially transmitted, interfering information. Indeed, it may be claimed that research on body image distortions has not established more than that women who engage in harmful practices of weight control perceive their body negatively and are oriented to a thinness ideal (Malson, 1998). The research, moreover, is complicated by the finding that noneating disordered women also significantly overestimate their body size (Dolan, Birtchnell, and Lacey, 1987; Raudenbush and Zellner, 1997; Sanders and Heiss, 1998); albeit anorexic women's overestimations might be greater and extended to all body parts (Gila, Castro, Toro and Salamero, 1998).

More recently, research has focused on risk factors that promote body image and eating disturbances, particularly the role of internalisation of societal ideals of attractiveness. In

Treatment and Prevention, and Eating Disorders Online)

this research "thin-ideal internalisation refers to the extent to which an individual "buys into" socially defined ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviours designed to produce an approximation of these ideals" (Thompson and Stice, 2001, p.181, emphasis in original). It is consequently argued that through the social reinforcement of the thin-ideal, via firstly the media and secondly significant others, internalisation may lead to body dissatisfaction and the engagement in dieting practises amongst a great number of women. The extent to which these ideals will be internalised, however, is seen to be linked to an increased susceptibility moderated by such risk factors as self-esteem, negative affect, locus of control, and inadequate stress management or social competence (BMA, 2000; Thompson and Stice, 2001).

For example, eating disorder symptom development has been proposed to be predicted by an interaction of a perfectionism trait, body dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem (Vohs, Voelz, Pettit, Bardone, Katz, Abramson, Heatherton, and Joiner, 2001). Similarly, the development of abnormal eating habits in children and adolescents has been associated with low self-and body-esteem (Hoare and Cosgrove, 1998). Women's problematic relationship to body and eating has furthermore been constructed through the concept of self-control. An extreme need for control (Fairburn, Shafran, and Cooper, 1999) or impulsivity together with a fear of a loss of control have been suggested to play a central role in the aetiology of weight concerns (Gowers and Shore, 2001). On the other hand, it has been stressed that having an internal locus of control, i.e. perceiving the outcome of one's actions and life events as contingent upon one's own behaviour and characteristics rather than an external locus of control, would protect against the development of eating symptomatology (Fouts and Vaughan, 2002).

Current approaches to the development of body image and eating disturbance maintain that there needs to be a multidimensional framework for the emergence and treatment of eating disorders, in which biological, personal, behavioural and socio-environmental factors can be accommodated (Halmi, 1997; BMA, 2000). In the proposed multidimensional or so-called bio-psycho-social models of disorder, culture is generally assigned the role of "external trigger which relays information" (BMA, 2000, p.12) about role expectations and the ideal of thinness. While these models aim to establish an interaction of different levels in the constitution of body weight concerns, several points of critique need to be raised.

At the centre of the multifactorial model remains firstly the individual and the dysfunction located within this individual. This individual is furthermore fragmented. It is seen to be constituted through separate and largely pre-existent aggregates of e.g. a mental schema, a genetic predisposition, low self-esteem, a perfectionism trait etc.. Just as there is a maintenance of a mind/body divide, Odgen (2002) has pointed out, there is also the divide of the social and the body. The social becomes an added-on factor. In the role of external trigger it is distinct from individual thinking but interacts with this thinking in that it creates a mismatch between expectation and perceived reality. This sets off the mechanism of dysfunctional processing. Meaning is here construed in terms of a computational equation, albeit one that defaults to error due to a bias in the cognitive make-up of the individual. As Prilleltensky has stressed, the problem is one of reification:

> "...reification is the treatment of one particular instance of a phenomenon as a discrete entity accounting for the phenomenon itself. In the case of human behaviour, certain cognitions that may be involved in the overall phenomenon of behaving are regarded not only as distinct events, standing on their own, but

also as causative forces of the behaviour under examination." (Prilleltensky, 1994, p.90)

The de-emphasis of context and the primacy given to individual processing as the main causative factor that still prevails in models of eating disorders, is conducive to reification. Moreover, taken out of context, psychological concepts such as self-esteem remain unquestioned and acquire the level of taken-for-granted personality dimensions. Yet, a point that I will return to throughout this thesis is that conceptions of self, as well as the psychological constructs that are applied to the individual, are socially constructed and embedded in an ideologically and politically entrenched research context (Prilleltensky, 1994).

The clear distinction made between 'normal' cognitions and 'disturbed' cognitions further reveals the prevalence of an orientation to the biomedical model in cognitive or biopsychosocial frameworks of eating disorder aetiology (Malson, 1998). In accordance with the biomedical model of disease, the identified level of intervention is primarily the individual and the recommended forms of prevention and intervention are expert led education and therapy. The core strategies that prevail in mental health prevention, George Albee maintains, are directly translated from conventional medical intervention methods that were focused on the elimination of transmittable diseases such as smallpox. They are firstly *"to identify the noxious agent* causing the problem and attempt to remove it"*, secondly "to *strengthen the resistance of the host* to the noxious agent", and thirdly "to *prevent transmission* of the noxious agent to the host" (Albee and Ryan, 1998, p. 441-442, emphasis in original). Applying these strategies to psychological well-being amounts not only to a reduction of the socio-cultural context in which beliefs and values are constructed, but also to victim blaming (Ryan, 1971; Crawford, 1977; Prilleltensky, 1994).

In the case of body image disturbance, these strategies merely reinforce a notion of the inadequacy of women. For example, cognitive-behavioural treatments of body image disturbance (e.g. Wilson and Fairburn, 1993; Rosen, 1995; Vitousek, 1995; Williamson, Muller, Reas, and Thaw, 1999) emphasise the need to correct the patient's 'dysfunctional' beliefs and to change the person's 'maladaptive' personality styles. Exposure assignments to distressing aspects of appearance include the wearing of form fitting outfits, eating in public, or accentuating a distressing feature in front of others. Similarly, the BMA's report (2000) identifies as an immediate aim "to strengthen the host against noxious influence" (p. 39), and suggests the education of young people about a wide range of eating disorder related issues. Emphasis is set, moreover, on providing alternative routes for achievement and self-esteem for vulnerable groups. Without having established an understanding of the wider social and ideological context in which body dissatisfaction has emerged as a problem, approaches to prevention of this kind firstly uphold a hierarchical division of expert versus lay knowledge; furthermore they may contribute to a perpetuation of the 'noxious' social environment that creates contradictory positions of individual worth that go far beyond aesthetic ideals.

Aiming to understand the meaningfulness of human experience and the social meaning context in which experiencing is located, is a central concern of critical psychological perspectives (Crossley, 2000). As Crossley has pointed out in reference to Engel's original proposition of the biopsychosocial model, there is an attempt to create a "rational scientific approach to behavioural and psychosocial data" (Engel, 1977, cited in Crossley 2000, p.6) so that psychosocial data can be statistically measured and compared to biomedical variables. While this has had the advantage of putting psychological concerns on the

agenda of medical science (Yardley, 1997, cited in Crossley, 2000, p.4), it has certainly meant a neglect of human sense making. If we consider for example, statements such as "I would like my body to look like the women that appear in TV shows and movies" and "women with toned bodies are more attractive" (Thompson and Stice, 2001, p. 182) that are used to measure thin-ideal-internalisation, little can be said in regard to why these statements may appear to be meaningful in a particular society or how they relate to the lived experience of young women.

It is an approach to the study of attitude that seeks a "substitute of behaviour", thus conceptualises attitude as a "pre-behaviour which would permit them to predict the behaviour" and consequently also to change it (Moscovici and Marková, 1998, p.381). However, the primary question here should be 'what is the attitude an attitude to'? Is the meaning of the object at which it is directed an a priori given or is it in fact constituted through a triadic interdependence of individual, social and object? Taking the latter position means to understand attitudes as expressions of a relation to an object in dialogue with the social knowledge that underlines it. Speaking of body schemata and social representations of the body is therefore not the same. While both, the concept of schema and the concept of social representation, are seen to have the function of orienting the individual to the world there is the important distinction that the former is not concerned with the origin of its content. Furthermore, 'social representation' refers to socially enacted and negotiated meaning constructs that are "out there in the talk and action constituting the social world of the community" (Wagner, Duveen, Farr, Jovchelovitch, Lorenci-Cioldi, Marková, and Rose, 1999, p.121). The different ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie social representations imply that body and eating need to be studied differently. The focus must be on the understanding of language

and beliefs; the ongoing sense making, explaining, reflecting and active re-positioning of individuals in a social context.

1.2.2   The Question of Cultural Differences

Social knowledge, social representations theory proposes, is a function of the juxtaposition of values, beliefs, practices and interactions that are anchored in a historically, economically and politically constituted social context. The cultural specificity of human phenomena is therefore an implicit assumption of social representations theory. In eating disorder research, the question of 'cultural differences' may be expected to be of central relevance. Until recently, eating disorders have been considered to be syndromes of the 'Western' industrialised world – with 'Western' referring primarily to North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand - as they did not seem to manifest in non-Western or developing countries (Gelder et.al., 1996). A review study by Davis and Yager carried out in 1992, however, only yielded a total of 35 studies that had assessed anorexia or bulimia nervosa amongst Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Africans, and Middle Easterners, of which 22 were case reports.

This initial lack of interest in the study of eating disorders in non-Western or non-white cultures can be linked to the early prevalence of two perspectives. There was for one the perspective that eating disorders were psychological problems that afflicted only White, middle or upper class girls. Perceived to be bound to wealth and privileges, the study of other societal groups was rendered irrelevant; a view that has finally been proven wrong (Gard and Freeman, 1996; Neumar-Sztainer, Story, Falkner, Beuhrig, and Resnick, 1999). For the other, anorexia and bulimia nervosa were construed as culture-bound syndromes, given the presupposition that they were nevertheless psychiatric conditions. Culture was

therefore seen to play a part only in shaping the final presentation of the disorder but was not considered to constitute in itself a sufficient causative force (Nasser, 1997).

As Nasser (1997) has pointed out, if we consider psychiatric conditions to be universally true, the meaning of the term cultural-boundedness corresponds to a view of culture as pathoplastic rather than pathogenic. This means that the presentation or absence of eating disorders in other cultural groups could be labelled 'atypical' but would still be considered to conform to the one diagnostic system. This perspective is also illustrated by the fact that cases of medieval female asceticism, i.e. women who were fasting for the purpose of uniting themselves with Christ through the emulation of his suffering on the cross (Lester, 1995), as well as the widespread diagnosis of female hysteria in the 19th century, are often classified as early cases of anorexia nervosa, albeit atypical in their presentation due to the cultural circumstance of the time (Russel, 1995); they are viewed, in others words, as cases of anorexia or bulimia "in disguise" (Bell, 1985). A pathogenic perspective, on the other hand, would understand these phenomena to be reactions to specific social conditions. In her analysis of asceticism amongst medieval women, Lester concluded:

> "...while their *behaviours* may be similar to those of anorexic and bulimic
> women, the *ideational system* accompanying these behaviours, and the
> significance of these behaviours for the individual, appears to be quite
> different...the way in which food behaviours are understood by the individual
> and the ultimate "goal" of these practices (and the significance of the goal) are
> unique products of the particular cultural context in which they are found."
> (Lester, 1995, p. 215, emphasis in original)

To understand eating disorders to be culture-bound phenomena would, if we follow Lester's perspective, entail that the diagnostic labels of anorexia and bulimia must not be

used to explain all unusual food practices including those that are today considered abnormal. Indeed, the practices of purging, fasting and vomiting were historically widely prevalent and at times advocated by medical practitioners (Nasser, 1993).

An increasing number of comparative studies were, however, carried out throughout the late 80s and 90s. These studies focused firstly on the prevalence of eating disorders amongst women from ethnic minorities who were living in Western countries. Studies would focus on the comparison of the clinical presentation of cases of anorexia or bulimia in non Caucasian females (e.g. Kope and Sack, 1987; Holden and Robinson, 1988, Lacey and Dolan, 1988), aiming to assess the interaction of ethnicity specific differences with individual differences, as well as the experience of immigration. An increasing number of studies then focused on the assessment of risk factors, namely body dissatisfaction and eating attitudes in different ethnic groups. Initially the results of these studies seemed to indicate that non-Caucasian women were less likely to be dissatisfied with their body than Caucasian women. For example, Rosen and Gross (1987) reported a general increase in the prevalence of weight reduction practices amongst high school students but noted that black female students were more likely to aim at a weight gain. Wardle and Marsland (1990) interviewed 846 children form multicultural schools in London and contended that weight concerns as well as dieting practices were higher in white girls than black or Asian girls. Similarly, Rucker and Cash (1992) in an assessment of multiple facets of body image and eating attitudes in college women maintained that black women held more favourable body image attitudes and engaged less frequently in eating restraint than white women.

The results of subsequent studies however, tend to report a reverse of these findings. Women from ethnic minorities were now found to show similar levels of body image disturbance, thinness ideation, and disordered eating attitudes as white women or were indeed considered to be at a greater risk of developing eating disorders. Comparing a total of 939 adolescent girls through an assessment of age, ethnicity, desired body shape, parent education, mother's and father's body shapes, pubertal age, and body dissatisfaction, Robinson et al. concluded that the prevalence of body dissatisfaction amongst Asian and Hispanic girls could be predictive of elevated rates of clinical eating disorders in these ethnic groups (Robinson, Killen, Litt, Hamer, Wilson, Haydel, Hayward, and Taylor, 1996).

Their results indicated for example, that white, Asian and Hispanic girls did not differ in regard to their desired body shape but that body dissatisfaction was more closely associated with measures of actual fatness among whites yet to a lesser degree among Asian and Hispanic girls; i.e. even very skinny girls in these ethnic groups were significantly dissatisfied with their bodies. The authors further concluded that there was the possibility of an under-recognition of clinical eating disorders in non-white girls, as well as the possibility that factors in the family or cultural environment of non-White girls may help to prevent the progression from body dissatisfaction to eating disorders. Similar findings have been reported in subsequent studies (Joiner and Kashubeck, 1996; French, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Downes, Resnick, and Blum, 1997; Sanders and Heiss, 1998; Cachelin, Veisel, Barzegarnazari, and Striegel-Moore, 2000).

Studies that aimed at the assessment of ethnicity and body dissatisfaction, such as the ones cited above, clearly contributed to the fact that a question about the role of culture was

increasingly considered in eating disorder research. The concept of 'ethnicity' may here be seen to constitute a more operational substitute for the less clearly defined concept of 'culture'. However, the use of the concept of ethnicity may equally also lead to an elusion of the role of culture. Namely, when ethnicity is not considered as a socially constructed concept but equated with race or nationality (Nasser, 1997). 'Culture' therefore becomes reduced to racial differences or generalised attributes of national identity that enter into the analysis of women's relationships with body and eating as fixed and pre-determined factors. This means to revert to the positivist individualistic model that I discussed in the preceding section. The further large scale measurement of the interaction of ethnicity with risk factors such as body image disturbance or unhealthy eating attitudes, as recommended by Robinson et al. (1996), leaves unanswered questions about the cultural significance of women's engagement with the 'thin' or 'fat' body in a dynamic and always changing social context.

In parallel to the perceived rise in the prevalence of eating disorder symptoms among ethnic minorities in Western countries, there was an increasing number of reports about the emergence of eating disorders in countries that had been considered to be immune to them. Some of this research was a reaction to conceptions of the 'other' culture as separate and unchanging that would determine women's traditional role in society to an extent that a concern with the feminine body or eating could not arise (e.g. Nasser, 1997). Increasingly, as I have discussed above, culture was also assigned the role of 'trigger' in cognitive models of eating disorder development and the interest was therefore in the impact of 'Westernisation' and global media on female beauty ideals. The outcomes of these studies supported the view that eating disorders were becoming a global problem. Thus, there has been a rapid increase in the number of eating disorder cases in Japan over recent decades

(Nogami, 1997) and increasing rates of body dissatisfaction and fat concerns have been reported among female high school students in China, particularly in Hong Kong (Lee and Lee, 2000). In Egypt a thinness ideal was reported to become more prevalent and abnormal eating attitudes were considered to be on the rise among teenage girls (Ford, Dolan, and Evans, 1990; Nasser, 1994). Female university students in Russia were recently found to score higher than British women on the eating disorder inventory and showed a greater drive for thinness despite having a lower actual body mass index (O'Keefe and Lovell, 1999). Similarly, leGrange et al. found that black South African students scored significantly higher on eating attitude tests than their Euro-African fellow students (leGrange, Telch, Tibbs, 1998). Significant levels of body dissatisfaction can also be seen to be reported in large samples from Argentina and Mexico (Alvarez Tapia, Franco Pardes, Mancilla Diaz, Alvarez Rayon, and Lopez Aguilar, 2000; Casullo, Gonzalez Barron, and Sifre, 2000).

A number of review studies (e.g. Nasser, 1997, or Miller and Pumariega, 2001) further support the impression that there is now little difference between cultures in regard to women's body dissatisfaction and concerns about eating due to a globalisation of culture (reinforced by the media and free market economies) that creates not only the isolation of individuals but also pronounced insecurities for women. In fact, Nasser has argued:

> "Human distress is currently being shaped by more or less the same forces. We will certainly be ill advised if we continue to believe that there are isolated pockets of humanity that are remote from these forces. Even if there are still such groups, it is debatable that we would be better informed about the cultural interactions with psychopathology if we studied them." (Nasser, 1997, p.105-106).

That cultural change and modernisation may indeed be in the foreground of the development of eating disorder symptoms has also been pointed out by other researchers (Littlewood, 1995; Katzman and Lee, 1997; Lee and Lee, 2000; Miller and Pumariega, 2001). Littlewood for example, offers a reading of the emergence of eating disorders in South Asia that proposes self-starvation as a strategy of active self-renunciation and determination. Anorexia is thus understood as a reaction to experiences of constraint that occur in relation to the confrontation with ambivalent cultural demands, rather than a disordered concern about fatness and thin beauty ideals. In fact, it has been found that South Asian women diagnosed with anorexia nervosa did not display a fear of fatness that is so common in Western countries (Lee, Ho, and Hsu, 1993). Perspectives such as these acknowledge culture as pathogenic and seek to capture the impact of cultural processes on individual well-being. Yet an understanding of cultural change as an overinclusive process of Westernisation that affects all societies in a similar way might be problematic. It infers firstly a simple division between modern Western knowledge and uniform traditional knowledge and a replacement of the latter by the former. It neglects that new and old knowledge may interact in a culturally specific way and may not produce the same conflicts in all cultural contexts. Moreover, the cross-cultural research carried out in this field generally reverts to the measurement of 'Westernisation' or ' acculturation' as test variables, without addressing the local knowledge and meaning context that is brought into the test situation. Or, indeed, Westernisation has been inferred to take place as a result of media exposure.

That the interaction of culture, femininity and eating is complex and may not be captured by a research approach that neglects local meanings is indicated by the inconclusive

findings of studies that have focused on the comparison of black and white women's attitudes to body image, weight, and eating. Women of African descent constitute an ethnic group which raises a number of questions in regard to the proposed protective or vulnerability enhancing role of cultural differences. Overall, research on ethnicity and body image disturbance has indicated that, compared to white women, women of African descent are more satisfied with their appearance, even though their body weight is on average higher than that of white women (Ofosu, Lafreniere, and Senn, 1998). Given that body image dissatisfaction has been identified as one of the strongest risk factors for eating disturbances, as I have discussed above, black women were assumed to be largely protected against eating disorders. In addition, researchers pointed to the finding that men of African descent showed a preference for a larger female figure and that these "racial differences" in male preference may be responsible for "racial body dissatisfaction differences" among women (Rosen, Brown, Braden, Dorsett, Franklin, Garlington, Kent, Lewis, and Petty, 1993, p.601).

Yet the findings of comparative studies carried out in the US and UK over the last decade only partly confirm these hypotheses. While it is repeatedly shown that black women hold more positive attitudes towards body image and weight (e.g. Akan and Grilo, 1995; Altabe, 1998; Miller, Gleaves, Hirsch, Green, Snow, and Corbett, 2000) there have also been findings that indicate that there is little difference between black and white women in regard to eating disturbance or body dissatisfaction (e.g. Wilfley, Schreiber, Pike, Striegel-Moore, Wright, Rodin, 1996; Caldwell, Brownell, Wilfley, 1997; Cachelin, Veisel, Barzegarnazari, Striegel-Moore, 2000). Reiss (1996) has found significantly higher levels of disordered eating attitudes and behaviour among African-Caribbean women in the UK (Reiss, 1996) and it has been pointed out that African-American women seem to be more

likely to engage in bulimic type behaviours (Striegel-Moore, Wilfley, Pike, Dohm, and Fairburn, 2000). Levels of acculturation on the other hand, i.e. internalisation of societal beliefs about attractiveness and identification with white culture seemed to be unrelated to these findings (Akan and Grilo, 1995).

Two recent meta-analyses of studies that compared non-white with white women in regard to eating disturbances further complicate the picture (Wildes and Emery, 2001; O'Neill, 2003). Wildes And Emery (2001), examined data obtained from 9937 Caucasian and 5997 African-descent participants as well as smaller samples from other ethnic groups. They concluded that white women overall experienced greater eating disturbance and body dissatisfaction than non-white women. Their examination also did not support the relationship between acculturation and eating pathology, but the authors point out that there is considerable inconsistency and lack of clarity in the use of constructs linked to 'acculturation'.

O'Neill, who unlike Wildes and Emery included only studies that focused on African American and white women residing in the US, argues that the difference between these two groups of women in regard to eating disturbances, was only small. In regard to bulimia and binge eating differences were indeed not significant despite the fact that African American women showed fewer risk factors such as body dissatisfaction. A surprising finding was that black college women seemed to experience significantly fewer symptoms of eating disturbances and body dissatisfaction than white college women, but that in high school or non-clinic samples levels of disturbances in the two groups were similar (Wildes and Emery, 2001). This finding goes against the expectation that an

orientation to socio-economic status and educational achievement may increase the risk of eating disorder development.

Both studies argued that the greatest weakness of research conducted in this field is the use of Western diagnostic instruments and constructs. As Wildes and Emery pointed out, "virtually all of the studies examined for inclusion for the present analysis failed to take into account different definitions of beauty and ideas about food" (Wildes and Emery, 2001, p.542). Useful insight is here provided by Parker et al.'s study, which revealed that a survey primarily designed for a white population masked important differences that existed between the African American and white girls who participated in their study (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims and Ritenbaum,1995). Initial survey results, in which 54% of the African American girls said they were trying to lose weight compared to 44% of the White girls, did not reflect the differences in body image and perceptions of self that African American girls had expressed during focus groups and interviews. Moreover, African American girls seemed to be able to switch between answering questions from the perspective of white girls oriented to white beauty ideals or the perspective of African American girls oriented to black ideals.

In conclusion, the incongruities contained in the research that I reviewed in this section point to a complex interplay of culture, identity and idiosyncratic experiences in the production of women's relationships to body and eating. Because neither Black women nor non-Western women constitute a homogeneous group, it is important to understand 'culture' to be polyphonic and always changing. This means to make the understanding of meaning contexts a research priority. As Katzman and Lee (1997) have pointed out, the use of eating disorder scales creates "a false sense of knowledge" (p.391) and does not

allow a meaning-centred analysis of the 'problem'. Narrow definitions of 'acculturation' as well as generalisations such as 'global Westernisation' or "cultural change itself" (Miller and Pumariega, 2001, p.104) as underlying causes for results of surveys that show an increase in cases of 'anorexia' or 'bulimia nervosa', all seem to neglect the lived experiences of women in Western and non-Western cultures. In his critical analysis of cross-cultural studies in social psychology, Faucheux (1976) already stressed that a necessary condition for understanding 'cultural reality' is to become aware of one's own culture and that this is only possible in dialogue with other cultures. In addition, the testing of a phenomenon must be grounded in a theory that accounts for culture as integral part of our social relations. "Unless one develops at once both the object and the theory", Faucheux concludes, "there is something like a vicious circle...One might either err blindly at the phenomenal level or make a shred theoretical break-through off-target." (p.310). This is a point to which I will return in Chapter 2.

1.2.3   The Role of Culture: Body, Eating and the Media?

Since the early stages of eating disorder research, the media have been considered to play a central role in predisposing women to body dissatisfaction and a drive for thinness (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, and Thompson, 1980; Freedman, 1984; Silverstein, Peterson, and Perdue, 1986; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, and Rodin, 1986). As I have indicated in my review of the literature above, the concept of body image disturbance as well as the notion of Westernisation have been closely linked to a view of the media, namely television, magazines and advertisements as powerful transmitters, or even primary cause of an idealisation of the thin female body. The increasing shift towards slim stereotypes of female beauty in the media that could be seen to parallel the increase of weight and eating related concerns amongst women in the US has been documented in a number of studies.

Most frequently quoted in this regard is Garner and colleagues' (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, and Thompson, 1980) analysis of *Playboy* centrefolds and Miss America Pageant contestants over the years 1959-1978 that showed a continuous decrease in body measurements and weights. This shift towards a thinner ideal was found to be paralleled by a simultaneous increase in the number of dieting articles published in women's magazines. A similar analysis has been provided by Silverstein, Peterson and Perdue (1986), who measured women depicted in photographs in two popular women's magazines, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Vogue*, published between the years 1901-1981, revealing an increasingly slim standard of female attractiveness. Guillen and Barr (1994) analysed nutrition and fitness messages presented between 1970-1990 in a magazine for adolescent women and found that weight loss and physical attractiveness were the ultimate reasons given for an adherence to nutrition or fitness plans. Again, Guillen and Barr found that there was a simultaneous decrease of the body measurements of the models depicted in this magazine over the years.

For one, these findings were understood as a call for experimental studies that could show that media exposure had a direct effect on body image and more significantly, behaviour itself. The two standard experimental designs here are: a) the exposure of women to pictures or television footage which either correspond to the thin societal ideal or divert from it, combined with the assessment of women's responses to body satisfaction, self-esteem or eating attitude scales, and b) the assessment of women's long-term media exposure through self-rating, i.e. how frequently they read or watch what kind of magazine or television show, in correlation to their scores on eating disorder and related scales. Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein (1994), drawing on the latter design, provided first evidence that there was a direct relation between media exposure and eating disorder

symptomatology. In addition, their analysis of the responses given by female college undergraduates seemed to reveal an indirect link between media exposure and eating disorders through gender-role endorsement, ideal body stereotype internalisation and body dissatisfaction.

Strong evidence comes from the research conducted by Becker and colleagues in Fiji, where television was introduced for the first time in 1995 (Becker, Burwell, Herzog, Hamburg, and Gilman, 2002). Fiji had a very low rate of eating disorders and traditionally the preference was for larger shapes in both sexes. Becker's survey of secondary school girls, carried out first in 1995 three weeks after the introduction of Western television and then again in 1998, revealed that there was a significant increase in weight loss behaviours, including vomiting among girls and a desire to emulate the behaviour and appearance of the characters seen in the television programmes. While I would maintain that these findings have to be understood in relation to the specific cultural context that constituted the lived reality in which these media messages were received by the young women, Becker's research has also been read as evidence for the media's primary role in inducing body image and eating disturbances in women.

Although I will argue shortly that an exclusive focus on media exposure in relation to the supposed eating disorder risk factors body image disturbance, drive for thinness, and internalisation is problematic, it should be noted that research as the one cited above has contributed to the general acknowledgement of socio-cultural pressures in the aetiology of eating disorders. While a concern for the content *and* context of sociocultural factors, such as the representation of women in the media, moved to the background in the subsequent quest to discover the causal mechanism that underlies 'disordered' eating, a concern for the

wider meaning context of media messages was certainly reflected in the initial analysis of media exposure (e.g. Freedman, 1984; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986; Stice et al. 1994). Striegel-Moore et al. for example, set out to answer the questions of 'why women?' and 'why now?', besides looking for individual differences that lead some women to develop eating disorders but not others. Their analysis emphasised aspects of conflicting gender roles in late modern societies and aspects of identity construction during adolescence. Thinness was addressed as an antithesis to the traditional and arguably inferior role of women as wife and mother and its association with the ample female body. In addition, thinness was understood to gain significance particularly in a competitive environment where women had to display ambition and power and where female thinness could be read as a personal achievement. Their further hypotheses were, nevertheless that the women at greater risk for bulimia would be those that showed a greater internalisation of "mores" (p.247) about thinness and attractiveness as well as a stronger adherence to an ideal of femininity, with class and personality traits being contributing factors.

Hypotheses such as these revert to a view of women as 'dupes' of societal ideals that are reinforced through media messages. It is particularly this positioning of women as inferior, in media representations just as in psychological theories, that has prompted a feminist approach to the issue of 'fat' and beauty (Chernin, 1983; Orbach, 1986; Woolf, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Kilbourne, 1994). Kilbourne's (1994) analysis of advertisements for dieting products, cigarettes and (other) beauty products stresses that the images and rhetoric used in these ads becomes meaningful in relation to the real life discriminations that women are faced with in late modern societies. Thus it is not thinness per se but the connotation of thinness with liberation, independence and freedom that becomes important for women's self-understanding. Kilbourne (1994) argues that the focus on thinness

exercised by society and exploited by the media diverts attention form the actual limits that are set against women's potential gain of power. The rhetoric of ads is underlined by a prescriptive regulating of the female body. The ideal of thinness is framed by a promise of success but clearly defines women's space and renders them physically and symbolically powerless. Moreover ads often allude to the religious and moral connotations of female food consumption, for example when fattening food is portrayed as temptation and sin and diet food as salvation; when diet creates the safe context in which women may 'unleash' and indulge in their (sexual) desires. These meanings have their root not in new beauty ideals but are continuations of dominant European traditions of thought that have functioned to reinforce a clear gender division in society.

Bordo (1993) has reminded us that rather than constructing the media and fashion industry as the sole enemy, attention must be directed at the question why thinness has become such a dominant cultural ideal. Thus, on a very fundamental level our thinking about the body is entrenched in a dualistic conception of mind and body that goes back to the thinking of Plato, Augustine and Descartes and can be found at the centre of Christianity's ethic of anti-sexuality. In Cartesian Dualism the body is experienced as alien to the self and as an 'enemy' of mindful intention; it needs to be controlled, if not annulled through the 'mastery' of mind. With the body being traditionally equated with the feminine, 'woman' too becomes a 'too much'. This binary way of thinking not only complements but also justifies an ideology of individual responsibility and an idea of unlimited opportunities that was significantly fuelled by an economic boom and an era of right wing politics in the 1980s (Prilleltensky, 1994).

In her analysis of contemporary advertisements, Bordo illustrates how the media manipulate rather than invent problems that psychology and popular discourse have targeted as characteristic dilemmas of the modern woman. She observes, for example, that " 'control' – a word that rarely used to appear in commercial contexts – has become a common trope in advertisements for products as disparate as mascara" (Bordo, 1993, p.105). The advertisements she refers to read "Perfect Pen Eyeliner. Puts you in control. And isn't that nice for a change?" and "Control. I strive for it. My cat achieves it" (p. 105) for a deodorant. The rhetoric deployed in advertisement that are directed at the male consumer, in contrast, speaks of a mastery and control of the world and others ("Now it's easier than ever to achieve a position of power over Manhattan" or "Don't just serve. Rule", p.105).

The media can be seen to play an important role in reinforcing a dominant ideology and the social control of women's bodies. An analysis of the media can, consequently, tell us a lot about the organisation of shared knowledge as well as the transformation of dominant social representations. Research on social representations has frequently drawn on media analyses, for example in the study of the generation and spreading of representations of psychoanalysis (Moscovici, 1976), representations of handicap (Farr, 1995), representations of AIDS (Kitzinger, 1995) and representations of madness (Rose, 1998). However, people's identities are, Bordo (1993) stresses not solely formed in interaction with such images. In eating disorder research, there is the risk that a focus on the media as core sociocultural factor (as, for example, in the recent report of the British Medical Association, 2000) results in a neglect of the wider cultural context in which women are engaged.

A review of this research reveals that a narrow conceptualisation of the relation between media exposure and eating disorder risk factors or symptomatology prevails. Thus the finding that women shift towards negative mood and body dissatisfaction when shown photographs of thin models is often explained through the internalisation of media information and heightened appearance comparison tendencies (e.g. Wilcox and Laird, 2000; van den Berg, Thompson, Obremski-Brandon, and Coovert, 2002). Wilcox and Laird for example, propose that women who rely on personal cues for self-perception will engage in a comparison of their actual appearance with the media image and will experience discomfort. Women who rely on situational cues on the other hand, will engage in identification and will not experience discomfort. Such a theorisation of women's reactions to media images is construed within an entirely individualistic perspective and in absence of any consideration of social meanings. As in the hypotheses proposed by Striegel-Moore et al. cited above, what is implicitly suggested is that women's thinking is faulty or maladaptive. In addition, the concept of 'narcissism' (Myers and Biocca) or 'perfectionism' (van den Berg et al., 2002) has been evoked to give such perspectives further theoretical weight.

From here the link is easily made to an understanding of eating disorders as a 'slimmer's disease' that affects women who 'over-adhere' to societal beauty ideals (see Malson, 1992 and 1998, for a discussion of this perspective). Eating disorders are trivialised as being about dieting, vanity, and the media. This is a discourse, Malson (1998) points out, that is also often taken up in media features about eating disorders. Thus, a representation of women as childlike and in need of correction is recycled and reproduced on multiple levels. I will not negate that the media retain a powerful presence in modern societies. Their contribution to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating is certainly significant and

a change in the depiction of women is long overdue. I will argue however, that women actively position and re-position themselves in a context of contradictory social demands, pressures and conditions of worth. Rather then being simply oriented to the beauty ideal of thinness, women engage in a dialogue with socially enacted beliefs and practices on which the media draw to sell their otherwise meaningless products.

1.2.4 Expert Representations of Weight Control: Body Weight as an Object of 'Medicalisation' and 'Healthism'

An analysis of the shift towards an ever thinner beauty ideal needs to pay attention also to the fact that weight loss has become a major public health concern. The practice of dieting and other weight loss behaviours did not only increase in parallel to the depiction of thin women in the media but also in parallel to an intensified health priority to eliminate and prevent obesity (Cogan and Ernsberger, 1999). Television has become the primary medium through which health campaigns seek with persistent regularity to alert the public of the risks of being 'overweight'. Due to its associated health risks, particularly type-2 diabetes and heart disease, obesity has been construed as a medical condition that requires treatment. The treatment that continues to be mainly prescribed is a strict diet as a means to achieve weight loss. This perspective is what some have called a "weight-centred approach towards health" (Berg, 1999; Cogan and Ernsberger, 1999, p.188). Weight loss, rather than good health at any size, has become foregrounded in understandings of health. As Berg has argued, "the current paradigm or medical model is weight-centred" in the sense that "it promotes an anti-obesity campaign that suggests only thin people can be healthy" (p.114).

Although health risks can certainly be associated with states of obesity, minimal attention seems to be paid to the risks that accompany weight loss behaviour and the fact that weight loss is rarely achieved in the long-term or only through drastic means. In fact there is growing evidence that the costs of weight loss efforts largely outweigh the assumed benefits (Berg, 1999; Ernsberger and Koltesky, 1999; Miller, 1999). Risky yet popular weight loss methods such as the use of dieting pills, semistarvation or other food restriction diets, stomach reduction surgery, purging, laxatives etc., have repeatedly been shown to lead to serious health problems including death (see Berg, 1999, for a review of this research). Moreover, the physical changes that accompany weight loss can be seen to have adverse effects on health, for example through an increased risk of osteoporosis due to a loss of bone minerals (Berg, 1999).

In an extensive review of studies on weight, disease, and mortality Ernsberger and Koltesky (1999) concluded that there is no strong evidence that supports the assumption that obesity leads to ill health. In fact they argued that research indicates that moderate obesity could be a health buffer. Chronic diseases such as type-2 diabetes, which are commonly thought to be caused by obesity, were more clearly linked to genetic factors and weight gain seemed to be a concurrent condition of this genetic risk. Weight loss also did not constitute a factor that could significantly improve the health of sufferers' of chronic conditions, but indeed seemed to be linked to additional risks. Hypertension for example, appeared to be caused by weight fluctuations that result from increased efforts to lose weight. Moreover, there seems to be an inverse relationship between overall rates of obesity and mortality. Although the increase of rates of obesity has been regularly asserted in Western population samples, mortality rates have at the same time declined. Ernsberger and Koltesky (1999) conclude that attention has to be paid to the fact that there are

advantages as well as disadvantages to being heavy and that being underweight constitutes a similar if not greater health hazard. The focus in health promotion should therefore be on positive lifestyle changes, not weight loss. Miller (1999) for example, has demonstrated that moderate but regular exercise without weight loss can by itself reduce the health risks that have commonly been associated with obesity.

Decisions such as the lowering of the obesity cut-off point to a body mass index of 25 – which means that 55% of all Americans are considered overweight and in need of losing weight – contribute to the impression that a "thinness bias" (Cogan and Ernsberger, 1999) prevails amongst health professionals rather than young women who are dissatisfied with their appearance. Health professionals seem to make the repeated error of attributing greater risks to obesity while only giving minimal weight to the health damages associated to weight loss efforts. Rothblum (1999) has demonstrated how psychologists in their roles as researchers, teachers, and expert voice in the media often perpetuate misinformation about weight and dieting. For example, the assumption that weight is under one's control, in other words that it can be changed at will. This is an assumption that is not only misinformed (Ernsberger and Cogan, 1999) but that also provokes negative psychological consequences. Believing that one's weight is attributable to one's qualities as a person suggests that being overweight is a personality flaw; not being able to attain one's 'perfect' weight will inevitably result in negative self appraisal. Moreover, this belief allows the increased stigmatisation of the overweight by those who have the 'ideal' weight (Rothblum, 1999). Not taking into account these psychological consequences, Rothblum argued, researchers and therapists may encourage the internal attribution of weight control because it may increase a person's weight loss efforts and bring about a more rapid, 'successful' weight reduction.

Despite the fact that obesity was not included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV, it is frequently included in textbooks for clinical or abnormal psychology. Rothblum (1999) analysed these texts and found that obesity is rarely addressed in terms of dieting risks and stigma. It is however, often included within a category of 'addiction' problems. Under headings such as "causes of persistent overeating" (Carson, Butcher, and Mineka, 1998, *Abnormal Psychology in Modern Life*, 10th edition, cited in Rothblum) a 'lack of self-motivation' can be seen to be listed among the main reasons for unsuccessful long-term weight reduction. In Peterson's (1996) *The Psychology of Abnormality* one can, for example, read:

> "The physical health consequences of obesity are well documented and need little elaboration…there is no shortage of treatment for this disorder, from biomedical to psychological…people cannot maintain weight loss if they go back to the style of life that led them to gain weight in the first place. This sounds commonsensical, but is obviously a message that the general public don't want to hear…The only way to keep weight off once it has been lost is to literally change one's lifestyle, eating less and/or exercising more for the rest of one's days….This conclusion follows from studies of interventions that work in the long run, strategies that teach people to approach eating in a self-consciously moderate way" (p.435, cited in Rothblum, 1999, 364-365).

Despite there being a significant number of research findings indicating that obesity cannot be equated with ill health and premature death (see e.g. Ernsberger and Koltesky, 1999), the existence of a direct causal link between obesity and illness is here construed as an obvious fact. Moreover, the author suggests that people are overweight because they do not want to listen to scientific truths but continue to lead their life in an irrational, non-

conscious and undisciplined way. There is therefore a clear distinction made between scientific thinking, lay thinking and the thinking of the 'disordered'. The rationale is then that it is the obese who have to be blamed for failing to lose weight and consequently for failing to be healthy.

The model of health inherent in such perspectives of obesity is one that emphasises lifestyle changes and individual responsibility. As Crawford (1980) has previously argued it is a model of health promotion that is driven by and effects victim blaming; 'health' is turned into the 'moral'. The concept of health has gained such importance for personal and social evaluation in the modern West that it has taken on the form of a new morality. Maintaining good health through particular individual lifestyles has thus become a supreme value (Crawford, 1984). "Health", Crawford argues, "substitutes for salvation and becomes a salvation of its own" (Crawford, 1984, p.63). Ill health consequently, is viewed as moral failure. Within this "healthism" (Crawford, 1980), body weight has become a central sign of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour and 'good' and 'bad' health. That 'fat' means 'ill' and a lack of self-control is so deeply embedded in our thinking that anti-fat prejudice remains one of the acceptable discriminations and prejudices of our time (Rothblum, 1994).

Figure 1.1 illustrates how this representation of the obese is frequently taken up in the media. The focus of the article to the left is on an eleven year old girl who is claimed to weigh 20 stones. The message is clear and simple: if she doesn't stop eating or gets a stomach-stapling operation, she may die. Despite this threat, Gemma does not seem to show any remorse; she "is still piling on the pounds". Through the juxtaposition of expert versus lay opinion there is a suggestion that people who are overweight are not only

38

14m face death in new famine

BY GEORGINA LITTLEJOHN

A NEW food crisis in the Horn of Africa threatens up to 14million people with starvation – in addition to 14million already facing disaster elsewhere in the continent.

Crop failures, caused by changing weather patterns, also threaten millions more people in places as far afield as Central America and North Korea, the United Nations warned yesterday.

The UN said the crisis was caused by failed or late rains and other weather-related disasters.

James Morris, executive director of the UN World Food Programme, said the situation was so severe it could overwhelm relief agencies.

'The system is under serious strain. We risk being swamped. We are experiencing a period of unprecedented crises,' he added. 'For us to do our work, we need more help than we have ever asked for in the past.'

The latest crisis in the Horn of Africa has put 5.2million people in Ethiopia and two-thirds of the population of Eritrea at risk. The UN would need 800,000 tons of emergency food aid next year alone just to keep people alive.

Aid agencies estimate 14.4million people in southern Africa face famine because of a lethal combination of failed rains, poor agricultural policies and other 'mistakes' by governments. Nearly half are in Zimbabwe, with neighbouring countries such as Malawi and Mozambique also affected. The UN must also try to feed 6.5million people in North Korea, 1.5million in Central America and 10million in Afghanistan.

The 20stone 11-year-old

A GIRL of 11 who weighs 20st has been told by her GP she may die without a stomach-stapling operation. Gemma Taylor, who is 5ft 7in and wears size 30 clothes, is still piling on the pounds. Her veins have started to collapse and she finds it difficult to breathe. But she cannot be operated on until she is 17. The youngster, from Leeds, who has been taunted by her fellow pupils, said she ate only 1,500 calories a day. 'People think I eat too much, but I don't,' she added. The family GP warned Gemma's parents, Karen and Alfred – both of whom are obese – their daughter was bingeing but they resented the accusation. Obesity surgeon Simon Dexter said it was 'very difficult' to maintain a 20st frame without eating excessively.

Gemma Taylor, with her sister Kimberley, 18, who weighs 7st

Picture: Ross Parry

Figure 1.1

lacking self-control but are also lying to themselves (i.e. both Gemma and her obese parents are denying that she is bingeing). This moral message is further enhanced through the juxtaposition with the article to the right. While people are dying of famine elsewhere in the world, some people do not seem to be able to set themselves any limits. The moral overtones - the allusions to greed and self-indulgence - need no further explanation.

We may claim, as in the case of eating disorders and the media, that a focus on the risks of obesity and individual behaviour diverts attention from social or macro-level sources of ill health. Conrad (1992) has argued that the "medicalisation" of phenomena constitutes one form of social control. Through the medicalisation of weight, authority is gained to define behaviours, persons and things and to individualise what might otherwise be seen as a collective problem. In their review of studies, Ernsberger and Koltesky (1999) emphasised for example, that the increased mortality and ill health found amongst lower socio-economic groups cannot be ascribed to higher levels of obesity but to the stresses of poverty and limited access to health services. Similarly, Wilkinson (1996) has demonstrated that societies are the more unhealthy the less they are egalitarian and socially cohesive. An individualisation of the 'problem' obesity on the other hand, implies that individuals have free choice over whether they are healthy or not (Germov and Williams, 1996).

In conclusion, the 'medicalisation' of weight together with expert discourses within which obesity is constructed as an individualistic, behavioural 'problem', contribute to the stigmatisation of the 'overweight'. Expert representations of body weight which are frequently reproduced in the media as well as in teaching resources for health professionals, can consequently be accused of reinforcing and legitimising the use of

unhealthy dieting practices (Germov and Williams, 1996). When framed by an individualistic model of health behaviour, health promotion campaigns that are devised to target on the one hand obesity and on the other body image concerns among girls are also problematic. Moulding and Hepworth (2001) examined approaches to body image in health promotion and found that the strategies chosen reflected health practitioners' orientation to cognitive-behavioural theory and humanist assumptions about rationality, choice and responsibility. A core strategy was therefore to raise the awareness of body image dissatisfaction and inappropriate eating behaviours through the education of young women, i.e. the provision of scientific facts. In such approaches, health information is presented as value free knowledge that people will use for the rational evaluation of the costs and benefits of their lifestyle (Crossley, 2000). The dualisms maintained are thus not only between mind and body, but also between expert and lay knowledge. Participants are positioned as recipients of information and the targets of intervention, individuals and social change, remain distinct (Moulding and Hepworth, 2001). Without the inclusion of participants as active partners in health promotion and social change, health campaigns will however, not only fail to acknowledge the complex relation between health behaviour, social context and identity, but participants may also increasingly become 'resistant' to health promoters' claims (Crossley, 2002).

1.2.5 Body and Eating as Socio-Cultural Objects of Study: A Brief Review of Post-Structuralist and Feminist Contributions

In the preceding sections I have repeatedly made the point that the body and eating need to be studied in relation to a socio-cultural context and the lived experiences of women. Contributions to such an understanding of the body have long been made in the field of sociology and anthropology. Socio-cultural and historical dimensions of the body and

41

particularly the regulation and social control of bodies, are among the issues raised for example, by Max Weber, Michel Foucault, and Norbert Elias in their analysis of industrial civilisation and scientific advancement. Appearance and bodily practices such as eating contribute to the construction of self in society. By being at the same time a means of expression for subjectivity (Falk, 1994) and an instrument through which cultural themes are reinstated, the body enters the realm of signs, the domain of ideology (Vološinov, 1973).

Structuralist anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, have offered a reading of 'body' and 'food' that has focused on their role as material media through which the logic and principles of a cultural system are encoded or mapped out (Khare, 1980). The body is thus understood as a symbol that gains meaning in relation to other symbols. In contrast to a positivist conception of the relation between mental representation and external object as one of simple correspondence, it is the relation of the sign to a code of signification that is of central importance. In *Natural Symbols,* Mary Douglas emphasised that "the physical body can have universal meaning only as a system which responds to the social system, expressing it as a system" (Douglas, 1973, p. 112). In other words, Douglas understands the body as an organic system that functions as an analogy of the social system. Taking a structuralist perspective, her focus lies on shared functional aspects of such natural symbols as the body and food, also suggesting that there exist universal natural systems of symbolising. As in Saussurian linguistics, precedence is given to the unity of sign and social structure at the cost of obliterating subjectivity (Holquist, 1990). Critics have subsequently rejected structuralist approaches on the grounds that they propose an artificial unity of sign and signification in which the abstract symbolic order dominates over the

actualities of subjective speech. Dialogism (to which I will return in Chapter 2) and post-structuralism offer alternative perspectives.

1.2.5.1 Post-structuralist Perspectives

Poststructuralist approaches to the body (e.g. Turner, 1984; Shilling, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Lupton; 1996) stress the contingent nature of embodiment and subjectivity and aim to overcome the rigid division between the social order and the physical body as receptor of social meanings. Foucauldian approaches hereby focus on the constitutive power of discoursive practices. The body is seen to be discoursively produced and reproduced within the possibilities of a historical and political context (Lupton, 1996). While acknowledging the material reality of the body, a Foucauldian post-structuralist analysis emphasises that the meanings of the body are formed through regulated systems of statements that are realised in discourse. Malson has pointed out (quoting Riley, 1988, and McNay, 1992, cited in Malson, 1998) that the body is not an "originating point", as it is always inscribed with social practices and power relations and can therefore not be known outside of discourse (Malson, 1998, p 30). In contrast to structuralist views, it is emphasised that the meanings of the body (as symbol) are contextual and changeable through the specific truths and positions which are realised in the discoursive relations of social practices, i.e. the actualities of speech. This means that discourse, understood as sets of 'deep principles' or 'grids of meaning' (Shilling, 1993) that are expressed also in actions and material structures, is seen to regulate that which can be conceived in a society. It follows that a central concern is with power as a core aspect of regulative knowledge (Walkerdine, 1986).

Central to Foucault's 'history of bodies' is the analysis of the body as a link between everyday practices and the large scale organisation of power, as reflected for example in institutional formations (Shilling, 1993). Thus he has mapped out the transition from 'the body flesh' to the 'mindful body' in his analysis of the changing forms of punishment (Foucault, 1979, cited inShilling,1993) as well as in changing discourses of sexuality (Foucault, 1981, cited in Shilling, 1993). While the visible flesh was made a target of punishment when 'criminals' were tortured, hanged, or burnt in public, it was the mind which was targeted through the physical constraint of the offender in the 19th century prison (Shilling, 1993). The theme that can be seen to run through Foucault's work is the increasing shift towards the disciplining of the body in relation to an increasing capitalist expansion and a concomitant population pressure particularly in urban areas (Turner, 1984). For Foucault, Turner (1991) points out, scientific advancement did not mean a liberation of the body but the intensification and development of new regimes and 'regimens' of control. His analysis of historical developments and scientific knowledge thus provides us with further insights into the causes and objectives of a concern with the control and maintenance of the body (as machine) in a Western society.

Turner's analysis of "the discourse of diet" shows the close interrelatedness of the rise of dietary management, a new interest in the health of the nation and the interests of capitalist production (Turner, 1991). While religious fasting and asceticism were about the renunciation of the body, and the control of one's appetite was a means of marking the superior civilised status of one's body in the late 18th century (Mennel, 1991), the utility of the body gradually became a primary objective behind dietary management. Turner (1984) reminds us that due to their etymological origin and usage both 'diet' and 'regimen' (from the Latin verb *regere* to rule) have double meanings. Both imply the government of the

individual body as well as the government of citizens. Connecting to Turner's analysis is Featherstone's (1991) discussion of the body in consumer culture. Late capitalist society is marked not only by mass production but also by mass consumption and a "propaganda of commodities" (Featherstone, 1991, p.172) that promotes a new morality of self-preservation and consumption.

Consumer culture draws on a conception of the body "which encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay...and combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression" (Featherstone, 1991, p.170). What we can see is the conjoining of discipline and hedonism for the marketability of self. The duality of imperatives described by Featherstone can be seen to reflect moreover, what Taylor (1989) has identified as a tension between two ethics that make up the modern subject. In seeking to find a ground between a mechanistic utilitarian view of the world rooted in Enlightenment and the naturalism of the Romantic movement, the modern era seemed to be marked by a simultaneous embracing of subjectivism and anti-subjectivism. What remains is a tension between an ethic of instrumental reason, which privileges self-control and discipline, and an ethic that idealizes the expression and engagement with emotions and inner impulses. Today, public messages displayed around food still closely revolve around these contradictory positions.

The sociological approaches cited above have demonstrated that concerns with the control of the body as well as the consumption of food can be seen to be produced in historical, religious, economic, political and ideological contexts. A number of points of criticism have nevertheless been raised. Foucault for example, has been criticised for reducing individuals to mimics who must perform in accordance with discoursive objectives

(Turner, 1984). Discourse, Turner argues, is understood to have a general effect. This neglects the fact that there is always also resistance to discourse and that discourse does not produce the same effects in all individuals. The determining power that has been ascribed to discourse furthermore means that the body is on the one hand assumed to be always present as the product of discourse while it vanishes, on the other hand, as a material and biological phenomenon (Shilling, 1993). Shilling's further criticism, which is equally directed at the work of Foucault and Turner, is the lack of attention given to the body as an "enabling property" (Shilling, 1993, p.93). While the body is understood to be shaped and reshaped by different discourses there is little space for the body to react back and affect discourse.

1.2.5.2   Feminist Perspectives

Feminist scholars have however, recognised in the Foucauldian post-structuralist approach a framework that allowed the transgression of essentialist accounts of gender inequalities and a monolithic view of patriarchial power. Drawing on Foucault's analysis, the female body and gender identity can be conceived to be historically and culturally produced - identity becomes dispersed into a multiplicity of shifting subject positions (Malson, 1998). Foucault's conception of power breaks away from an authoritarian or mechanistic view in that power is seen to be exercised not from 'above' but from 'within' the social body (Clegg, 1989). Power manifests itself as a decentralised force that regulates the body through the normalising of certain forms of realisation and the ruling out of others. It is here, Bordo (1993) has pointed out, that feminism and post-structuralism meet. What marks the beginning of feminist thinking (which precedes post-structuralism and Foucault) is the recognition that "the 'definition and shaping' of the body is 'the focal point of struggles over the shape of power'" (Bordo, 1993, p.17, in reference to Johnson, 1989, who

46

ascribes this recognition to Foucault). From here follows the realisation that the body is always at the same time personal and political. Women who were not only associated with but who were also largely confined to a life centred on the body recognised that "the most mundane, 'trivial' aspects of the women's bodily existence were in fact significant elements in the social construction of an oppressive feminine norm" (Bordo, 1993, p. 18).

Feminist analyses of eating disorders however, have their beginning in psychoanalytic thought. Although psychoanalysis can be read to be patriarchialist and phallocentric (Ussher, 1991), it offers an understanding of the masculine and feminine that goes beyond the biological. In a psychoanalytic ontology, masculinity and femininity are not understood to be manifestations of pre-determined biological entities but as resting on the unconscious interpretation of physical sex differences and their psychological and social signification (Malson, 1998). The power of the unconscious is derived from the fact that we can only ever know it in its random expression (Mitchell, 1974). By offering an analysis of the laws of the unconscious, psychoanalysis provides a starting-point for the exploration of the ideological, i.e. how the ideas and images of our social reality are lived within us (Mitchell, 1974). Such a feminist-psychoanalytic approach is used by Orbach (1986a) and Chernin (1983; 1986) who have provided an analysis of anorexia that highlights women's alienation from the female body in a cultural context that is constituted through the intersection of a valuation of thinness with family, economic, and historical developments.

Central to Orbach's analysis of anorexia, which she understands as a metaphor of our time, is the mother-daughter relationship that has become ambivalent and debilitating due to the changing role of women in Western society and the absence of substantial changes in

regard to gender inequality (Orbach, 1986a). Her detailed analysis demonstrates how patriarchal structure is translated through the mother-daughter interaction into anxieties about female needs, hunger and satisfaction. The body has become a central vehicle for self-expression due to women's primary association with a providing for others, i.e. offering the female body for nurturance and satisfaction, attending to the bodily needs of others and a denial of one's own needs. This means, in Orbach's words, that "a woman's identity is deeply entwined with a sense of herself as an attractive person and with a body with which she negotiates the world" (Orbach, 1986a, p. 51). At the same time women increasingly experience their position to be one of repression. A repression of their equal status in patriarchal society corresponds to the requirement to repress their own needs when caring for others. Compulsive overeating, so Orbach argues, can result form this ambiguity and can constitute a temporary soothing and an attempt to articulate a different femininity (for example, a neutralising of the sexual, objectified identity through fat).

Self-starvation on the other hand, represents for Orbach a rejection of "a world that has already disappointed" (1986a, p.44). The psychological process of projective identification is here of central importance. Due to the identification of the mother with the daughter their relationship becomes invested with anxiety that is most powerfully played out in the domain of body management and feeding. The conflict is between a need to provide for and continue the dependence of the daughter (symbolically through feeding), a gratification of seeing the daughter eat due to the own hunger repression, the need to reinforce a restraint of her eating, and the recognition that the mother socialises the daughter into the acceptance of an inferior position in society. As a result the daughter experiences a frequent "tempering" with her internal cues and she begins to misinterpret her inner sensations. Self-imposed food deprivation can then function as a solution to

48

complex intra-psychic conflicts. Not eating, in other words, becomes a "hunger strike" in the struggle for survival.

It is difficult to convey the depth of Orbach's argument in such a brief summary. What constitutes the crucial aspect of her analysis however, is the fact she provides an account of anorexia in which a 'confusion about societal expectations' is not construed as an added on risk factor. Social order and its inscription on the body and psyche of the individual is the cause of a woman's problematic relationship to her body; her refusal to eat as well as her overeating is an active (if unconscious) response to her position in society. This de-pathologises eating disorders and locates them in "the same universe that is given to all women" (Orbach, 1986a, p.96). Chernin's work (1983, 1986) similarly arrives at this conclusion. Her analysis of the "tyranny of slenderness" deconstructs thin beauty idealisation into a patriarchal fear of female power and the attempt to control and reduce the space that women occupy in society. She also focuses on the mother-daughter relationship which she sees disturbed by the gap between the old female role and the new requirements of womanhood. There is for one the necessity to bring about a radical separation from the mother and for the other a strong sense of guilt for rejecting her position. For Chernin anorexia constitutes then a struggle for self-definition, a "symbolic gender transformation" (p.52) that functions as a substitute for a rite of passage.

Despite their analytic strength and the foregrounding of gender and social structure in understandings of eating disorders, both Orbach and Chernin did don't successfully overcome an essentialist view of the body. Thus for Orbach 'fat' continues to be a distortion while she construes 'thin' as a natural state for women once they have rid themselves off patriarchal dictation (see Orbach, 1986b). For Chernin, on the other hand,

it is thinness which is rooted in a struggle against female nature. The association of female-nature-body is therefore reinstated as a given. The exclusive focus on the mother-daughter relationship moreover neglects the implied or actual interaction with others (besides the own mother) in processes of identity construction. As one of my participants noted upon reading Orbach, "it just feels too closed in" (Rhona). In both cases, the psychoanalyst's superior insight into and interpretation of very specific aspects of women's relationship to food, body and gender is presented as the true cause or meaning context of eating disorders. When Turner (1984) announces that "the onset of anorexia is situated in a conflict over dependence and autonomy in the relationship between mother and daughter" (p.189), we can see (20 years later) that this may not be true for all women and that the gender conflicts that have been expressed through eating disorders are always also changing.

A Foucauldian approach, on the other hand, prevents a reversion to narrow definitions of women's relationship with their body. Feminist analyses of eating disorders that have been informed by a post-structuralist framework have demonstrated that femininity and the female body are always produced through a variety of subject positions and sustain multiple, culturally constituted meanings (Malson, 1997). Femininity is therefore not assumed to constitute a coherent or unified concept; the notion of contradiction is inherent to an understanding of subjectivity. Walkerdine has pointed out that "different practices have different histories; and the effects in terms of power may well be differently lived" (Walkerdine, 1986, p.65). Bordo's analysis of the discoursive production of the female body in Western thought and popular culture (1993) has been most influential in demonstrating the diverse ways in which dominant forms of thinking can be inscribed in images of slenderness.

Central to her analysis is the deconstruction of dualism, the primordial dualistic conception of mind/body and masculine/feminine which can be seen to be imbricated in scientific knowledge, consumer culture, the division of labour, and for example, media representations. These dominant forms of thinking, which have surfaced in varied, historically changing and overlapping images have become multiply implied in the experience of female subjectivity. For example, the muscular body has today become a 'cultural icon' (Bordo, 1993, p.195), but images of muscularity can still be used to connote racial meanings by foregrounding an association with the animalistic. While muscularity can be used to imply the naturalness of sexual differences particularly through its association with male power, it has increasingly been associated with female attractiveness. Particularly in advertisements, images of the toned muscular female body are frequently exploited to suggest women's emancipation, success, and power. However, rather than destabilising old gender-dualities, the association of female muscularity with will power is rooted in and plays into fears of female bodily desire. Desire, Bordo points out, is at the same time regulated through macro-level forces, i.e. the structure of economy and market, which dictates a desire to consume and indulge.

Malson (1995, 1998; Malson and Ussher, 1996a), whose work unlike Bordo's, is grounded in the discoursive analysis of interviews with 'anorexic' women, re-conceptualises the anorexic body as 'poly-text'. The discoursive construction of the thin body in these interviews revealed that the thin body could signify both a confirmation of dominant meanings of femininity and a rejection of them. Thus the thin 'anorexic' female body could be construed to retain aspects of a 'perfect femininity' while at the same time de-gendering or even disembodying identity. In the light of discourses that define 'woman' as

bodily excess, the young women who participated in Malson's study drew on the 'anorexic' body to construct a "self-possessed femininity" that was associated with being beautiful for themselves rather than the male gaze (Malson, 1998, p.113). Cartesian dualism at the same time alienated identity from the body as it provided a means through which identity could be constructed as a transgression of the discoursively inscribed limitations and vulnerabilities of femininity. The main contradiction here was between a simultaneous self-production and self-annihilation. Malson concludes that anorexia cannot be understood as an individual pathology but as "a heterogeneous collectivity of subjectivites, experiences and body-management practices that are located within and constituted by a late capitalist, 'postmodern' discoursive context that is cross-cut by the inequalities of 'patriarchal' gender power relations" (Malson, 1999, p.150).

A criticism of Malson's analysis and other feminists' work has been that they privilege gender and sexism over other oppressions (Thompson, 1994; Griffin, 1999). Although 'anorexia' has been construed in terms of heterogeneity, little is said about the heterogeneity of women in a Western society, i.e. their class specific, racialised, or non-heterosexual contexts. A consideration of the diverse contexts in which eating disorders manifest themselves is crucial for an understanding of women's concerns about eating and the body, as I have argued throughout this chapter. However, seeking to determine what constitutes the true nature of social oppressions, Saukko (2002) pointed out, also risks that discussions end in deadlock.

For Saukko, the problem of both post-structuralist and emotivist subjectivist approaches lies in the attempt to 'know' the self either from the outside or the inside. Feminist debates can be seen to revolve around an either/or logic, where it is proposed that the true

subjective self can either only be known though the resuming of the silenced subjective voice or through the deconstruction of the discourses that constitute it as an object. Poststructuralist work in particular, risks undermining its critique of dualism by reproducing a dichotomy between knowing subject and known object and materiality/representation (Budgeon, 2003). That is, the dominant relation that women are proposed to have to their bodies is one that is mediated by discourse; the body does not exist anterior to its discursive production. In advocating a both/and logic in which subjective specificity and social unity are acknowledged, Saukko proposes the notion of 'agonistic dialogues' (Saukko, 2002). Studying the self in an agonistically dialogic way highlights the social as a conversation between different ways of experiencing. Femininity and the body can therefore be understood to gain meaning through a dialogue of distinct local perspectives that make up the larger "polyvocal social panorama" (Saukko, 2000, p.303). It is along these lines that I will seek to contribute to an understanding of women's concerns over body and eating in two distinct cultural contexts.

1.3   Conclusion

In my review of current trends in the study of body image disturbance and eating disorders I have argued that the specific nature of the phenomenon of eating disorders requires a framework that prevents individualist conceptualisations of health behaviour and narrow understandings of the relation between the individual and the social. To recapitulate, what underlies research on body image disturbance and eating attitudes is the assumption that the content of beliefs is a function of a mechanistic relation between individual processing and the interference of socially transmitted information. Meaning, I have argued, is construed in terms of a computational equation albeit one that defaults to error. The individual is perceived in terms of pre-existent psychological aggregates and individual

differences. Multifactorial or biopsychosocial models aim to provide a holistic view of eating disorder aetiology but remain focused on the individual and the 'dysfunction' located within the individual. The individual and social are construed as distinct entities and psychological concepts remain unquestioned. Research on cultural differences shows a greater consideration of the interrelationship between femininity, gender and social context, but risks reverting to a reduction of culture and subjectivity by focusing on racial or ethnic stereotypes and closed definitions of 'Westernisation' or 'acculturation'. While the implications of modernisation have a destabilising effect particularly on the identity of women, we cannot assume a simple division between modern knowledge and traditional knowledge and a uniform replacement of the latter by the former. Similarly, the thinness ideal has not been invented by the media but can be seen to be rooted in dominant traditions of Western thought and economic and political developments in late modernity. A focus on the media as a core sociocultural factor in the causation of women's concerns about weight and eating, however, risks a trivialising of eating disorders. Furthermore a thinness bias can be seen to be prevalent in health professionals' understandings of health, which further contributes to the stigmatisation of the overweight and a legitimisation of unhealthy dieting practices. The values and assumptions embedded in health promotion programmes have been found to be consistent with an individualistic view of health behaviour and the humanist notions of rationality, choice and responsibility. This generally results in the exclusion of women's own knowledge and experiences from intervention strategies that aim at the facilitation of individual and social change.

Post-structuralist feminist approaches have presented an analysis of the 'thin' female body that demonstrates how cultural discourses regulate and gender the body in multiple often conflicting ways and how in a late capitalist, post-modern context the 'anorexic' body can

be drawn upon to reproduce, contest and reject dominant discoursive meanings. My own study seeks to contribute to this work by providing an analysis of the sociocultural constitution of women's relationship to body and eating that is informed by a dialogic, social representational framework. While not claiming to provide a solution to the complex ontological, epistemological and methodological problems that I have addressed in this chapter, a dialogical perspective can overcome some of the shortcomings of current research in this field. Particular emphasis will firstly be laid on the dynamic interdependence of self and other (rather than self and discourse) and the necessary tension between different points of view in the production of meaning. This means to pay attention to how different meaning contexts work in the here and now and from different subjective perspectives. It means, moreover, to understand self and other - and in this sense body, self and other - as co-agents in the construction of knowledge contents. That meaning is nevertheless not entirely relative or subjective is illustrated through the juxtaposition of the British and Tobagonian research texts.

Chapter 2

2. Social Representations and the Dialogicality of Self and Otherness

In this chapter I will develop the theoretical position that I have adopted for the study of

women's relationships to body and eating. The chapter divides into four sections. It

begins with an account of the ontogenesis of self that is based on intersubjectivity and a

notion of self-in-relations. Section two discusses the prevalence of a Cartesian/Newtonian

paradigm in psychology and argues for a shift towards an alternative paradigm that allows

us to address the interdependent and dynamic nature of social phenomena. In section three

I outline the presuppositions of a dialogical theory of knowledge and link these finally to

the theory of social representations.

2.1. The Ontogenesis of Human Experience: Intersubjectivity and Symbolic Representation

Cartesian assumptions that are deeply ingrained in our common sense thinking as well as

the discipline of psychology, as I argued in Chapter 1, significantly constrain how we can

theorise interpersonal relations. Cognitivist explanations of individual and social

behaviour rest on a dualism of inner and outer and the conceptualisation of an atomistic

self. The individual is construed as an aggregate of personality attributes and it is assumed

that internal mental processing can be understood independently of its immediate physical

and social world. The abstraction of the individual from its environment results in a mode

of inquiry that is centred around personal cognitive causation and a de-emphasis of affect, context, and history (Valsiner, 1991; Prilleltensky, 1994). In developmental psychology, cognitivism has had the effect of directing attention away from questions about the ontogenetic nature of a sense of self and symbolic activity. "The question of *how* cognitive processes emerge, develop and reach their fully functional states", Valsiner contends, "has been replaced by the question of *whether* persons (at different age levels) can be shown to *'possess' specific mental functions* that are adaptive in specific task settings." (Valsiner, 1991, p.477, emphasis in original).

It is difficult however, to bypass the social, relational nature of the emergence of self. From birth, interpersonal engagement has a unique status in the infant's experiencing. For example, newborns show preferential tracking of drawings of human faces (Johnson, Dziurawiec, Ellis, and Morton, 1991) and clearly recognise other persons as animate beings. They produce melodic patterns of vocalisation in response to people but not objects, e.g. a doll (Legerstee, 1991). Trevarthen and others (Trevarthen, 1979; Murray and Trevarthen, 1985; both cited in Trevarthen, 1993) found that by 6 to 8 weeks of age, infants begin to engage in active 'protoconversations' with their mothers that consist of eye contact, the exchange of smiles, vocalisations and other gestures in an answer-and-reply manner. These conversations are sustained by the infant but are terminated when there is an interruption in the timing of the mother's responses (e.g. when shown a recording of the mother's interaction instead of a live transmission).

Protoconversations illustrate not only the infant's readiness to tune into interpersonal gesturing and the expression of emotions but also the early importance of a sense of agency in a natural interchange with another person. Pre-conceptual self-knowledge, as

Neisser reminds us, is secondly developed through the manipulation and physical experience of the environment (Neisser, 1991). We can therefore claim that infants experience themselves as "active agents in physical and social settings" (Neisser, 1991, p. 14) even before they gain a proper concept of self. We can see in these early dyadic interactions between infants and other people a form of innate intersubjectivity. The significant step towards an intersubjectivity that can be seen to form the basis of a concept of self constitutes, according to Tomasello (1993, 1999), the emergence of triadic interactions when the infant is between 9 to 12 months of age. This behaviour does not just involve the directing of attention to the other person but the engagement with the environment and self through the other's perspective. A reference triangle is formed between child, adult and object that forms the beginning of a child's cultural learning (Tomasello, 1999). Learning not *"from* another but *through* another" (Tomasello, 1993, p.175, emphasis in original) is the necessary prerequisite for the ability to understand referential symbols, i.e. language.

These developmental perspectives call for a theorisation of the self that gives precedence to 'self-in-relations' (Ho, Peng, Cheng Lai, Chan, 2001). The interdependence of self and other is of course central to Mead's psychology. Mead theorised the self as part of a process of social experiencing and activity (Mead, 1934). For him, the cognizing subject begins with the recognition of the self from the standpoint of the other. It is more precisely, the ability of seeing the self from the perspective of the social group, the generalised other, that enables the development of abstract thought and thus a fully developed self (Hermans and Kempen, 1993). At this point we should inquire further into the nature of the relation between self and other. What is it that makes the interaction between subject and object, inner and outer dialogical?

Mead's emphasis on the notion of 'taking the attitude of the other' can conduce to the view

that his conception of the relationship between self and other is after all monologic (see

e.g. Taylor, 1991, cited in Hermans and Kempen, 1993). This would be the case if we

understand the notion of 'viewing the self through the eyes of the other' as a theory of

internalization. That is, when we understand the self to be constituted only and

unidirectionally through the view of the other; or when the self, as Ho and colleagues have

pointed out (Ho et al., 2001), is construed as relationship. For one, such a conception begs

the question of "where is the self in 'self as relationship'?" (Ho, et al., 2001, p.935). A

question that can also be directed at post structuralist theories of subjectivity. Secondly, as

Taylor (1991, cited in Hermans and Kempen, 1993) has argued, when we construe self-

other relations in such a way that the central focus is on the organism's reacting to the

environment, then we arrive again at a conception of interaction as consisting of individual

and monological acts that are initiated by a self in response to an internalized stimulus.

An alternative reading of Mead's theory and its implications for the relation between self,

other and object is however, possible. Marková (2003) has pointed out that a basic idea in

Mead's analysis of the conversation of gestures is the shared responsibility for the

construction of message meanings. This means, that 'I' and 'Other' act as co-authors. The

message is only complete in the meeting point between two participants whose acts are

complementary: "one participant starts the gesture but it is the other who completes it by

giving meaning to it" (Marková, 2003, p.252). Sense-making is therefore a process of

sharing different points of view. Within this process the self is engaged in decentring, a

transgression of its own perspective, but remains an active participant in the transformation

of two perspectives or positions (as the latter term connotes also physical, embodied

space[4]) into something new. Trevarthen's study shows that the infant's tendency towards interpersonal gesturing rests not on the mimicry of the other but is motivated by the experience of mutual attunement and agentic participation. Subjectivity must therefore be understood to be realised in the space between separateness and unity of self and other. It is not fixed but mutable and changing within the bounds of the interpersonal, material context. Neither self nor other originate in the mind but are a function of their interactive force. In conclusion, it is the ontogenetic primacy of reciprocal responsiveness that makes knowing and symbolic representing possible (Joplin, 1993). Adopting such a theoretical stance has important implications for how we understand the organisation of knowledge and how we study human phenomena.

2.2   Decentring Newtonian Psychology

Just like in its view of the self it may be claimed, the science of psychology has maintained a highly centralised ego. In its endeavour to achieve scientific objectivity, psychology, like other disciplines, has continuously overlooked its pervasive reliance on Newtonian concepts of reality. Abstracted from the Cartesian/Newtonian or Platonic/Cartesian paradigm that served as the dominant map of science since the 18th century has been a mechanistic view of human phenomena and a centralised equilibrium ideal of personhood (Sampson, 1985). The implications and limits of such an approach have been widely commented on over the past 20 years and the call has been for a paradigm shift (Sampson, 1978, 1985; Marková, 1982; Capra, 1983). A brief summary of this debate will here serve to establish the historical grounding for the turn towards a dialogic epistemology.

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[4] In response to a similar criticism of Piaget's notion of egocentrism/decentrism in his stage model of development as being artificial and purely intellectual notions, Sampson (1981) , proposed a notion of "material decentring" that links thinking to collective social practices and life.

Cartesian dualism, as I discussed already in Chapter 1, has pervaded Western thinking, lay as well as expert knowledge since the 17th century and has its roots in Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy (Marková, 1982; 1996). It is however, the conjunction of a Cartesian belief in the certainty of science with the compelling success of Newtonian mechanics in the area of physics that led to a shift towards stringent scientific and technological activity in all areas of science (Capra, 1983). In the light of new scientific discoveries the belief that all phenomena could be explained through the study of their basic elements and the quantitative observation of their interaction became an integral part of scientific thinking. Viewed as a mechanical system the world could now be studied objectively through the prediction and measurement of immutable and timeless particulars (Capra, 1983; Marková, 1996). This is of course an untenable argument. Kuhn's (1962) analysis of scientific paradigms has most clearly demonstrated that scientific findings are never independent of the society or historical period within which they emerge but are always a function of a specific world view or guiding theoretical principle through which reality becomes conceivable. The acknowledgement of paradigms in the sciences is important. As Sampson (1978) has pointed out:

> "To argue that a concept such as a paradigm exists and governs scientific inquiry is already to locate such inquiry in its historical and cultural context and thus no longer to see science as a transcendent enterprise, nor scientific truths as abstract, general, and universal." (p.1334).

For scientific disciplines like psychology, the problem is then less the fact that data is 'manufactured' by theory (Marková, 1982) but that psychology contents itself with remaining relatively unconscious of the principles that guide its conceptualisations. A neglect of ontological and epistemological presuppositions has for example, significantly

61

limited our understanding of dynamic phenomena (Marková, 1996); and, it has effected 'victim blaming' practices through the exclusion of human experiencing and social context from experimental investigation. Newtonian physics are based on the image of mutually inhibiting dynamic forces. This means that elements can only interact, move or expand, by means of displacing each other. This principle can, Capra (1983) argued for example, be found in Freud's conceptualisation of the relation between ego, superego and id, where the development or expansion of one element comes at the cost of the repression or displacement of another element of the human psyche. The same idea certainly underlies social psychological approaches to the study of individual and group behaviour. Here the aim is to measure the environment's influence on the individual which is assumed to replace the qualities of the latter to some degree (Marková, 1982).

The extent to which our common sense thinking about the world is structured by Newtonian thinking is reflected in the difficulty of accepting an alternative non-mechanistic view, be it of the workings of nature or our ideal of personhood. Within science itself the eventual transcendence of the Newtonian paradigm, through the proposition of Einstein's quantum theory and the theory of relativity, was met with incomprehensibility and resistance: "The new physics necessitated profound changes in concepts of space, time, matter, object, and cause and effect; and because these concepts are so fundamental to our way of experiencing the world, their transformation came as a great shock." (Capra, 1983, p.65). Another alternative perspective, one that precedes Einstein's theories, is offered by a Hegelian paradigm (Marková, 1982).

Both of these theories propose the relative and interdependent nature of entities. Particulars are understood as part of patterns of a process, rather than constituting static or

fixed objects with intrinsic properties. In physics, the universe becomes conceived as a dynamic whole made up of interrelated parts that can only be understood as "patterns of a cosmic process" (Capra, 1983, p.66). Subatomic particles are no longer things but are the expression of an interconnection between things. They have a dual nature and therefore change depending on how they are looked at (they appear once as a 'wave' and then as a 'particle' and are ultimately neither the one nor the other). For Hegel, 'individual' and 'environment' just as 'universal' and 'particular' were inseparable opposites that manifested or expressed themselves through mutual interaction. He proposed, that it is on the basis of an organism's inner tension, the tension between actual and possible states in the interaction with an opposite, that organisms or things engage in an activity that makes them transcend their fixed form (Marková, 1982, 2000a). A paradigm based on these basic principles allows us to conceive phenomena as decentralized (from a stable cause and essence) and the individual and social as co-determinants of social realities and changing subjective states.

Just as different phenomena required a different paradigm in the domain of physics, there has for a long time been a need for a wider recognition of alternative paradigms in psychology. The simultaneous existence of two paradigms contributes to the dialogic tension that allows us to think anew. However, there also emerges a crucial question when we are faced with two opposing paradigms. As Kuhn has concluded: "no paradigm ever solves all problems it defines and since no two paradigms leave all the same problems unsolved, paradigm debates always involve the question: Which problems is it more significant to have solved?" (Kuhn, 1962, p.110). To make such a decision would of course require a reconsideration of values in mainstream psychological research.

2.3   Dialogicality, Asymmetry and Change

The preceding section served to ground the ontological and epistemological presuppositions upon which I draw in the present thesis in a context of historically changing paradigms. I will now turn to the tenets of the dialogical theory of common sense knowledge and understanding that frames my study of body and eating. As an epistemology, dialogism rests on the principles of interdependence, polyphony, and change. The origins of this line of thought can be found in theology and the work of such neo-Kantian philosophers as Rosenstock and Rosenzweig (see Marková, 2000a) but it is today mainly associated with the principles of dialogue developed in the work of Bakhtin. Holquist (1990) refers to Bakhtin's theory of knowledge as a "meditation on knowledge" and hereby expresses Bakhtin's critical stance towards all notions of unity and centrism. In Bakhtinian thought 'knowing' is constituted through otherness and therefore evades a unitary source or form. In the shape of a dialogic exchange knowledge becomes more closely associated with understanding and relativity (Holquist, 1990). As in relativity theory, meaning arises in relation or contrast to something else. Moreover, it is constituted through the simultaneity and separateness of self and other; to use the words of Rommetveit (1974), it is constituted in the dialogic space that constitutes "the temporarily shared social world" (p.25) of the communicative act.

In its insistence on both simultaneity and difference of self and other in the *event* of sense making, Bakhtin's approach to language differentiates itself from Saussure's structuralist model and Hegel's dialectic. Saussure's view of the division between language and the individual speech act was for Bakhtin another form of monologism. That is, it constituted an artificial synchrony in which the utterance as a purely individual act was juxtaposed with "the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the

individual" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.81.). Consequently, self and the exchange of different points of view got lost in a deterministic order. Hegelian dialectics, for Bakhtin, too constituted an abstract monologism. He rejected the idea of an evolution of the mind in the manner of fixed stages that eventually, through the resolution of all opposites, arrives at an 'absolute mind' (Hermans ad Kempen, 1993). In contrast, if we take dialogue as a starting point for all understanding and therefore mind, there is no absolute point of resolution but always a juxtaposition of opposites and points of view through which new meaning is produced. The Hegelian notion of progress is substituted with the notions of multiplicity and variety. Hegel's conception of contradiction and a struggle for recognition, as I will argue in Chapter 5, is on the other hand quite similar to the principles of dialogism (see also Marková, 2000a).

Dialogism, then, is a theory of knowledge that postulates knowing as inseparable from an ongoing active process of social interaction. Meaning, moreover, becomes the expression of a relationship between self and other. The stages in the "dialogic movement of *understanding*" (Bakhtin, 1986; p.161, emphasis in original) are the contact between texts and personalities and the backward and forward movement between past and anticipated texts. Subjectivity and meaning 'live' only in contact with context. The emphasis lies on "active responsive understanding" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.94) which implies that meaning construction is motivated by a 'contract' (Rommetveit, 1974) between interlocutors that are always addressed by potential message meanings and respond, re-position, and change message meanings in relation to each other and the evoked contexts. Dialogism in this sense also becomes a theory of being. The notions of addressivity and response have important implications for a reading of subjectivity.

While responsive understanding is shared, it is not just a passive reinstating of what has been given in the sense of a simple repetition of the existing order. 'Responding' first of all, is driven by a difference in points of view. It is this gap between self and other from which a need for dialogue arises (Linell and Luckmann, 1991) - without it existence would be reduced to abstract monologue[5]. Within a dialogic framework, difference or asymmetry is an integrate part of the dynamics of dialogue (Marková and Foppa, 1991) *and* of intersubjectivity. As Holquist has argued:

> "Dialogue always implies the simultaneous existence of manifold possibilities, a smaller number of values, and the need for choice. At all the possible levels of conflict between stasis and change there is always a situated subject whose specific space is defined precisely by inbetween-ness." (Holquist, p.181)

Although asymmetry in the sense of inequality (e.g. in regard to the right to develop and use knowledge, in the control of certain perspectives on topics) are debilitating and restricting (Linell and Luckman, 1991, see also Chapter 1), the acknowledgement of difference in a conceptualisation of intersubjectivity here draws attention to the agentic position of individuals. Conceptualisations of 'intersubjectivity' based on total harmony or a merging of two minds (see Marková, 2003, for a discussion of these theories) neglect those aspects of the intersubjective exchange that make progress and social change possible. A change of knowledge is driven by the dynamic tension of oppositions (e.g. Moscovici, 1976). 'Responding' and 'asymmetry' thus encompass a notion of agency, which is essential for an understanding of subjectivity. In this sense, subjectivity is neither fixed by cognitive schemas nor entirely constraint by the discourse through which it is addressed but entails the active production of a socially contextualised self.

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[5] Monologue can exist in appearance but thought and being is always directed towards an other, is an inter-view of voices.

Saukko (2002) likewise sees in the notion of dialogicality a bridge between subjective specificity and social unity, agency and structure that prevents the dichotomy between a true and false self and the quest to capture either the one or the other. Although Saukko's notion of 'agonistic dialogues' draws on Hanna Arendt's theorisation of political identity, her position also links to the Bakhtinian notions of simultaneity and polyphony. Agonistic dialogues entail the contesting of contradictory positions. Saukko thus proposes that practices of the self are always ambivalent and may be both subjugating and emancipating depending on the subjective or social position from which they are viewed. This means not to adopt a relativist stance but to acknowledge that difference and unity are interdependent parts in a dialogical space of shifting relations between distinct subjective perspectives and a shared social world. Neither one - subjectivity or social, particular or whole - can be understood independently from the other. Moscovici's concept of social representations has been defined in a similar way.

2.4   Social Representations and the Relational Nature of Common Sense Knowledge

The aim of the present section is not to review the by now extensive work on the theory of social representations, or to enter into the debates about the various ways of conceptualising social representations. My primary concern is here to highlight how social representations link to a dialogical study of social phenomena and how they can contribute to an understanding of the research themes of the present study.

While dialogism is concerned with the principles and processes involved in meaning making, the concept of social representation is more clearly oriented to the organisation

and content of common sense knowledge. Social representations constitute shared systems of meanings that are constructed through the social elaboration of objects and phenomena in social interactions. Through the process of social representation objects and phenomena become jointly acknowledged aspects of a social reality and thus shared reference points through which communication can take place. Because they familiarise and give shape to aspects of the material and social world, they also function to guide actions and sense making in the everyday. Due to their underlying presuppositions about the genesis and nature of common sense knowledge, social representations can also be used as a theory and it is in this regard that they can be linked most closely to the principles of dialogicality.

In examining the content of common sense knowledge, social representations theory postulates that individual and social are co-determinants of a social reality. The genesis of social representations is hereby seen to lie in language, in communication and symbolic activity, with the emphasis being on the negotiation of meanings between two opposing partners (Moscovici and Marková, 1998). Social representing is an activity that can neither exist only in individual minds nor an objective social reality but always requires the simultaneity of the two. This is a fundamental aspect of social representations that is reflected also in the rejection of a distinction between 'primitive' thought and scientific thought, lower or higher forms of common sense thinking (Moscovici, 1984, Moscovici, 1998).

Both types of thinking, Moscovici (1998) suggests, constitute forms of belief that have an inherently social nature and are in other words social representations. Common sense, which from a scientific point of view has been perceived as an aggregate of stereotypes, attitudes or biases, does not, from the point of view of social representations theory,

constitute a qualitatively inferior form of thinking and cannot be replaced by an objective scientific logic. As in the dialogic idea of intertextuality the ongoing activity of understanding can be seen to take place through the contact between different texts. As Moscovici (1998, p.235) states: "scientific representations daily and 'spontaneously' become common sense, while the representations of common sense change into scientific and autonomous representations". My discussion of lay and expert representations of obesity in the preceding chapter most clearly illustrates such a bi-directional influence of representations.

Social representations then, can be understood to function in a similar way as paradigm beliefs. They describe and explain relations and activities in everyday life, they organise knowledge and how we view the world; they make certain aspects of the world conceivable but not others. Because social representations are formed in an ongoing exchange of different points of view, they are never entirely fixed and entail contradictory positions. When we represent social phenomena or ideas in our shared social reality we do so to familiarise the threatening, to make accessible new ideas through old concepts (Moscovici, 1984). Social representations are therefore always "inscribed within the 'framework of pre-existent thought' " (Moscovici and Vignaux, 2000). At the same time, when there is tension between beliefs, phenomena can become re-presented and thus stated anew. For an understanding of the 'stabilisation and destabilisation of ideas' (Moscovici and Vignaux, 2000) the concept of themata has been particularly useful.

2.4.1   Themata as Organising Principles

Moscovici and Vignaux (2000) have used the concept of themata in the sense of "focal semantic points" or source ideas to give more concrete form to a link between cognition

and communication while also laying emphasis on the socio-historical embeddedness of social representations. As Marková (2000a) has outlined, the concept of themata can be found in the history of science, for example in Holton's analysis of the formation of certain schools of thought. Holton (1978, cited in Marková, 2000a) proposed that the course of development of schools of scientific thought is underlined by dyads or triplets of oppositions that have guided scientific thinking, e.g. the oppositions of constancy/evolution/catastrophic change. Similarly, theories of self-knowledge can be found to have been rooted in and developed along such fundamental opposites as inner/outer, which variously changed into mind/body, rational/mystical or rational/irrational.

The important aspect about themata is that their antinomies are interdependent; in other words, it is through their relation that they form a meaning whole. Such polarities are fundamental to our thinking as we most clearly understand what something *is* through what it *is not* (Marková, 2000). As fundamental opposites they can remain implicit in our common sense thinking, but they can also become the focus of attention when they gain specific symbolic significance for a social group. When oppositional taxonomies become problematised in a society that is a source of tension or conflict, Marková (2000) proposes, they become themata from which social representations are generated. While themata retain some historical consistency, their boundaries, content and intersection with other oppositional categories change in relation to the specific social and material context of a society. Themata can therefore be understood as organising principles that allow us to conceive the social representational knowledge of a social group in terms of an organised whole of interdependent perspectives rather than independent representations or discourses. I will return to these theoretical and methodological possibilities in Chapter 4.

2.4.2   Core and Periphery or Field?

A final note should be made about the structure of social representations. In the present chapter I have stressed the dialogicality of, firstly, self and other and, secondly, common sense knowledge. Dialogicality not only implies interdependence and intersubjectivity but also relativity. That is, meaning is understood to be unfixed, dynamic, and dependent on different points of view. However, I have also argued that we can understand common sense knowledge as an organised whole and that social representations can be found to be oriented by underlying themata. The emphasis has therefore been on the role of con-text in meaning production.

In response to the finding that social representations are both stable and changing, as well as consensual and marked by a heterogeneity of meanings, the structural distinction between 'core' and 'periphery' (Abric, 1993; Guimelli, 1993) has frequently been made in research on social representations. Because a distinction between core and periphery can appear to suggest a clear delineation between shared aspects of a social representation (core) and individual variations of such representations (periphery), I prefer to use the metaphor of 'field' for the present study. Dialogicality emphasises the simultaneity of individual and social and the fact that meanings are always ambiguously fixed. Like in the figure-ground phenomenon, meanings change depending on which relations are foregrounded or from which perspective they are viewed.

A field metaphor proposes that a phenomenon is understood as "part of a totality of coexistent facts which are conceived as mutually interdependent" (Deutsch, 1968, p.414), with its properties being determined by its relation to the system of meanings of which it is a part. Speaking of a social representational field, moreover, allows me to attend to the

negotiation of possible subjective positions within the boundaries of a socially

acknowledged reality. This unites us also with a conceptualisation of the dialogical self as

constituted through relations between different perspectival positions that, as Valsiner

proposed, develop within the self as a field (Valsiner, 2002). In fact, we may think of

social representations as 'patchwork quilts' (a metaphor Saukko, 2000, has borrowed from

Deleuze and Guattari). "Patchwork quilts have no centre, and the basic motif (the patch) is

multiple, giving rise to more disjunctive or "rhythmic resonances" that unite the piece"

(Saukko, 2000, p.302, citing Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.476).

Chapter 3

3. Methods: From Research Context to Research Process

This chapter provides an overview of the study's design, the collection of the research material, and the steps of analysis that have been carried out. The first part of this chapter describes the research context in terms of the type of method that has been used and the cultural contexts in which the study has been conducted, i.e. the UK and Tobago. The second part outlines the process of recruiting and meeting participants, the use of interviews and the initial steps of the interview analysis.

3.1 Research Context

3.1.1 The Use of Qualitative Methods

Choosing an appropriate method is a function of two things: the objects of study and the theoretical principles that underlie the study. Let me begin with the theoretical context. In the preceding chapter I have argued for a conceptualisation of self as self-in relation. Such a conceptualisation implies multiple subject positions and the negotiation of subjectivity in juxtaposition with real or implied others and their view of the self. I have, moreover, laid a strong emphasis on the role of the evoked meaning context in the ongoing activity of sense making. Thus I would argue that the significance of self as well as such objects and practices as body and eating can only be understood in relation to their immediate meaning contexts. Furthermore, the interdependence and dialogicality of social representations suggest that practices or ideas are never entirely fixed, are never just the one or the other but are always ambiguous.

The objects of inquiry are the social representation of body and eating. The aim of this study is to explore women's understanding of the body and the bodily practice of eating in the context of femininity and in a specific cultural context. My interest is in women's subjective yet socially situated concerns about weight, the 'thin' and the 'fat' body, eating and not eating as these have become widely problematised in Western countries. In my review of the literature in this field, a criticism has been that the quantitative research tools that have been used to measure for example body dissatisfaction and eating attitudes are not sensitive enough to pick up the varied significance of women's engagement with their body; moreover, culture is often reduced to simplistic variables.

Taken together these theoretical and empirical objectives require a method that allows me to attend to the complexity and multidimensionality of the meanings of body and eating. My interest is hereby mainly in women's reflections on and constructions of meanings/positions in conversation. In this regard I consider the use of qualitative methods that are based on the oral production of texts most appropriate. Qualitative methods first and foremost let us inquire into qualitative relations, e.g. the patterns of meaning production. Qualitative methods based on the oral production of texts, such as semi-structured or narrative interviews, are sufficiently flexible and open to participants' experiences that they allow us to attend to the particulars of participants' positions in relation to their social context and ways of living. The aim of the research is therefore to explore the intersection of body, eating and femininity "in their temporal and local particularity, and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts" (Flick, 1998, p.13).

With the epistemological principle being one of 'verstehen' (understanding) rather than 'erklären'[6] (explaining) criteria of objectivity, validity and reliability are substituted with specificity and a rich description of the research product. It is further assumed that research is never neutral but always socially embedded and carried out from a particular standpoint (see Faucheux, 1976; Farr, 1984; Banister, Burman, parker, Taylor, and Tindall, 1994). I have sought to increase the credibility of my research by laying my theoretical

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[6] This distinction of terms has its roots in the German 'Hermeneutic Sociology of Knowledge'.

presuppositions and by making myself visible as a researcher in the research process and data presentation.

3.1.2   Interviews as Method

The primary method of inquiry has been semi-structured in-depth interviews. Openly designed interviews, particularly when care is taken to establish a rapport and trust relationship between researcher and participant, facilitate a 'whole person' focus (Bornat, 1999). Semi-structured in depth interviews allow the researcher to 'tune into' the subjective context of the participant and permit the exploration of the individual's social context and past life experiences. The idea is to fit questions to the positions and comments of the interviewee and to encourage the interviewee to explore and re-construct her experiences. Because the interviewer is seeking to fit the structure of the interview to the participant's line of thought, the interviewee retains a level of control over the interview content. While the interviewee is still probed on specific issues that are of relevance to the study, the focus of the interview can become a matter of negotiation (Burman, 1994). This method has the advantage of providing insight into the way issues and concerns are connected in the subjective perceptions of participants.

Semi-structured open interviews can therefore come close to the proposed workings of a dialogic exchange as they require the interviewee to respond to questions and comments, to reflect, to recount, and to negotiate meanings. A main objective with regard to the interview design and analysis has been to identify how themes are received and taken up by the interviewee; what relations are established between themes and what images or logics are associated with them. Thus it is not assumed that minimal interviewer presence will produce authentic 'facts' or give access to the 'true' experiences of the interviewee. As William F. White has put it:

> "In dealing with subjective material, the interviewer is, of course, not trying to discover the *true attitude or sentiment* of the informant. He should recognise that ambivalence is a fairly common condition of man – that men can and hold conflicting sentiments at any given time. Furthermore, men hold varying

sentiments according to the situations in which they find themselves". (Whyte, 1980, p.117, cited in Silverman, 2001, p. 112)

The interviewer aims to understand what meanings or interpretations are produced in response to particular positions in dialogue, how they relate to the wider context, and what their implications are for self-other interactions. In a sense, the researcher invites the interviewee to engage with social representations and to position herself in relation to it. Albeit it has frequently been claimed that interviews come close to naturally occurring conversations, we should not forget that interviews are nevertheless directive. Moreover, how 'natural' their conversational style is always depends on the fit between the interviewer and the interviewee. Some participants can indeed use the interview situation as an opportunity to 'think aloud', while it is clearly a much more formal and artificial context for others. Taken together however, interviews offer a rich account of participants' experiences and illustrate how social knowledge is constructed in relation to a personal, idiosyncratic context.

3.1.2.1   Justification of One Method Approach

Several methods have been piloted for this study, i.e. a sentence completion task, focus group interviews, and notebook diaries. The technique of word associations has frequently been used in social representations research and the sentence completion task is a variant of word associations. For the present study a sentence completion task was devised that consisted of a number of short sentence beginnings relating to the body and eating, which the participants were asked to complete with one or several words, or with several sentences. This sentence completion task was piloted with 20 female undergraduate students. Participants found this task difficult to engage with and the associations that could be retrieved through this method were rather limited.

Focus groups have become particularly popular in social representational research as they are assumed to reveal social representations and thematisations in the making. Focus groups are in addition less directive as the course of discussions is usually determined by the group interaction and in absence of researcher interference. However, it has been found that the method of focus groups is not well suited to the questions that the present

study seeks to answer. In the pilot focus group (consisting of 4 British undergraduate female students) that was conducted for the present study, discussions quickly reverted to general statements about media influences and eating disorders rather than the women's own experiences or positions in regard to the issues of body and eating, weight and dieting. Issues relating to body and eating are of a sensitive personal and possibly problematic nature for many women. Consideration was therefore given to the fact that discussions arranged to take place in a group of women who did not know each other and who were not motivated to join the group due to a shared experience (as for example in a eating disorder self-help group) was not necessarily beneficial and could pose risks for participants.

Finally, interview participants in the UK and Tobago were given diary notebooks and asked to add any thoughts, memories or impressions that related to issues raised during the interview or that related to the interview experience itself. This method was dropped in the course of the study as participants only made minimal use of it. Interviews therefore proved to be the most appropriate method for the exploration of women's relationships to body and eating, and were consequently expanded to increase the depth of the research material.

3.1.3   The Cultural Context

The central aim of this study has been to explore women's engagement with 'body' and 'eating' in two distinct cultural contexts, i.e. a Western and non-Western context. My research was therefore conducted in Scotland and in Tobago, WI. Tobago still constitutes one of the few locations where eating disorders are relatively unknown, while the prevalence of eating disorders and weight concerns amongst women in Scotland has been similar to other Western countries. The selection of these research locations was determined by the research questions as well as pragmatic criteria: i) considerable cultural, ethnic and historical differences exist between the two countries; ii) due to Tobago's socio-historical characteristics the exploration of women's perspectives on issues relating to body and eating can provide a valuable addition to cross-cultural research in the area of eating disorders. Tobago's society is marked, on the one hand, by its history of slavery and, on the other, by its more recent participation in modern consumerist life styles.

Western media have, for a considerable period of time, been available and fashion shows and beauty contests are extremely popular events in Trinidad as well as Tobago. Despite this, eating disorders continue to be relatively unknown. Although women of African descent have often been thought of as being less affected by eating disorders the findings are inconclusive and few studies have explored qualitative differences in regard to black women's perceptions of body, weight and eating (see 1.2.2); iii) the main language of both countries is English; iv) because I already had existing contacts in Tobago (due to a previous stay in one of the villages on the island) it was possible to carry out the research within the financial restraints and time limits of a research degree.

Although I am aware that it is not unproblematic to substitute Scottish with British, I have decided to refer to my participants and the research context as British/UK, the main reason being that not all my participants had grown up in Scotland or lived there throughout adolescence. Because an analysis of the societies as a whole exceeds the scope of the present study, only a brief characterisation of Tobago has here been included, as it is assumed that the reader is less familiar with this location.

3.1.3.1   Tobago

Tobago is the smaller sister island of Trinidad and is located northeast of Venezuela. The republic of Trinidad & Tobago constitutes one of the most prosperous countries in the Caribbean due to its petroleum and natural gas production. Tobago's economy in addition is supported by tourism. Under British colonial control since the 19th century, Trinidad & Tobago gained independence in 1962. With a large percentage of Trinidad-Tobagonians living in the USA, ties to North America and its culture are presently much stronger than to Europe. At least since the oil boom in the 1970s both Trinidad and Tobago have not been alien to mass consumption (see Miller, 1994). Television has been more widely available on the island since the 1970s and in Tobago a television set is today a taken for granted commodity in the majority of households. In comparison to Trinidad, the small island of Tobago is relatively rural and its population predominantly African-Caribbean. A large number of households continue to be female headed and the birth of a child is not generally seen as a reason for the father and mother of the child to get married or to move in together. Festivals and parties continue to be jointly celebrated by communities. Harvest,

besides Carnival and Christmas, constitutes one of the most important celebrations in the year and also one of the main expenditures of a household in a year. Each village in Tobago keeps Harvest on one Sunday in the year and while this is a Christian tradition it is celebrated primarily through the offering of food and drink to visitors that will come from all over the island for this particular event. Each festival is accompanied by large outdoor parties, which are mainly attended by the younger people. Music plays a central role in the social life of Tobago, particularly the local music genres of Soca and Calypso. Both of these see their highlight during Carnival when singers in Tobago and Trinidad compete for the annual Carnival titles. While Soca is more closely associated with dance and party the central characteristic of Calypso is that it comments on cultural issues from love sickness to politics and thus functions as a medium for public debates (see Finden-Crofts, 1998).

3.2   Research Process

3.2.1   Participants

Appendix 1 provides a list of the 14 women[7] who participated in the interviews in the UK, and the 12 participants who participated in interviews in Tobago (pilot interviews with 2 African women and 1 African-Caribbean woman who had moved to the UK during their adolescence were conducted but only partly transcribed). The age range of the British sample was 16-24 years; the age range of the Tobagonian sample was 16-26 years. All participants in the UK sample were white and all participants in Tobago were of African-Caribbean descent. A wide range of female body shapes and sizes was represented in both samples. Criteria for the selection of participants were age and educational or occupational status to avoid having an all student sample. The focus was on the age group 16-23 because this constitutes the age when women can experience weight and eating as most problematic. In both groups about half of the women still lived with their families, while half lived on their own, with their partner or in shared accommodation. In the UK participants were recruited through posters (2 respondents) and existing contacts in the community, i.e. work place (outside the university), community classes, friends of friends.

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[7] All names have been changed.

In Tobago contacts to participants were similarly established through the engagement in the community, i.e. neighbourhood acquaintances, community events, friends of participants. Potential participants needed to be able to commit themselves to four interview meetings over a period of two to three weeks (for aims and content of these meetings see 3.2.3). Because the aim was to establish an in-depth rapport with participants the sample size was considered to be adequate for the purpose of gaining a contextualised understanding of women's subjective perspectives and life experiences.

3.2.2 The Researcher in the Fieldwork Context

In both research locations my position was not only that of a researcher but also that of a community member. This means that my analysis of the interview material was informed by my participation in and observation of everyday ways of acting and interacting. Throughout the data collection period these observations were recorded in a log book, which was subsequently used for the analysis of interview accounts. Participation in everyday activities in Tobago was vital for the development of the interview guide and my understanding of women's perspectives and concerns. During my three months stay in Tobago my engagement with the community began with arranging to live in one of the villages in the house of a single woman in her fifties, who also ran a small parlour at the roadside where she sold snacks and soft drinks. I shared into the daily housework beginning with the cleaning of the yard to the cooking of food and the washing of clothes. I soon also began selling in the parlour and so came into contact with a large number of people on a daily basis. Besides these activities I attended church services, community meetings, festivals, and parties together with various women from the community. A number of my participants in both research locations had consequently not first met me in the role of researcher, which helped in establishing a rapport between interviewer and interviewee. While I maintained a position as outsider throughout my stay I quickly moved beyond the position of 'tourist', which meant that I was no longer seen to be exempt from local rules of conduct, expectations and judgements that were usually directed at young single women. My position of outsider allowed me to inquire into and be trusted with information, while my position as temporary community member allowed me to gain insight into the everyday life world of the young Tobagonian women. Interviews were arranged a couple of weeks into my stay, once I had achieved a level of

cultural familiarity. That means that interviews were conducted at a point when I felt confident that I could adjust myself to the local conversational style and had sufficient insight into the young women's everyday life to amend the interview guide. In the UK, I similarly maintained a position as outsider (i.e. I am recognised as foreigner) but my participation in the community beyond the university enabled me to gain a good understanding of the young British women's diverse life styles and concerns.

3.2.3   Interview Structure and Questions

The design of the interview structure was determined by ethical concerns and the aim to establish an in-depth rapport. As I have mentioned above (3.2.1), the participants committed themselves to four meetings over a two to three week period. One-to-one in-depth interviews invite participants to share their personal life experiences with the researcher and consequently also pose a number of risks for the participant. In addition, 'body' and 'eating' constitute sensitive topics for many Western women. Ethical considerations begin with the principle that research participation should be beneficial and should do no harm to the participant.

Qualitative data collection can be invasive and due to the open design of semi-structured interviews the exact content of the interview is unforeseeable. The close relationship between interviewer and interviewee may moreover lead participants to disclose information that they did not intend to disclose. Informed consent and the awareness that consent may need to be renegotiated became central concerns in the design of the in-depth interviews. For the present study I decided to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the interviewee prior to the first topic-focused interview. This first meeting served primarily to enhance the transparency of the research and to provide a sense of what the interview situation would be like. Besides using the meeting to introduce myself as researcher, the meeting was used to address the basic elements of consent. These included i) informing the participant of the background and the general aims of the study, ii) an explanation of the research procedure, iii) a description of possible risks, iv) an explanation of the rights of the participant, i.e. that the participant is free to withdraw consent at any time and may discontinue participation in the project, v) an offer to answer any queries concerning the

research or myself. The first meeting lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and consisted of the verbal explanation of the research followed by the signing of the consent form (Appendix 2). During this first meeting participants were also informed that they would be reimbursed for their time through a payment of £15 (TT$ 40) and that this reimbursement would not be withdrawn should they decide to discontinue their participation. Care was taken throughout to minimise power differences between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example, participants were given a choice of whether to conduct the interviews at their home or in a public library or community centre. The majority of interviews were consequently carried out in the participants' homes. The initial meeting was conducted separately from the main interview meetings in order to allow the young women time to reconsider their participation.

Ethically sensitive interviewing includes a consideration of the length of interviews, i.e. the length of the interviews should be negotiated with the participant. For the present study 1 hour to 1 ½ hours per topic-focused interview were deemed appropriate. As a result the total time spent at interview with each participant over the 3 main interview meetings ranged from 1 ½ to 3 hours. Upon receiving consent three more meetings were arranged with the participant. The second meeting was designed to focus on issues relating to the body, while the third meeting was designed to focus on the topics 'food and eating'. This meant that each aspect (body and eating, which are interrelated but need not be in terms of the issues raised) could be developed in a more detailed and coherent manner.

For these two interview meetings an interview guide (Appendix 3), consisting of a set of possible deepening questions, was devised. This guide was subsequently used in the form of a topic guide (Appendix 4). Throughout the interviews precedence was given to the issues raised by the participants and the structure of the interview guide was largely suspended. For Tobago the interview guide was altered in accordance with my observations in the research context. With each interview my 'repertoire' of questions and prompts increased due to the different accounts of my participants. My interviewing style was guided by the person-centred principles unconditional positive regard and empathic listening, i.e. letting the participant know that I am hearing what they tell me and signalling that I am sensitive to their experiences by giving empathic responses and feeding back what I have understood they told me. Care was taken to use open questions, prompts, and questions that give opportunity for narrative. The starting point of both interview meetings

were early memories of bodily change on the one hand and childhood eating habits on the other. Because the interest was in the juxtaposition of meanings of femininity, the body and eating, questions about the experiences of changing into a woman were also included in the interviews.

Finally, meeting four served as a follow-up of the issues raised during the preceding two interview meetings. All interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. The analysis has been based on a total of over 65 hours of recorded interviews.

3.2.4   Methods of Analysis

The analysis of the interview material was carried out in seven stages, within which different strategies were applied to the within- and between-case comparison of the phenomena in question. Table 3.1 provides an overview of these seven stages and the step-by-step products of analysis. My first analytic activity was to immerse myself in the data. This consisted of listening to the audio recordings, a close reading of all interview transcripts, and a reviewing of my field observations. This activity was necessary to acquire a first understanding of the similarities and differences between participants' experiences and perspectives. The interview transcripts were then entered into the software package "QSR – NUD*IST Vivo", which provides flexible tools for the management of large amounts of qualitative data. NUD*IST Vivo allows the researcher to work without a pre-constructed coding frame and enables the flexible linking of text documents, memos, attributes of participants, general ideas and category codes. Themes can be marked in the course of the familiarisation with the data, and can then be organised into independent or hierarchically organised category codes. NUD*IST Vivo further offers a number of special-purpose search functions that enable the researcher to explore questions about the relations between codes, attributes or text patterns. Due to its flexibility NUD*IST Vivo is ideally suited for a grounded approach to data analysis. My aim was not to fix meanings early on in the analysis but to begin with an open-ended indexing system that could provide an overview of the general facets of the participants' accounts. The second stage of analysis therefore consisted of a sentence by sentence labelling of the general themes and content within each interview account.

Table 3.1   Analytic Stages and Strategies for the Exploration of Women's Experiences Within and Across Interview Transcripts.

Aim	Focus of Comparison	Analytic Strategy	Product
Familiarisation with the data	Within individual accounts	Listening to audio recordings. Close reading of all interview transcripts. Comparing individual accounts to field observations.	Sense of the similarities and differences between experiences and perspectives.
Overview of themes mentioned	Within individual accounts	Sentence by sentence indexing of thematic content.	Coding categories (NVivo Nodes)
Identification of variations around category codes	Within and across national groups	Comparison of thematic codes	Sub-themes
Identification of thematic profiles	Within and across national groups	Counting occurrences of themes	Code frequencies
Identification of meaning contexts	Within individual interview and within national groups	Identifying the relational organisation of themes	Patterns of meaning
Identification of organising principle	Across national groups	Comparison of meaning patterns	Dialogic thema
Critical reflection on applicability of the thema 'recognition/disrespect'	Within individual accounts	Reconnection of thema to individual accounts and field observations	Validation of interpretative frame

Having linked the interview texts to basic coding categories, I began the more fine-tuned comparison of the coded thematic content within and across my participants' experiences and perspectives. The aim of this analytical step was to identify variations in how a given theme was manifested, to check for consistency in the use of codes and to further develop the coding frame. The next step consisted of calculating code frequencies in order to have an indication of the thematic profiles of the two national groups (a list of thematic codes and code frequencies can be found in Appendix 5). Although theme frequencies can be established through the qualitative coding of interviews, the use of such data has to be viewed with caution. Qualitative coding is subjective and the insight gained from coding frequencies is rather limited. When coding for themes rather than single word occurrences (the unit of analysis hence being the unit of meaning) it is not always clear where a theme begins and ends and consequently how often it should be coded. Moreover, themes are often mentioned as a function of the question that has been asked and in using semi-

structured interviews the combination of questions will vary in each interview and particularly across research locations. Theme frequencies should therefore only be used as a 'pointer' for trends in the data.

The focus of the analysis then shifted to the exploration of the relational organisation of themes and subject positions within individual accounts and within the British and Tobagonian interview texts. This interpretative process resulted in the identification of the interconnections of meanings (patterns of meaning) within the interview texts of the two cultural groups. The aim was finally to examine the identified patterns of meaning to find out what if anything unites or orients them across the variations in individual accounts and groups. This final stage of the analysis resulted in the proposition of the dialogic thema recognition/disrespect as overarching organising principle. Chapter 4 discusses the theoretical underpinnings of this interpretative frame.

Chapter 4

4. A Dialogical Reading of Body and Eating: Recognition and Disrespect

This chapter continues the analysis of the interview findings by proposing the basic thema

of recognition and disrespect as interpretative frame and organising principle. The chapter

discusses firstly the thema's ontological basis and secondly its socio-historical dimensions.

Chapters 5-8 apply the thema recognition/disrespect to the further interpretation of the

interview texts.

4.1 A Dialogic Reading of Body and Eating: The Interpretative Frame

The starting point of this study has been the acknowledgement that women's engagement

with body and eating is simultaneously idiosyncratic as it is socially situated. I have

discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis that individualistic conceptualisations of 'body image'

and 'eating attitudes' are reductionist and neglect the lived experiences of women as well

as their socio-cultural contexts. Drawing on dialogical principles and social

representations theory as alternatives to positivist research paradigms, the main purpose of

this analysis is to explore the dialogic space within which beliefs and practices that revolve

around the body and eating are enacted. In comparing the ways in which gender,

embodiment and subjectivity are expressed in the two contrasting cultural settings of

Tobago and the UK, the following questions are at the centre of this analysis: What are the

meaning contexts and the social reality that women locate themselves in when they speak

about body and eating? What knowledge is deployed in women's accounts of eating and not eating, looking good and being overweight? How is this knowledge organised and how does it impinge on women's everyday practices?

The analysis of interviews as described in the previous chapter has produced thematic profiles of the British and Tobagonian texts. As profiles, they not only offer an overview of the themes that participants addressed in the interview dialogues, but also provide an indication of the dominance of themes judged on the basis of code frequencies. While not wanting to negate the usefulness of coding for the analysis, an exclusive focus on frequencies has to be criticised on several grounds. Frequency counts imply quantitative criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity. However, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, the accurate measurement of the presence or absence of themes is neither obtainable nor would it be sufficient for an understanding of the content and function of the discursive exchange.

For the present study frequency counts have only limited hermeneutic value. The epistemological presuppositions, which I have proposed in Chapters 2, emphasise the dynamic and relational nature of symbolic activity. An analysis that takes frequencies of themes as a starting point, on the contrary, focuses our attention on a static and one-dimensional relation between the number of times a particular item has been mentioned and the importance or salience of this item for the speaker[8]. Taking a dialogical perspective however, means to start with the presupposition that what is said has no meaning in itself but is meaningful only in relation to something other – is always responsive (Voloshinov, 1973; Bakhtin, 1986). Whether we can judge the frequency of a

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[8] Continuing along this line of reasoning also means to assume that what is not mentioned or not mentioned often has little salience or significance for the speaker.

theme to be an indicator of its importance will then depend on our insight into its relational meaning context and our understanding of the responsive position that is taken up through its expression. In other words, what is not mentioned becomes equally if not even more relevant to an understanding of the dialogue than what is mentioned frequently.

Focusing on themes as disconnected frequency counts also neglects other aspects of the dialogue. If we understand common knowledge to be an organised whole rather than an undifferentiated mass of subjective meanings then we have to ask questions about the role or place of themes within it. For example, are certain meanings or aspects of reality repeated because they have become problematised or because they constitute socially sanctioned truths that are jointly reinstated? Are other themes not mentioned because they constitute underlying taken for granted aspects of reality? Could they be what (Marková, 2000) refers to as dialogically re-cycled perspectives which are anchored in common knowledge and maintain relative stability? If yes, they may be interpretations or evaluations derived from underlying assumptions that have taken a more or less unquestioned position in common thinking.

In the interviews conducted in the UK for example, 'independence' was not often mentioned explicitly yet it constituted an implicit starting point for thematisations of a self seeking to confirm its individuality and success. In Tobago on the other hand, independence was addressed as a main goal in life. Dialogical aspects of this thematic difference become clearer when drawing again on the figure-ground phenomenon. Rather than reducing the significance of independence to 'important'-'not important', I propose that 'independence' in the Tobago context constitutes an immediate focus of attention because it continues to be a source of considerable tensions between self and others. In

Tobago it could therefore be said that independence has become foregrounded, whereas it has become part of the ground which gives gestalt to other aspects of experience in the British contexts. In both contexts however, the meanings of independence play a dynamic role in the realisation and construction of reality. Their difference lies in the way they are linked to the whole and the tensions or oppositions that motivate their expression.

To repeat, the contribution of a dialogical analysis to the understanding of 'body' and 'eating' lies in the precedence it gives to the question of addressivity and response: what are the identified themes and practices oriented to? An emphasis on 'response' implies that thinking and acting are never only individual but are always also shared and multivoiced as responding is oriented to others' positions and responsive intentions. "The utterance", Bakhtin resumes, "is a link in the chain of speech communion" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.84). The analysis of utterance meanings thus should begin with an understanding of 'motivation'. What is the starting point or shared context within which the dialogic positions derive their meaning? For example, 'not eating' can express strength and superiority in response to demands of self-production and restraint, yet may be an expression of defeat or a means of self-demarcation in a context where others are seen to constitute the most immediate threats to personhood. The meanings of 'not eating' are therefore infused with the motives of the preceding utterances as much as subjective positions are constrained by the knowledge context of the particular culture. However because every response also bears a novel relation between self, other, and the world, there is simultaneously the potential for the significance of 'not eating' to be stated anew.

Taking into account these ontological and epistemological points, I shall now return to the interpretation of my interview data. Rather than continuing the further analysis with a

linear comparison of thematic differences, I have attempted to formulate a perspective that opens up to the dynamic, polyphonic and possibly contradictory dimensions of the subject positions expressed in the Tobagonian and British texts. To take as a starting point for the interpretation of the research material a basic thema that rests on the tension of fundamental opposites allows me to view the research themes as parts of a differentiated whole yet as located in an unfixed space of contested subject positions. For the present study I propose as such a core thema 'recognition and disrespect'.

Based on my empirical observations, I will argue that the dialogical opposition of recognition/disrespect has become an overarching theme, which orients experiences and practices of self in both cultures. The search for recognition cannot be understood as an individually motivated struggle – as it might be for example, in some studies focused on self-esteem - but is a socially thematised motif that needs to be viewed in relation to a socio-historical context. Finally, I will argue that differences in the way recognition has been thematised and anchored in dominant social representations produce the context for contradictory practices of the self. In the remainder of this chapter I will provide a brief overview of the theoretical basis for the use of the thema recognition/disrespect as interpretative and organisational principle. Chapters 5 to 8 on the other hand will discuss thematisations of recognition on the level of empirical investigation.

4.1.1 Recognition/Disrespect as Interpretative Frame: Theoretical Underpinnings

I shall firstly attempt to justify my choice of heuristic by tracing its theoretical links to the social ontology and epistemology I have proposed in this thesis. An analysis of the conceptualisation of recognition/disrespect with implications for social psychology should, I believe, start with a reference to the philosophy of Hegel. Many authors may agree that

Hegel's central thesis - history as the realisation of reason and freedom, the superiority of objective and absolute spirit - is dead, yet Hegel's philosophy continues to be a source of essential contributions to social and political thought today (Wood, 1990; Taylor, 1975; Taylor, 1991). It is also useful for the present analysis.

As I have argued in Chapter 2, Hegel's work introduces to the human sciences 'contradiction' as the ultimate ontological principle and as, Lukács points out, not as something that had to be overcome but as "the dynamic basis of reality as a whole" and "the real vehicle of history" (Lukács, 1978, p.3). At the root of movement is contradiction (Taylor, 1975; Marková, 1987, 2000a). That is, change becomes possible because there is contradiction that needs to be passed over into something else. At the basis of this dialectic of contradictions is the fundamental ontological conflict that all things are mediate, i.e. exist only in relation to something else and are at the same time what they are not because their identity is derived from opposition (Taylor, 1975; Marková, 1987). As in the discussion of dialogue above it is this tension between opposites and their mutual interaction which is at the basis of thought and identity. This brings us close to the Hegelian notion of recognition.

Unlike in the cognitive sense, 'recognition' here means not just the identification of an object, but its two most important meanings in Hegel's dialectic are a) to recognize as a person and b) to acknowledge in a special way, to assign worth (Inwood, 1992). To become self-conscious and acquire the status of person one needs to become aware of oneself as 'I', and this means firstly to become 'reflected into' oneself (Inwood, 1992). Recognition is required for self-consciousness as reflection into oneself requires to be reflected back from something more than an object. The 'I' must be reflected by its

opposite other to see itself as 'Me'. Again the self depends on the simultaneous unity and contrast with others. So Hegel's position, only if recognition is mutual between myself and others can I reach true fulfilment of self-consciousness and the status of being human (Taylor, 1975; Wood, 1990). However, if I fail to recognise in the other those qualities that make him a person, I cannot become aware of a reflection of these very qualities in myself. And equally if I am denied the acknowledgement of qualities of worth by the other I will struggle to develop my identity as independent person.

Hegel's model of recognition develops into a complex ethical argument that is not easily summarised, but most often cited in this regard is the allegory of the Master-Slave dialectic[9]. In its simplified form this allegory expresses the following: the master slave relation arises out of a human drive for self-certainty. In the course of the struggle for self-centred recognition between two individuals, one, in choice of life, sees himself forced to subjugate to the other who emerges as the superior, the master, with all rights to recognition. The master from then on strives on the activity and recognition of the slave, who himself is caught up in the need for self-preservation. While there is an initial success of the master, this soon turns out to be an illusion. The master fails to gain true self-consciousness and is ultimately not free. It is the slave, who through his struggle with material reality and the need to supersede desires, progresses to independence and universal consciousness. The master on the other hand is related to material reality only through the slave and regresses to a consumer – a thing not reflected in any of its creations. Moreover because he does not recognise the other as free he cannot look onto himself in the other as an independent person; recognition has become one-sided and cannot succeed (Taylor, 1975; Wood, 1990).

While there are several limitations to Hegel's master/slave argument within the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[10], it provides an account for the necessity of the reciprocal social. Indeed, Hegel's master/slave dialectic can be read as a plea for a conception of self-development grounded in acts of mutual recognition. It implies that I can only realise my worth and desire for self-sufficiency, if I understand my status as free person to be located within a community of recognition and a shared acknowledgement of conditions of worth. That an inherently social model of the struggle for recognition has been central to Hegel's philosophical investigation before he turned to a philosophy of consciousness has also been emphasised by Honneth (1995) in his analysis of Hegel's early Jena writings. At the core of Hegel's theory, before his turn to logic and spirit, Honneth argues, is the idea that intersubjective coexistence is the precondition for the development of ethical human nature: individuals need to be recognised first by others, whom they also recognise, as independent in order to gain an understanding of themselves as autonomous acting entities within a community of binding rights and duties (Honneth, 1995).

What can be drawn from Hegel's speculative philosophical dialectic in respect to the empirical analysis of the present thesis, is that it grounds self-development and social integrity in normative acts of mutual recognition. It lends to the analysis a frame that brings into focus the reference points along which women's identity is defined and challenged. I am arguing therefore that dimensions of a Hegelian dialectic of 'recognition'

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[9]Hegel's master/slave allegory has formed a central idea in Marxist thought, and has been applied to African American as well as feminist work. See for example, Kimberly Hutchings recent book, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (2003).

[10] e.g. Hegel's further argument relies heavily on rationality and a concept of the pure universal spirit, it is oriented to the metaphysical goal of overcoming external existence, and it does not translate well into practice where it leaves open the possibility of exclusion, that is recognition being guaranteed amongst a privileged group of superiors.

and 'disrespect' are also imbricated in women's struggles with embodiment, appearance and eating.

Turning to social theory, Hegel's position resonates clearly with Mead's social psychology of intersubjectivity. In Mead's psychology (Mead, 1934), as I have discussed in Chapter 2, the self cannot be conceptualised independently from the social context. The individual self emerges when it becomes an object to itself through taking the standpoint of, what Mead calls, the generalised other. The individual self therefore arises in mutual social experiencing. It should be noted however that, unlike in Hegel's work, 'social recognition' did not constitute an explicit focus in Mead's work but was inevitably implied in the interdependence between self and other. Mead does therefore not discuss particular qualities of recognition and their consequences for social integration or moral development. Honneth (2002), who originally embraced Mead's psychology in *The Struggle for Recognition*, has since distanced himself from Mead's thought for these reasons, and argues that such a conceptualisation of recognition does not suffice for a model aimed at explaining the necessity of 'struggles' for recognition.

Mead nevertheless states that to achieve the realisation of the 'I' we "must be recognised by others to have the very values which we want to have belong to (us)" (1934, p. 204) and even more so, "we want to recognise ourselves in our differences from other persons" (1934, p. 205). This could mean that we not only seek to be confirmed through socially recognised values of a unity with others but that we, at the same time, struggle to set ourselves apart and be recognised for our difference. Mead illustrates this with examples of nationalism and religious sectarianism, which he sees to be expressions of a constant need to realise ourselves in the superiority over others. On a functional level, Mead

concludes that this drive for superiority or distinction is an expression of "the preservation of the self" (1934, p. 208), as it is only through our distinct capacities that we can realise our potential to change situations.

Within the realm of social psychology, it is Ichheiser who has made the struggles and tensions of recognition or misrecognition in interpersonal relations a central focus of his work (Ichheiser, 1930; 1943; 1949). At the bottom of all human relations, in Ichheiser's view of social perception, is the 'image of the other man', the impressions and roles assigned to the individual on the basis of social expectations. Ichheiser's emphasis lies here not so much on the functional role of expectations of a generalised other but on the damaging psychological consequences misrecognitions can have for the individual.

Positive relations to self require an attunement of the different images of the subjective and objective self and this relies heavily on the condition of social cohesion. If there are, on the other hand, discrepancies between the images held by the person himself and the images assigned to him, social relations will become disturbed, and, at a greater psychological cost, tensions between 'I' and 'Me' will become debilitating for the development of the self. Because the predominant response to misrecognition, Ichheiser points out, is not a change in the dominant 'outer' images or roles but an attempt to adapt the self to the false image, the expression of the 'inner' personality becomes negated. At the least this means entering into a state of estrangement. At worst it means, the breakdown of mental health.[11] At the root of both, Ichheiser concludes, are disturbances in social relations and not as may be assumed, psychological faults of the individual mind (Ichheiser, 1949).

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[11] It should also be noted here, that the way in which negative recognition, in the form of stigma, can 'spoil' identities has been extensively discussed by Goffman (1963).

To conclude, drawing on both philosophical argument and social psychological theory, I have postulated that mutual recognition constitutes the normative or universal condition under which identity is formed and interpreted. Positive-self-relating stems from reciprocal movements of recognition, while acts of non-recognition or misrecognition threaten or deny an individual's status as a person. The struggle for recognition, on the other hand, bears for the individual also the pathway to true independence. A method of analysis based on the significance of recognition rejoins the dialogical position that I have discussed above in a number of ways. It views self and meaning as the result of a relation and as relative to other perspectives. It acknowledges opposition as integrate part of self development and sense making. It reinstates the Hegelian as well as dialogic position that the particular is realised through the whole. And finally, it posits that the driving force behind all change is the dynamic tension between opposites.

In regard to the present study, this means to explore the meanings and practices revolving around body and eating in relation to conditions of worth. It will be presupposed that the experiences expressed in the interviews are relative not in the sense that they are randomly subjective but that they stand in a meaningful relation to a differentiated whole; a manifest part of this whole being the dialectic of recognition and disrespect. However, exploring women's engagement with body and eating through the perspective of 'struggles for recognition' should not imply that Hegel's allegory is understood as an all encompassing 'grand narrative' into which the research product can be made to fit (Harrison, 1999) or which reveals some final truth. It is employed as an interpretative frame that can provide viable insight into the social relational aspects of the research material. Adopting this view, for example, allows us to conceive the ambivalent nature of subject positions.

Struggles for recognition can position the individual as subjugated and oppressed, yet at the same time as autonomous and empowered. It is this ambivalence which has been supported by Hegel's allegory.

The question that has up until now not been considered in this discussion is why it might be proposed that struggles for recognition have become problematised and a particular focus of attention today. This question can be answered when we understand the form and content of 'recognition' to be historically contingent (Honneth, 2002). In other words, how has what it means to be a person been differentiated historically?

4.1.2   Historical Contingencies

A society's concept of 'person', just like its conception of identity, manifests itself as part of a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Giddens, 1991). As part of a changing social reality the content and form of what it means to be a person also changes. How I conceive and experience my status of person or my identity will not be derived from a universal truth but will be determined by the cultural context within which I live. We will therefore find differences in the way the self is conceived between different points of time in history as well as different cultures. Moreover, the construction of identity is not a one way process that ends with the passive internalisation of definitions. Definitions of identity change with definitions of reality but the way I conceive and experience myself can in turn alter my ways of interacting with the world and thus generate a new construction of reality. Berger reminds us, that "men not only define themselves, but they actualise these definitions in real experience – they live them" (Berger, 1970, p.344). What are therefore the conditions of worth that are impinging on the modern concept of

person? And, how do these modern conceptions of person in turn shape our interpersonal reality?

Ichheiser's particular contribution to a social psychological conceptualisation of recognition lies in his consideration of the socio-historical dimensions of social perception. One of the central theses of his work has been that the interpretations and evaluative qualities actualised in processes of social perception are largely derived from the cultural and ideological themes of a society; only to a small part are they based on 'original' or 'natural' reactions in human relations. His analysis of the links between misattribution and ideology highlights, as a particular source of debilitating acts of interpretation, modern societies' all encompassing orientation to success and failure (Ichheiser, 1930, 1943, 1949). This means that values, beliefs, goals and the evaluation of the worth of a person have become based on an ideology of achievement. Part of this ideology, as I have already pointed out earlier, is the collective representation of the individual as being responsible for his or her actions (Farr, 1991).

In this context of individual responsibility, the person's worth is not only measured by his or her success but it is also believed that everybody gets what they deserve. Success is seen as the reward for competence and other positively valued qualities, such as kindness, and intelligence. This however, conflicts with the actual conditions of success, namely that success depends partly on personal and partly on situational factors (Ichheiser, 1930, 1943, 1949). Moreover, the personal qualities often contributing to individual success are not those promoted by the moral standards of the society. The misinterpretation of personal versus social-situational factors, is a fallacy at the basis of modern thinking, Ichheiser notes, which significantly affects the individual on a number of levels. Submerged in both

lay and scientific thinking, it not only shapes the socially accepted definition of personality, but it also affects the dynamics of personality itself (Ichheiser, 1943). Ichheiser thus describes conditions in which recognition fails. Because of paradoxical demands and false expectations in the individual qualities of a decontextualised self, it is misrecognition which prevails. An individual's worth is recognised for qualities which are unattainable or false. At the same time, the need for positive reflection and security through others has become vital for maintaining identity.

An analysis of the historical decline of the concept of honour and the emergence of the concept of dignity (Berger, 1970) makes this problematisation of recognition more clear. Despite the universal need for recognition, social recognition has not always been a focus of attention in the history of the self. Berger demonstrated this by drawing a comparison between the implications of the concepts of 'honour' and 'dignity' for identity. Today, the concept of 'honour' has lost its significance in everyday interactions. Yet until the 18th century, it functioned as the most significant expression of a person's worth, albeit being exchanged and defended only amongst a privileged group of people. 'Honour' thus presupposed an understanding of identity as a given, locating the individual in relatively fixed positions. Identity, just as the expectations and behaviours connected to a particular identity, were anchored in social hierarchies. It means also that a person's responsibilities together with the qualities of his or her personality were conceived as a direct consequence of a person's social role. Although the concept of 'honour' implies the explicit distinction between the worth of people, its underlying assumptions about identity guarantee a certain level of recognition. Recognition was exchanged to the extent that identity rested largely on taken for granted social categories, whose validity was jointly acknowledged (Taylor, 1991).

The advent of humanism and democracy resulted in a number of changes in regard to this conception of 'person'. Egalitarian principles contributed to the decline of social hierarchies and the emergence of an ideal that no longer saw an individual's intrinsic worth as dependent on his or her social position. Consequently, the concept to replace the selectively applied concept of honour was that of dignity. Unlike honour, dignity could pertain to all regardless of their role in society. With the new concept of dignity however, came also the ideal of an authentic self, which again problematised recognition (Berger, 1970, Taylor, 1991). The new ideal centres around an individualized self whose identity, the definition and expression of its original way of being, should be inwardly generated.

One implication of this new focus on the inner qualities of self has been, as Ichheiser demonstrated, that success and failure have become the responsibility of the individual. No longer is a person's worth derived from his or her social standing. In fact, the reverse seems to be the case in that a person's social position is now seen as the just consequence of his or her intrinsic worth. For recognition it means, moreover, that the self always remains in a state of uncertainty since it can only be recognised once it has succeeded in producing its own identity. The latter is a nearly unachievable task for the individual person. Identity can only be generated in dialogue with others. Devoid of a priori recognition and guided by a false ideal the individual now has to struggle for identification and is always at risk of being misrecognized or disrespected. It is for these reasons that we rely more than ever on other's acts of recognition to gain self-certainty, and that our sense of self has become so vulnerable to having negative images projected upon us (Taylor, 1991).

I do not wish to imply that the genesis of the authentic self has made disrespect damaging or discrimination possible. It is needless to say that acts of degradation and disrespect have had most severe consequences for the individual person as well as whole peoples through out history. The history of humankind can indeed be read as a history of discrimination. My intention is however, to show that the social conditions of late modernity exacerbate struggles for recognition together with the risks of failed recognition. What has changed at the end of the twentieth century is that identities have become ultimately uncertain. The socio-structural and ideological changes that have been taking place over the course of the twentieth century have moved societies beyond the certainties and truths of the past and have exchanged these for a new individualized freedom (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Lash, 2002). While opening up new possibilities for individuals the dissolution of traditions, customs and fixed positions meant also to give way to doubt and risk. Everyday life has attained a new complexity within which the self is faced with the continuous task of identity production (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2002).

The new complexity of modern realities together with an all encompassing uncertainty challenges subjective positions and individual worth more than ever. Just as our environments are always moving we are required to make choices and decisions fast yet without having the affirmation of a continuous identity. Beck consequently gives precedence to a notion of 'reflex' rather than 'reflection' in the conceptualisation of modernity and substitutes the old law of 'I am therefore I think' with 'I am I'. It is this latter notion of 'I am I' which has come to dominate contemporary social consciousness and which also constitutes a great fallacy in this era of individual freedom. The demand of producing an authentic true inner self stands in stark contrast to a reality that has opened up

to an infinite number of possibilities to which the individual adjusts with multiple and always changing subject positions (Goffman, 1971; Giddens, 1991).

I would then like to propose that the crucial difference between a traditional society and a society of the second modernity lies in the prevalence of a dominant social representation of 'authenticity' in the collective consciousness of people. Derived from this social representation are new ways of engaging with our material and social environment – new notions of person are actualised and reality is in turn acted upon and changed. Part of this social representation of an authentic self are criteria for normality that are oriented to agency, production, and self realisation. In fact, these are the homogenising criteria to which individuals of modern societies need to conform. Bauman summarises the implications of this new representation of the 'individualized self' as follows:

"To put it in a nutshell, 'individualization' consists in transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' – and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance: in other words, it consists in establishing a de jure autonomy (although not necessarily de facto one)... Modernity replaces determination of social standing with compulsive and obligatory self-determination." (Bauman, 2002, p. xv).

The effects of what Bauman describes as a 'compulsive and obligatory self-determination' can be seen in all areas of modern life. From the way we 'manage' close relationships, choose our hobbies, up to the type of food we select, our choices are oriented to an ambivalent need of ensuring the recognition of our self-produced identity and at the same time asserting our independence. Popular psychology has long tapped into these

requirements of the individualized person. As an example of popular psychology's focus on self-determination may be taken B Moses' recent publication, *What Next* (2003a), advertised as the complete guide to taking control of your working life. Her new book, just like her previous bestselling publications, is focused on career management and the struggle of finding the perfect balance between work and life.

Implied already by its title, 'What Next' proclaims that success is a matter of staying focused on your goals and pursuing these through determined choices. Moses declares that if you single-mindedly pursue your goals, you can 'have it all' in the course of your working life. The central principle of Moses' approach is self-determination: "the foundation for any meaningful career, deliberation and decision is knowing yourself" (Moses, 2003b) – this means knowing your unique values, your motivational type and ultimately what kind of role and environment you would be happiest in. The gist of Moses' guide is then, if you can establish a "single minded sense of purpose" you will also be able to stay in control of your time, as you will be able to routinely assess yourself, readjust your work/life balance and stay focused on your individual needs. While this approach seems to empower individuals to "activists" – "no one is a victim of their work" (Moses, 2003b) – on first sight, it is fundamentally a rationale for blaming individuals for their social standing and for blending out a need for social responsibility and change.

Claims as the above deny the role of the social and focus on individuals in isolation. The definition of my goals and purpose just like the definition of my identity are developed in dialogue with those normative presuppositions that underlie my culture's concept of person. I am therefore restrained by other's expectations to the extent that I can only affirm those qualities or capabilities of mine that I can be recognised for by the ones with

whom I interact (Honneth, 2002). And finally, to view needs and choices as a 'single act' neglects the fact that we seek security and enjoyment in homogeneous community. Having to be self-determined and different from all others does not fulfil these needs.

What I hope to have demonstrated in this brief analysis of the historical contingency of recognition is that while the struggle for recognition constitutes a basic ontological motive, the conditions of recognition are thematised in dependence of culturally shared social representations. The accounts produced by the participants of the present study in both cultures can be seen to be oriented to the two dimensions of recognition/disrespect. Yet the way recognition is thematised in the British contexts is significantly different from the way recognition is addressed in the Tobagonian contexts. As I have argued above, dominant social representations of authenticity, responsibility and an individualized self position the individual in a context of paradoxical demands that problematise struggles for recognition, make the individual more dependent on others and particularly vulnerable to misrecognition. In Tobago on the other hand, and this will be illustrated in the following chapters, recognition is anchored in socially acknowledged identities. However, disrespect has moved to the foreground of self-other relations giving self-preservation priority over self-determination. I will argue that 'body' and 'eating' must be understood in relation to these conditions of recognition and the culture's social representation of person, which are impinging on identity. The further interpretation of my research findings will highlight that it is particularly in the context of being a young woman that identity construction and the development of a positive relation to self is problematised. It is in this context that bodily practices, some of which are self damaging, derive their meaning.

4.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for a dialogical reading of the research material that begins with the relational aspects of the research texts rather than the frequency of its thematic elements. To answer questions about the meanings of body and eating in the lives of the women that participated in the present study, it is necessary to understand what knowledge organises the social reality that is constructed around a culture's self-other relations. I have proposed that a basic thema, which underpins women's dialogic positions and practices in both cultures, is recognition/disrespect. Within these two cultural contexts recognition/disrespect is thematised in dependence of the changing conditions of worth which form the basis for a culture's concept of 'person'. This chapter has provided the theoretical rationale for the use of 'recognition' as a motivational principle. In the following chapters I will apply the thema recognition/disrespect as interpretative frame to the further empirical analysis of 'body' and 'eating'.

Chapter 5

5. Gendered Bodies and Embodied Identities

The following analysis attempts to understand the relation self/body in a non-reductionist way by viewing it along the dimensions of recognition/disrespect. This dimension, I have argued in the previous chapter, can be seen to orient and meaningfully integrate the texts produced in both, the British and Tobagonian interviews, while leaving space for an acknowledgement of the contesting of multiple subject positions. In the following chapters I will demonstrate that the differences between experiences and practices observed in the UK and Tobago suggest distinct cultural thematisations of recognition and its underlying social representations of person. It has been suggested that late modern societies are marked by doubt and a multiplicity of values, attitudes and life styles and that they differ from traditional societies in which a similar world view may be jointly upheld. Despite this possible difference I will propose that each culture forms an integrated whole of interdependent positions. What should be the further implications of this stance for an analysis of body and eating in the context of femininity?

In my discussion of post-structuralist and feminist approaches in Chapter 1, I have argued that there is a danger of reverting to narrow conceptualisations of self/body in the quest to either bring to the fore the true subjective voice or to deconstruct the disempowering social discourses that define our experiences of femininity and the body: focusing on the authentic subjective experience neglects that subjective positions are always interlaced

with the social; research that, on the other hand, views the subject as constituted through discursive constructions must be aware of the risk of reducing women to passive and unknowing recipients of patriarchal interests. Understanding body and eating within the context of struggles for recognition can forefend some of these problems. Conceived as part of the dialogicality of human relations the notion of struggles for recognition requires to take into account the agentic role of the individual, as I have outlined in the previous chapter. Dialogicality means a difference of points of view and never a complete merging of minds, and for this, mind and representation. It means that subjectivity is neither located outside the social nor wholly constituted by discourse or representation. To view the individual women's accounts along the dimension recognition/disrespect means to view them as part of a differentiated whole consisting of interdependent yet unfixed subject positions. This allows me to bring to the foreground the specificity of each experience, but also the conjuncture of the individual with the social that impinges on the self through jointly exchanged conditions of recognition. The aim is therefore to bring attention to the way representations can 'work' (Saukko 2000) in different cultural and individual contexts. The struggle to construct identity through socially shared conditions of recognition, while simultaneously resisting and acting upon representations of the self, results in always ambivalent, competing or contradictory subject positions.

Having thus argued for a conception of subjectivity as polyphonic, what remains to be addressed is the interconnection of subjectivity, gender and the body. How should this connection be conceived for the empirical analysis of the present thesis? Taking the dialogic thema of recognition and disrespect as a starting point opens up the possibility to avoid binary theorisations of mind/body, sex/gender or materiality/representation that feminist approaches have repeatedly been criticised of intensifying (Grosz, 1994; Gatens,

1996; Colebrook, 2000; Saukko, 2002; Budgeon 2003, Hutchings 2003). With the use of the notion 'struggles for recognition' I wish to bring to the foreground the interdependence of these entities. What the allegory of struggles for recognition can show is that no strict boundary can exist between self and other, that each is constituted through its opposite and their dynamic relation as an event of becoming. To quote Colebrook, "what something *is* is given through its activity of differentiation" (Colebrook, 2000, p. 87, original italics). This has important implications also for an understanding of 'body'.

The dualism of mind/body continues to constitute a core problem in theorisations of gender and identity (Shilling and Mellor, 1996; McNay, 1999; Colebrook, 2003). Distinctions such as sex/gender around which some of the main debates in feminist thought have revolved infer a boundary between the body-material and the body-representation that limits how we can analytically engage with women's agency and also constrains the feminist goal of social critique. Most paradoxically what can be seen to be recycled with the upholding of binary conceptualisations of body and identity is the traditional dualism of masculine/feminine that has dominated the history of science. It is particularly paradoxical if we consider that critiquing the conflation of masculine/feminine with the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy has been a focal point of feminist approaches to eating disorders (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Malson, 1998). Traditionally conceived in dualist terms, as I have pointed out before, masculinity has been distinguished from femininity through the qualities of rationality, strength and independence whereas femininity has been associated with body, weakness and dependence. This posits the body in separation and opposition to the mind.

Analytical approaches that focus on the social construction of identity and construe the body as signified only through representation or discourse echo this dualism. Giddens's analysis of identity for example, upon which I drew in my discussion of the historical thematisation of recognition, can - despite the contribution it makes to an understanding of the modern context of person - likewise be criticised for a privileging of mind over body (Shilling and Mellor, 1996; McNay, 1999; Budgeon, 2003). In Giddens's work identity has become a reflexive project of the mind. The modern person faced with an ever changing multitude of choices and environments has become entirely mind driven and acts *upon* the body to achieve the desired productions of self. The self is ultimately construed as outside of the body. The body means anything the mind wants it to mean and does not exist anterior to this reflexive thought. Giddens can therefore be accused of formulating an account of identity that is more or less disembodied.

While new representations of choice and control impinge on the way bodily practices are reflected upon, which I can also see in the experiences of the British women that participated in my study, we cannot understand the body as a "passive blank surface" (McNay, 1999, p.96) upon which cognitive content and power relations are inscribed. It is true that "the body is not the origin of its meanings" (Malson, 1998, p.112) but we also need to be careful not to think and fix the body in opposition to that which signifies it. Here Grosz (1994) offers a different view on the relation between mind and the corporeal, one that sees each constituted but not reducible to the other. This means that body and self stand in a non-dichotomous and dynamic relation that eludes completeness. Body and self are not defined in negativity but as positively affirming each other. Grosz rethinks the body as event. This idea reminds one also of Holquist's reading of dialogism: "I am an event, the event of constantly responding...At a basic biological level, thirst does not just

exist in the natural world, it happens to me...; and lack of water means nothing without the response of thirst." (1990; p. 48).

For my analysis the above considerations mean that what needs to be added to the emphasis on subjective agency is an emphasis on embodied and gendered agency that lets us inquire into the mutual instigating of body, self and other, augmenting the points of their convergence and divergence. This chapter focuses on the participants' identities as women and how these identities are enacted in the dialogues of the different individual and cultural contexts.

5.1   Representations of 'Being a Woman': Distinct and Uncertain Identities

I have argued above that the differences between experiences and practices observed in the UK and Tobago suggest distinct cultural thematisations of recognition and its underlying social representations of person. One such difference between the two groups of women was their way of addressing and reflecting upon their identity as women in the interview dialogues. What it means to be a woman could be perceived as an unquestionable part of common knowledge in the one cultural context while it remained an irreconcilable and uncertain concept in the other. Before I will try to explore the question of how identities of women seem to have been enacted differently in the Tobagonian and British texts, I would like to turn to the women's reflections on first 'becoming a woman'.

5.1.1   Menarche and the Dialogic Construction of Femininity

All my interviews began with the question about the change when we move from being a girl to being woman and how or if this was experienced by my interviewee. The universally most similar and apparent change in regard to this question is that of physical

development. The biological processes that occur during adolescence change a young person's sense of embodiment and self and culminate in what is considered adult sexuality. While puberty and sexuality have not been made an explicit focus in this study, my questions about changing from being a girl or child to being a woman tapped into these experiences of adolescence. In all my interviews the experience of bodily maturation during adolescence was addressed either directly by the interviewee or through a question. Traditionally puberty is conceived as the marker of the onset of womanhood. How was this experience made sense of by the women themselves?

The participants reflections on physical developments during adolescence most often started with the experience of the first menstruation:

N[12]
I always start with the kind of change when we move from from being a girl to maybe becoming a woman/ or being more like a woman/ and for many people that is just during their teenage years/ probably/ that they would experience this kind of change/ is is that something that/ that you would say you kind of experienced like that
Candis (T&T)
yes I I would say from the age about 13/ like that's when you become a young woman/ that's when you start seeing your periods and stuff like that you know / yea would say that/ from age 13/ [...] it all started for me when I was 13/ when I was 13/ it all happened so naturally/ there was no body change/ it just all happened [?] / it just all happened/ and I was telling myself/ I was so shocked/ I was telling myself/ what is this/ you know/ I didn't really know much about it because my mother didn't really you know put me down and talk to me about these sort of things you know/ so I didn't really know what to really make out of it when it really happened and stuff like that/ when I started I was a bit scared and stuff like that/ and I went through about it about 6 to 7 months until I could even tell her about it/ cause I was frightened/ I didn't know what it was/ I thought I was pregnant/ you know all diff/ you know all different sort of things/ you know/ and then I went to school and I was telling my friends them about it/ and then they said it's what uhm what a young woman normally goes through/ it's called a period and stuff like that/ then I felt a little better/ then I told her and stuff like that you know/ just a bit scared you know

N
yea first of all that/ because we go through a lot of bodily changes during that time/ how was that experience for you
Linda (UK)
hmm strange/I think strange is probably the word/ but every girl sort of experiences it/ it's/ and it's hm the start of being a woman (laughs)/ telling your mother that you have started your period/ I suppose it's quite embarrassing in a way as well/ and then a few years go by and it's just something that you just sort of have to take it and you don't think about it

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[12] The initial N refers to the interviewer. Brackets [...] indicate where words or sentences have been omitted from the selected extract.

anymore/ but to start of with I would say embarrassing more than anything else/ thinking oh this is going to last forever sort of thing

N

could you tell me more/ or/ what more specifically is embarrassing

Linda

I just mean like/ like probably having your first period/ and and then your body starts changing/ and then you develop some hips that appear from nowhere/ and you just sort of fill out a bit/ yea I think embarrassing would probably be the word for starting your period/ and having to explain to your mum/ oh my God I am having my period

N

not a very nice experience

Linda

it's not/ no/ all those years ago and it feels like it hadn't happened/ it's just something that you have got to get used to/ and you adjust to it/ just like other things that happen/ that is definitely a striking one that I remember from my teenage years

I have chosen the above extracts from my interviews with Candis and Linda because they illustrate to me what seems to be, on first reading, the most prominent characteristic of all accounts of the first menstruation: shame and embarrassment. This also seemed to be conveyed in the accounts of participants who did not speak about it in as much detail as above. Thus the experience of menarche was often only hinted at ("or getting your periods/ things like that are really quite/ you know/ I mean"), kept in second person accounts, or told through parodying the naiveté and fear with which it was encountered. It may also not seem surprising that menstruation was construed by participants in both cultures as a bodily reaction that had to be kept private, with the only person confided in most often being the mother in the UK[13] and an older sister or friend in Tobago. These first experiences rejoin strong cultural ideas about menstruation that can be traced throughout history.

Beliefs about the menstruating woman have always been marked by associations with the uncontrollable and threatening (Ussher, 1991; Walker, 1997). What experiences of shame and embarrassment can be seen to be oriented to here is a thematisation of menstruation along a binary of purity and pollution in both a hygienic and a moral sense. The event of

menarche, the first visible sign of a girl's reproductive potential, is thus also a sign of the end of the purity and innocence of childhood. Fears such as "I thought I was pregnant" recall associations with sin and the threat of a disobedient sexuality. Indeed, menstruation features as a curse or punishment in various religious texts (Walker, 1997). Accounts of menarche that describe its unsettling and unpleasant nature, such as the above, reflect this shared knowledge and, it can be claimed, in turn reproduce what is deemed as an acceptable view in the misogynist context that continues to surround menstruation (Walker, 1997). Alternative understandings of menstruation and women's ongoing experience of it are largely absent from public discourse.

One of the most central images in representations of the menstruating woman, for example, continues to be blood. Images of women's monthly bloodiness have maintained powerful associations throughout history – death, the supernatural, the unclean and primitive - and have justified measures of constraint in different cultural contexts. Due to their polluting and toxic nature menstruating women had to be prevented from direct and indirect contact with others, thus had to stay in separate lodgings, could not prepare food, touch animals or have sex with a man to name but a few (see e.g. Douglas, 1984; Britton, 1996). In Tobago remains of this knowledge can still be found, as one of my participants tells me while explaining that girls that climb trees are tomboys:

> **Kenisha**
> [...] they say/ when girls climb/ people does say/ girls mustn't climb tree because
> **N**
> they mustn't
> **Kenisha**
> Yea/ because/ uhm/ does make the fruit sour/ yea/ it does make the fruit sour
> **N**
> right
> **Kenisha**
> yea everybody have a slang for everything

---

[13] Amongst my participants only one departed from this expectation. Helen, who had described herself as a particularly 'girlie girl' who dreaded being mis-recognised as a boy, remembered that she announced having her first period to everyone and was met with general bewilderment.

N
why do you think that is/ why do you think they say that
Kenisha
because a girl when she open up over the tree/ like when she climbing/ and they gonna say that will make the fruit sour/ but/ some people gonna look at that

Although similar beliefs may be dismissed in late modern societies as unscientific, one of the most pervasive associations with menstruation in these Western societies is still that of uncleanliness. We can therefore see a continuation of the taboo that surrounds the 'bleeding' female body also in the West of the 21st century. Adverts for menstrual products illustrate these contemporary fears and have also reinforced them (Treneman, 1988; Block Coutts and Berg, 1994; Park, 1996). The liberating tone of these adverts – we all now know that with a tampon you can run, swim and play tennis and that sanitary towels are so slim and safe that you can wear anything you want – is contrasted by the secrecy it emphasises. New menstrual products thus help us to control and hide our monthly impurity and allow us to continue to be the happy and pristine women as which we receive recognition.

Indeed, what remained for the young women in my study, when reflecting on their experiences of menstruation in the here and now, was the association with pain and hygiene that restrains them in their everyday life. The remainders, and possibly reminders of the more negative images and fears that had been associated with menarche. On the other hand, what can also be seen in the accounts of the young women is a position that normalises the menstruating body. In contrast to the negative social appraisal of menstruation, the women emphasised that it is a shared experience ("everybody gets it"), that you just get used to it or in Claire's words that "you sort of realised oh well this is just how it's got to be". In Tobago, it was also emphasised that it was good because it offers your body a "clean-out". Bringing to the foreground the natural force of the body allows a

distancing from the discomfort of 'being' a bleeding body, affirms the corporeal and unites the self with the body in naturalness. It brings to the fore moreover the awareness of the female body in relation to other female bodies and thus the awareness of a shared identity. What may indeed be reflected in these dialogues is the negotiating between different subject positions, the local experience and ambivalent social meanings.

There is however also another possible implication of the position that emphasises the normality of the menstruating body. The menstruating body becomes construed as too ordinary to mention it. As one of my participants pointed out "people say/ my mum's age/ she wouldn't even think about it at all". Anchored in biological facts it constitutes a topic of reflection only in a medical context; and again the focus is on how to control its abnormalities. These shifting positions between the horror and the ordinary of menstruation remind me of my own experiences. Having received a 'modern' view on menstruation that set the female members of my family apart from the old-fashioned complexes and hysterias, I have in fact no memory of my first period. I remember quite well however, the stories that circulated amongst my peers of the girl that was left covered in blood when her menstruation set in while she was in school, the shamefulness of requiring menstrual products, the agony of having to join the PE class and being found out, and on top of this the avoidance of this topic in my own family beyond menarche.

In coexistence with the negative social appraisal of the bleeding female body, the reinforcement of the normality of this bodily process can moreover function as a means of positioning women as not justified in having feelings of shame or anger when experiencing the constraints of menstruation. There is again a tendency to pathologise women that experience their menstrual cycle as problematic, reflected particularly in the popularity of

diagnoses such as PMS (Ussher, 1991; Swann, 1997). It brings us back to the position that women are psychologically afflicted due to their physiology and that their problems can be marginalised as 'women's problems'. As Park points out, "medical science has resurrected the notion that women are chronically unreliable and unpredictable" (1996). Interestingly, mood swings due to changing hormone levels were only mentioned by the British women in my study, while Tobagonian women did not make such references to an unstable temper. In Tobago hormones were mentioned in association with sexual activity and desire, and as a dangerous side-product in meat.

5.1.1.1 The Proof and Lack of Womanhood: Menarche and Identity in the British Texts

I have begun to re-describe the young women's experiences of physically changing into a woman as a negotiation of ambivalent positions between the material force of the body and the social signification of these bodily processes. It is on the basis of this dialogicality or tension of meanings that a reflection on self-other relations and a reflection on the body in relation to other bodies is accentuated. What, however, could the experience of menarche, which has been construed throughout history as the physical marker of female reproduction and the end of a girl's childhood, contribute to the young women's identification with being a woman? In contrast to this common expectation, menarche was seldom viewed as contributing to their identity as women by the British participants in this study. Rather than a marker of womanhood, menarche induced a state of dependence and helplessness associated most with being like a child not like a woman:

> **N**
> so you said bodily changes/ like getting your period/ while being considered to be the big
> **Christine**
> change yea
> **N**
> thing/ wasn't really so big maybe

Christine

it it was a change/ I certainly thought oh no /and seeing/ I really wanted it before I got it/ but after I got it I kind of thought oh no I can't really cope with it/ I don't like it/ uhm cause I didn't feel/ I nearly would have said that biologically I was a woman/ but I don't say that in itself/ that means being a woman

(Naomi responded to the question whether she felt she was treated differently when physical changes started to take place during puberty)

Naomi

[...] one of the times during kind of during my teenage years when I think maybe I felt most sort of kind of child like and needing to be protected was when I actually did start my periods/ and I was very embarrassed about telling my Mum about it even though I was already what almost 15 at the time/ uhm and I didn't say anything to her for about a whole day and then I was like well you know obviously I'm gonna actually need you know like some sanitary towels I have to go tell my Mum/ and uhm I was you know bit upset you know sort of crying and stuff/ and I kind of like went to bed with a hot water bottle and I just felt like a little child who was ill/ and that you know I didn't actually feel you know right now I'm a woman you know at all

Both, Christine and Naomi, as illustrated by the extracts above, see menarche as either not significant or not reconcilable with what they identified for themselves to be characteristics of their womanhood. Two perspectives are rejoined by the young women in Britain. Their stories reflect firstly an orientation to the expectation that the onset of womanhood can be biologically determined. This expectation was shared by the young women in the sense that almost all stressed that they had anticipated physical changes to happen. There was always the threat of being left behind or staying "just a young girl" (Melanie). From the perspective of the 'young girl' biological maturation seemed to promise a desired reality in which they would be treated differently by others. The physical 'proof' of female maturity therefore held an association with power that simultaneously emphasised an experience of non-recognition and the denial of respect for the little girl. The most prominent memories of being a little girl were in fact about being teased and bullied. With bodily development taking its course, biological determination, however, became contrasted by uncertainty. For many of my British participants the fulfilment of physical maturation also seemed to call into question what being a woman entailed.

5.1.1.2 Embracing Female Potency: Menarche and Identity in the Tobagonian Texts

While menstruation is a taboo also in Tobago, menarche seems to be more directly linked with the maturity of a girl's sexuality. Gender identity and the manifestation of male and female sexuality are inextricably intertwined in the everyday interactions that I observed and participated in during my research stay in Tobago (see also, Miller, 1994; Yelvington, 1996). Unlike the young women in the UK, women in Tobago did not mention that they had anticipated physical changes to happen or that they feared they were going to be left behind. On the contrary, the young Tobagonian women described how boys had anticipated their physical development and had continuously commented on their attractiveness to them. To illustrate the particular twofold nature of the beginning of a girls menstrual cycle, I will excerpt again from my interview with Candis (who's description of menarche I have already cited above):

> **N**
> can I ask you again about the bodily changes/ cause you just told me already uhm/ that you get more attention from the guys
> **Candis (T&T)**
> of the guys yes/ you see/ once/ you see a woman hit the age from about 15/ between the age of 15/ from 15 up I would say from 16 15 up/ the guys would be more attracted to them/ because you know they will start seeing their monthly and they will have a bit you know breast and they have a little bit you know bottom and stuff like that you know and the guys will just like to see those things/ yea they will like to see those things/ especially when they wear nice short pants or nice short skirts and stuff like that they would like to see those things/ really turn them on/ I know/ I can tell you/ I know I can tell you/ they like to see those things/ you know/ and they start seeping[14] girls and calling them/ and for instance the girl doesn't take them on they will curse them you know in that sort of way/ yea/ that's how disrespectful men are

The first of Candis's descriptions construed the beginning of a girl's menstrual cycle as a hidden and threatening event. In this second extract menstruation is perceived as part of a girl's unfolding sexual potency. Although power imbalances are evident particularly

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[14] 'Seeping' or 'sooting' here refers to hissing sounds ('psst') or vocalisations of the lips. It is mainly directed at the opposite sex and aims at getting the person's attention, sometimes followed by attempts to start a conversation or simply followed by sexual comments or calling names. Unlike in the UK this use of vocal gesture is not reserved for commenting on a woman's exceptional 'sexy' appearance, but is widely practised by young as well as older persons. It can be used by men and women alike, but it is most typical for the behaviour of men.

between the younger men and women of Tobago, objectification and passivity can not sufficiently describe female sexuality and its role in gender relations. Despite Candis's final emphasis on the disrespectfulness of men and their objectification and denigration of women, women's sexuality is not constructed as passive. There is the suggestion of an inevitable power of female sexuality in the dialogue. In "I know I can tell you", Candis underlines her knowledge of this power over men to me, and does this with slight amusement partly in response to my assumed naiveté as white woman. The majority of the young women that I spoke to shared this amusement over men's reactions to them and were quick to mock men's 'chats' and 'slangs' amongst themselves, although they would not respond to men's seeping or 'sweet talking' on most occasions.

The dialogic positions contained within this short excerpt reveal two dimensions of the construction of male-female relationships. Both men and women define each other in antagonistic terms. There is an expectation of disrespect and, as I will discuss in more detail later, of being used by the other. However, women's identity is defined through the simultaneous opposition and complementarity to men and vice versa. Seeing your menstruation and other bodily developments are part of this publicly recognised and confirmed identity. The duality of male and female sexuality is not only conceived as a natural given but it also takes on a central role in the contesting of power relations in Tobago. This contesting of the genders through the 'idiom' (Miller, 1994) of sexuality finds expression as well in the popular Calypso and Soca songs of the country. A carnival hit in 2002, performed by Lima and entitled 'The sugar factory', praises women's sexuality in the following way:

> ....We girls got the sugar factory
> We got the sugar real plenty plenty plenty
> The sugar and spice makes everything nice like water on ice
> I gon' give you it
> the sugar and spice makes everything nice

> nough men dos cry and beg for it
> the sugar and spice makes everything nice like water on ice
> boy come for it
> the sugar and spice makes everything
> nough man does die for it
> a dat a what the men them want
> a dat a what the men them need
> the men them want the factory
> we got all the sugar plenty...

The use of sugar or sweetness as a metaphor for girls resembles traditional associations that define girls as nice and pristine, such as in the old English nursery rhyme 'sugar and spice and everything nice that's what little girls are made of'. However, in the Caribbean sugar has, a strong connotation with pleasure and is part of a context in which food and eating is used metaphorically to express the sexual attraction between men and women and to allude to the sexual act itself. This metaphor also expresses some fundamental assumptions about gender relations. Male-female relationships are construed in terms of an exchange, even in a material sense, and are located on the level of basic needs. It is moreover an exchange that pertains to all rather than being dependent on individual qualities. I have drawn on the short excerpt and the calypso lyrics above to illustrate how gender identity, and for that an explicitly embodied gender identity, is mutually reinforced in everyday life in Tobago. I will now argue that this contrasts with the tensions inherent in constructions of becoming a 'woman' in the interviews with my British participants.

5.1.2   Becoming a 'Woman': Recognition and Meanings of 'Maturity'

When trying to explore further the question of how the young women reflected upon and constructed their understandings of being a woman the focus returns again to the way others recognised and responded to the developing female body. As the interview extracts below illustrate, participants from both cultures described this experience in very similar terms and as an almost inescapable truth of 'becoming a woman':

N
I'm kind of interested in the change when we move from being a girl to being a woman/ or being more like a woman/ so it's usually whilst we are teenagers that we first think about becoming adult women or as feminine/ so is that when you think back/ as a teenager/ kind of/ what you experienced/ a change/ or

Marie (UK)
Yea yea I think so/ there is all the bodily changes you know/ and you start to look quite feminine/ I think you get regarded differently by people/ you know you are not just a little girl anymore you are becoming a young women/ and people always look at you that way and talk to you that way as well sort of during your teenage years/ well it depends on how developed you are I suppose/ I don't know

Safiya (T&T)
...and I mean body appearances/ everybody will realize that you are coming into a teenager because the developments/ like me I started to get more hips and stuff like that/ so you know I was looking well as them boys will say/ you know so everybody will tell me and say she is a woman now/ you know/ because I have the appearance of a woman you know/ so they will say

The subjective experience of becoming a woman is constructed here through the eyes of the other more than it is through the direct experience of the woman's own embodiment. Physical appearance is therefore one of the first qualities to be recognised and affirmed for women, and this appears to be seen as true in both cultures. However, on closer examination we will find that women's identities are thematised along different underlying representations.

5.1.2.1 Androgynous Adults vs Silly Girls: Representations of Maturity in the British Interviews

In the British interviews there was a notable foregrounding of maturity as a characteristic of a young woman's identity, something that, as Fiona pointed out, is "not gender specific". In describing themselves as mature or an adult, 'becoming a woman' was construed as an androgynous process that could function to detach women from more traditional conceptualisations of femininity. Representing themselves in a non-gender specific way can, I would argue, be seen as an orientation to an ideal that has been put in use by the feminist movement. The way this ideal is thematised in the young women's dialogues, however, reveals that it is not only a potentially empowering representation but

that it is also contradictory in character and, just as Bem's own concept of androgyny, reproduces the very gender polarisation that it aims to undercut (Bem, 1993). When examining the way 'maturity' is thematised in the dialogues, it can be seen that the ideal of the mature adult is not represented in a neutral way, but against and in contrast to a gender specific image of women as "silly" or "stupid". It is through this construction of 'adult' as in opposition to stereotypical conceptions of femininity that an orientation towards the male role becomes discernible. I will draw on the following extracts (taken from interviews with my British participants) to discuss this point further:

(Rhona has been responding to my question about changing from girl to woman)
Rhona
[...] yea well/ mentally I think I wouldn't really consider myself a woman yet/ you know what I mean/ I would see myself more as like sort of a young adult or something
N
young adult
Rhona
yea/ I don't know it's like/ just you know/ I just still feel like a teenager/ it's like I don't I don't feel completely mature enough to be like a woman/ but I wouldn't say I was like immature/ you know what I mean/ I think like me and my friends are quite mature for our age because we are quite intelligent [...]

(Nicole has been speaking about being different from her friends, trying to fit in but being regarded as too controlling)
Nicole
well/ I'm/ the thing is that/ in a society I believe that everybody needs to/ in order to fit in/ everybody needs to have a role/ everybody needs to have you know/ something you can associate with them some kind of you know thing/ and I chose the role of being grown up mature taking care of everybody/ you know very strict very quite/ uhm you know not not very wuaa/ not you know stupid in/ you know how they could just giggle at everything they see

N
this is maybe a very difficult question/ because I don't even know if I could answer it myself/ is there anyway in which you could describe how feeling like a girl is different from feeling like a woman for you
Caroline
well I think uhm/ it is how people treat you as well/ if people treat you like a girl they are gonna treat you differently than when they treat you like a woman/ if people perceive you as someone who is immature/ as someone who doesn't understand/ they are going to treat you like a girl who hasn't fully grown up and who is not a woman yet/ but if you are a woman you seem to act out your life in a calm organised sensible (laughs) manner then I think people will treat you differently/ any other differences between a girl and a woman/ hmm

The meanings expressed in these dialogue excerpts are paradigmatic for the way women in the UK defined their identities in conversation. Maturity /immaturity is constructed here

firstly along the binary of intelligent/stupid. Through the emphasis on such qualities as 'organised', 'sensible' or 'contained', there is furthermore the implication of the disorderliness - behaviourally, cognitive or emotionally- and irrationality of the other woman or girl. Not only is this desired identity linked to a notion of individual choice but it is also part of the young women's knowledge that one will be treated differently due to others' recognition of this choice for mature behaviour. The immature girl on the other hand, will be denied recognition. This production of a mature female identity, although represented as overcoming gender differences, due to its underlying thematisation of recognition and disrespect, continues to be oriented towards gender polarisation and an idealisation of the male role. Men's positions have traditionally been associated with being rational, mind controlled and in charge. Bringing to the foreground these characteristics and thereby blending out other possibilities of signification, defines, in Bem's words, "males and male experience as a neutral standard or norm and females and female experience as a sex-specific deviation from the norm" (1993, p51).

Through an emphasis on the dimension of the mind there is also a de-emphasis of the body in the construction of the desired identity of 'woman'. The feminine, particularly through its continued vicinity to representations of the disordered and uncontrolled, is interlaced with threats of a denial of recognition. It is moreover the combination of the ideal of self-determination with feminist ideals of emancipation that may contribute to a weakening of distinct female identities. And yet, traditional representations of femininity permeate everyday experiences of being a woman on many levels. Although women's role in society has changed considerably in Western consumerist societies, 'who I am' as a woman continues to be significantly determined by 'how I look' (Malson, 2000). As I have illustrated above, it is for example on the basis of their changing appearance that girls

receive recognition and are first considered a woman. Many of the young women also identified with more traditional aspects of being a woman; their femininity and distinction form men mattered to them. The need for a mediation between these conflicting positions was reflected in the dialogues. Nicole, for example, who throughout the interview described her chosen role of the mature adult like woman, expressed simultaneously a rejection of this role: "and personally I am getting tired of that because it's not me". I would therefore argue that, in the aim to discover one's 'true' self, the development of an identity as woman was imbued with doubt and uncertainty in the British interview dialogues.

5.1.2.2 'A Woman Should Be a Woman': Tobagonian Representations of Womanhood

In Tobago on the other hand, women's constructions of 'being a woman' were oriented to much more distinct meanings. In the Tobagonian dialogues women's identity was often addressed as an unquestioned truth. The following extract illustrates my point; Kendra (T&T) responds to my question of whether there are any differences between growing up as a girl or growing up as a boy in her community:

Kendra
well these days men changing their their uhm their private parts into woman and woman changing them private parts into men/ well for woman I find some of them doesn't take care of their self/ they bore their tongue/ they bore their their mouth/ their lip/ they bore their face/ they bore their eye/ a woman should be a woman
N
how should that be
Kendra
a woman
N
how should a woman be a woman
Kendra
well by doing the woman things

At the time of the interview newspapers reported repeatedly about a young transsexual Trinidadian woman who had finally, after a 4 year law case, received compensation from

the government for having been unlawfully arrested and harassed by the police. The case also became a topic of conversation. 'Deviations' from the heterosexual norm continue to be condemned by the majority of men and women in the Caribbean as wrong and are often fiercely attacked in public discourse. Kendra's first statement is motivated by such a representation of the 'sexually deviant' other. It responds to a part of my original question, i.e. 'differences between men and women', and shifts the focus to what may be red as a defence of gender essentialism (Grosz, 1989). Kendra's statements rest on representations of men and women as bound to a given essence. It is assumed that to each gender belongs a fixed biology, behaviour, character and role in the heterosexual relationship. These qualities have the status of a natural given and are true for all. There is moreover a notion that one should not act contrary to one's nature. Who does so is merely 'fooling themself', a common judgement applied to people who are crossing over into the domain of the other gender, particularly when this involves appearance, social and sexual conduct. These particular meanings may have been brought to the foreground partly through me being a representative of a world in which sex or gender identity changes may be practised more widely than in Trinidad & Tobago. Despite my differences as a foreigner, Kendra's explanation, "a woman should be a woman [...] by doing the woman things", is seen to be self-explanatory.

5.1.2.3   Respectability vs Reputation in the Caribbean: Alternative Readings

Although women's identity was constructed as a socially acknowledged truth, this does not mean that women are granted unconditional recognition. While the British women in my study prioritised maturity in becoming a woman, the young women in Tobago emphasised the importance of their reputation. Although being mature and serious was considered to be a quality that distinguished girls from women, maturity was thematised more explicitly

in dependence to being responsible and having a good reputation. This kind of maturity was linked with a requirement of an awareness of the self as gendered and embodied and ultimately the ability to restrain one's movement. Arielle (T&T) explained her concerns about becoming a woman as follows:

N
hm/ how do you think uhm people see you as a woman now/ maybe
Arielle
well most people who I know from small/ some of them don't make me out they say Wooh how big you are growing you are growing up to be/ the/ uhm right now the most I/ one thing I does study sometimes more than anything else is my reputation
N
your reputation
Arielle
I don't want it to be ruined by some/ what so ever/ some guy or some girl or nothing really/ so some time I concentrate a lot on that/ because some time to me it all/ some times it all depends on your reputation you know [noise interruption] you know how you carry about yourself I does I does look at that all the time mostly
N
how you carry about yourself/ can you explain that more/ cause that's kind of something we are not so accustomed to saying/ so I'm not so sure what it means/ you know what people think of when they say it
Arielle
ok you know/ you might be/ you know/ ok for instance/ I/ you might be a boy and I/ you know I might come and like you and fall in love with you and next thing/ I might see that boy and/ you know and do the same thing/ and you just going about like that/ and then have a bad reputation and people call you names and all sorts of things
N
mhm/ so it's mainly in/ how you/ how you/ uhm/ how do you say/ it's mainly about how you interact with with boys/ like as a girl your reputation comes about by like how many boyfriends you have/ or if you like only sticking to one/ is that mainly what it is
Arielle
yea or/ some time people say like moving from friend to friend or whatsoever that's really bad

The moral standard of the domesticated and sexually restrained woman is what stands out in Arielle's explanation of the importance of reputation in a young woman's life. These concerns with reputation stand in contrast to the celebration of sexuality found otherwise in the Tobagonian culture. One could link this value conflict, as Koningsbruggen (1997) has done for example, to Wilson's (1969; 1973) portrayal of reputation and respectability, the dualism of native and foreign values. Drawing on Wilson's concept, the concern with reputation that the young women expressed in the interviews would then be derived from an orientation to values of respectability, that is, an orientation to status, decency, and

duration. In the post-colonial Caribbean context respectability represents the preferred value system of women, which can be seen to stem from their primary position in the realm of the family and the church, so Wilson's argument; it should, however, also be considered as a value system that expresses a resistance to the sexual exploitation of women through the coloniser or otherwise dominant white class (see Bush, 1990; hooks, 1991; Beckles, 2000; Hill Collins 2002). Respectability contrasts with the domain of men, which is that of reputation. Masculine reputation entails individualistic freedom with recognition being sought through the contesting of masculine skills and behaviours in a male peer group. An adherence to masculine reputation emphasises amongst other qualities sexual virility. It is respectability which, Wilson argues, is an imported colonial ideal[15].

Wilson's account of the polarity of gender value systems in the Caribbean certainly has parallels with the concerns of the young women that participated in the interviews as well as with the value judgements that I could observe (and as a single woman living in the community also became an object of) during my stay on the island. The preoccupation with the promiscuous woman is indeed not specific to the Caribbean, which seems to lend support to the argument that 'respectability' is derived from a foreign value system. The young women in Tobago often pointed out to me that men could have an indefinite number of sexual relations in a short space of time and be glorified as 'macho', yet women would be cursed as 'whore' when moving from one boy to the other. This is an experience that was also shared by some of the British participants, particularly at a younger age.

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[15] In the case of Trinidad & Tobago it would be necessary to consider that male sexual promiscuity can be linked to the strong French colonial influence on Trinidad culture, while the ideal of respectability may be linked to the later British/Anglo-Christian colonial presence on the island (Miller, 1994, Gray; 1999).

In Tobago, however, unlike in the British contexts, the concern with respectability - or in the participants' words "the way they carry about theirself" - constitutes a crucial starting point for understandings of what it means to become a woman and goes beyond moral judgements about sexual conduct. Other expectations about women's nature have to be taken into account. As Arielle corrected me, 'reputation' requires a more general restraint of social contacts. A woman that is "all about the place" also risks ruining her reputation. The underlying assumption is here that women may either intentionally stir up or accidentally get involved in confusion or 'bacchanal business'[16]. While Wilson's concept can thus be useful in understanding the strong prevalence of a sexual double-standard in the Caribbean as well as elucidating the social life of men, his depiction of Caribbean women as subscribing to imported middle-class values can not uphold and has indeed been criticised repeatedly (Besson, 1993, Koningsbruggen, Brana-Shute, 1993)

In this present study, women's subscriptions to respectability were based on socially acknowledged assumptions about women's indisputable nature that are specific to Tobago. For example, assumptions abut women's sexual virility and their inclination towards scandal and confusion. The young women's concern with reputation seemed moreover to be linked to an ideal of independence, and not, like in the traditional British or church model, to images of a woman defined in dependence to her husband. Carrying yourself responsibly and respectably promised the prospect of an independent life. The majority of the young women saw themselves as independent earners and with no ties to man or

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[16]In Trinidad & Tobago the term 'bacchanal' is often used to sum up particular states of disorder or excitement. It can refer to the scandal or confusion that results from gossip or one person's interference with another person's affairs. As such it is judged negatively and stands in contrast to the behaviour of respectable people and the values of the upper middle class, who nevertheless are not exempt from bacchanal. Bacchanal however can also become a celebrated state. For example, there is a standing expression that 'carnival is bacchanal'. In this case bacchanal refers to the simultaneousness of the excitement, movement, and enjoyment of different groups of people, a mix-up that turns the usual order of society upside down. Bacchanal moreover is said to bring out the true nature of people and can be too sweet to resist at times.

family, besides to their own children. While many continued to live in extended family (mostly female headed) households and choose to share a household with a man for periods of time, to live independently was declared to be a major goal in life. This pronunciation of the ideal of autonomy is better characterised by pride than female modesty as we might find it in British colonial and Anglo-Christian models of femininity.

By means of an emphasis on autonomy and pride, respectability is thematised in a way that reconciles the female value system, rather than conflicting it with expressions of sexuality. Respectability, theorised in opposition to reputation, I would then argue, can no longer sum up how women want to be seen in public and how others want to see them. For example, simultaneously with concerns for respectability, many young women would proudly show off a 'rude' girl attitude and their enjoyment of 'getting on bad' be it in dance, style, or sexual activity. The 'rude gal' has now also found a glorified place in soca songs and it is the preferred identity of the female dancehall artist. This dimension of female reputation is not defined in opposition but in competition to masculine reputation. It is on this dimension of female identity that a distinctly fashionable and sexy style, loudness, the ability to give chats, and particularly the skill of 'wining'[17] - the female-dominated dance form most popular during Carnival - as a display of power gain importance for recognition. Women, too, are competing amongst each other for status. I agree also with Koningsbruggen (1997) and Aching (2002) that the exaggerated mimicry of the sexual act

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[17]'Wining' is a dance movement that originated in Carnival but is now probably the most popular dance style in Trinidad & Tobago and particularly amongst women. It involves a rotation of the waist while hips and buttocks are lifted up and down, with the rest of the body remaining relatively still. It can be performed by women on their own, men and women in pairs or in a row of dancers. Because of its sexual suggestiveness it has often been criticised for its indecency especially by the elderly and church representatives. Wining can range from a relaxed bumping to the music to 'rough' wines performed mainly by women on their own. It is through this latter form that women show off their skills in bending back and forwards, wining on one leg or low down to the ground. Wining can therefore be about the enjoyment, including the erotic enjoyment, of the body that is 'freeing up' in the wine but it can also be about a display of skills. Part of wining is for example to challenge a man and let him prove that he can match the skills and endurance of the woman. At

in wining can take on dimensions of parody, thus functioning as a mockery of men's phallocentrism[18]. This articulation of female sexuality should therefore not be read as sexual indecency or an objectification of women. Rather it can function as an affirmation of agency, an expression of absolute freedom (Miller, 1991), or a contesting with men's claims to privileges and power. Carolyn Cooper offers a similar interpretation of supposed sexual looseness and dancehall culture in Jamaica:

> "Though the denigration of slackness seems to determine the concomitant denigration of female sexuality, this feminisation of slackness in the dancehall can also be read in a radically different way as an innocently transgressive celebration of freedom from sin and law. Liberated from the repressive respectability of a conservative gender ideology of female property and propriety, these women lay proper claim to control their own bodies." (Cooper, 1995, p.11).

I would like to claim that in both cultural contexts the female body can become a means of resistance to imposed and/or restrained identities. In the Tobagonian context described above the body mediates between both values of respectability and reputation. For the Tobagonian women the foregrounding of a 'freeing-up' of the body, particularly through the expressive media of style and dance, effects an affirmation of their agency; and simultaneous with a thematisation of the force of the feminine body, women experience a need to secure their independence through taking responsibility for their femininity and thus to restrain their movements. In the British context, on the other hand, denigrating representations of femininity are resisted through a foregrounding of identities of the mature adult like woman. This however privileges the mind and may necessitate exerting

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parties DJ's and singers will 'hot up' the party through a succession of orders such as 'drop your waistline' 'get on bad' 'work up a sweat', 'mash up the place' etc. shouted at the crowd.

control upon the body. Yet it is the femininity of the maturing body which first yields a recognition of the adult identity.

5.2   Young Girls and Big Women: Identity Between Freedom and Restraint, Acceptance and Discard

In all interviews the themes of freedom/restraint and independence/dependence took up a central position. I will now focus in some more detail on the differences that could be found between the particular ways in which these fundamental opposites were thematised in the British and Tobagonian texts. It is in the British texts for example, that narrative reflections most often started and returned to conflicts of acceptance and discard. Concerns with acceptance were on the other hand not voiced in the Tobagonian texts. These differences have to be understood as a reflection of different social conditions and different demands on women's identities. They are linked to representations of self and other, discussed in the following chapter, together with which they form the meaning context for thematisations of body and eating.

5.2.1   Dialogic Significations of Self-Determination, Choice and Acceptance in the British Texts

In both cultural contexts freedom was firstly constructed through its negation, i.e. restraint. Being restrained to the home and confined to domestic duties by one's parents was a paramount experience of the young women in Tobago. Concerns with the vulnerability of the young girl and an imposed need of protection on the other hand, continued to be a reference point for experiences of freedom by the British participants in my study. In both

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[18] For example, when Denise Belfont, soca diva (respected also for her admirable 'thick and sweet' shape), sings "Is I who does run things baby" while performing high and low wines on stage that make the audience, men and women, break down with cheers.

cases women's positions were perceived to stand in stark contrast to boys' seemingly

unlimited privileges. What then, was freedom positively associated with? In the UK the

emphasis was predominantly on personal choice. I will draw on the following dialogue

extract to explore this thematisation further:

Rhona (B)
[...] and uhm I just think it's/ like I mean perhaps more freedom when you grow up/ cause
it's like you've always got/ I mean I still have/ but like you know your parents telling you
what to do/ but when you are reaching a certain age you can just go but I don't want to do
that/ and like you know just make your own choices/ and I think it's more to do with that as
well/ like you know you got to pick up on yourself and just decide look I'm not gonna do
that/ and like what am I gonna do then/ and you've got to think about you know what you
want to do in the future/ and it sort of like hits you a bit so
N
and it's up to you what you want to do
Rhona
yea I know/ cause it's like me/ it's like/ cause I've got to be happy with myself/ so it's like/ I
think I suppose it's more like you just like/ you have to take more responsibility in that way/
but it's like it can be worrying but it can be good as well because/ I don't know/ it's like it's
better than sort of being sort of naïve and like/ I don't know/ just cause/ like when you think
about it like I don't know it's like quite confusing to think about/ it's just uh when you are
younger you are just sort of uh rolling along with things/ but now it's like you can't/ you just
you got to like sort of push yourself you know/ so it's not really/ it's just more/ you got to
make more decisions

Rhona's understanding of freedom is anchored in a claim to self-determination. The

realisation of personal choice in adolescence is contrasted with a depiction of childhood as

"rolling along", a time in which the self as an individualised entity is either absent or

suppressed by the determination through the parent. With the rejection of the parental will

however, comes not only freedom but also the new obligation to make decisions. Freedom

then is framed by a question of choice about the future and who one wants to be. At the

same time, that breaking-free and the diversion from expectations and rules becomes

important there is also an emphasis on responsibility for the own happiness. On this latter

dimension freedom comes very close to being synonymous with control, otherwise one of

its antonyms. The need to "pick up on yourself" and to "push yourself" suggests a need to

exercise self-control in order to succeed in making the "right" choices.

But the link of 'pushing yourself', self-control and freedom in this context is not only about the own happiness. Displaying self-determination and control has an important function in protecting the self against possible acts of disrespect. Melanie elaborates this dimension of freedom in the following way:

Melanie
I actually/ like feel like I/ I really feel like I don't want to go home on my own/ but like recently I've just been pushing myself just to go out because I don't want to feel like I need somebody to walk me home you know/ I want to feel just like I can do everything on my own and just be like self-sufficient/ you know/ if I need to go out to the shop in the middle of the night then I will you know/ and also I need to build up my confidence/ because if you are really self-conscious when you walk down the street of course somebody might pick up on that you know/ and if you are just confident then uhm nobody would bother you

Melanie's concern with pushing herself to become self-sufficient constitutes one of the rare direct considerations of independence in the British interviews. Her desire to be able to do everything on her own stems from her experience of being positioned as in need of protection, which, she pointed out to me, makes her feel scared and vulnerable. One reason for needing to be self-sufficient is the prospect of being able to exercise full agency in ones life. There is also another aspect of the knowledge of self and other that enters into the dialogue. Women, in particular, need to display freedom and confidence in order to prevent being positioned as an inferior and to protect the self against threats of abuse. Paradoxically, the appraisal of independence constitutes then not only a distancing from the other but also a confirmation of one's dependence on others' recognition. As illustrated above, distinctions between the antinomies of freedom/restraint, freedom/determination or independence/dependence are not clear cut. The interview excerpts can be interpreted as a dialogue that revolves around tensions and overlaps between these oppositional antinomies. This dialogue may further reflect the negotiation between values and desires connected to ideals of self-determination and control – in other words a social representation of 'person' that projects responsibility for the production of

identity onto the individual – as well as the threats of a denial of recognition permitted through derogatory social representations of women.

Moreover it is notable that the need to affirm one's self-determination, so central a theme in the British interviews, was paralleled by a concern for issues of acceptance and discard. For example, while the young women emphasised their choice and freedom, a theme to which the dialogue returned repeatedly was that of being bullied or being aware of others being bullied throughout adolescence. The experiences that the young women reported during the interviews ranged from being teased, picked on and slagged off, to being excluded, humiliated and threatened. It was noted that bullying was carried out equally by girls and boys, but girls comprised the main bullies in the accounts of the young women in my study. For girls, more than for boys, the pressure to fit in was seen to be high. While reasons for being excluded varied, fitting in or being judged negatively most frequently depended on a particular appearance or look. The desire to be accepted by other girls was remembered as being a paramount experience of childhood and adolescence:

Claire
I think there is a certain emphasis on/ you like to be/ to look a certain way/ for me personally ehm when I went to school/ when I was that age you know 12 13 14 there were certain groups of people where you felt you had to fit in/ you had to look a certain way in order to be part of that group/ and for girls that meant maybe looking a certain way or you know dressing a certain way you know/ just be like part of the in-gang/ and if you didn't look like that you know then you were perceived as like you know/ just you know/ you weren't picked on but you were sort of discarded

Naomi
[...] I suppose there is always an element of that you know/ you just like nobody is going to fancy me if I look like a boy/ if I don't have any breasts or whatever/ but more of it was to do with the fact of being kind of accepted by your peer group/ by other girls

The question of "how can I be genuinely kind of respected or allowed to join in" (Naomi) continued to be an implicit or explicitly voiced concern for the majority of my British participants even in their twenties. Because being teased, bullied or discarded by ones peers is an extremely debilitating experience, it might not be surprising that

134

acceptance/discard was repeatedly addressed in the interviews. The centrality of this thema in the interviews may however also reflect the fact that bullying has, over the past decade, become an ongoing topic of public debate and has thus become thematised in the British society. It is only in the context of an increased social appraisal of individual rights, including children's rights, and equal opportunities that child bullying could become a topic of discussion and be recognised as a problem that requires intervention. In turn, in a context in which self-determination is valued and necessary for recognition, experiences of being bullied, i.e. experiences of being controlled, dominated or devalued in any form, would constitute a severe violation of expectations in self and other. It is an experience that, in an act of resistance, may also increase the need to pronounce one's individuality and difference. E.g.:

> **Helen**
> I think I never/ I think I didn't realise that I got bullied in school until I look back at it now and I think what a bunch of bitches they were/ but then it never really affected me then/ to the extent that it just made me more do it more kind of/ stupid wear more kind of abstract clothes and all that and just laugh at them when they said things

5.2.2 From Childhood to Young Lady to Big Woman: Dialogic Juxtaposition in the Tobagonian Texts

In Tobago on the other hand, bullying was not thematised in relation to acceptance/discard and was indeed not explicitly addressed in the memories of childhood and adolescence. This does not mean that what is referred to by the British participants as bullying did not occur in Tobago. However, it is difficult to say whether child bullying was not talked about because it had not yet become a topic of public attention or whether bullying had not been thematised because it did not yet constitute a problem to the same extent as it does in the UK. Yet an attempt can be made to partly explain the elusion of the need to be accepted together with accounts of child bullying in the reported memories of the

135

Tobagonian women by looking at the way 'others' and 'childhood' were represented in the dialogues.

As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, representations of the other are marked by a lack of trust. It is part of common knowledge, for example, that others will try to devalue, defeat, or take advantage of you in some way. I would argue, that it is therefore demarcation rather than acceptance which is foregrounded in reflections on everyday interactions in the Tobagonian social contexts that I observed. Differences were moreover apparent in the way childhood was represented in the British and Tobagonian interview texts. While being mostly described as a time of play, the borders between childhood, adolescence and adulthood seemed to be blurred in the British interviews. Childhood often entered into the dialogue as a time in which one was shielded by parents, a time in which the self lacked recognition as individual entity, or even as an early struggle with the individual personality. In the interviews with the Tobagonian women, childhood was unanimously highlighted as a time of freedom. Images of childhood fun and liberties thus constituted the background against which the very contrary experiences of restraint during teenage years were depicted.

This contrast between childhood and teenage to adulthood was paralleled by a contrast between a unity of self and peers in the early years and a subsequent proclamation of 'keeping to yourself', i.e. not seeking the association with friends. Childhood stories moreover often revolved around the breaking of rules, unlike in the UK where this was characteristic of teenage years. Despite the punishment received for misbehaving, childhood was not construed as a serious time. As Safiya sums up below, "laugh and cry live in the same house". I would argue that this particular representation of childhood

functions as a dialogic opposite through which the 'here and now' is rendered comprehensible. The particular contrasting nature of childhood as freedom, innocent misbehaving, and a submerging in togetherness may moreover account for the finding that bullying did not constitute a focus of attention or was not problematised in the interviews with the young Tobagonian women.

Safiya
[...] now our mother she wouldn't run us down you know/ but when we leave home we have to come right home back there to sleep/ so we get our licking/ we go we bathe/ get something to eat and go in our bed you know/ yea everybody was accustomed to the licks/ but I mean you still used to run away because it was fun/ we cried we laughed/ laugh and cry live in the same house/ so you know we had a real lot of fun growing up/ I mean we does say our days was the best days/ just the school days primary school days those were the best days that children will have/ because you know you actually do crazy things that you didn't imagine you would a do at the time/ but just that you know it's children you know/ so you enjoy your life/ childhood days/ even my mom/ I does hear my mom saying childhood days was the best days that she had/ I mean you know now you get big you gonna be working and you might go out with few associates or your friends still you know/ but I mean like how you used to relax yourself and have a wonderful time/ when we go to the beaches and all/ in the rivers/ and you know schooldays you had sports in school and that kind of thing/ so those were the best days of my life you know/ we never used to study like boyfriend and those kind of things in those days

Marissa
well as you get older you are more more taught to be proper/ in the sense/ because when you are younger you are more care free in the sense that you sit anyhow you walk you go anyhow you say anything you know

With freedom being tied to childhood the focus in the majority of accounts about being a young girl did lie on restraint and propriety (albeit not without expressions of resistance as I have argued above). The 'anyhow and anything' of childhood is superseded by the obligation to act responsible. Thus teenage is a time where "everything has to stop". Not being allowed to go here or there, talk to certain people, make own decisions, but having the responsibility to carry out most household duties were still primary complaints of the young women that participated in my study. In these reflections on what being a young girl was about representations of 'the other' became more frequently associated with being taken advantage of. It is in this context that the future ideal was pronounced to be independence.

I have earlier made the point that the dialogic relation between self-determination, choice and a non-gender specific maturity may contribute to a weakening of distinct female identities. On the other hand, I maintained, women's identities are often understood as unquestioned truths in the Tobagonian texts. This does not mean however, that women's identities can be fixed upon stable and one-dimensional positions. Particularly in the context of thematisations of freedom/restraint and independence/dependence there are likewise tensions between oppositional identities. I will therefore expound my view that feminine subjectivities, also in the Tobagonian texts, need to be considered as mapped in a space that is defined by a dialogue between contradictory positions.

Two distinct female identities seemed to me to be reference points for young women in Tobago. Firstly the identity of the 'young lady' and secondly that of the 'big woman'. In the interview context, most of my participants spoke from the perspective of the 'young lady'. Being a young lady requires the adherence to a number of expectations oriented mostly to decency and propriety ("as a young lady I expect certain things from myself certain things I should do and shouldn't do" Arielle), thus connecting to the notion of 'respectability' that I already discussed above. The majority of the young women also pointed out that they were often admired for thinking, acting and moving like a young lady, i.e. for their conscious step into womanhood ("and they admire me you know really for who I am/ and that I'm a young lady and I I know that I'm a young lady/ and I don't carry about myself you know" Mauricia).

This enactment of the 'young lady' identity was contrasted by the attitude of young girls who like to 'play big woman'. While the notion 'big woman' in its most basic sense refers

to a woman of more advanced age, 'playing big woman' refers to a young girl's open claims to liberties including the liberty to 'track'[19] men, thus overriding the expectations that have been set in the 'young lady'. Girls that feel they are 'big women' were on the whole critically conceived by my participants. For example, it was pointed out that 'having your own way' would ultimately only cause trouble and embarrassment. The advice for the girls that played big woman was that they needed to "cool down", that "life (was) too sweet" for them, and that they would need to stop and look where they were heading. But in the specific context of restraint and dependence that constituted the young women's immediate reality, the big woman identity is also desirable. Once a girl can call herself 'big woman' it means that she has gained the privileges that allow her to make her own decisions. From the perspective of a young girl, 'big woman style' for example could also be described as "you always liming you always going out they will say she got big money you know she could ride when she want" (Akina). Many young women would try to claim this identity for themselves.

Through the juxtaposition of the two identities, the moral space of what is a good and a bad life was defined. Their signification in the lives of the young women was however, changing. Both dimensions of identity, 'young lady' and 'big woman' can come to signify individual strength and be deployed to overcome disrespect or dependence relative to the meanings and counter-positions that are eventuated through the dialogical context. Depending on the view of the opposite other through which the self seeks to gain recognition, meanings of identity may be oriented to either the one or the other side of the dimension. If we understand the self as an event of differentiation, I would argue furthermore that the contrary demands of the two identities, young lady and big woman,

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[19]'Tracking' refers to "actions associated with sustained pursuit of a serious sexual or romantic interest of which flirting could be part" (Yelvington, 1996, p.314).

are always simultaneously impacting on the self, thus requiring an active negotiation of positions. The young women's relation to men can be taken as an illustration of this point.

During my research stay in Tobago I have often heard men say that Tobago girls would always be looking for sex and would be tracking them inexhaustibly. References to men by the female participants in my study would, on the other hand, reveal a powerful position of men that impacted on women's identity construction in two ways. It was mainly men who were seen to be disrespectful towards young women, particularly when they saw their sexual advances rejected. However, to gain recognition from men for one's attractiveness, at the same time, constituted a path to independence and empowerment. Men are not only the stakeholders of privileges and freedom relative to the young women, but are also more likely to obtain paid employment. In addition, they represent on the level of gender identity, the complementary other through which women's self-understanding is defined and vice versa. In the interview extract below Abigail explains the difficult negotiation of these power relations:

Abigail
yea a lot/ they uhm/ the men down here they tend to feel that they are men and what they want/ from whoever it is/ they must get it/ even though it's not your wife/ and you say you want it/ to have sexual intercourse with you/ and you say no them intend that you want it and you must get it and even though you told them no/ they does say in a way they does say you small you ain't ready yet you just playing it hot but you ain't ready yet/ you know you ain't ready
N
aha/ it's not what a girl that age wants to hear really
Abigail
no/ you ain't ready for the life out here yet/ and you know when you feel you are ready for the life and people telling you you ain't ready/ what's going on there/ you would feel like them know what they are saying/ I ain't really ready yet I have to do something to show them that I ready you know/ and then/ that how they will start out/ most especially now a days most young girls growing up teenagers they see fashion going on they like sexy clothes they like KFC/ and that is what the men and them using

The exchange between men and women described above can firstly be read as a sexualisation of women in a situation that is mostly defined by men. Secondly it may be analysed as a vacillation between 'having' and 'not having' (Yelvington , 1996), a granting

and denying of recognition and power. We can then read women's contrasting positions as a mediation between rejection, acceptance and resistance to situations that define them as relatively disempowered. By accepting and even competing with men on a sexual level, either through flirting or the initiation of sexual relationships, women are risking to gain a bad reputation but are also seeking power. The ambivalent subjectivities of the young women in these Tobagonian contexts are then not a matter of personality or biological desires, but are rooted in specific thematisations of recognition and disrespect. The social and individual converge to produce these subjectivities.

5.3   Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to explore how the question of becoming and being a woman was made sense of in the interview texts from the two cultural backgrounds. I began this analysis by attending to the different themes of womanhood that were addressed by my participants. Albeit this meant to fragment the dialogue into different questions, it could be seen that associations of self, other, and body interconnected across the various aspects of womanhood to form specific thematisations of recognition and disrespect. To resume, a common starting point for 'becoming a woman' was an experience of menarche marked by shame and embarrassment that foregrounded representations of women as disordered and polluted. I argued that women's subjectivities were not fixed by these negative representations but that they were constituted through a negotiation of ambivalent positions between the material force of the body and the social signification of these bodily processes. For example, the menstruating body could signify restraint and dependence, but also the naturalness of the body and a shared female identity.

Different thematisations of recognition and disrespect further differentiated between the experiences of menarche and its association with female identity. While bodily development could be experienced as part of a publicly recognised and confirmed identity in the socio-cultural context of the young women in Tobago, it was often experienced as irreconcilable with what the young British women associated with womanhood. In the interviews with my British participants, denigrating representations of femininity interacted with representations of a mature androgynous individual and the ideals of self-determination and personal choice. They constituted contradictory subject positions between which the young women had to mediate in the quest to maintain a positive recognition of their female identity. I argued further that women did not unambiguously position themselves along the antinomies of freedom/restraint, independence/dependence, but that the competing demands of self-determination, choice and responsibility on the one hand, and vulnerability and a need for acceptance on the other hand, resulted in overlaps and tensions between these themata. In Tobago, constructions of women's identity could be seen to be underpinned by socially acknowledged truths about what it means to be a woman. I argued, nevertheless, that women were not granted unconditional recognition but that the interview dialogues revolved around contradictory positions that were oriented to a reclaiming of independence and agency. Respectability and reputation, as well as representations of 'young lady' and 'big woman' constituted the counterpoints that simultaneously defined possibilities of recognition and disrespect.

In conclusion, women's identities could be seen to be constructed in a dialogue that consisted of a polyphony of interconnected and oppositional voices. In both socio-cultural contexts women's subjective positions reflected an orientation to socially enacted demands of recognition and threats of disrespect, yet the way recognition was thematised by the

British and Tobagonian women differed significantly. I will now turn to representations of self and other that underpinned the meanings of 'being a woman' that I discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 6

6. The Self between Proximity and Distance to the Other

In the preceding chapter I have explicated some of the thematisations of becoming or being a woman that were underlying constructions of identity in the British and Tobagonian interview dialogues. I have aimed to demonstrate that across and within the individual interview texts female identity is constructed in dialogue with different, socially-exchanged conditions of recognition. Identity has thus been conceived as a project that is motivated by a struggle for recognition, and consequently a negotiation of contesting subject positions. For example, between a recognition of women as feminine looking and the ideal of the de-feminised adult or between the restraint of the reputable young lady and the display of power of the 'rude gal'. The struggle for recognition in interconnection with representations of femininity has been shown to locate subjectivity in an ambivalent space of such basic opposites as freedom/restraint and dependence/independence in both cultural contexts. Yet I have pointed out that whilst participants in Tobago often represented their identity as a socially acknowledged truth women's identities in the British interviews were mostly marked by uncertainty. I will now extend this analysis of identity by focusing on representations of self and other that were central to the dialogical contexts in which distinctly different meanings of body, weight and eating were configured and acted upon.

In Chapter 4 I have argued that an understanding of self must begin with an understanding of contradiction and tension as forming the basis of all meaning including identity. 'Self'

gains meaning in relation to something other than itself and cannot be reduced to fixed personality traits or explored as a unitary entity. Conceptions of self and person manifest themselves as part of a socially constructed reality. I have then argued that social recognition has become problematised in modern societies because of changing representations of person. That is, on the one hand, the inwardly generated and authentic definition and expression of the self has become the ideal of the modern person; on the other hand, this has created a greater need to seek certainty of one's identity through the recognition of the individualised self by others. Continuing from these assumptions this chapter will firstly explore the way in which 'self' and 'other' has been addressed in the British interviews, followed by an analysis of these themes in the Tobagonian interviews. It has been found that within each group, subjective positions interconnect to form specific patterns of assumptions and expectations in self and other. Furthermore, thematisations in both cultural texts could be read as an ambivalent quest for the proximity and at times, simultaneous distance to others. The themes that are explored under the following subheadings further contribute to the representational context which forms the ground for thematisations of body and eating discussed in the subsequent chapters.

6.1   Representations of Self and Other: British Contexts

6.1.1   Self

I have chosen to focus on four themes, which are below referred to as authenticity, success/failure, control and self-esteem, because they constituted reoccurring reference points along which the 'self' was constructed in the British interview texts. The themes are configured in the text as an interrelated set of assumptions that can be understood as reflecting the opposite dimensions of a desired and a rejected self. At the same time they

can be seen to either position the self in distance or in proximity to others. For example, the ideal of the authentic and autonomous self upholds a distance between self and other while the rejected state of other-determination defines the self in close proximity to others. The thema of success/failure on the other hand, imposes a hierarchical structure on self-other relations and orients the self along the qualities of strong/weak and superior/inferior. It should be pointed out that the thematisations discussed below were not dependent on whether participants described themselves as shy or confident, quiet or outspoken, but constituted distinguishable reference points across all interviews.

6.1.1.1   Authenticity

(Laura responds to my question of "where do you see yourself in 10 years time")
Laura
[...] but I think that is the dream that I'm gonna aim at/ you know just a place for people to express their express their individuality/ and express/ just express themselves you know [...]

Melanie
[...] I hate being compared to people because I just want to be myself/ and I've always been compared to people and I I don't know I get worried/ I don't want people to think I'm copying/ I don't want anyone to think that I'm like oh Ally McBeal well I'll try and be like her you know
N
that you are just copying somebody else
Melanie
yea/ cause I want to have my own personality/ and I I don't like people to generalise cause I sort of feel like I don't do it to anybody else so they shouldn't do it to me you know

The nuances of self contained in these short extracts resonate with what I have earlier described as the modern ideal of authenticity, i.e. an ideal oriented to self-realisation and an inwardly generated identity. "To be yourself" is revealed as an expectation in the above extracts and in the British interviews on the whole. We can read this as a prioritisation of individual freedom or even a celebration of the beauty of diversity. There is firstly a sense that any imposing of identity or limitations to self-expression, actual or implied, as in the comparison drawn between Melanie and a TV celebrity, constitute an act of disrespect. There is then a suggestion that being yourself is tied to more than just the assumption that

146

we are all different. "Bringing out your own identity" is reflected in the interviews as a goal in life.

The realisation and expression of your unique personality is not an individually chosen ideal but is anchored here in the joint recognition of authenticity as a desired quality. However, more so, than through this desired dimension, authenticity was thematised through the dimension of disrespect. In the UK interviews the dialogue was often mapped between a generalised other and a self that was at risk of being judged or misrecognised as having an inferior personality, i.e. as lacking uniqueness, individuality or determination. The ideal of authenticity was thus complicated by the need to defend the self against threats of devaluation in the case of a failure to demonstrate and display one's individuality; and in this latter context individuality, rather than being an open notion, derived meaning in association with the thema of success. Self-realisation seemed to be linked to popularity, education, getting a job, and, the most significant visual signifier of all of these, a specific look and weight.

The ideal of the authentic self that can, on the one hand, be seen to endorse the egalitarian principle of individual dignity or worth, imposes, in this dialogical context, a repressive hierarchical social structure. In the interviews my participants expressed a notable mismatch between a 'Me' as it is judged by myself and as it is seen to be judged by others or society as a whole. In the light of this always pending threat of non-recognition and concomitant failure, authenticity also interconnected with the theme of autonomy. Claiming the position of "this is who I am and I don't really care what other people think about me" (Rhona) redefines others as non-significant and the self as not only inwardly generated but self-contained. The distance thus established between self and others can

147

function to affirm subjective agency. It stands in contrast, however, to the need to be accepted by others, a desire for the proximity to others that I have already discussed in the previous chapters. This competing of the demands of authenticity, autonomy and acceptance is illustrated by the following extract taken from Emma's response to the question of 'How do you think others see you?':

Emma
I would/ well I would like to see people see me as kind of laid back don't give a damn kind of person/ cause I don't really/ but deep down I do really care/ like I do/ like I am concerned in what people think of me and how I look/ uhm I wouldn't like to think people were looking at me and going Oh my god what is Emma wearing or/ do you know what I mean/ I come across as a person that's like I don't really care what you think about me uhm just accept me the way I am/ but deep down I am like I hope they think I look all right and cause I've put in a lot of effort to look this way so

Emma's concerns are not just about the display of a good dress-sense but reflect an orientation to assumptions and expectations in the self that are not easily resolved or indeed unattainable. The body and its appearance, however, enter into the dialogic exchange of meaning as a medium through which problematised themes are played out and new meanings are transmitted.

6.1.1.2   Success and Failure

I have argued that understandings of the self were informed by a juxtaposition of success, authenticity and recognition/disrespect. This aspect of the British interview texts needs to be discussed in more detail. Expectations of success and failure permeated the young women's reflections on identity and constituted a leitmotif in the accounts that revolved around dieting and exercising. The requirements of 'being yourself' and 'becoming somebody', i.e. a person of achievement, were sometimes inextricably intertwined. For example:

N
so your expectations in yourself are quite high

Rhona
well like yea/ I do sort of uhm/ it's like I want to be an individual and I want to be successful like for myself/ and like/ just like who I wanna be you know/ I want to make something of myself/ I don't want to just be a bum [...]

While success could mean having a job or a degree the conditions of success were not often tangibly delineated in the dialogues. Success was most often addressed as a constant worry: to take charge of one's life, knowing what one wants to do, staying focused on one's goals, being judged as a failure. Indeed, individual progress seemed to be a measure of self-worth through which, at times, life as a whole was interpreted, as illustrated in this extract from an interview with Christine:

(Christine has been speaking about being frightened of ageing and society's bad attitude towards age in response to my question about her feelings in regard to her body growing old)
Christine
[..] I think my fear of ageing is more I haven't got this I haven't got that I don't know were I'm going yet you know that kind of thing more than actually being old or apparently people will look at me and expect something that I can't give them [...]

Similarly, having 'life experience' was often coined in terms of having moved on, having been to different places or having met a lot of people.

What I wish to draw attention to, is the role of the 'other' in the construction of success as a dimension of self. While 'achieving for yourself', in line with the themes of authenticity and autonomy, was seen to be important, the dialogic thematisation of success was driven by a tension between a desired self and a self seen through the eyes of a generalised other. Even if demands of success were resisted or rejected, others' expectations and judgements of success and failure constituted a central reference point for the young women. The successful self was constructed through the foregrounding of its opposite, that is a self seen as weak and lacking. It was therefore the disrespect of, and distance to others which prevailed in thematisations of success and failure. I would argue that the orientation to success in the individual interview texts reflected an awareness of powerlessness

embedded in the hierarchical organisation of self-other relations, rather than being driven by perfectionism trait or the need to seek attention void of this negative social context. Representations of women as weak, immature or flawed, that I have discussed in the previous chapter, can be seen to reinforce a sense of potential devaluation or exclusion in the young women's knowledge of self. Moreover, it may be argued that, while expectations of success and achievement today apply to women just as they apply to men, women continue to be underrepresented in high status positions, which further complicates the notion of individual success.

Of course it may still be claimed that to succeed, that is to develop and demonstrate competency, constitutes a universal human need (White, 1959; Deci an Ryan, 2000), just as choosing what to do with one's life constitutes a basic human right. However the thematisations found in the interview texts did not reveal a neutral or empowering notion of success. The self was positioned in competition and hierarchical distance to the other. Personal factors were given precedence over social situational factors in understandings of success. There was, furthermore, an interplay of representations of 'self' linked to authenticity, autonomy and self-determination resulting in a foregrounding of choice and individual responsibility in thematisations of success and failure. Taken together, these factors expose individuals to the risk of non-recognition with personal failure resulting in the withdrawal of that which makes them a person. Yet without the support of an otherwise acknowledged identity, these young women were in greater need of the proximity and recognition of others.

6.1.1.3   Control

In recent years the concept of 'control' has increasingly received attention in clinical and personality studies. This research can broadly be divided into two groups: firstly research that focuses on a dysfunctional lack of, or need for control, and secondly research that indicates the importance of self-control or a sense of control for psychological and physical well-being. For example, 'low self-control', often linked to cognitive models of central executive functions, has been found to be a predictor of addictions and delinquency (e.g. Lyvers, 2000; Heiby and Mearig, 2002; Marcotte, Marcotte and Bouffard, 2002; Wills, and Stoolmiller, 2002) and is assumed to be the main cause of ADHD. A maladaptive 'need for control' or a trait like 'high desire for control', on the other hand, has been seen as a cause for depression (e.g. Mazure, Bruce, Maciejewski, and Jacobs, 2000) anxiety disorders (e.g. Nelson, Hammen, Daley, Burge, Davila, 2001) but most of all eating disorders, as I have already discussed in chapter 1. However, a 'perceived loss of control' has long been understood to result in feelings of helplessness and thus to play a role in inducing states of depression or anxiety (e.g. Chorpita and Barlow, 1998; Endler, Macrodimitris, and Kocovski, 2000; Iqbal, Birchwood, Chadwick & Trower, 2000; Biswas and Chattopadhyay, 2001). Particularly for individuals who have experienced a loss of control, that is a loss of agency or decision making, due to physical or mental illness, ageing or unemployment the importance of internal versus external control seems to be evident. More generally though, the literature, both scientific and popular, reflects the importance of a 'sense of control' in all areas of life and particularly life achievement (e.g. Moses, 2003; Ross and Broh, 2000).

The notion of control was indeed frequently drawn upon in the interviews with the young British women. 'Being in control' seemed to constitute a meaningful element in

understandings of the self and was often used in explanatory reasoning about problematic needs or behaviours such as restrained eating or exercising. What, however, was the thematic link between 'control' and the particular social representations of 'self' deployed in the interviews? Or in other words, what is the basis for this significance of control in understandings and the enactment of the self?

Control could firstly be linked with representations of a controlled femininity as for example reflected in Fiona's understanding of having to wear a bra for the first time:

Fiona
Yea/ you know it is just fitting in you know/ and you are a women and you know everything has to be shut down and has to be under control you know [...]

This means that for women there could be an early and outwardly imposed association between body, identity and the visual display of control, an association that seems to become exacerbated with the progression into adolescence. Secondly, in reference to "fitting in", the notion of control gained meaning as a changing of oneself in order to fulfil the expectations of others. The juxtaposition of change and control was a reoccurring theme in the interviews. Participants spoke about taking control over one part of their life in counterbalance to the occurrence of a change in another part of their life - the upholding of the notion of control thus taking on a comforting function. The meaning of control can consequently be ambivalent: it can be given significance in relation to a changing of self or others but at the same time as a stability producing compensation for change.

The role of 'control' in constructions of self becomes clearer when viewing it along the dimension recognition/disrespect and through its dialogic opposite. The notion of control as an ultimate form of self-determination was invoked mostly in situations in which there was an experience or anticipation of disempowerment, when the self was perceived to be

weak. Thus there was a strong association between getting control and getting power.

With a few of my participants describing themselves as a "control freak", 'being in

control' could refer to a tendency to exert a dominant influence over others and one's

environment in general. It was however, the self and the self as perceived by others at

which the notion of control was directed mostly. I will draw on the following three

extracts to make my perspective more clear:

(Nicole has pointed out to me early in the first interview that she does a lot of controlling, as her friends' organiser, as school captain etc., and that her friends consequently regard her as bossy.)
Nicole
[...] everyday I have to confront something/ I have to deal with something/ I have to do something/ I have to you know prove something/ and we are not talking school work and stuff because that's obvious that's gonna happen you know (?)/ but just friendships and life and everyday circumstance situations which I don't have/ it's just my head is just constantly constantly like so heavy sometimes like a 500 pound weight on it
N
because you have to take like control of things
Nicole
yea
N
that actually everything goes the way it's supposed to go
Nicole
yea/ but you see the question is am I/ if I stop taking control would they stop going the way they are going/ that's a risk I'm just not willing to take/ that's why people say Nicole if you drop everything will it all drop on you/ I happen to not know that but it could very well/ but it's hard for me now to change who I am in the respect of my friends who who think they know who I am/ it's hard for me to be who I am because a I don't know/ I don't really know because I haven't had time to know/ and they would take so you know maybe they won't like who I am/ know I know that I am very sociable like I do talk a lot I uh I enjoy everything and everyone I don't have any enemies you know but it's just
N
why can't they (?) like care for you
Nicole
yea the reason the reason that's happening is because of me not because of them/ the reason I do not have any (?) I am like this is because of me/ and so manufactured it all seems to be you know/ as if I wake up every morning and go there is my plan of the day and this is what I'm gonna see and do/ I honestly feel like one of those written characters you know

(Naomi reflects on the question of how she became conscious of weight and dieting)
Naomi
[...] I think it was to do with a bit of sort of self control the idea that this kind of obsession with me putting on weight happened during the time that I was studying I think was cause I was quite worried about doing well in my exams and I felt like right I you know I've got to get a grip here and make sure I pass these and I have to do this and I have to do well and I have to get this grade [...]

(Caroline has been speaking about feeling more confident and getting more recognition when looking attractive)
N

do you think it has to do something with/ as well/ control/ that you are kind of in control
Caroline
yea/ you are in control of your body/ you are in control of your personality/ you know what
you want and how you are going to get it/ I think appearance and image can have a great
effect on someone.

Despite their different starting points as well as the individual differences between the

speakers, there are several connecting points contained in the three extracts above and their

deployment of 'control'. The desire or need to take control of one's actions, personality,

body and social relations by one's own will has become a central focus in the construction

and signalling of who I am. It is this power of the will which seems to guarantee not only

recognition by others, but also success. The exertion of control through the mind as the

superior faculty of self has become an "obsession" in the struggle to uphold a positive

identity and to define the space or distance between self and other. It is underlined by an

imminent risk of failure and rejection. The controlled self is contrasted by a weak and

disoriented self that can only gain the non-recognition of others. There is a sense in which

a loss of control could mean an overpowering of the self or a collapsing of one's space and

recognised status, leaving the self with no "grip" on life. On the opposite end of this

spectrum lies a self that has become entirely "manufactured", and it is here that a stifling

effect of control makes itself felt.

In the light of the above considerations, I would like to argue that the notion of self-

control, rather than being a neutral psychological necessity, is driven by the ideological

context of an individualised identity and is defined by the contingencies of socially

exchanged recognition and disrespect. The need for 'control' as thematised in the

interviews, is embedded in a late modern social context in which a person's identity and

recognition have become dependent on self-production. However, while the display of

control has gained significantly in importance, the extent of how much control we actually

have over our lives has not become more or less. The paradox inherent in thematisations of self, which emphasise self-control, is that we cannot exert a great extent of control over life events, our success in life, as well as our wider social and material environments. In this paradox the body may, however, remain as a site on which control can be most visibly exercised. Only few studies have considered the role of an individualistic meaning context in measures of control (but see e.g. Morling and Fiske, 1999; O'Connor and Shimizu, 2002 for exceptions).

6.1.1.4   Self-esteem

A final point should be made on self-esteem as a theme in the interview texts. I have already discussed in Chapter 1 that the psychological concept of self-esteem constitutes a central focus in body image and eating disorder research. Not only has there been a general fascination with self-esteem amongst the scientific community[20], but self-esteem may also have become one of the most popularised psychological concepts of the last two decades (Crocker, 2002; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, 2003). Particularly in the USA, the causal relationship between high self-esteem and personal well-being or achievement can be said to have gained the status of folk theory (Miller, 2001, cited in Crocker, 2002; Miller, Wang, Sandel, and Cho, 2002).

In the literature, self esteem refers to global feelings of self-worth, self-regard and self-acceptance, with low self-esteem generally referring to a negative definition of self. The importance that has been placed on high self-esteem stems from a great number of correlational findings that have linked low self-esteem to an extensive list of psychological and societal problems. While correlations cannot give an insight into the causal relation of

variables, research findings have subsequently been read as evidence that a change in self-esteem can bring about changes in the objective reality of self and world (Baumeister et al., 2003). In North America and in Europe, albeit maybe to a lesser degree in the latter region, the widespread preoccupation with self-esteem is reflected in the demand for self-help books, training, and therapies targeting self-esteem problems, as well as in child rearing advice and school programmes that aim to produce better and more successful individuals.

Based on the findings of my own research, I would like to argue that self-esteem has indeed been thematised in late modern societies. Its significance is a function of the meanings, understandings, and ideologies that underpin self-knowledge in this specific Western context. The weight given to self-esteem, I suggest, may be seen as a consequence of the problematisation of self-worth and social recognition in late modernity. The perceived benefits of high self-esteem may therefore not have universal validity but have to be viewed relative to a social context. I have demonstrated above that the collective appraisal of the ideals of authenticity, success/failure and control requires the self to negotiate between different threats to a positive identity, and that each ideal thus has the potential to constrain positive self-development. Likewise, the ideal of high self-esteem needs to be critically examined in regard to its benefits.

Indeed a number of authors have recently shed doubt on the alleged benefits of high self-esteem (e.g. London, 1997; Crocker, 2002; Baumeister et al., 2003). In their extensive review study Baumeister et al. concluded that with the exception of a link to happiness, self-esteem is "not a major predictor or cause of almost anything" (Baumeister et al., 2003,

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[20] A psychINFO search of all publications cited in the database up to the year 2003 yielded a total of 16,658 publications containing "self esteem" in the abstract, of which 10,699 were published between the years 1990

p.37). Thus there was no strong relationship between high self-esteem, academic achievement, occupational success, or better coping with stress. At the same time low self-esteem could not be reliably linked to anti-social behaviour, depression, smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, and early or risky sexual activity (with, the authors suggest, the exception of a possible link to bulimia). Crocker's (2002) research has emphasised that the pursuit of self-esteem, has in fact, costs for self and others. In order to attain self-esteem we are engaging in the satisfaction of certain criteria that can prove to ourselves and others that we have worth. Pursuing self-esteem that is bound to external validation is not only unstable but also creates stress, hostility and conflict, most significantly because it imposes a competitive structure on our relationships to others. That high self-esteem, or subtypes of it, can be more clearly linked to anti-social behaviour than low self-esteem has indeed been demonstrated (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 1996; Salmiavalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, and Lagerspetz, 1999).

I did not set out to measure or explore self-esteem in my interview study. However, participants did describe themselves in positive and negative terms. The construction of self-worth in its positive and negative form, seemed to be dependent on the features of the social context in which the young women perceived themselves. Self-esteem was not stable but was constructed through and against external contingencies and social representations that were impinging on the situation. I would like to argue further that not only have scientific theories of self-esteem become part of common-sense knowledge but to have high self-esteem could be said to have become a condition of worth itself. Here is an example from my interview with Laura, in which I had asked, "what is important to you

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and 2002.

157

in terms of how we should treat our body?" and am feeding back to her what I seemed to

have understood from her account:

N
[...] you said like uhm like health/ like not smoking/ eating certain things
Laura
uhum
N
and I guess maybe/ what I hear from/ what you've told me/ that like the physical aspects of your appearance shouldn't be so much in the foreground/ it should be more your personality coming through
Laura
yea and I think that if you find more who you are then you will be more happy/ and then you will be able to/ everything else will kind of balance out/ like if you are all right with yourself then you probably will be able to uhm feel like oh I'm gonna need to go exercise or something/ or uhm if you are all right with who you are then you probably will be like well I don't want to smoke/ I mean just/ maybe that could be/ so I think it does matter a lot what you think about yourself/ but then looks just affect a lot of people and how they think about themselves and so/ which I think can kind of/ I mean it could probably be good you know/ like so it would maybe make them healthy by exercising and stuff but I don't know

This interview excerpt illustrates the dialogical signification of 'self-esteem' in

juxtaposition with authenticity, responsibility, rationality, and health. I have highlighted

by repetition, the theme of health and the association of appearance with personality.

Laura, in response, combines these to a 'logic' of self-esteem: finding out who you are is

firstly linked to greater happiness and an overall balance in life; secondly, high self-esteem

enables the individual to rational thinking and acting and thus to take up the responsibility

of being healthy; finally, this responsibility is foregrounded and the focus shifts from high

self-esteem to a negative regard of one's appearance as a means of reinforcing the

individual's obligation to engage in health advancing behaviours. The notion of self-

esteem here gains meaning through a polyphony of external contingencies that determine a

person's worth. The focus however, is on an individualised self devoid of a social context.

Finding out who you are and asserting this identity is the responsibility of the individual.

'To feel good about yourself' is moreover, located on the level of expectation in as much

as it seems to be perceived as a pre-requisite for desirable attributes of self, i.e. being

rational, autonomous, responsible and successful.

A collective appraisal of high self-esteem was reflected in the majority of my interviews. Yet having to prove to others that one was worthwhile was a reoccurring source of conflict for the young women and was often experienced as an implicit threat. In addition, proving that one was worthwhile often seemed to be synonymous with proving that one was a confident or self-assured person. In their memories, displaying the personal quality of confidence was associated with gaining popularity and respect. Low self-esteem on the other hand could imply a weak personality or a lack of will power and thus an undesired identity. In the interviews, self-esteem did not emerge as an internalised consistent attitude towards self but as a heterogeneous aspect of self and a function of the social situation in which the self was experienced. Levels of self-esteem varied in the memories of the young women and reflected a parallelism of being vulnerable to other's judgement, resisting this judgement and seeking alternative ways of asserting the self. These points are illustrated with the following three interview extracts:

(Marie responds to the question whether she had an ideal of the 'perfect girl' when she was younger)
Marie
well I think when I was quite young I was really quite confident/ I don't know/ I was very popular at school and and I'd think 'oh well I don't care' you know/ and then I went through a bit of an identity crisis I think in my teens/ I hated everything about me so I think almost anything was better you know/ hmm but then now I don't have any such thing/ I don't think anybody is perfect cause I'm a bit of a cynic nowadays (laughs)

(Emma has been speaking about being bullied in school)
Emma
[...] but uhm when I started hanging about with the right people in third year/ I think it was/ I must have been about fifteen/ and I started hanging about with the right people and I started like getting boyfriends and stuff like that/ and uhm I got more confident and I was more popular/ so/ and I never had any problems after that never/ and I started going to drama classes and that's how I got into my drama/ and I got more confident and people actually respected me and that was good/ but uhm I think because of the bullying and stuff like that I grew up faster in a way like kind of mentally/ it was uhm people always said you are quite mature for your age/ and I started when I was 16 I was going out with a guy that was nine years older than me/ so that was/ I got into like mature things/ I went to the pub when I was 16 and I was like hanging about with all these older people which I think made me more mature [...]

Melanie
people think because I'm shy that I'm self-conscious but I'm not like I'm quite confident in that way/ I have been recently because I just I just decided that that I was just gonna like you know like myself

It is the implicit threat of devaluation, the hierarchical organisation of self-other relations, and individual responsibility for 'who I am' that can be seen to interact in producing adverse experiences of self. In the preceding sections I have discussed that the conditions of recognition or worth that were found to impinge on the young women's identities were indeed difficult to obtain and rendered the construction of self insecure. In the light of this self-threatening context and considering that particularly during adolescence, identity cannot be defined by the individual in isolation, I would like to argue that slogans promoting high self-esteem such as, 'all I have to do is just be me' may be misleading.

While meant to increase a young person's ability to make the right choices, emphases on self-assurance and confidence of this kind may make it more difficult for individuals to admit that they are unsure about who they are or are possibly feeling bad about themselves. Rather than promoting unconditional acceptance and proximity to others, a society's high self-esteem focus may indeed increase pressures and social barriers. In regard to young women, pressures to be more than 'just a little girl' are already perceived to be high, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter. Taken together this context of identity could increase health risking behaviours rather than reduce them. Descombe's (2001) research on smoking amongst teenagers for example, suggests that smoking can play an important role in signalling self-affirmation to other, i.e. affirming that 'this is who I am', 'someone different and special'. Similarly, for women and increasingly also for men, self-worth has been inextricably intertwined with how one looks to the extent that appearance has become a crucial signifier of personal achievement. As one of my participants put it:

Linda
to feel good about yourself does definitely have a large physical aspect to it/ I don't think you can really feel mentally feel good without thinking to yourself that you physically look good/ there has to be this connection

I will return to this interconnection of self-regard and appearance in the following chapter.

6.1.2   Other

I have touched upon representations of 'others' in both my analysis of gender identity and my analysis of the self. I will now extend the notion of others by attempting a reading of self/other relations that focuses on patterns of references to others across the interviews that I conducted with my participants in the UK. Unlike in the case of the interviews with my participants in Tobago, the initial question of 'how were others viewed in relation to the self?', with which I reassessed my data, seemed to evoke a breadth of references but only an elusive answer. Despite having prompted reflections on self-other relations throughout the interviews and extensively coded for mentions of others, I had difficulties discerning shared meanings or functions in the overall text. I believe that two factors have contributed to this initial problem of making sense of self-other relations. For one, the way participants spoke about others constituted a familiar aspect of my own view of reality unlike the exchanged and enacted beliefs about others that I encountered in Tobago and that contrasted with my own beliefs. Secondly, theories of how others can, should and do act were not articulated as common and certain knowledge in the UK interviews, but were interspersed with idiosyncratic accounts of life histories and thus not readily accessible. On the level of underlying notions of shared sense-making references to others could nevertheless be seen to reflect a representational pattern across interviews, around which subjectivity was constituted.

6.1.2.1 Others in Proximity: Self-Others-Friends

While references to others ranged from quotes of family members to beliefs about people in general, i.e. a generalised other, I will focus on some connecting themes that appeared to be central to constructions of self and identity in the British interview text viewed as a whole. Reoccurring with statements of self-worth for example, was a dialogue between self and others in the role of friends. The young women made frequent references to parents and siblings but reflections on 'self' and self-evaluation often began with a notion of having or not having friends.

'Having lots of friends' was a common characteristic of the 'perfect girl' and was an important criterion for feeling good about oneself. Representations of others in the role of friends moreover, connected with ideals of maturity and authenticity. It was through a socialising with friends, as well as references to this socialising, that one's maturity as person was reinstated. With friends, boundaries could be overstepped and independence demonstrated through a joint claiming of public spaces as well as just 'fun' for oneself. When friends were defined as people that are like me, think like me or have the same preferences in music and fashion, drawing upon the relation between self and friends in the interview dialogues could also function as an emphasis on the own individuality.

The security and support offered by the relation to friends was underlined by references to others that were seen to be unpopular or excluded and thus not only lacked company but were also prone to disrespect and bullying. Not being able to make friends was expressed to be a worry by several of the young women, even if they were currently happy with their circle of friends. In addition, accounts of actual experiences of bullying often focused on the fact that one was not able to make friends with other peers as a consequence.

Constructions of self in the interview dialogues were thus intertwined with representations of an undesired identity in the form of the isolated and disrespected other. Overall, it might be claimed that relations to others, particularly friends, served important psychological needs of the individual. Others were represented as providing for the individual. It has indeed been argued that viewing relationships "as a means for attaining individual selves' goals rather than as ends by themselves" (Heine, 2001, p.894) could be a distinctively Western characteristic (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

6.1.2.2   Expectations in the Other: Self-Other-Trust

In the interviews, representations of others besides reflecting particular functions, reflected a set of expectations about the quality of self-other relationships. There was for one, the expectation that self and others and especially women amongst each other, should be close, an expectation that was frustrated at times. For example, in contrast to this expectation of closeness, the 'other woman' was often associated with 'bitchiness' and set in opposition to the self in the interview dialogues. There was further the expectation that others could or should be trusted - with the exception of cases where experiences of bullying or being exposed to violence had destroyed feelings of trust. When I asked about trust in the interviews, my British participants mostly emphasised that they trusted people or that they, in fact, trusted others too much. Trusting others seemed to be an expectation in oneself to the same extent as trustworthiness was expected of others.

As a quality of the self, trust could be seen to link to the ideal of closeness between self and others and a need of acceptance. Trusting others could moreover be seen as a rejoinder of thematisations of self and control (e.g. "I thought I was always gonna be in control of my life...I was kind of like care free I trusted everybody...", Emma). The

foregrounding of individual agency which can be observed in late modern societies, together with an underlying notion of control that encompasses not only a sense of control over the self but also one's environment, de-emphasises social forces and links failure to inadequacies of the self rather than the social environment. Others, rather than being seen as potential causes of failure, may therefore be viewed as reliable. Equally, there may be the expectation that others too, have the ability to be in control and have the choice to act rationally and responsibly (e.g. "I trust others too much…I trust that they will do the right thing I trust that they will behave the way they should towards you know others…", Nicole). Viewed in this way, trust is an expectation in others that is not based on a uni-dimensional notion but is multifaceted and constituted through the interaction with culturally specific representations of 'person'.

6.1.2.3   Others in Distance to the Self: Comparison and Judgment

The patterns of references to others that I highlighted above reflected functions and expectations that were oriented towards self-other proximity. Parallel to this orientation, it seemed to me, was a dialogue between self and others based on comparison, competition and judgement. This dialogue seemed to emphasise differences and distance between self and others. To begin with, social comparison can function to objectify the self, or in other words it can function to make the self known and conceivable. In the interviews, references to siblings and parents often contained comparisons that highlighted individual differences and delineated self from others. These comparisons could be either between 'me' and other members of the family, or between 'us' as family and other people. The articulation of differences between one's family and other people however also superseded the purpose of identity objectification in that it was at times underpinned by a superiority/inferiority distinction. This notion of superiority/inferiority was much more in

164

the foreground in references to a generalised other, a point that I have already discussed above.

Besides reflecting on themselves in dialogue with me as interviewer, my interviewees were engaged in a dialogue with omnipresent others that were judging the self on a number of measures, such as intelligence, maturity, occupational success, looks or simply being different. Of all these, appearance was recognised as a powerful measure of self-worth in the eyes of the other. Claire's reflection on peer expectations illustrates this point:

Claire
[...] there was always/ from what I remember/ there was always/ you had to be a certain way/ look a certain way/ and I think even to be honest/ even when you are at school/ I think even like maybe the teachers noticed it as well you know/ they would probably pay more attention to some people more than others/ and you sort of think back/ well when I think back/ you know girls that did really well or looked really pretty or whatever you know they made I think they made more of an impact upon the teachers than maybe the ones/ I think because the teachers maybe knew that they were liked more so maybe that
N
that's interesting
Claire
yea-
N
is that something you kind of observed-
Claire
I actually remember-
N
already when you were that age
Claire
I remember being/ I remember/ when was it/ God how old was I/ about I think I was 13/ yea about 12 or 13 and I was moving in/ I think it was in about primary 7/ must have been about 12 years old/ and there was uhm there was a girl in particular who was really good at sport and really good at everything/ and she was like really pretty and skinny and blonde and you know/ and I remember we had like a school sports sort of day and uhm the teacher at the time made more of an emphasis in her like Oh Heather did really really well she did this she did that/ you know there was this real emphasis/ and I could pick that up even at that age/ I do remember that age uhm/ I do remember that/ and I do probably remember being quite intimidated by people looking a certain way as well/ stupid but I sometimes I feel a bit patronised

In this extract, 'looking pretty', 'doing well' and 'being popular' are conflated in a joint sanctioning of one person's superiority over others. Claire responds not only to the idealised properties of the 'pretty girl' but she responds also to the teacher's discriminative act of recognition, as well as underlying expectations of a generalised other ("you always

had to be a certain way", "because the teachers maybe knew that they were liked more").

It is noteworthy that at the end of the extract the dialogue shifts from the 'perfect girl' situated in a school context to "people looking a certain way" in a general sense and the tense changes from the past to the present. To an extent then, it might be claimed, the feeling of being intimidated by others continued to have an effect on the experiencing of self. Moreover, the idealised status of others was rendered intact. Although the young women took a critical stance towards others who judged and discriminated superficially, an adherence to others was maintained in the dialogues and the responsibility for not being recognised remained with the individual. In conclusion, representations of others could be seen to be organised by competing dialogues that foregrounded either others' proximity or others' opposition to the self. In other words, thematisations of self-other relations could be seen to be organised along two dimensions. These dimensions were distinguished by a struggle for recognition, as reflected in the emphasis on the acceptance by and closeness to others, particularly the role of others as friends, and a risk of non-recognition and disrespect, reflected in representations of the excluded other and others' contempt.

6.2   Representations of Self and Other: Tobagonian Contexts

6.2.1   Self

Similar to the representations of self reflected in the British interviews, the self could be read to be represented along a dimension of an undesired and desired state and in proximity or distance to others in the Tobagonian interviews. The desired state of the self could be seen to be associated with a demarcation and preservation of the self, contrasted by an undesired state that exposed the self to influences of others and subsequently to the risk of disrespect. The distance to others could therefore be seen to be foregrounded in

reflections on self-other relations in Tobago, while the proximity to others constituted a given in the everyday life of the young women and thus functioned as the background against which the self was positioned. I have chosen the themes referred to below as idiosyncrasy, self-knowledge, self-demarcation and self-esteem to exemplify these patterns. They constituted composite parts of women's individually distinctive constructions of self.

6.2.1.1 Idiosyncrasy

I had begun my analysis of 'self' in the British texts with the ideal of authenticity. Authenticity is, first of all, an ideal that emphasises the individuality of a person, that is, it marks a person as a distinct and independent entity and as characterised by a distinguishing set of qualities. An emphasis on individuality in this basic sense was also a dominant feature of self-references in Tobago. Self-understandings could indeed be said to have been grounded in pronounced individualism in both of the socio-cultural contexts that I observed and participated in. Yet when viewed as a whole, representations of self and other revealed a markedly different sense of individualism in the Tobagonian and British texts. It is for this reason that I have chosen 'idiosyncrasy' as a heading for the first theme of my analysis of representations of self below, albeit the selected extracts could be said to bear close resemblance to the statements of my British participants (discussed in 6.1.1.1) and the themes of authenticity and autonomy on first reading.

The word 'idiosyncrasy', etymologically derived from 'peculiar' and 'mixing together', refers primarily to a mix of characteristics, which distinguishes one individual from another. An emphasis on one's distinctive and independent nature as person was a central feature of self-references in Tobago. Unlike in the British representations of self that could

be seen to be oriented to the realisation of a true inner self - a self-identity that had to be

chosen and produced by the individual, the distinctiveness of self was often pronounced as

an unquestionable given in reflections on self-other relations in Tobago. For example, the

expression "that is just me", was a common way of answering to questions about the self in

a variety of domains, such as personality, mood, behaviour, looks etc. The extract below,

taken from a discussion of 'style' exemplifies this meaning:

> **N**
> what do you/ do you have an ideal/ or do you uhm/ of how you want to look/ or who you
> compare yourself to maybe
> **Candis**
> you see I'm a person Nike/ I never compare myself to nobody/ I always dresses according
> to how I want myself to look/ I don't look (?) myself (?) ok (?)/ I never compare myself to
> nobody never/ I does compare myself with me and how I want to look/ I dress to the
> occasion and I dress to suit/ know what I mean/ that's me

Candis's concluding remark – "that's me" - leaves nothing to be added. Not only does it

sum up what Candis has been explaining in regard to herself but it also pre-empts any

further questioning into the reasons or motivations for her choices. In this brief dialogue,

the self is constructed as self-contained, rejecting any suggestion of a comparison of self

and others; "Me" is entirely sufficient, in fact, "I does compare myself with me".

However, it would be mistaken to view this individualistic expression of self to be

motivated by a thematisation of self-realisation, autonomy and success as seen in the

British texts. Beyond the emphasis on self-sufficiency as an end in itself, these particular

self-references gain meaning in dialogic opposition to a representation of others as

negatively influencing the self. Statements such as "that is just me", therefore also

accentuate that one's behaviour, preferences or choices have nothing to do with others and

their potential intentions to "bring you down".

Before I discuss this thematisation of the distance to others in more detail, one more note

should be made in regard to the above account. Simultaneously with the pronunciation of

individual distinctiveness and a fixed sense of self, we can see the expression of an orientation to social expectations and a realisation of the self in the moment. In the particular context of the above extract, it is contained in the turn 'I dress how I want to look' – "I dress to the occasion and I dress to suit". These demands of style indeed played a significant role in the construction of identity of the young women. Recognition of the self, it may be argued, is here accomplished through display and performance in the event. As Miller (1994) has argued in his ethnographic study of modernity in Trinidad, preoccupations with style in this context reflect not a turn to superficiality but the preference for transient versus transcendent values in the pursuit of identity affirmation. He concludes:

"From the response of the day, such as the judgment made upon what is one wearing, or from this particular and assumed transient activity, one finds who one is. It is the event itself which gives judgment…It is in this manner that an identity is constructed that is free, that is minimally subject to control. In this strategy style plays a vital role, since it is the ability to change which renders one specific to the event." (Miller, 1994, p. 311).

Expressions of idiosyncrasy I have argued, were juxtaposed with specific expectations of and in others, particularly the desire to accentuate a distance between self and others. These patterns of dialogue could be observed in different thematic combinations. By way of example:

(Akina has been responding to the question 'what do you think people expect from you' to which she responded that some people would expect her to be like her sister, i.e. to get herself into confusion)
N
right some are expecting you you are just the same
Akina
Yea/ but I wanna show them that I wouldn't come out so/ I want to better myself in something that I like/ not / not/ I don't like it/ I just like forcing myself to do it/ I wouldn't do it

(Safiya has been talking about her father and that she would like to know who her half-brothers and sisters are)
Safiya
yea on his side you know/ but other than that I don't really fight up myself/ because I'm happy where I am and that kind of thing/ you know that is about it/ and I'm old enough you know/ I work on my own/ I don't have to look for anybody to get anything from since I'm growing up you know/ I was always independent/ I wanted to be independent on my own yea

The notion of 'not forcing myself to do things that I don't want to do' upon which Akina draws here, could firstly be read to reinforce the suggestion of a given idiosyncratic nature of self, against which one would not attempt to push oneself, the focus thus being on oneself as individual. More so, it has to be understood as an expression of independence, similar to the notion of 'not fighting up myself' (Safiya), and most of all, a resistance to others. My participants for example, explained this relation to me by drawing upon the proverb of 'you can force a donkey to the well but you can't force it to drink the water'. While I did read this proverb to mean that there is only so much you can do for a person, my participants emphasised meanings that showed that no matter what I would try, I could not force them to do something that they did not want to do, and thus could also not lead them astray. Taking up the position of 'not forcing myself' in the dialogic exchange can thus function as an emphasis on a person's experience in self-other relations and their ability to act responsibly. It is interesting that, thematised through a tension between maintaining the respectability as well as a state of purity of self versus the polluting influence of others, statements of idiosyncrasy could not be substituted with having things your own way. The extracts below both taken from an interview with Kenisha illustrate this duality of positions:

(Kenisha has been speaking about others' comments on people's appearance)
Kenisha
[...] some people does/ some people does go over the board to uhm suit them but not me/ I not/ me me ain't study nobody [...]

N
how you see yourself/ so I was wondering how you see yourself like in comparison to to other girls here/ or other people here

Kenisha
uh how I see myself/ far different from some in ways/ like uhm some some like have to have liberty/ and I don have that
N
some like to have what
Kenisha
liberty/ I don't have that/ liberty is like having your own way/ I don' like to have my own way/ cause when you have your own ways it bring you into trouble/ in these/ around these times/ it does bring you into trouble/ yea I different in that way/ like I wanna go somewhere I prefer to ask/ and if they say no you can't go then to go and get embarrassed
N
so having your own way would mean just going out whenever you feel like
Kenisha
yea doing what you are not supposed to be doing/ doing what you want I think bring you into trouble and embarrassment [...]

What could be seen in this brief discussion of references to an idiosyncratic self in the interviews, was a thematisation of self and other that foregrounded the polluting and disrespectful acts of others. The proximity of others could however, be actively resisted through a pronouncing of states of self-sufficiency. Moreover, selves were eventuated in parallel dialogues of social expectations oriented to transcendence and jointly exchanged transient values.

6.2.1.2   Self-knowledge – Life teachings

Mauricia
[...] I learned a lot of things from old people because I love to sit down with them/ because that is where I know about life/ that is where I learned things about life/ don't feel because/ don't feel because you get something good now it's gonna last you know/ good things won't last you know

Mauricia's point of view highlights the centrality of two aspects of knowledge in self-other understandings in Tobago: orality and life experience. I use the term 'orality' here to describe a handing down of meaning over time in story, proverb, allegory and song (Jones, 2003), the oral expression and reinstatement of truths about the world in an everyday social context. Jointly acknowledged truths, in the form of 'life teachings', constituted common reference points in Tobago. In everyday conversations the exchange of life teachings could be seen to function as an affirming of a shared reality and as a signal to another that

one has gained life experience. Rather than being oriented by a notion of progress and achievement (as discussed in reference to the British interviews), a person's success and status was often measured against a level of life experience in the interviews with the young Tobagonian women. At the foreground of understandings of the self was therefore the knowledge of one's place in the world and even more importantly a knowledge of life's or other people's way of operating. In this context, self-knowledge had become a function of life knowledge.

In the interview dialogues, knowledge about life could be seen to be organised around a number of themes; more specifically, it were such antonymous states as purity/pollution, chance/determination, transience/transcendence and survival/depravity that could be seen to be reproduced in social representations of 'life'. There was firstly an association of life with hardship. An important factor in gaining maturity was seen to be an awareness of the seriousness of life. A 'big woman' is a woman who has "lived the life", while many young girls were criticised for seeing life as "too sweet" and not knowing what life is all about. In connection to this notion of hardship Mauricia's statement above further illustrates the use of a teaching that underlines the transient nature of life. "Good things won't last" negates the constancy of any state of happiness or success and underlines a circularity of life's giving and taking, e.g. "you get it now and you will lose it and you will get back something again..." (Mauricia). To this teaching connects the often repeated statement that "life is unfair and unpredictable". Both of these truths about life subject a person's standing in the world to transience: good and bad things will happen outwith the individual's control. Rather than individual responsibility, it seems to be chance and determination of circumstances that were foregrounded in these reflections on life. In a

shared historic context of oppression and deprivation these life teachings can also take on a self-protective function.

Other beliefs about life however, give weight to concerns with the long term rather than the transient. For example, the belief that a woman's conduct during pregnancy or a man's evil doings can have consequences over several generations:

Abigail
[...] according to what you do while being pregnant that is why the child does be stray/ if you do good things while you are pregnant the child may live a good life/ what I mean good life/ she may obey the parents you know/ but we does say in the Caribbean/ especially in Tobago/ in Tobago they does say the generation like your forefathers the great great great great/ or your you know/ if your great grandfather was a dis kind a person or your great uncle had this thing in he blood some you know they will say/ or if the great grandmother was a evil woman or she was crazy you might inherit it you know/ yea that is how you know Tobagonians/ even in Trinidad they does say that it's a generation thing/ they take something from the generation something may pass on

Implicit in the dialogic exchange that focuses on this passing-on between the generations is again a representation of others as causing the impurity of the self. Being good as well as 'keeping to yourself' can, therefore mean self-preservation in the here and now, and transcendence. A concern with the long-term can of course also be seen to underlie the importance given to life experience, particularly in relation to the reputation of a young woman. Overall the most dominant association with life experience was, however, 'knowing what people are about'. 'Knowing yourself' gained importance in relation to having learned that others could take advantage of you or otherwise negatively affect you. For example, when my participants in Tobago reflected on a notion of 'control', they emphasised meanings of control that were oriented to self-demarcation. It was a staying in control of your temper, i.e. staying cool in relation to others, knowing how to control your manners, your movements, and your sexual impulses, so as to not get yourself into confusion with others. The following excerpt from an interview with Danielle illustrates this thematisation of control:

173

Danielle
uh like /I would say like you have to control yourself/ like if somebody talking to you/ you ain't do something/ right/ and somebody talking to you about it/ and then you know you must ha- have something to tell them/ just just close your mouth and just listen to them don't say anything/ but some people they they answer you back and tell you all different kind of thing/ but me me not/ I does just listen or I sing or something and don't take it on/ you ha you ha to know to control yourself
N
how to behave yourself/ uhu/ uhu
Danielle
they does say a still tongue keeps a wise head
N
hu
Danielle
they does say still tongue keeps a wise head/ that mean you mustn't say anything when they talking to you/ just listen look as if somebody talking to you and you ain't answering back they go just shut up

Danielle uses the notion 'control' here not to refer to the control of a self as an individualised entity, but to refer to a controlling of yourself as a direct means of staying in control of your interaction with others ("don't take it on"). She speaks from the perspective of a self that needs to defend against imposed social relations which may be invasive and disrespectful. Controlling yourself thus places the other at a distance or, in the participant's words, 'puts them in their place'. In the interviews, 'control' was moreover something that the young women saw enforced upon them, i.e. being controlled by one's parents or a boyfriend, rather than it being an inwardly generated need.

What I wish to have shown in this section is that in the interview dialogues in Tobago, knowing your inner self was inextricably intertwined with knowing others. It was the gaining of life experience which constituted a central condition of worth, more than individual achievement which was construed as a transient state and not predominantly under the control of the individual. Nevertheless individualism in the sense of a clear delineation between self and others who posed a threat of disrespect, could be seen to mark the dialogic positions of the young women. On the other hand, there was also a noticeable sense of connectedness on the level of explicitly voiced and exchanged life teachings.

6.2.1.3   Self-demarcation

As I have discussed above, self-demarcation constituted an underlying theme or motive in both expressions of idiosyncrasy and self-knowledge. The self, as demarcated from others was, I would like to suggest, a dominant way of thinking about the self in Tobago. Judging on the basis of the frequency of remarks that pointed to the necessity of 'keeping to yourself' and 'having to see about yourself' one could in fact argue for a case of extreme individualism if not even collectively defended egoism. In fact a recurrent accusation of others was that they were greedy and thinking only about themselves. However, focusing on these aspects of self-other representation without taking into account the wider context in which they were articulated masks the connectedness of self and other that prevailed in everyday life: for example, the importance of orally exchanged life knowledge discussed in the previous section; the predominance of shared households; the use of the outside as a space in which housework, personal care, cooking and socialising were carried out; the joint celebration of festivals, fêtes, christenings, weddings, wakes and funerals in the community rather than the family or the close circle of friends; the regular exchange of labour and money, the latter being known throughout the Caribbean as the practice of sou-sou[21].

It is in this context of closeness and mutual dependence, which is not always down to choice but often still a necessity, that individualistic statements demarcating a clear boundary between self and other derive their significance. Because life is marked by one's close connections to others and the exposure to the eyes of the other, statements of self-demarcation can function to keep oneself on guard. As Kenisha explains:

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[21] Sou-sou, susu (*Caribbean*): an arrangement made among friends whereby each person makes regular contributions to a fund, the money being drawn out periodically by each individual in turn. Etymology: probably of W African origin, influenced by French *sou* small coin, via Creole.

Kenisha
sometimes you have to keep to yourself yea you know when you don't keep to yourself it will come to confusion yea I believe with everybody with friend with everybody [...]

This portraying of the self as demarcated from others links to sayings such as 'people mouth water does blight you' or expressions like 'people watching you bad eye' that reveal a representation of others as invasive, defacing or even spoiling the success of a person. It may be linked indeed to a past in which people had to survive in a hostile and insecure context thus needed to develop independent sources of self-worth (Jones, 2003). The construction of the individualised self as desired identity moreover seemed to arise as a greater need for women. Although many of the young Tobagonian women that I spoke to could be seen to associate with a best friend or other women, it was striking that these young women emphasised that they would not seek the friendship or company of women. This keeping to oneself was thought to be generally true for women in Tobago, as exemplified by the following interview extracts:

N
so how would you describe Tobago girls
Akina
commess[22]
N
commess yea
Akina
always get into confusion and just like have no friends

N
[...] so can I ask you if/ you say you have few friends/ do you have more girlfriends or more like boys as friends
Arielle
more boys
N
more boys uhu/ why is that/ any reason
Arielle
Yes/ because the boys the boys might be uh they might like trouble/ but at the same time they wouldn't be causing any confusion/ because normal
N
aha not causing confusion
Arielle
girls like when it's plenty girls it always have some big bacchanal or some big (inaudible) or some big fight out or what so ever/ because they always say/ have/ where it have plenty

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(The Collins English Dictionary, 2000, HarperCollins Publishers)
[22] For a definition of the meanings of 'commess' see 6.2.2.2

panties there always confusion/ cause all these girls/ so I have more boys than girls as friends

(Danielle has been telling me that she doesn't really like to lime with girls)
Danielle
for you see now the girls they talk about other people/ the guys could just talk among themselves then/ like when there is males right we are talking about me and you/ but girls now them talking about other people outside and thing
N
so it's hard to trust them is that what it is
Danielle
cause you can't tell a girl a secret/ them they gonna tell this and this gonna tell that/ and is so it going and by the time the end of the day the whole village know

It can be seen in these dialogic constructions that the ability to keep to oneself is conceived as a masculine quality while untrustworthiness and the bringing about of interpersonal confusion were represented in association with 'the other woman'. The preference for aligning oneself with men and to demarcate oneself from other women however, reflects not only perceived or actual differences in interpersonal behaviour. It reflects also the subtle reconstruction and recognition of men's status and freedom in everyday dialogue – a status which may indeed allow men to convey the much desired state of self-demarcation. Moreover, this negative representation of women by women can be seen to be underlined by women's greater restraint through others and a struggle for agency that may not only make women interact with suspicion towards each other but ultimately makes a collective challenging of their position unlikely. In the dialogue extracts above, gender, power, and specific representations of 'others' thus interacted to produce meanings of an individualistic self that were different from those in the British contexts that I explored.

In conclusion, the emphasis on self-demarcation in the interview texts could not be taken as a sign of an individualism that stands in antithesis to collectivism and would set a society apart from those societies conventionally viewed as inherently relational. As David Ho and his colleagues have already pointed out in their studies of conceptions of 'self' in China (Ho and Chiu, 1998; Ho, et al., 2001), individualism and collectivism,

rather than being viewed as opposite ends of a continuum, should more accurately be considered as distinct constructs that can coexist in a society. On the basis of my above analysis of representations of 'self' in Tobago, I would like to argue further that not only did individualism and collectivism coexist but they were in fact interdependent. Individualistic notions derived their meanings in dialogue with a collectivist social context.

6.2.1.4. Self-esteem

A noteworthy feature of self representation in Tobago was the very assertive manner in which women, and in particular young women, spoke about themselves. Considering the negative images of the self in the eyes of the other, for example the negative representation of women or the stigmatised identity of African-Caribbeans in the context of the colonial experience, this may at first seem surprising. In line with classical theories of stigmatisation (e.g. Allport, 1954) we might expect that, due to the internalisation of the devalued view of the self, low self-esteem has become a stable personality trait of the stigmatised person. Rather than having internalised these negative attitudes however, positive self-regard constituted an almost unquestionable aspect of feelings about the self for the majority of the young Tobagonian women.

Crocker's research (Crocker and Major, 1989; Crocker, 1999, Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax, and Blaine, 1999) on self-esteem and stigmatisation offers valuable insight in regard to this finding. Firstly, empirical research does not provide strong support for the hypothesis that stigmatised groups suffer from global low self-esteem. In fact African Americans are often found to have slightly higher levels of self-esteem. Secondly, there are ways in which being part of a stigmatised group can have self-protective effects. And thirdly, that the effects of stigma on the self are dependent on the immediate social context,

i.e. that self-worth or the lack of it "emerges in the situation and is a function of the meaning given to that situation", which is "partly shaped by the collective representations that the stigmatised person brings to the situation" (Crocker, 1999, p.91). In a similar vein I will argue that what was reflected in my participants' answers to questions about self-esteem was not a stable personality trait that could be measured across time, situations and social contexts, but an understanding of self-worth that was constructed in response and opposition to a specific context of recognition and disrespect.

In the preceding sections I have outlined a context in which others were represented as a continuous threat to the recognition and success of the self, and in which not only life was seen to be subject to transience but also individual achievement. This context may indeed require the maintenance of a level of positive self-regard that does not depend on external validation. A parallel may thus be drawn between the African-American and the African-Caribbean experience. As Jones has argued, "centuries of oppression, dehumanisation, and discrimination require African Americans to seek and secure relatively independent sources of self-worth." (Jones, 2003). Similarly, in Tobago, I would like to argue, high self-esteem can be seen to be interlinked with the meanings of self-demarcation and the overall importance given to self-preservation that I have discussed above.

In contrast to the thematisation of self-esteem in the UK, self-esteem was not addressed as an individual problem by my participants in Tobago. On the contrary, to feel good about oneself was often perceived as self-evident, as the following two excerpts illustrate:

N
self-esteem/ you know what I mean/ self-esteem/ like how highly or lowly you feel about yourself
Danielle
I sure everybody does feel good about theirself

N
so if I ask you what you like best about your life right now it's probably
Kendra
who I like best about my life/ that is just me/ is just Kendra

Here, self-esteem is here not thematised as a topic of concern or as of particular

psychological importance but is construed as an unquestionable pride in who one is. This

does not mean that these young women did not also think critically about themselves or

experienced negative regard. Notions of low self-esteem could be seen to gain meaning

mainly in relation to a dialogic foregrounding of two conditions. Firstly, in accounts that

where oriented to the possibility that others are trying to take advantage of you or are

trying to make you feel bad about yourself, and secondly, in the context of risking to spoil

one's reputation as a young girl. While others are often judged as a risk to one's

reputation, as I have discussed previously, greater responsibility for their conduct and an

expectation of self-control rests more heavily with the young women who can not yet call

themselves 'big women'. Nevertheless, self-pride and a belief in one's abilities emerged

as the preferred way of reflecting upon the self in the here and now and particularly in

face-to-face juxtaposition with others.

I would like to argue further that the young Tobagonian women who participated in my

study actively negotiated and enacted positive views of the self. For example, the young

women would bring to the foreground positive aspects of either the individual self or their

group while actively distancing themselves from possible dimensions in which they lacked

or could not excel:

Marissa
because I had an accident about age nine/ about age nine with my foot/ and I always feel
that part of something of me is missing/ so I'm telling myself in order to make up for the
part that missing I have to make up for the rest/ so that kind of motivated me to look good
smell good talk good and try to be a good person generally/ so that was my motivation

N
what about/ you just said self-esteem/ how does that come in
Kenisha
like you wanna make some/ nobody wouldn't make/ uh like somebody wanna bring you down/ and according to how you is you feel bad/ but if somebody wanna bring you down you have to tell yourself that is one person understand that is one person/ you don't have to study them/ you know you could do other things that could make yourself feel proud

The extract from an interview with Marissa firstly illustrates a strategy of 'making what you got work for you', even if the circumstances in which life has placed you are disadvantageous. What is brought to the foreground of the conception of self-worth is the ability to show others the best in you. It is therefore the knowledge of one's idiosyncrasy, the acting upon this knowledge and the knowledge that others will recognise one's idiosyncratic qualities that work together in the resisting of a negative representation of self. As Kenisha points out, "you know you could do other things that could make yourself feel proud". The second extract moreover clearly reflects the expectation that another person might want to 'bring you down'. The logic of self-esteem that Kenisha proposes shields the self from a loss of worth by linking acts of disrespect not to one's personal qualities but to the inevitable nature of others. This foregrounding of positive aspects of the self can also be seen to be paralleled by the finding of Oyserman and colleagues (2002) that African Americans scored higher on individualism than Whites when individualism was defined by their personal uniqueness. Rather than being unaware of their flaws, mistakes or weaknesses, I would like to argue that the young women in Tobago followed a deliberate strategy of re-presenting themselves that aimed at the preservation of a level of self-sufficiency. One can also see this orientation interlink with 'teachings' of the kind "you have to get respect for yourself for people to respect you" or the frequently made statement of "I see about myself". To conclude, I propose that high self-esteem could be seen to be constructed through the simultaneous orientation to a socio-historical past and

an anticipated set of future possibilities (Valsiner, 2003a) that were delineated by socially exchanged representations of a generalised 'other'.

6.2.2   Other

My analysis of representations of 'self' in the interviews with my Tobagonian participants yielded subjective positions that were on the one hand informed by a close proximity of self-other relations, while being at the same time enacted through the persistent creation of a distance between self and others. These two dimensions along which self-other relations could be seen to be represented were addressed differently in the interview texts. A representation of others as invasive and polluting in interconnection with the requirement of a distance to, or demarcation from others, as I have already discussed above, constituted a particular focus of attention. This dimension of the representation of others could be said to have been organised into a set of beliefs, a 'theory' that was exchanged and elaborated in everyday conversations. The proximity to others, I argued earlier, could on the other hand be conceived as a taken for granted aspect of the daily life of the young women. Nevertheless the proximity to others also played a key role in the affirmation of identities. The following paragraphs will explore this duality in more detail.

6.2.2.1   Others in Proximity: Life as Shared Event(s)

The starting point for an analysis of self-other relations in Tobago must be the closeness, mutual dependence and reciprocity between people that characterised everyday interactions. Several factors contribute to this context of connectedness. There is for one the blurring of a boundary between public and private space due to the use of the outside as a place where a wide variety of daily activities are carried out. For example, bathing,

cooking, and the washing of clothes and wares are often carried out in the yard around the house and therefore visibly and in vicinity to others. The outside moreover constitutes the preferred space for socialising, with specific 'liming spots' being regular meeting places for men. Climate and the relatively small size of the communities are obvious contributing factors[23].

In contrast to this importance of the outside the inside of a household gains principal importance as a public space on two occasions in the year; during the celebration of Harvest and Christmas, when people move from house to house, where they are offered food and drink. Similarly, such family events as weddings, christenings, wakes, and funerals are opened up to the community. In the interviews particularly, the two events of Harvest and Carnival evoked vivid recounts of the young women's enjoyment and their 'performance' in the event either as a community or an individual. Harvest brings together the inside and the outside and pride is derived from how well one's community or family household offered entertainment, food and drink (with an emphasis being also on which house cooked the biggest and nicest food); in regard to Carnival it was the submergence in joint excitement as well as the 'freeing-up' and 'getting on bad' as expressions of a state of individualised freedom that were foregrounded in the recounts.

Connectedness is further derived from the sharing of households and the extended family. This is a dimension of connectedness which was however, addressed mainly on two levels in the interviews. For some of the young women, responsibilities in the household and their position in the family was associated with restraint. Yet the older members of the family were also referred to as a source of life teachings (see 6.2.1.2). 'Orality' (Jones,

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[23] While indeed many of my participants have pointed out to me that Tobago is small and that wherever you go you will always meet somebody you know, it should be noted that similar patterns of interaction could

2003), I argued earlier, was a central aspect of the construction of knowledge on which self-other understandings were based. I have further stressed proximity as a sense of mutual dependence. In the interviews, this dimension of proximity emerged also in the form of an expectation in others. Friendship, kinship and romantic relationships could be seen to be linked to the expectation of an exchange, often of a monetary nature. This is not due to a superficiality of values but links to an orientation towards transience. As Miller has argued, "the relationship is largely constituted by exchange which is an active process that has to be constantly reaffirmed by the participants (Miller, 1994, p.229). Reciprocity not only confirms a serious commitment to the relationship but at the same time avoids a fixing of relations as the relationship is defined in an ongoing sequence of events. Proximity can here be seen to be established in simultaneity with a distance to others.

The connectedness between self and other could, moreover, be seen to be affirmed in day-to-day interactions through the importance of others in the role of an audience. The explicit commenting on others' appearance, particularly the appearance of women, I pointed out in Chapter 6, could function as an affirmation of identity. The young women actively sought a definition of their identity through the response of the other to their idiosyncratic way of expressing themselves in style, dance, walk, and talk. The seeking of others as audience could however, also be seen to be associated with tension. For example others were frequently represented as invasive spectators, a theme in the representation of others that I will discuss in the following section.

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also be found in the much more urban Trinidad (Miller, 1994).

Finally, the proximity of others was at times idealised as sameness and constructed in opposition to the loneliness of the one's who segregate themselves from the community due to wealth. The following extract illustrates this point of view:

Safiya
and a next thing we have over here that I don't really like uhm/ some people tend to feel that they are much better then others you know/ they are more fortunate than others which to me those who think that they are more fort more fortunate than others/ and I mean you may be much fortunate in a sense that you are working you are able to work and get your own money and that kind of stuff and you get car you have a nice big house you know you live in large luxury/ and then I might be living in a little house and I have a work but it's not you know big as yours you know and that kind of thing/ and you will tell yourself ah hey I am better than her because she is living in more little house and my house is big and that kind of way/ but if you really look all the big big nice houses are luxurious the kind of friends that you will have is only pompous people will come to your house/ but you see nobody wouldn't be afraid to come in my house because my house is small and you wouldn't fraid to dirty up a curtain because we wouldn't mind if you'd come in the house you dirty the curtain/ it's not that you actually do it for spite or on purpose you know but just that you come in you sit down you enjoy yourself you lime/ you surprised to see the amount of people that will come in our house and sit down and just lime you know have a good time and old talk or just passing you know/ and the big houses with their/ and it's only like you alone you and your family in the house and you don't really see much people

6.2.2.2   The Proximity of Self and Other as a Threat

With proximity being such a dominant feature of everyday life, there may also arise the risk of making oneself vulnerable to others' disrespect, just as a deviation from a perceived level of sameness could be experienced as a threat. Connected to this risk was a thematisation of others as invasive and polluting, in dialogue with which representations of the self could be seen to be constructed. The representation of 'other' in terms of an opposition to 'self' was organised around a number of themes that are relevant also for an understanding of representations of body and eating in the Tobagonian contexts.

One of the most frequently referred to themes in the interviews as well as the conversations that I witnessed during my stay in Tobago was the invasiveness of others summed up in the expression 'commess'. 'Commess' or being 'commessive' refers in its very basic sense to the practice of spreading gossip. The emphasis in the use of the term 'commess' is however on a twisting and inventing of news or stories about a person with the intention to

185

spoil that person's reputation. Furthermore a primary objective of commess is to set people up against each other. It is often due to the confusion caused by the commessive interference of others that friendships or relationships are broken off. An understanding of the nature of commess can be seen to rest firstly on the belief that others are acting against you with the intent to cause harm or take advantage of you. Secondly, there is a notion that others are disregarding a necessary distance between self and other; and thirdly, the primary motivational factor for these acts of invasiveness is considered to be jealousy. The following three examples illustrate statements that were frequently made by my participants:

Miriam
in Tobago people just don't keep to themselves/ they always in other people's business/ they always know something about somebody even before the person even know it themself they know it

Danielle
well you know when somebody seeing something going good here they does try to mess it up that is how they try to mess up their lives

(Candis refers to her relationship with her present partner)
Candis
we've been through a whole lot you know/ it was always you know about what people said then you know/ people come people telling all different sort of things about me and him/ he didn't really have the trust in me then to really believe or to come and ask me if it was true/ he just took what his friends told him and that drove us apart more and more and more you know in a way/ and you can't really overcome that/ and look were we are today

While I argued that representations of others in the UK interviews reflected the expectation that others could and should be trusted this expectation seemed to be reversed in Tobago. Although an expectation of trust was drawn upon in regard to intimate relationships, the untrustworthiness of people was generally stressed by my participants. This of course, has implications also for the further understanding of friendship. On the dimension of distance and disrespect, friendship was represented as a risk. Besides the gender specificity of this understanding of friendship that I noted in my discussion of self-demarcation, to trust in having friends was often associated with the possibility of being led astray or being used.

For example, the truth of the saying 'your best friend is your worst enemy and your worst enemy is your best friend' was pointed out to me on several occasions. In contrast and, it may be claimed, in response to the dependence on friends in everyday interactions, the notion of friendship was represented as a too much of proximity.

Finally, in parallel to an emphasis on keeping the self neat and clean - not only in a physical but also a spiritual and moral sense - there was an association of others with a notion of pollution that also highlighted the need of distance to others. In the more literal sense, this association was with the possibility of contracting a disease or being exposed to another's lack of personal hygiene. However, a sense of pollution could also be derived from a person's conduct and their qualities as a person. Sometimes this binary of purity/pollution could be reflected in the phrases used to describe a relation between people:

> **N**
> what do you find most difficult or troubling in your/ maybe in your life at the stage where you are at now as a woman/ if you think of/ in terms of your environment maybe/ the life you lead you know
> **Kenisha**
> Aeh/ I think about/ uhm environment nice but the people in the environment some of them need to get out of the environment yea
> **N**
> here
> **Kenisha**
> bring a dirty name/ yes the household nice but some will bring a around the village and thing/ some will bring a dirty name

Although others could be perceived to spoil the environment due to their general wrong doings, reputation or an actual lack of cleanliness, in the particular case that Kenisha refers to the pollution is seen to be derived from the practice of 'Obhea'. 'Obhea'[24] is best described as a belief system that is oriented to the supernatural and constitutes a synthesis of West African, European and East Indian spirituality, witchcraft and magic (Frye, 2000).

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[24] The word 'obhea' is derived from the Ashanti term 'obayifo' which means witch or wizard (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2000)

In Tobago it is mostly seen to be tied to the Baptist church. The practice of Obhea can be said to involve broadly two categories: the putting on and taking off of spells, and to a lesser degree the healing of illness. It is mainly the practice of casting spells with the intention to harm others or the intention to tie one person to another that I found to be addressed as a common concern in Tobago. Obhea could be considered a powerful means of polluting a person through the use of evil spirits. Whether or not one believes in the effectiveness of Obhea practices, the association with this belief system evoked a representation of others as acting with the intent to restrain or cause damage to people.

To conclude, representations of others in the Tobagonian texts could be seen to be shaped by a pronounced duality of the need to locate the self in proximity and distance to others. While the connectedness of everyday life could provide a strong sense of identity and support, there was simultaneously the risk of disrespect permitted through the lack of distance to others. Representation of 'self' that emphasised the idiosyncratic worth and distinctness of the self could be seen to be constituted in dialogue with this meaning context.

6.3   Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated firstly that representations of self and other were constituted through a dialogue that was mapped between interconnecting and antonymous expectations and assumptions. In both interview texts the self could be seen to be construed in response to representations of the other. Representation of self and other were therefore constructed in interdependence. The subjective positions taken up in the dialogue reflected that my participants actively sought a negotiation of the proximity or distance between self and other. Moreover, it was the alternating between a desired state of self associated with the

conditions of recognition and an undesired state of self associated with the risk of disrespect that characterised the young women's reflections on self and other. Finally, I proposed that reflections in both cultural contexts were marked by a notion of individualism, yet that meanings of the individualistic self differed between the two societies. In the Tobagonian texts individualistic notions derived their meaning in dialogue with a collectivist social context.

Despite these similarities, my analysis discerned distinct representational patterns for the British and Tobagonian interview texts. In the British interviews, understandings of the self were framed by the interconnection of the ideals of self-realisation, success, control and self-affirmation, which however were problematised against the background of a meaning context that highlighted individual responsibility and the individual production of identity. While there was a strong sense of hierarchical differences between self and others, there was a notable orientation to the establishment of the proximity to and recognition of others. In the Tobagonian texts this pattern could be seen to be partly reversed. While it was through the proximity to others in everyday interactions that a strong sense of identity could be gained, the dominant orientation was to the maintenance of a necessary distance to others. In dialogue with these positions of the other, a strong sense of idiosyncrasy, self-demarcation, and high self-esteem could be seen to be prioritised in reflections on the self. The foregrounding of others' influence on the self as well as life's transient nature moreover may have been the reason why individual responsibility, self-control and success were not addressed as dominant concerns in the self-understandings of my participants from Tobago.

Chapter 7

7. Body and Eating in British cultural contexts

In Chapters 5 and 6, I have offered a thematic analysis of the interview dialogues that aimed at locating the body in a representational context of identity, self and other. Subjective positions moreover, could be seen to be defined by the physical body and the proximity or distance of other bodies and selves. While the immediate focus in Chapters 5 and 6 has been the dialogic enactment of the female identity, the self and representations of the 'other', I will now shift the focus of analysis to 'body' and 'eating' and their thematisation in the British texts. To resume, the starting point for this study has been the finding that women's experiences of body, weight and eating have become increasingly problematised in late modern consumerist societies. In the present chapter I wish to demonstrate the interrelatedness of such meanings of the body and the conditions of social recognition that I have outlined in the preceding chapters. While I will maintain that the body and its manipulation is experienced differently by each person and can fulfil different functions in a person's struggle to maintain a positive sense of self, I will analyse my participant's reflections on the body from the perspective of socially exchanged and negotiated meaning contents. Self and body are viewed as acting and reacting on each other while being also always situated in an intersubjective dialogue that is driven by the tensions of contesting subject positions, points of view, and demands of recognition.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Sections one to four explore representations of 'body' and 'eating' in juxtaposition with femininity, self, other, and health/illness. Section five illustrates how women negotiated alternative identities that resist dominant representations of the thin body.

7.1 Dialogic Juxtapositions of Body, Eating and Femininity

I have argued in Chapter 5 that women's identities could be seen to be constructed in a dialogue that consisted of a polyphony of interconnected and oppositional voices. In this dialogue, meanings of the body interlinked with contesting meanings of femininity. For my British participants it seemed to be particularly the opposites of the 'thin' and 'fat' body, eating and not eating that gained significance for experiences of femininity and the recognition of one's gender identity. This section will illustrate the dialogic interdependence of 'weight', 'eating' and 'femininity' as they were deployed in the young women's reflections on the body.

7.1.1 The 'Fat' Woman as Antonym of Femininity

> **N**
> was there any time when when talking about eating became a thing amongst your peers/ amongst friends in school for example
> **Caroline**
> oh yea I mean/ I think the girl's worst nightmare is the thing about getting fat [...]

'Getting fat' was not the worst nightmare of all the British women that participated in my study, and not all became weight conscious at an early age. However, a representation of the 'fat woman' as unattractive and unrecognised informed the young women's awareness of themselves and how they saw themselves in the eyes of the other. The body thus expressed a relation between self and social environment. The 'fat' female body hereby gained meaning as an opposite to the beauty ideal of the thin female body. In addition, it

191

could be seen to gain meaning in juxtaposition with the ideal of the contained mature woman and was aligned with images of women as flawed and in need of control. In the British interviews, the 'fat' body was often addressed as a threat to one's personhood. Rather than constituting 'just a person', women "muffled by fat" (Naomi) could signify both non-body and non-person.

As I have discussed before, eating disorders can be linked to the late modern ambiguity of women's roles and the ambivalence of society's expectations in them. Nasser sees these as manifestations of a "conflict between the socialised femininity that is needed for social approval and the masculinity required to perform well" (Nasser, 1997, p. 64). In the UK, the need to gain recognition of one's physical femininity as a marker of female identity further problematised the young women's relationship to their bodies and their body weight. In the interview texts, the 'fat' female body was not only associated with a state of non-person but could moreover, be seen to be experienced as an antonym of desired outer expressions of femininity. Marie makes sense of her experience of gaining and losing weight in the following way:

> (Marie has been telling me about a time when she put on weight due to medication and when she was struggling to lose this weight again)
> **Marie**
> [...] I just got to the point where I hated my body/ I hated the way I looked and thinking now I just wear baggy clothes all the time/ baggy trousers baggy jumpers/ just didn't want my body to be seen 'cause it was hideous/ I thought I was the ugliest person/ and then I started to diet a bit over the summer/ uhm I've recently lost more and now I'm well still too fat you now but not so bad you know bearable now/ and I do feel more feminine to be honest/ I feel a lot more a lot more attractive/ uhm because I don't feel sort of like the big blobloblo/ I feel more curved and toned/ the ideal feminine shape I supposed/ really it's just you know/ lost the waist and hips (?)/ it does make you feel a lot more a lot more confident as well/ I feel confident to wear sort of any of my clothes/ and hey damn it I don't look so bad now/ and I look better than I did.

While Marie emphasised in the course of the interview that a woman's beauty does not depend on her size and that she rejects media images of skinny women, her experience of increased body weight was not a neutral one. Her 'overweight' body was firstly a body

that needed to be hidden from others and that set her apart from others as the "ugliest person". Marie's experience of feeling feminine after having lost some weight contrasts with her experience of being overweight, of herself as 'the big blobloblo' - a metonymy that renders the self a thing marked by undelineated femininity rather than a person or woman. Having lost weight, she feels attractive and confident.

There was further a sense of responsibility for, as Marie says later, letting "yourself get that way", even if your weight gain was caused by medication. The body became a symbol of a personal fault. As such it could imply the loss of the ability to set oneself in positive relation to others, particularly in regard to one's gender identity. The dialogue that can be seen to unfold here is not driven by the perfectionism needs of a self biased by an unrealistic body image ideal but is a dialogue that is mapped between conditions of worth, self, and other. It is the tension between them that defines the space in which the struggle for a positive body image is amplified.

In the reflections of the young women self, gender identity and the body could also be seen to be inextricably intertwined, acting and reacting on each other. In regard to experiences of femininity, becoming a woman was often interlinked with becoming conscious of weight in the UK texts. The extract below, taken from an interview with Christine, demonstrates this process:

> (Christine has been talking about weight consciousness amongst girls in school)
> **N**
> so you were uhm starting to get more conscious about your weight or your shape uhm round like
> **Christine**
> probably probably about 13/ you know I thought you know I'm well chubby/ but then I started to lose the weight/ I did start to monitor my weight a bit uhm my eating a bit just slightly you know/ I used to eat lean cuisine dinners uhm and just started to do a bit of exercise/ and I lost a lot of my poppy fat and then I went to sort of what I would call like a natural good weight for a girl that age just before I went back to Scotland when I started doing the silly the sort of eating thing and trying to control my weight obsessively almost uhm/ but probably about 13 well about 11 12 I was becoming conscious of being female/

cause my mum allowed me to grow out my hair and then I pierced my ears when I was ten/
I was allowed to chose my clothes so maybe about then I was getting conscious about
being a girl/ and I remember it exciting and good/ and then 13 losing the weight/ and then
having more feelings for boys at my youth group my church group that I would like a boy
and have good feelings about liking him and him like me/ and being seen as more
attractive (?) and all that [...]

In Christine's account of "becoming conscious of being female" we can see the body and

the self reinforcing each other in a chain of events. Changes in her appearance interacted

with changes in self-perception that in turn changed how she felt towards and was seen by

others. This process of becoming was moreover framed by the experience of losing

weight. Losing weight marked the differentiation between the identity of the child and the

gender-distinct identity of the teenage girl. Finally, 'losing weight' seemed to allow the

realisation of an exchange of romantic feelings between self and others as a possibility.

Again, the 'fat' female body was addressed in antinomy to experiences of femininity and a

positively recognised female identity.

7.1.2   Thin Bodies and the Capturing of 'Sexy' Androgyny

In the previous section, I have discussed how weight and particularly the loss of it could

become foregrounded in experiences of femininity. In the UK interviews, there was,

moreover, a sense of always being positioned ambiguously between being too much

woman and having too little femininity. On the one hand, gaining weight was linked to

images of women that were dominated by their bodily needs and physical constitution, e.g.

the 'big mama'; images of women that were not only 'too much' but that were either de-

sexualised or over-sexualised by the mass and shape of their bodies, e.g. 'the big

blobloblo' or 'the African tribe's woman'[25]. These images seemed to threaten with a loss

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[25] The reference to 'the African tribe's woman' links to representations of African women as over-sexualised
'other', which can be traced to such highly popularised images as that of the 'The Hottentot Venus' at the
beginning of 19th century. In these representations 'woman' is not only reduced to 'nature', but the female
body has become reduced to sexual organs, buttocks and breasts. Fragmented in this way the black female
body is fetishized and serves as an object for men's voyeurism (Hall, 1997).

of agency, an imposed identity or the reduction of the self to a particular bodily feature.

On the other hand, being just thin, particularly during adolescence, and thus looking just

like a boy could also pose the risk of a denial of recognition and an unwanted identity. As

Melanie, who has been skinnier than her friends throughout her childhood and teenage

years, explains:

Melanie
I just didn't feel like I had like a figure like everybody else/ and you felt like a like a boy/ and
also in magazines and things/ there is supposed to be like four types of figures or five I
can't remember/ there is like the (?) figure which is like all kind of shapely and womanly/
and there is the I can't remember there is another nice figure/ and then there is the boyish
figure and that's me/ and this is like kind of magazine you know/ and it's like I don't know
because you know people with small boobs and small hips and small everything are kind of
boyish/ but I don't know I don't think they should say that kind of things in magazines
because you know it makes you feel very self-conscious to think that you know people are
gonna think she looks more like a man you know

I have already pointed out in Chapter 6 that the majority of my participants in the UK

noted that they had anticipated bodily changes as markers of female maturity and

connected this to a fear of being left behind or not being accepted by one's peers.

Similarly, Melanie's experience of her body as thin and boyish continued to place doubt on

her identity and her relation to others. As the extract above reveals, she also perceives her

experience of embodied identity to be mediated by the media. Melanie maintains a critical

distance to media images that categorise her, but sees herself struggling against the thus

fixed reality of her identity in the eyes of the other. In the course of the interview it

becomes clear that the complexity of her embodied identity exceeds the simple

categorisation that has been suggested in the public discourse that she cites. Nevertheless,

she also finds herself positioned by and responding to a dialogic turn that foregrounds her

thinness as a lack. It can be seen here that 'thinness' just like its opposite 'fatness' can be

problematised in a context that requires a negotiation of contradictory female identities.

The lack of visible femininity moreover calls forth another association in the UK texts, that of a deviant sexuality:

Helen
there was a boy in my class I remember who was really really fat/ I think it was worse for guys than girls actually/ uhm but a couple of really fat girls and to be honest with you they never really had any friends or anything which is horrible when you think about it now/ but I always made a conscious effort to see the people that got bullied/ there was a there was a fat issue and there was an issue about/ there was this girl in my class who was clearly gay at primary school right clearly at primary school age/ and she was dead really masculine looking she looks like a guy/ and uhm she got bullied/ the hell got bullied out of her/ but she used to kid on it never bothered her/ but it must have and nobody used to speak to her

N
do you think people treat you differently if if you are like a smaller size/ if you are skinnier like more like just in shape you know
Emma
I know for a fact that people do treat you different/ because like when I was younger I had my long I had really long black hair and I was dead thin/ I wasn't dead thin but I was slim and just a healthy weight and I used to get a lot of attention when I was out at night with guys and stuff like that/ and now I don't feel as if I do get as much attention because I've got short hair/ I never ever got one look when I had my head shaved/ which was good which was good cause you wouldn't nae you didn't want their attention but
N
no/ it was another kind of
Emma
yea it's just dead weird/ it's/ but I did notice a big difference/ like see when you've not got like you don't look a certain way people do treat you different/ though when I had my short hair like guys you wouldn't get attention from guys that uh/ people were calling you I was getting called a dyke/ when you are just walking down the street and you are like excuse me uh who are you to tell me that/ even my Dad called me that when I shaved my head cause he he wanted me with my long hair and I was he was really upset when I got my hair cut/ but it was something I wanted to do so I didn't care/ the people did do and still do treat you different if you look different/ if you look different they will treat you different

In the first of these interview excerpts it is both the 'fat kid' and the masculine looking girl, which are identified as targets of bullying and exclusion. The excerpt further reflects that already at primary school age children show an acute awareness of normative gender representations and a tendency to draw a sharp boundary between the categories of the masculine and feminine (see also Lloyd and Duveen, 1992; Thorne and Luria, 2002). The bipolar opposition of the male and female identity may be actively reinstated in children's interactions because it offers a degree of clarity, order and stability that assists their making sense of the world. One can however also see, Duveen argues, "how their thoughts and actions become structured in terms of the representations of the communities in which

they are growing up" (Duveen, 2001, p. 261). The children's perception of gender identities is not simply internally generated but constitutes a reconstruction of socially enacted patterns of meaning. Acts of bullying as the ones described by Helen, can be seen to be grounded firstly in the children's awareness that the social relations that surround them are hierarchically structured, and secondly that gender continues to be a central denominator of power. They are reflective of the persistent though sometimes subtle prevalence of hostile attitudes towards deviations from the heterosexual norm in the wider society.

Negative reactions to women's deviations from normative feminine images are certainly the focus of the second excerpt that I cited above. The excerpt demonstrates that Emma's gender identity is varied and that she sees these different identities juxtaposed with different styles and appearances. Her change from a thin feminine look to a 'not-as-thin', boyish look is associated with a change in the way others respond to her. Not being as thin firstly means not getting as much positive male attention; for how Emma sees herself and wants to be seen by others at the time, this has however, little significance - it was "good" because she didn't want "their attention". Yet her more masculine style is not only connected to a lack of positive male attention but is associated with the invasive comments from others, particularly men. Although Emma stresses her autonomous state as a person, her position is in part defined by the imposed, derogative identity of the 'dyke'.

With both 'thin' and 'fat' body problematised by negative meanings that can fix identity and make the self vulnerable to the disregard of others, the young British women often identified as an ideal the body that merged characteristics of both genders. My participants in the UK thus compared themselves and saw themselves compared to lithe, toned,

muscular, thin body images that despite their overall androgyny maintained a high level of

gender distinctiveness through either large breasts or for example a tiny waist.

Considering these contradictory representations, it becomes clear that the attaining of a

positive identity that is both gendered and embodied has become an ambivalent task of

capturing the 'right' femininity.

It can also be seen, how, in the case of anorexia nervosa, the starved body can overcome

the gendered significations that the fat or just thin female body sustains by de-gendering

the body both physically and symbolically. As Malson has argued, "whilst the 'anorexic

body' may be (multiply) constructed as hyper-feminine, it may also be (multiply)

constructed as non-feminine, as boyish or as an evasion of the femininities signified by the

post-pubertal female body" (Malson, 1998, p.116). While it is through the 'fat', 'fragile'

and menstruating body that the notion of 'labile femininity' (Ussher, 1991) can be

inscribed on women, the 'anorexic' body can succeed this state by ridding itself of any

gender specific body shape, undoing even the process of menstruation. In the negative

meaning context that still surrounds menstruation (see Chapter 5), amenorrhea, the absence

of menstruation, which sets in due to a severe loss in body fat, can indeed be experienced

as a powerful physical symbol of self-determination and purity (Malson and Ussher, 1996;

Malson, 1998).

7.1.3   Eating and Female Excess

'Eating' was addressed in a variety of contexts and was assigned a plurality of meanings

by my British interviewees. However, in contrast to social representations of eating in

Tobago, there was an apprehension of 'eating' in terms of a negative valuation of 'eating

too much' and a positive valuation of 'eating little' that was foregrounded in

interconnection with questions of identifying or being identified as 'woman'. 'Eating' and particularly its negation, 'not eating', gained meaning in dialogic juxtaposition with negative representations of femininity that framed the dialogue in which women sought recognition of their identity.

Eating just like being overweight was often phrased in terms of a 'too much'. My British participants' reflections on their eating habits, preferences and rules demonstrated that the bodily need of eating maintained a vicinity to representations of the mature female body as voracious, dominated by its biological makeup, and in fact needing too much. This representation of embodied femininity as dangerous and animalistic has far reaching roots in mythology, religion, as well as the history of medicine as I pointed out in Chapter 1. It is contrasted by the ideal of the petite woman who is not only small in size but also devoid of bodily needs and other 'impurities'. It is in this meaning context that eating moderately, particularly when in public, is seen to be prescriptive for women. Naomi's description of her changing ideas of wanting to be womanly illustrates this juxtaposition of eating, bodily neediness and femininity that could be found in the British interviews:

> (Naomi has been talking about having been happy when she physically changed into looking more like a woman but then having been shocked by the fact that she still seemed to get bigger)
> **Naomi**
> [...] I made this kind of vow to myself that from that Monday morning when I got up I would start being serious about you know like not putting on weight/ because I just had this vision that God if I had managed to put on three pounds in just a week and then just a couple of months before that I'd only been what 7 stone then if I was putting on weight at that rate I'd be eight stone before I knew it/ and then it'd be nine stone and then I'd be huge/ [...] I think maybe I was just embarrassed about the fact that I was just a grown lassie who needed a lot of food [...]
> **N**
> it sounds like maybe/ so you maybe almost thought you were
> **Naomi**
> I was abnormal
> **N**
> you/ that can't be right
> **Naomi**
> that I actually need
> **N**
> something must be happening

Naomi
yea but I actually need to you know what I mean/ but I mean boys feel no embarrassment
about that/ you think about teenage boys roaming around the kitchen just like having like
five breakfasts and stuff
N
I know/ it's almost a sign of them becoming a man
Naomi
whereas like when you are a girl you are just/ well you are hrrrhrrhrr (*pig sound*)/ you know
what I mean if you need

The positions that are brought into this brief dialogue extract are multiple. There is firstly

the binary of mind/body against which 'being serious' and 'gaining weight' are construed

as antagonistic opposites. There is the fear that if unwatched the body could grow

unstoppably and take on monstrous proportions. This calls forth not only embarrassment

but an association with the abnormal. Finally, Naomi is quite aware of the gender

dimension of her experience. While eating a lot can be read as a positive symbol of

masculinity, a woman that gives in to her need for food risks being de-personified. In this

moment of Naomi's sense-making, eating is experienced as a symbol of female excess.

Naomi finally draws on the analogy of girl and pig, an analogy that underlines eating as a

primitive maybe even immoral activity. We can see how the decision to loose weight

(Naomi consequently engaged in several years of rigorous dieting and exercising) is

oriented to a dimension of worth consisting of mind, rationality, masculine, and normality

that stands in binary opposition to the body, bodily neediness, feminine, and abnormality.

7.1.4   Eating, Comfort and Satisfaction

'Eating' as a signifier of female excess was one facet of the thematisation of eating in the

UK interviews. In contrast to this notion that required the manipulation and restraint of the

body, eating was also addressed as a source of comfort and satisfaction by the young

British women. Eating is considered to be a pleasurable and satisfying aspect of everyday

life, as well as a central aspect of festivals and celebrations all over the world. The

construal of eating as a comfort can however, also be seen to be marked by an

ideologically specific juxtaposition of femininity, eating, and emotion. Eating and emotion are closely intertwined because of both the sensual quality and the social signification of food (Lupton, 1996). Indeed, in Western consumer societies the association of 'woman' with sensuality and pleasure has been drawn on extensively in the advertisement of food products. In the media the conjuncture of woman-eating has not only been used to eroticise food, but has also been used to advertise certain food products as a remedy for women's inner needs and desires. For example, Bordo points out that while women's natural role has traditionally been seen to be the nurturing of others, "eating - in the form of private, *self*-feeding" has been represented "as a substitute for human love" (Bordo p.126, emphasis in original). It may not be an exaggeration to say that chocolate and ice cream are today readily recognised as synonyms for love and sexual pleasure, as well as a quick fix for women's 'emotional instability' which afflicts them due to their hormonal disposition.

Secondly, I would like to argue that the importance of 'eating' as comfort and satisfaction, in other words as a form of luxury, is grounded in a meaning-system that revolves around 'the necessary' and 'the unnecessary'. In the early history of thought and religion luxury was defined predominately through an emphasis on the unnecessary (Falk, 1994). It was construed as excess, a desire for transgression that was not suitable for the ordinary human being (the archetypal example is here the story Adam and Eve). From the 18th century however, with the emergence of economic ideas that acknowledged the complementary nature of the opposites of consumption and production, and together with a change of the concept of 'person', 'luxury' gained a new significance (Falk, 1994). Luxury became objectified as functional private consumption and shifted thus from the dimension of 'the unnecessary' to the dimension of 'the necessary'. The granting of luxury has consequently

also entered into everywo/man's self-understanding. In this context, eating plays an important role as a luxury commodity that can maintain the balance of the producer/consumer self. I will use the following extract to illustrate how idiosyncratic experiences and practices of eating are interlaced with the social themata that I discussed above:

(Christine responds to my question about different functions of eating)
Christine
[...] I also like/ I do/ I use it as reward as well/ that's true/ like always have nice food/ but if I'm staying in on Friday/ oh which usually I am let's face it/ I always have nice food for a Friday night/ that's a sort of ritual on Friday night/ so the kind of ritual is really nice food on Friday night/ me time and television/ so that's the kind of ritual
N
me time/ I like that
Christine
me time yea/ don't interrupt me stay away
N
a kind of treating yourself
Christine
yea yea use it for rewards definitely/ like if you've done something you didn't want to do or if you've done bad on something you say ah I'll have that cappuccino cake you know I deserve it kind of thing/ uhm my mum says that I comfort eat but I don't think I do
N
sorry
Christine
my mum says that I comfort eat but that sounds a bit you know
N
ok so when you are feeling down you would be kind of
Christine
yea I suppose I would be/ I don't think I mean/ ok I do to a point/ but/ I do it to a point but I think that sounds a bit extreme it sounds like I have a problem kind of thing/ uhm but no I don't think/ ok I do a bit/ I think everyone does a bit/ but I don't see the problem with that/ just something they like to do/ a kind of reward thing uhm

In this interview excerpt, Christine begins with the description of a personalised food ritual - the preparation of special food on a Friday night. Her experience of eating as a reward can subsequently be seen to alternate between a polyphony of dialogic positions. We can firstly see the intersection of 'luxury' with a highly individualised notion of self, from which the experience of eating emerges as a 'treating yourself'. Eating then, is experienced as a delineator of the time and space that needs to be claimed for the self in an act of regeneration, i.e. "me time". When eating is anchored within a notion of reward the dialogue is further informed by a tension between success and failure. Eating becomes

both a satisfying return for having done well *and* a means of compensation for actual or implied failure. As I have argued in my analysis of representations of 'self' (see 6.1.1.2), others' expectations and judgements of success and failure constituted a central reference point for the young British women. Christine's use of eating, I would further suggest, can be read here even as a marker of self-worth that is motivated by a resistance to a perpetual sense of devaluation and that orients the self to success. However such a potential meaning moves to the background with the labelling of Christine's enjoyment of food as "comfort eating".

Through the notion of 'comfort eating' her food practice is repositioned in a context of weakness and disorder – it suggests that she has a problem. It recalls such meanings of femininity, eating and emotion that I have discussed at the beginning of this section, i.e. meaning patterns that suggest women's lack of emotional stability and in this case, also a lack of adequate coping skills. This negative representation of Christine's relationship to food causes her to defend herself by neutralising her experience into something everybody does whereby she draws again on the concept of reward. To conclude, the passage demonstrates a young woman's simultaneous communicating and sense making of an aspect of her relationship to eating. It reveals that experience is not simply determined through representation but that this relation is better understood as "a back-and-forth movement between representing and experiencing" (Valsiner, 2003, p. 7.3). Furthermore, the example illustrates the unfolding of a dialogue between chosen 'I' positions, imposed positions and the creation of new meanings, within the frame of culturally specific themata.

7.2   Body and Self

I have shown that weight and eating could be problematised in interdependence with culturally specific representations of femininity. Experiences of gaining and losing weight together with practices of eating and not eating could further be seen to be closely intertwined with representation of a desired and undesired self, as discussed in Chapter 6 under the themes of authenticity, success/failure, control and self-esteem. In the following paragraphs, I shall attempt to demonstrate this relation in more detail.

7.2.1   Weight, Diet and Self-disgust

In my analysis of representations of self, I argued that the ideal of self-realisation constituted a central reference point in the interviews with my British participants. To 'bring out' one's inner self and consequently not to be limited in regard to one's self-expression emerged as a fundamental expectation in self and others. It could further be seen that the demand for an expression of one's individuality was bound to specific conditions of worth. In this context, the maintenance of a specific look and weight could become an important signifier of being a self-determined person. The ideal of the thin and shaped-up female body was addressed by my interviewees not only as an aesthetic ideal but as a marker of their worth as a person. For the majority of my participants not being able to determine one's weight consequently meant an infringement on their perception of self and their interactions with others. The experience of weight gain as well as the inability to stick to dieting rules could be seen to be connected to feelings of guilt, disgust and inferiority (e.g. "The whole process is quite strange/ so many different feelings I think/ cause you start of with this frustration/ total disgust", Marie). For some, this meant a retreat to self-damaging behaviours, such as unhealthy dieting, purging or over-exercising.

The following extract, in which Fiona talks about the consequences of failing to adhere to her own dieting rules, illustrates these experiences:

Fiona
first you can feel it in your body/ you feel fat and you feel bloated and you feel more lethargic/ that automatically makes you feel extremely low and not worthy to be seen/ so I stay in/ stay in not go out/ and you feel/ even if it is not true/ but then you feel like you (?) although even if you don't go on you just feel lousy about yourself/ don't you think/ that's the worst scenario
N
so you feel kind of disgusted with yourself/ you feel like
Fiona
yeah angry with yourself/ because I can't stick to it/ not just sticking to it but then doing something to make it worse/ do you know what I mean/ I mean if you say I stick to some raw vegetables for his week you don't stick to it/ you don't have raw vegetables everyday but you make it worse you have sweets and fatty stuff/ so in the end you feel more lousy about yourself/ and then you start questioning yourself more/ you start comparing yourself more to other people.
N
Hmm/ yea/ how do feel in relation to other people when you don't manage to control your eating in a way that you wanted to control it
Fiona
everyone then looks a lot slimmer and and nice/ everyone looks superfit/ and like I said you don't feel like you are as good as them in a way
N
not worthy
Fiona
yea/ not worthy to be to be seen/ you feel like (?)/ so I am sure it's all in the head

The starting point for making sense of the experience of not having managed to stick to one's dieting rules is the conception of the relation mind/body in terms of a duality. The negativity of the experience of the body as fat is, I would argue, conceived as a function of its antithesis to a self guided by mindful intention or more precisely, is a function of the failure to give precedence to this intention. Feeling lethargic thereby stands in stark contrast to the collectively valued and desired state of progress (see 6.1.1.2). While the dialogue is initially mapped between body and self, the overarching perspective is that of the other. Fiona sees herself set in relation to superior others, in comparison to whom she feels not worthy to be seen. Her self-disgust is not based on an intrinsic level of self-esteem but is embedded in a dialogue that revolves around a shared meaning complex. With her emphasis on self-questioning, it is individual responsibility (for being denied recognition) that moves to the foreground. The idea of "it's all in the head" on the other

hand seems to marginalise this centrality of a struggle for recognition and reduces her experience to a cognitive bias. We can see this final dialogical turn to be responsive to two stigmatising representations – a representation of women as passive adherents of manipulative media images, which distort their self perception, and also a representation of the (mentally) 'ill' as unable to properly understand their health-related practices.

7.2.2   The Body as an Image of Success

Success and failure, I have argued earlier, could be viewed as a leitmotif of the accounts that revolved around dieting and exercising in the interviews with my British participants. On the dimension of success, I discussed reward as a possible function of eating. The nature of success and failure as interdependent opposites is such, however, that the one always implicates the other, that each evokes the other as a possibility. The notion of failure could, for example, be seen to be intertwined with perceptions of the female body as fat, needy or instable. Similarly: with a foregrounding of these meanings the experience of eating, similarly, could be associated with an experience of passivity that related the self more closely to the dimension of failure. 'Not eating' or the exercising of the body on the other hand, could be argued to gain significance as active states of self-management and thus as evoking a notion of success. I will draw on two examples to illustrate this relation:

> (Caroline has been talking about her body ideal in terms of wanting to be attractive)
> **N**
> how would you describe that/ cause that's different for some people as well
> **Caroline**
> yea/ hm attractive/ I mean/ hm/ I think a person a woman can be attractive in personality but also in body/ but hm the personality I don't think is something you can change because it's something that's in you/ but your body is something that you can change/ well it makes you feel good about yourself/ say if you went to the gym or you did a bit of exercise or whatever/ it makes you feel attractive/ and doesn't make you feel lazy/ and makes you feel as if you have done something with your day [...]

> (In response to my question whether she connected eating to pleasure, Rhona talked about eating as a fun activity)

Rhona
but I sort of I think like my diet sort of changed just over the last month or so/ I've not been in/ before I would sort of eat until I sort of/ I could be quite sort of just taking another bit or just going for seconds and sort of eating until I was full/ but now I'm sort of full just after like I had my first course/ or like I don't really want to go back for more/ like I'm sort of more
N
is it more a decision to not uh overeat or
Rhona
I don't know/ I think it was just like that as well/ because it makes me feel sick and also when I go to bed I can't sleep as well you know/ cause I think that matters/ and I just uh I feel it's a lot better I think cause it's like cooking and eating can take up time as well/ and it's like I'm sort of like starting to motivate myself now for the school work/ but before I was just like lazy and stuff/ so like I think because I am prioritising that more/ but like I have felt better now/ I've not been like you know eating so much so I like to eat lighter foods now

In both these interview extracts, 'not being lazy' is emphasised as a reason for the management of the body, here in the form of exercise and the restraint of eating. For Caroline it is the causal interconnection of changing your body, feeling good about yourself, feeling attractive, and feeling "as if you have done something with your day" that gives justice to the ideal of the thin body as well as the need to exercise. The development of this dialogic perspective rests moreover on the contrasting representation of body and personality - the former being represented as malleable while the latter is represented as "something in you" and thus as something that needs to be 'brought out' rather than changed. It resonates with a representation of person that is oriented to the ideal of authenticity discussed in Chapter 6. In the extract from my interview with Rhona, an emphasis can firstly be seen to be laid on the physical and economical advantage of changing one's diet, i.e. not feeling sick, sleeping better, having more time. These advantages then gain meaning in relation to a notion of motivation and the prioritising of educational success.

Despite the emphasis on the sensual experience of embodiment, it is noteworthy that in the interviews in the UK, eating and exercising could be seen to have become objects of much thought and reflection. I would like to argue that this is an expression of the fact that to act upon the body, not in accordance with its bodily needs but through the faculty of the mind,

has become an important physical proof of the approximation of the self to progress and success. Eating in the 'right' way moreover, has not only a health but also a moral dimension. Exercising and eating only so much or only certain foods can thus be associated with being sensible and superior in one's choices. In the extracts above, for example, light foods as well as exercise are not brought into the dialogue through an orientation to health but through an orientation to qualities of the self. As an advertisement for Evian water has made clear, 'it is not what you put on but what you put in', that, it may be added, makes you a beautiful and successful person.

7.2.3   The Body, Self and Control

In Chapter 6, I have argued that 'being in control' constituted a meaningful element in understandings of the self and was often drawn upon in explanatory reasoning about problematic needs or behaviours such as restrained eating or exercising. In critiquing research that implements 'control' uncritically as a psychological given, I have stressed the need to analyse the notion of control in relation to the thematic meaning context in which it has arisen with such significance. The importance of generating a sense of control through rigorous exercising, a change in body weight or the denial of food depends on an experiential context in which the denial or mastery of bodily needs can be viewed in relation to how one is perceived as 'person'. The relation 'control' and 'body' in the interviews in the UK was, for example, often closely bound up with demands of success and failure and a need to gain or regain recognition from others. It was on the level of this pattern of positions that the young British women's understandings of their body and their bodily practises interconnected, not the equation of control and dieting per se.

The following is an extract from an interview with Emma, who has been talking about a time in her life when she was "not eating anything" as "smoking and drinking juice" was her diet. I have here brought into the interview dialogue the idea of feeling in or out of control depending on one's body weight:

> **N**
> do you think it has anything to do with control/ like you being in control if you/ of your life/ if you look a certain way
> **Emma**
> uhm in control/ uhm I think/ I'm uch I don't know/ I don't know (interruption)
> **N**
> in control/ like say when we manage our weight to be uhm at a certain level and our looks to be a certain way you feel in control/ like in control and if we don't do that we feel like we've lost control over ourselves/ our lives/ and we're just kind of a failure
> **Emma**
> yea uhm/ I don't think it's a control thing/ when when I was/ I hate saying overweight because I wasn't overweight/ but when I had a wee (little) bit of weight uhm/ it wasn't/ I couldn't/ I never considered like uhm not in control of myself/ it was just like a more men- / not in control of your mental state/ do you know what I mean/ I felt really/ not being able to control yourself
> **N**
> maybe you felt really vulnerable
> **Emma**
> vulnerable to other people not myself/ I just felt uhm other people were judging me all the time/ and cause I know the kind of person I am/ and people were judging me straight away/ and I wasn't I didn't have the control like saying this is the kind of person I am/ and other people were just making assumptions straight away and I never had that control/ just like kind of express the kind of person I was/ and these people were just jumping to the conclusion that I was a fat looser when I wasn't

My proposed hypothesis about the role of control enforces a perspective on Emma's experience that leaves it delineated by the relation between an inner and outer self, i.e. it suggests a need for control that is defined by the dialogic relation between self-mind and self-body only. While seeking to assimilate herself to this view, Emma shifts the perspective to the relation between self and others. Emma's understanding of the 'problem' is consequently not focused on self-control and body dissatisfaction. The point of view that she takes brings to the foreground the judgments of others and the debilitating effects of non-recognition. Here, the need to gain control can be made sense of in the context of having to defend who one is ("these people were just jumping to the conclusion that I was a fat loser when I wasn't"). The strong association of body weight and shape with the socially appraised qualities of will power and determination results in a mismatch

between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others. While there is a need to be recognised and accepted, the 'overweight' body risks the imposition of a stigmatised identity. In the light of the above considerations, it may be suggested that rather than focusing on the individual's inadequate need for control in eating disorder research and prevention which, it should be pointed out, also means to inadvertently reinforce a notion of individual responsibility, the emphasis should be on the joint development of a critical awareness of the significance of control in a socio-culturally transmitted reality.

7.2.4   The Youthful Body: an Expression of Freedom

Rhona
[...] I never really want to be sort of overweight or like sort of fat cause like/ I don't know/ it's also a thing like what I sort of think is/ you should try and/ I mean it's sort of shallow but try and look your best in your youth/ cause like you know like youth/ it's just it's more sort of free you have freedom/ whereas like when you are older you are more tied down and you lose your looks [...]

In the British texts, 'youth' was frequently represented as a time of freedom (see 6.2) but consequently also as a time in which the demands for self-determination were paramount. Given this interconnection of self, youth and freedom, the symbolic value of the 'thin' body for the realisation of the desired self could be seen to be twofold. The 'thin' body firstly contrasts with the 'fat' body in terms of their juxtaposition with the binary mind/body. While the 'thin' moderated body may be conceived as an outward expression of the rational self, the fat body is mostly represented in terms of a 'raving' of bodily needs. The thin body then becomes meaningful in relation to the desired state of freedom and youth through its association with self-determination. Secondly, it is the thin body which, through its vicinity to the childlike, creates not only the association with youth but evokes also to the ideal of androgynous femininity. It thus sets the self apart from the identity of the full-grown or older woman that is, as Rhona points out above, perceived to be "more tied down" and losing her looks. Being thin has therefore far reaching

implications for the self-understanding of women. Moreover, it may be concluded that in the context of their thematic interdependence the female body and the self can be seen to be ambiguously situated between the opposites of freedom and restraint.

7.3   Body and Eating: Shared Enactments

In my discussion of the juxtaposition of the body with representations of femininity and self, I aimed to stress the pervasive presence of others, actual and implied, in the young women's understandings and practices of body, weight and eating. While this may seem an unnecessary point to make for some, it is a point that I believe needs to be emphasised more strongly in social psychological analyses of eating disorders. Studies that focus exclusively on the individual and her relation to the socially signified body are at risk of failing to defy interpretations of 'body dissatisfaction' as an intrapersonal problem. Although I cannot claim to offer a satisfactory solution for this difficulty of providing a non-reductive analysis of the triadic relation ego/alter/object, I will attempt to give more weight to the role of the other by exemplifying shared enactments of eating, not eating and weight concern.

7.3.1   'Fat Talk' and the Negotiation of Shared Subjectivities

To talk about oneself as fat, needing to lose weight or eating too much has become an almost normative aspect of girls' as well as women's interactions. This discourse which often involves the statement 'I'm so fat', has been termed 'fat talk' by Nichter and Vuckovic (1994). For my British participants, 'fat talk' constituted a familiar way of relating to other women. Several of my participants pointed out that they saw their weight concerns largely influenced by their position amongst other women:

Emma
when I was younger it was all about what guys think/ but now it's like I don't care about guys/ they are just a/ if they don't like it they/ big deal/ uhm but it's women as well because you feel as if people like compare all the time/ I mean my mate compares to me all the time

Rather than the pressure from the media or the need to make oneself attractive to men, it was the face-to-face interaction with other women that was often associated with heightened weight awareness. 'Fat talk' as well as the comparison of one's weight and figure to that of other women in one's social circle, I would like to argue, has gained particular significance for the negotiation of female relationships. As Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) as well as Parker et al. (1995) have argued in their studies on body image, 'fat talk' could function as a means to maintain group affiliations, a strategy to establish a level of sameness and a medium for the expression of negative feelings about oneself.

Taken together, persistent acts of comparison and the use of talk about weight can be seen to reflect the competing dialogues of proximity and distance to others that I discussed in Chapter 6 (see 6.1.2). Weight talk is used to position the self in close proximity to others while socio-cultural thematisations of weight emphasise a distance between self and other along the dimensions of superiority/inferiority and success/failure. What the analysis of interviews revealed was a coexistence of a sense of enforced competition, e.g. a sense of having to outdo each other in terms of dieting and weight loss, with attempts to normalise this otherwise threatening context through the use of a scripted dialogic exchange. The recycling of weight-related statements in 'fat talk' can firstly impose onto the situation a certain degree of predictability. Through the use of dialogic cues it binds the other to a set of known responses and can forefend the uncertainty of expressing negative feelings to others. It thus not only creates an arena of familiarity in which negative feelings can be addressed but also counteracts the perceived distance to others. Marie's description of peer talk about weight and diet illustrates this strategy:

212

Marie
a lot of us did/ but I'd never tell them/you'd never tell them exactly how you felt cause then they'd all be like oh you are not you are not too fat/ like it was secret/ but you'd still talk about it to an extent just to sort of see how everybody else was feeling/ maybe you'd be oh so I am not having chips today because I'm on a diet or 'I'll just get fat if I eat them/ and they'd be 'no you are not fat/ I am

The framing of one's feelings in terms of the dominant social representation of female body dissatisfaction may also be read as what Valsiner has termed "forward-oriented constraining" (Valsiner, 2003b, p.12.3), in which the individual takes the role of an active re- and co-constructor and regulates experiencing by delineating limited possible future positions. The importance of weight talk for the negotiation of a shared subjectivity is evident in the preceding as well as the following interview extract:

N
I'm just like/ that's one thing I'm interested in/ like how it was amongst your like peers you know/ if that kind of issue was talked about a lot/ like food and calories and eating
Melanie
yea actually my friends they talk about it quite a lot/ quite a few of my friends do anyway/ they are all quite para/ like even though they are not you know like uhm at all overweight or at all anything you know/ they are just normal and they seem to think that they should be thinner/ I have never felt that way I've always been like I wanna get fatter/ but uhm a lot of my friends are like oh no I've eaten so much today and I've eaten you know/ and this is/ you know a lot of my friends check on chocolate you know for how many calories and things [...] I don't know I find it all kind of not very interesting
N
strange for you because you wanted to get bigger
Melanie
and it's also a topic I can't really uhm/ you know because people when people do talk about it quite a lot cause it's obviously very important to them/ but I can't really join in cause I don't really want to lose weight and I'm not really bothered about/ and I don't want to look you know like if I did join in I would/ like mad because like I don't want to look like I'm anorexic or something [...]

For Melanie, who has always been very skinny, her friends talk about weight and eating poses somewhat of a dilemma. Not joining into their weight talk makes it difficult for her to signal her affinity and belonging to the group of friends, whereas joining into the joint expression of body dissatisfaction could result in being labelled 'ill'. For girls who are unhappy with the way they look, weight talk could here mean the delineation from representations of abnormality that their wish for body transformation may evoke (see also Budgeon, 2003). Criticising one's body within the parameters of 'fat talk' renders it a

normal feeling that every girl shares. Yet it is also clear that not everybody is allowed to

join in and that there are limits to opening up about how one really feels. Talking about

'being fat' may furthermore have another function. It may be used in response to

associations of fatness with a lack of will power and determination, to signal to others that

one was indeed concerned and trying to take responsibility for bodily excess. In

conclusion, acts of comparing as well as weight talk can mean an enforcement of body

dissatisfaction amongst girls. Through the establishment of a shared subjectivity, these

strategies can however also become a means of balancing and undermining the negative

implications of dominant representations of the 'fat' body.

7.3.2   "You can't have that": the Collective Monitoring of Eating

As became apparent from the comparison of the interviews with my British participants,

worries about eating as well as attempts to restrain one's eating constituted common

experiences in the everyday life of the young women. These eating concerns often resulted

in a difficult balancing of abstinence and indulging that could be carried out in private,

particularly when attempts to not eat became more rigorous. However there was also a

clear inter-personal dimension of practices that revolved around the restriction of eating. I

will discuss this finding in more detail by drawing on the following two interview excerpts:

> (Sharon has been telling me about having gained weight as a teenager and having tried to
> stick to restrictive diet rules)
> **Sharon**
> uhm I think at the time I thought it was extremely important/ it was something that I had to
> do uhm/ because it's it was very uncool to be fat/ it was uhm/ I don't know like uh like uh if
> you are fat you cannot do the same things that oth- that normal people can do/ and it just
> people laughed at you more when you are fat
> **N**
> did you feel fat
> **Sharon**
> yea I guess I was definitely a lot bigger than I am now/ but yea I did I did feel fat/ just
> sluggish and generally unfit and really woah/ just uhm/ and and my friends I don't know
> what/ they were they were uhm round about the same size as me and so we 'd all kind of
> do it together/ uhm like we would help each other out you know/ like uhm like we thought it
> would be like a really good idea if like if we saw one of us buying a chocolate bar you
> would like insult them really and say like you fat cow/ and we thought yea that's gonna stop
> us eating chocolate/ so if anyone bought a bar of chocolate or crisps or was eating

something they shouldn't have been eating and the rest of us saw then we would uh I guess attack that person (?)/ you know what are you doing you fat cow you you are gonna get all sluggish and you are nasty

Naomi
[...] until this year I've never lived in a flat with just girls/ and I remember having a conversation with one of my flatmates a couple of years ago about uhm one of her friends from college and how her and uh this other girl shared a flat and how they would go around the supermarket together/ and she'd been out shopping with them and they would discuss how much fat was in every product and they would put something in their trolley and the other one would look at it with derision and say oh you can't have that you know we are not having that in our house if we have that in our house then we will end up getting fat or you know we have to have this instead/ and then the two of them would still always eat like lots of chocolate in their room behind closed doors/ and I just thought that was freak behaviour because I had kind of been through something like that and kind of come out of it and when I saw people aged like 21 acting like that I was like you know that's child behaviour/ you know why why are you doing this/ this is ridiculous making each other feel bad about what you are eating/ you know it's really none of your business what your friend or your flatmates eat eat/ and so I I've really no time for this idea let's have a diet coke break girls/ you know I just I I get I get angry

In the extract from the interview with Sharon, the dialogue is firstly directed by the intersection of being fat, being restrained in one's agency and being disrespected. The communal strategy of telling each other off for eating things that are high in calorie content can again be seen to fulfil a number of functions. It reinforces a level of sameness amongst the group of girls who are joined up in the task of monitoring each other's eating. There is an element of helping each other compete in eating less. The interaction reads like a mimicry of the implicit and discomforting threats of the real life experience of being fat. While being perceived to be "sluggish" and "nasty" is a fear of the girls, it becomes a manageable concern through the collective re-presentation in the mock attacks on each other. The dialogues that are established collectively can therefore be seen to achieve both a reinforcing of food worries but also a transgressing of the repressive capacity of the representational context.

The second extract more clearly reflects the power dimension of girls' interactions in relation to eating and dieting. In the foreground is the binary opposition of good and bad food, a distinction that is here not only developed in juxtaposition with the opposition of

non-fattening/fattening but that also has a moral implication. The girl that does not

conform to the requirement of choosing 'good' food is made to feel bad about her choice.

In this context of superior and inferior food consumption the collective monitoring of

dieting behaviours can be seen to sustain a hierarchical distance amongst women, which is

reflected also in the endorsement of public and private eating habits. Representations of

women as happily dieting together, reflected for example in the idea of "let's have a diet

coke break", are consequently rejected by my interviewee Naomi.

7.3.3   Eating, Socialising and the Claiming of Lifestyle

Besides constituting a worry food and eating could also be seen to be represented in

relation to luxury and comfort as I have already argued in section 7.1.4. While I earlier

discussed this aspect of eating as fulfilling the needs of an individualised self, eating in the

form of dining also played an important role in the young women's socialising practises, as

illustrated by the examples below:

Helen
I think for us the main thing that we do together is eat/ we go out for a meal/ it changes
when you are younger you want to go out and drink or I don't know you want to go to the
pictures and the skating and stuff/ you don't want to do that anymore we are past that/ so
it's like going for a meal having people in for a meal

N
what do you like best about eating
Linda
I like good food/ I love going out for a nice/ just dining is/ a nice meal and a nice glass of
wine and just sit/ it is a sort of sociable thing as well/ we because we have such a big flat
we are always having people round for dinner parties/ and the sociable aspect like good
food
N
what is good food/ because that differs for people
Linda
I don't know uhm
N
elaborately prepared food
Linda
not really cause we are quite simple/ simple people/ not simple people but we make simple
foods cause we are not exactly master chefs/ I like plain food/ plain nice vegetable/
something that doesn't make me feel/ like something light/ I hate heavy food I just hate it
so much/ so yea something nice and light that generally makes you feel good after/ it
doesn't really make you full and heavy

Eating can be seen to have gained importance as a leisure activity and a form of social entertainment. The primary function of eating here is to make self and others feel nice through the offering of "good food". Eating then connects with the dialogic interconnection of self-worth and the notion of 'having friends' (see 6.1.2.1). It creates a proximity to others that moreover evokes the association of a sophisticated if not luxurious lifestyle. The "nice meal" and the "glass of red wine", it may be argued, transmit the symbolic meanings of harmony, relaxation and most of all a sense of transformation. There is then a clear contradiction in representations of eating. While eating is one the one hand associated with a need of restraint and control, there is on the other hand the idealisation of eating as a form of social indulgence and comfort. When Linda elaborates on the meaning of "good food" however, it becomes apparent that it is "light food" which is associated with feeling nice, whereas heavy food seems to be associated with a feeling of disgust or 'nastiness' that may go beyond the physical sensation of feeling full.

7.4 The Body and Representations of Health /Illness

My analysis of the juxtaposition of the 'body' with representations of femininity, self and other has revealed that the problematisation of weight and eating is underlined by contradictory dialogic positions and conditions of worth. I have pointed out in Chapter 1 that a fundamental contradiction is inherent also in contemporary public health discourses that are directed at the 'right' management of the body. For one, there is the aim to reduce unhealthy levels of obesity in the society by promoting diet and weight consciousness, and for the other there is the need to reduce body dissatisfaction and dieting amongst the female population in order to prevent the further increase in the prevalence of eating disorders.

The growing importance of the perceived interconnection of the 'thin' and 'fat' body, eating and not eating with thematisations of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' is also reflected in the fact that findings of health research are today widely distributed in the media and constitute a common topic of everyday conversations. Food has consequently become closely connected to a notion of eating dangers, with eating being frequently perceived in terms of 'risk taking'. This was also reflected in the experiences of my British participants. For example:

> (Christine has been taking about receiving her mother's health advice in relation to her eating habits)
> **Christine**
> [...] she's recently been/ you know how those health people always giving out new information on something like eggs will give you whatever or you know/ but recently she's heard that chocolate can give you strokes and I do eat a lot of chocolate [...]

The multiple risks contained in food – cancer, heart disease, chemicals, BSE etc. – could be seen to be intricately intertwined with demands of rationality and individual responsibility for health, as I will demonstrate in the following section. I will then discuss how women actively responded to these contradictory demands.

7.4.1 Thin is Healthy - Fat is Irresponsible

The meanings of 'fat' could be seen to vary depending on which dimensions of the representational field were foregrounded in the dialogue, e.g. 'fat' could evoke associations with female excess, bodily neediness, and a lack of self-control. Besides in the case where being too skinny was experienced as a lack and an uncertainty, weight was thematised through an emphasis on its negativity. In the context of health 'fatness' resonated most clearly with a notion of not acting responsibly. Obesity, as others have pointed out before me (see Chapter 1) has become a moral issue. The dominant message from the health sciences has been for a long time that 'overweight' is at its least an illness inducing state and at its most, a sickness and has to be controlled by the individual through a change in

lifestyle; being healthy or unhealthy is therefore construed as a choice of the 'health

consumer' (Germov and Williams, 1996). This authoritative stance could also be seen to

direct the young British women's sense making in relation to weight and eating:

> (Caroline has been talking about not liking rich foods)
> **Caroline**
> yea/ it's just too much/ I do I like light foods/ I like salads and whatever/ although I said I like say you know maybe a big fry or something but I think you know I would never ever eat fries all the time you know/ it would be like a special treat for me if I sat down and had fry/ hm it it annoys me when I see people you know who eat really extremely fatty foods all the time/I mean that's/ I mean why don't they take much better care of themselves/ you know like in a country with a huge risk of heart disease heart attacks whatever you know/ that's why you know/ the way they eat/ and and the fries and whatever else they have/ then when people are eating they don't really think of twenty years thirty years down the line do they you know they don't think well I'm gonna have a heart attack because of what I am eating now/ it's like what you do now reflects what you do later/ but that's that's not really what they think of when they eat

> (Naomi responds to my question how she became more conscious of weight)
> **Naomi**
> well you know obviously I have heard about dieting and I was aware of like the sort of ideas like you know low fat food for this and you eat top loads of fresh fruit and vegetables and you know I'd always been kind of aware of what what was a healthy and what makes you put on weight and that type of thing

> (Laura has been talking about heating healthily and knowing what your body needs)
> **Laura**
> so yea I guess it does I think it is quite a big deal uhm what you intake/ cause that's kind of what you are what you eat/ no

"What you do now reflects what you do later" and "you are what you eat" are statements

that establish a strong causal relationship between a person's choice of food and their

worthiness as a person. What is healthy is construed in contrast to what makes you put on

weight. Dieting rather than being a symptom of beauty obsession becomes an essential

part of living healthily and responsibly. In turn, it is looking good in terms of having a

slender contained body that is recognised as a "tangible evidence" (Lupton, 1996, p.137) of

feeling healthy and feeling good about oneself (and thus may even outweigh the health

damaging effects of smoking and drinking as Fiona points out below). This focus on the

outward expression of the inner qualities of health, fitness and strength, both physically

and mentally, is also reflected in the common preference for the expression 'being in

shape'. Asked if there is any particular way in which we should treat our body, Fiona explains:

Fiona
definitely sports/ definitely the way you take care of your body is to keep yourself active/ and and I mean yea smoking and drinking but that's not as important as long as you keep fit/ your body will look good and as long if you look good/ or even if your body is not perfect you just feel good about yourself when you when you are active/ I think it is the only way/ nothing else works/ with liposuction those things/ don't make you feel good

In my local gym, a display that was meant to raise its users' awareness of 'exercise disorder' highlighted the differences between a healthy and a 'disordered' workout by pointing, among other things, to the distinguishing feature of purposeful versus purposeless exercise. The logic that Fiona proposes about exercise in the interview extract above, as well as the uses of weight loss behaviours that I have discussed in the preceding sections, go beyond the imitation of beauty ideals and the purposeless desire to be thin. The potentially unhealthy practices of dieting and over-exercising can be used to transmit important messages about the self, a well as position the self and the body in resistance to or assertion of socially embraced conditions of worth.

7.4.2   Negotiating Ambiguous Meanings of Dieting and Health

The young British women did not only use potentially unhealthy practices of dieting and exercising to assert their positions but they also consciously assessed and sought to rectify the contradictory character of the health demands that were directed at them. Within the frame of possible meanings that were mapped out by the socio-cultural context in which they participated, the young women negotiated their use of health related behaviours and redefined meaning relations. Quite contrary to the idea of fixed cognitive schemas or persistent processing biases that distort women's perception of their body, women could be seen to actively balance demands of control and 'healthy' behaviour with having a

lifestyle, indulging and 'treating' the self. The following reflections on dieting and

exercising taken from an interview with Linda illustrate this point:

> **Linda**
> [...] uh I don't actually know if my sort of dieting-binges if I have lost anything/ probably when I don't mean to then that's when I do lose a bit of weight/ it's not just losing weight it's feeling good about myself as well/ it always feels good
>
> **N**
> what does that/ can you explain that feeling/ feeling good
>
> **Linda**
> I always/ that's part of the reason why I go to the gym cause it gives me a lot of energy/ where as you say food gives you energy I would say rather than eating food I would go to the gym for an hour and a half/ uhm I just love the feeling of burning off this fat and sweating/ I feel so great after an hour and a half/ it's just the getting there but once I am there it's so good/ and it alleviates the guilt that I've maybe had from say going to the pub and having two pints of beer/ It's like oh that's all right I have had two pints of beer had a good time and I don't feel bad about myself now because I've (?) and I worked it off/ so generally with food, especially in relation to me I feel if I have had indulged in some way then I would have to go and work it off to make me feel better

While the focus is set firstly on the goal to lose weight, Linda's choice of the phrase

"dieting-binges" implies, with a hint of irony, the point of view that her dieting attempts

are not only ineffective but possibly also unhealthy. The perspective then shifts. Rather

than the loss of weight in itself, what is conceived to be of central significance is the

juxtaposition of "feeling good about myself" and the engagement in an activity that aims at

the counterbalancing of 'unhealthy' consumption. Exercise thus emerges as the more

meaningful activity as it provides the immediate physical experience of 'burning off' and

'sweating out' the guilt of having indulged. Although the disciplining of the body is still

conceived in terms of a moral task the desire to lose weight has moved to the background

of the experience of body and self.

The young women who participated in this study had frown up during the 80s and 90s

when eating disorders were highly topical. Their knowledge of healthy and unhealthy

eating included also the awareness that 'diet' has become closely associated with female

irrationality, disorder or dysfunction. With anorexia or bulimia nervosa being often

conceived as disorders that afflict predominantly the spoilt middle-class girl, the

engagement in weight loss behaviour could also set women in association with a negative

label of female vanity. Dieting as risk behaviour was consequently associated with stigma.

However, women also found practices or interpretations that solved the paradox inherent in

expert messages on weight control and defended against negative implications of weight

loss behaviour, as illustrated in the following extract:

(Fiona added this reflection on dieting at the end of our second interview)
Fiona
you see I never liked to tell myself even when we were younger/ diet is always/ for me a diet is always associated with a bad thing/ for me and even for/ I swear when whenever you tell my mum when she is cooking say no we don't want to eat that no I don't want to eat that it's fried and she knows what I am what we are like and she goes oh so you are on a diet and we go no not at all we are not on a diet/ cause diet is always a bad thing/ I never like to think of myself as being on a diet/ so I like to see it more as a change in life-style not as a diet
N
how is it a change in life-style
Fiona
because I don't see it as a short term thing saying I am going to do this/ make it part of what I do everyday as a normal thing/ not like right this week it's going to be diet and then that's it/ but I don't know/ because I mean for us diet is always a very dirty thing/ so stay away from it/ (?) it's so too girly/ you know I'm on a diet (in a childlike voice)/ so

Dieting is here construed in terms of an association with stigmatising representations of women as "girly", from which Fiona seeks to be set apart. Nevertheless there is the awareness that weight loss still carries important messages about the self and not being in control of body and eating poses the greater risks of devaluation, exclusion and the denial of social recognition. In response to this paradox Fiona reinterprets her need to diet as a change in life style. Dieting is thus framed in terms of 'otherness', with which the self is not associated. The extract illustrates how women could develop strategies of protecting their identities against stigmatising representations and claim a version of health that enables positive social identities. In the context of the promotion of healthy eating, the further provision of information as 'strengthening' strategy may therefore be limited in success as it does not directly apply to women's experiences. By reinforcing stigmatising representations of 'risk' behaviour and neglecting the purposefulness of women's engagement with weight loss behaviours, health promotion programmes may meet resistance but more so may make it impossible for young women to address health problems.

7.5 Challenging Social Representations

Although the young British women who participated in my study could, throughout this

analysis, be seen to be oriented to the thin body ideal, it is crucial to highlight again that we

are not merely positioned by given representations. Dialogicality means tension, the

clashing of different points of view, evaluation and the negotiation of new meanings.

Through the experience of a struggle around issues of weight and eating the young women also constructed alternative identities and affirmative ideals of femininity. For instance, they would assert themselves through the rejection of feminine representations that portray them as "little and sparkly and delicate" and the transformation of these into notions of "a strong woman" (Christine). Similarly, the extract below shows how Naomi develops a means of negotiating the demands of control and rejecting representations of idealised thinness:

Naomi
I have got a sense of perspective but I have still got a body image ideal/ I have still got these things that I make myself do because I feel that if/ you know I need to have this control over myself/ but I think it's it's more achievable to say you know well I I know I know I've got big thighs but that's because I am meant to be a dancer and I am meant to be a skier and I need big thighs/ so you know great

Challenging the content of representations linked to female identity in this way enabled women such as Christine and Naomi to shift the emphasis from health damaging behaviours to practices of body management focused on strength and naturalness. Representing the self in this way may still be marked by individualistic notions of control and responsibility but none-the-less constitutes a critical engagement with dominant representations. Such engagement is potentially empowering.

7.6   Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how women's engagement with the body, weight and eating could become problematised in relation to socially enacted representations of femininity, a desirable and undesirable self, the proximity and distance to others and notions of health and illness. In the foreground of this discussion was a) the actual or implied presence of others in valuations of the body, and b) women's active negotiation of conditions of worth. Idealised states of personhood just as idealised representation of the feminine identity were not understood to be generated within the individual's mind but

were shown to be socially exchanged and therefore not fixed (as in a stable personality trait) but shifting and ambiguous.

Meanings of the 'thin' and 'fat' body, eating and not eating resonated with different patterns of binary oppositions that were underlying the social representations of self and gender identity. Femininity and weight were closely interlinked in the reflections of the young women. Both the 'thin' and the 'fat' body were problematised in a context of contradictory demands that revolved around being too womanly or not sufficiently feminine. As was reflected in the women's negotiation of positive and negative femininity, attaining a positive identity that was both gendered and embodied had become an ambivalent task of capturing the 'right' femininity. Eating was found to be at the same time constructed as a source of comfort, a commodity for the self in a consumer/producer context, and a signifier of emotional instability and female excess. Women's engagement with these notions were best described as a back-and-forth movement between representing and experiencing.

In juxtaposition with representations of a desired and undesired self the 'thin', 'controlled' body could become an important outer expression of self-determination and personal worth. Thematisations of weight were marked by an emphasis on the distance to others in terms of an orientation to the notions of superiority/inferiority and success/failure. The establishment of a shared subjectivity through weight talk and joint food monitoring could become a means of balancing and undermining the negative implications of dominant representations. In the context of health and illness fat and eating carried strong connotations of risk and moral responsibility. At the same time, the young women were aware of stigmatising representations of dieting connected to a representation of eating

disorders and reinterpreted their own engagement in risky and potentially unhealthy dieting

practices. Finally, the young women also re-presented themselves through the construction

of alternative identities.

Chapter 8

8. Body and Eating in Tobago

My analysis of representations of body and eating in the British texts revealed a close

interconnection of the opposites fat/thin and consumption/restraint with conditions of

worth that oriented the individual to the ideals of responsibility, rationality, will power and

success. The female body and eating could be seen to have become problematised in the

young women's attempts to maintain a positive identity and to receive the recognition of

others. Their engagement with their bodies often resulted in ambiguous positions that

required the balancing of contradictory demands. I will now turn to the analysis of body

and eating in the Tobagonian texts.

> **Michelle**
> if I were to be fat I would be fat in Trinidad/ prefer to be fat in Trinidad than to be fat here
> you know/ I would prefer to be fat in Trinidad if I were to be fat anywhere/ I'd prefer to be
> fat there than to be fat here because you are more likely to find someone who thinks you
> are dead gorgeous in the Caribbean if you're fat than here you know/ you are ugly here if
> you are fat/ it's like an instantaneous reaction you know/ I mean some of the fattest people
> I knew had husbands and wives and kids you know/ here you tend to find obese people
> would either marry obese people or you know they would find comfort in being around
> people who are big as well/ because they just wouldn't be accepted in circles of people
> who were supposedly normal size

For Michelle, who moved from Trinidad to the UK when she was 17 years old, the

difference between these two cultural contexts in regard to their respective attitudes

towards weight and appearance was paramount. During her 5 years of her stay in the UK

her relationship to her appearance changed: while she had taken pride in her body shape

before moving to the UK, both body and eating had become aspects of her life that at

times, she loathed. Moreover, she had become acutely aware of the consequences of being

seen as 'overweight' – "to be fat" has come to mean the loss of a positive affirmation that one was attractive to and accepted by others.

In this chapter I will explore 'body' and 'eating' as they were addressed in the interviews with my Tobagonian participants. I will demonstrate that the reasons for a lack of body image concerns and 'disordered' attitudes to weight and dieting go beyond the fact that men in this culture show a greater acceptance of larger body shapes, as has frequently been suggested.

8.1   Body and Eating: Expressions of Femininity

My analysis of women's constructions of identity in the preceding chapters has proposed that the Tobagonian interviews were marked by a strong notion of femininity which was defined through the simultaneous opposition and complementarity to men. The young women's identity was inextricably intertwined with the pronounced manifestation of female sexuality. The symbolic contesting between the genders, I argued, constituted a central and explicit feature of everyday social interactions. While the young women in my study would also claim the domain of the masculine for themselves, for example in terms of a competing for agency and men's powers through the 'rude gal' identity (see 6.1.2.3), their female identity was mostly addressed as an unquestionable truth in this context of dialogic positions.

I will further argue that gender identity, sexuality, and correspondingly the body in its outer and inner form was made sense of in terms of a thematic distinction of natural/unnatural. The foregrounding of the natural potency of the body allows an understanding of bodily needs in terms of a natural force and, in addition, makes it possible

227

to appreciate different female shapes as an expression of female nature. The present section will discuss the 'fat' and 'thin' body in relation to these significations of femininity as well as in juxtaposition with such opposites as freedom/restraint and young lady/big woman that I previously highlighted in my analysis of the interview texts.

8.1.1 Shape, Diversity, and Intrinsic Femininity

> (Safiya has been discussing style and some people's tendency to vanity)
> **Safiya**
> I live a natural life/ I like my jewellery and stuff/ I like to wear nice clothes/ dressed always looking good that is me you know/ and always like looking actually like a woman then that's all to it in being feminine and liking to be feminine

The emphases contained in this short statement express a unity between body and identity that can be seen to be derived from the connection of 'naturalness' and the use of 'style' to look good. Indeed, I would like to argue that the main function of nice clothes and jewellery in this context is understood to be the accentuation of what is already there as a natural given - an intrinsic femininity. The use of style can, moreover, be seen to express a person's pride and enjoyment in their gendered body. In the interviews with my Tobagonian participants on the whole, liking one's appearance was not dependent on one's size, even though some of my participants pointed out that they could 'lose a bit of weight'. In regard to men's preferences for either smaller or bigger sized women the young women's perspective often seemed to be a function of their own size. For example, in talking about their looks, women who saw themselves as being quite small in size often emphasised that guys liked to see just that. Women who were of a larger size, on the other hand, stressed that men preferred a fuller female shape. Men indeed differed in regard to their preference of size, yet women's positive valuation of their own size could also be seen to be independent of others' comments. The following two extracts illustrate these aspects in the women's own words:

Marissa

mhm yea they (men) appreciate women who have big butt bottom/ and they don't like/ to me the minority likes sl-/ they more like women with solid more solid but not too big but not really too small/ they like to see them curves the curves I guess/ generally most men don't as far as I know don't like too much of a small woman/ so you find now that I would like to lose some weight but not too much cause I think that if I lose too much I'll you know lose the appeal/ yea that is more the culture here/ they/ men more like big women and most women are generally thick anyway here

N

how do you feel/ how do you feel about your body/ your appearance now

Arielle

well usually people tell/ usually I feel good about my body about my size about everything/ and mostly people say hey you look nice you have a nice shape put on a little more size/ I don't want any more size

N

size/ they find you are too skinny

Arielle

I don't know/ I like my size/ I'm keeping my size I love it/ some people say hey you look nice just put on a little bit more size and you look good because soon as you put on a little more size hey your bottom will grow and lelelel/ but but to me I like my size because I don't know it just growing up with this size and I like it/ when I was small they used to call me figure one

The reflections on the body contained in both these extracts, I would like to argue, are underpinned by an intersection of the complementary opposition man /woman, the thema natural/unnatural, and a notion of idiosyncrasy. Both extracts are oriented to the perception of the female body size and shape in the eyes of the other and both young women are recognised in terms of the physical insinuation of their feminine sexuality. While they may not match these body ideals entirely, it can be seen that the one uses the assumed preference of men to confirm her attractiveness, while the other rejects people's comments through a foregrounding of the idiosyncrasy of her figure. In both cases the need to change the body is rendered obsolete. In the interviews with my Tobagonian participants, on the whole there was a clear sense that one's body in its inner and outer expression, was not only a natural given, but was also a God given. The body was thus construed in terms of a manifestation of powerful forces, reflecting both the beauty of God's and nature's doings. Viewed from this perspectival position, it can also be seen that mind and body can be conceived as the inseparable dimensions of the whole that represents

'me' as a person, rather than in terms of a primacy to the mind and the need to exert control over the body.

The body and its size and shape were, as exemplified in the second interview extract above, frequently commented on in face-to-face interactions. This also included comments on people's 'fatness'. Unlike in the UK were comments about a person's weight gain would never be made in the person's presence, particularly if this person was female, it was common to address a person with "I see you are getting fat" in Tobago. On some occasions, for example when two women met who had not seen each other in a long time, the comment "you get fat" could even replace the question 'how are you doing?'. Although 'fatness' could be associated with the negative state of greediness and certain health problems, it was 'getting small' that was more closely associated with illness and a person being unwell. Comments on fatness overall were not received as a disrespect but were often understood as an act of teasing that invited the addressee's assertion of their own wit and humour. Then it may be proposed that rather than positioning the individual as non-person, body size and particularly the 'fat' body were actively drawn upon as integrate parts of affirmative self expression in the co-definition of identities during face-to-face interactions.

As I have already pointed out above the young women were not unanimously oriented to a bigger body ideal. Some women explicitly stressed the importance of staying slim:

(Candis has been telling me that she doesn't want to gain size that she likes to stay slim and trim)
N
no/ so what does that mean for you
Candis
it means you know/is just a term say you're uhm slim and trim that's me cause when you are slim and trim you could wear everything/ you could wear the latest style/ you could be (?) everything you put on is gonna fit you/ that's the truth/as you see the way I dress just everything I put on fits me you you know what I mean/ yea I look so well (laughs)/ it's good for me really honestly it's really good and I feel very good/ people may think that I am too

230

slim but then my size is good for me I love my size you know what I mean/ I don't think that I am too slim you think that I am too slim

While an emphasis on idiosyncrasy is also contained in this extract (i.e. "people may think that I am too slim but then my size is good for me I love my size"), the primary association is between the slim trim body and the ability to fit into the latest styles. The importance of wearing fitted clothes of the latest fashion however, goes beyond looking good and feeling sexy – it establishes the association with a specific lifestyle; this lifestyle is focused on the domains of consumption, enjoyment and most of all the expression of freedom. Wearing the latest styles is closely bound up with the realm of dance and party (mostly the soca party), which together epitomize a relation to life that may be best characterised by the expression "don't take it on". Both the expressions, 'don't study it' or 'free up', with the latter being particularly associated with dance and carnival, can be used as a reminder that one should not let oneself get pinned down by the injustices of life or let oneself get tied down by others' doings. The slim and trim body in juxtaposition with style, dance, enjoyment and consumption can be read as an expression of not feeling burdened and doing what one wants to do. The emphasis is on the spending out or unleashing of energy including money and sexual energy, as symbols of freedom. In this context, the slim and trim body also connotes the contesting with men in terms of endurance and fitness (girls for example, might boast jokingly "I like them (men) young/ young like him yea/ that strong/ when they are a bit old you can't just really you know perform you know/ I like them young yea I like them young and strong"). These meanings of the slim and trim body find their highlight in Carnival. Carnival, as my participants told me, is also the time in the year when women might collectively engage in weight loss behaviour. While Christmas is a time of eating, Carnival is thus a time of getting small 'for the jump-up'.

8.1.2   Being Too Slim – Young Girls vs Big Women

In the previous section I aimed to demonstrate that understandings of both the 'fat' and the 'thin' female body functioned as a positive affirmation of the young women's identity. Different body shapes could moreover express a vicinity to different, socially enacted ideals. In contrast to these positive expressions, the thin female body, juxtaposed with meanings of being a 'young girl' and being a 'big woman', could also imply constraints in regard to the agency and recognition of the young woman. As I have argued in Chapter 6 (see 6.2.2), the association with the 'big woman' identity meant the association with privileges and the ability to make one's own decisions. For the 'young lady' on the other hand, a central concern was with the spoiling of one's reputation. Looking thin and thus young could, for some of my participants, also call forth associations with disempowerment and the possibility of disrespect, as the following extract illustrates:

> (Danielle, who is slim, has been telling me that she feels she could gain a little more weight)
> **Danielle**
> no I like this size/ but I mean maybe the legs could ? little/ my face could get a little fatter
> **N**
> cause you find that is more/ that would bring out yourself better
> **Danielle**
> it just/ sometime when I going to town they say you look fourteen and you look thirteen and is that child yours and all these kind a/ maybe if I put on a little bit more size
> **N**
> you look more like a big woman
> **Danielle**
> maybe I look bigger

Danielle's wish to gain some more weight is linked not to a beauty ideal but to the desire to be recognised as a woman who has gained enough maturity to be able to determine her movements and social affiliations. On the basis of her young appearance, her conduct is questioned and her impropriety implied. Being thin aligns her with the identity of the 'young girl', which not only imposes the requirement of restraint but, I would argue, a power difference between her and men, who enjoy most privileges. These meanings of the thin body stand in contrast to the meanings of the 'slim and trim' body that I discussed

above, yet both may be seen to be oriented by the opposites of freedom/restraint and independence/dependence. Again, I would like to argue that the relation of the body, self and other is never unambiguously fixed but constituted through the tension between a multiplicity of possible positions that either foreground the recognition or disrespect of the person.

8.2   Self-Definition and Bodily Expression

Similar to the British interviews, references to the body in the Tobagonian interview texts also carried important messages about the self. While the slim body could express an association of self with freedom and independence as I have discussed above, weight was mainly associated with qualities of the self through the theme of idiosyncrasy. The focus of attention was moreover set on an engagement with the body that was directed firstly at the enhanced presentation of the body through style and neatness, and secondly the attuning of self to the body. In the following sections I will discuss this interconnection of self and body under the themes of purity, style and bodily intuition.

8.2.1   Body, Self, and Purity

The opposites of purity and pollution, as I have pointed out in the preceding chapters, could be found to underpin thematisations of self-other relations in Tobago. I saw the desire to emphasise a distance between self and other derived predominantly from a representation of others as invasive and polluting. In contrast to this association of the other with a risk of pollution, the notion of purity was foregounded in constructions of the relation between self and body. Purity could for one, be represented in terms of hygiene and cleanliness. The need to keep the body as neat and clean as possible was stressed repeatedly by my participants. This emphasis on cleanliness could also be seen to have a

moral dimension. In a religious context for example when people would talk to me about the 'gospel'[26], it was pointed out that the righteous person would take the greatest care to keep the body clean and to look neat and tidy. Cleanliness and neatness, I would like to argue, constituted central elements of the idealised state of personhood in Tobago. The following example taken from an interview with Miriam further illustrates this relation:

N
[...] how do you think one should look after one's body/ how should one treat one's body
Miriam
well maybe you should treat it like a trophy
N
a trophy
Miriam
yea always keep it neat and tidy and well taken care off
N
mhm/ mhm/ so that means like/ what does that involve
Miriam
well uhm it's like hygiene you have to bathe like three times a day
[...]
Miriam
hu/ well uhm/ your body is something like a prize position/ you always have to keep it like well in a way/ you just always have to take care of it you know/ like how you always polish a trophy and keep it up in the shelf you know so that people can see it it's always looking beautiful it's like that

The analogy of the trophy that Miriam draws on to explain her understanding of how one should take care of the body, construes the body as a marker of a person's special qualities. The body is like a "prize position" - it may be read as reflecting the uniqueness and worthiness of a person. In turn, the body, understood as an award, needs to be valued and esteemed highly. This requires firstly the prioritisation of personal hygiene. Secondly, it requires that the body be kept well and presented always at its best. From the understanding of the body as an award, trophy, or prize position that marks the owner as a distinguished person follows that the body should also be presented to others and be admired for its beauty. It can be seen that the relation of body, self and other that is

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[26] Particularly for active church members or followers of the Rastafarian faith a common aspect of everyday conversation would be to exchange with or preach to the listener essential teachings or psalms from the Bible.

234

delineated through the analogy of the trophy resonates with the themes of idiosyncrasy and self-esteem that I discussed in Chapter 6.

In accord with these themes, the extract above reflects an orientation to the uniqueness of self, body and the unity of these two dimensions of person. Viewing the body through the analogy of the trophy may furthermore constitute an active strategy of establishing a sense of worth that is independent from others' judgement. Yet, others gain importance for the meaningful relating of body and self as an audience (e.g. "so that people can see it it's always looking beautiful"). The meanings of the body, then, may again be seen to be framed by the simultaneity of a need for the proximity and distance to others. It may also be argued that an emphasis on purity when viewed from a moral perspective, particularly in interconnection with religious teachings, stresses an orientation to transcendence, i.e. an orientation to the long term, the evaluation of life as a whole and the surpassing of the present state. Viewed in terms of neatness and the presentation of self and body to the other, the notion of purity may however also express a focus on transience, i.e. the realisation of the self in the moment. In this latter sense purity interconnected with the concept of style.

8.2.2   The Importance of Style

A central means of reinstating the individual qualities of the self constituted the concept of style. It was moreover style that took precedence over weight or good looks as determinants of a person's attractiveness. Rather than simply referring to a following of the latest fashion, style must be understood as the creative combination of fashion items with the idiosyncratic features of the wearer. The unification of appearance, movement and talk is used to produce a performance of who one is. Consequently style may but need

not involve very expensive items. While particularly younger men would spend large

amounts of money on the latest shoe wear, brand clothing and jewellery, it was generally

agreed that it is in the end the original way of wearing these items that determines if a

person has style. For example, several of my participants pointed out that it was the way

they were shaped, i.e. the unique way a particular piece of clothing fitted on them, that

brought out the style in a fashion item.

Nails, hair, shoes, jewellery and dress were often combined to reflect a characteristic way

of a person's sense of style, for example by laying particular importance on matching

colours, wearing just plain or patterned clothes or always wearing a specific type of hat:

> (Mauricia has been talking about dressing appropriately and hardly wearing short clothes)
> **N**
> so you don't like to look sexy
> **Mauricia**
> yea but I think when I look/ (laughs) sexy hm/ but I wouldn't say that you know because people like how I dress/ I I like to match like me all my nails if my nails red something on me gonna be red/ that's me/ if I have on blue and white everything has to be blue and white/ they like how I dress and some people does say wait how much thing that girl girl you always get on/ and I don't know how people does see me but a lot of people like how I dress/ and the appearance is a key factor to get from people you know/ because that is how some of them that is how they look at you/ you know/ from your appearance like some of them (?) some of them most likely they from looking at you they could just you know like I mean they could know what type of person you are just by looking/ from your appearance only [...]

The display of style is here constructed first and foremost as a way of addressing others.

Although the wearing of a certain type of clothes may be used to signal one's group

membership, e.g. the wearing of dresses rather than short skirts, style is predominantly

used to express one's individual qualities, in other words one's originality to others.

Attractiveness then, is understood as the ability to display a unity of the body and self in

style. The active self-definition of who one is in dialogue with the image of the self in the

eyes of the immediate other is foregrounded in this understanding of body and self.

An important aspect of style for the young women in my study seemed, moreover, to be

the neatness of their appearance. This connects with the theme of purity as discussed in

the previous section, in that a neatness in the way one dresses may also be read to highlight the inner strengths of a person and their concern for cleanliness in regard to both physical and spiritual contact with others. With neatness being often used in reference to fitted (tight) clothes, to dress neat could in addition, be seen to have the function of rendering more transparent the goodness of the fit between the items of clothing and the shape of the wearer, 'thin' or 'fat'. Further, a neat way of dressing could enhance the effect that was created by the wearer through their way of walking, posing or dancing in the outfit. Neatness furthermore, could be linked to the idea of looking new, thus could connote a distancing from anything old and an emphasis on the moment. For example, this could mean that some people would only wear an outfit once for a particular occasion and not again thereafter. The following extract illustrates this importance of neatness:

Arielle
well to me the most important thing right now you know if you are going somewhere all I study is my looks how my hair combed if my top match my pants if my shoe go with (?)/ you know sometime I say oh God this wouldn't look good with silver you change and you put on gold/ I more too look at my/ just how I look like/ cause you know cause when I stepped out I like hear them say uuh you look so you look beautiful you look nice you look splendid oh you look good today/ so most likely is how I look
N
so it's mainly/ it's dress/ and what/ something else jewellery/ it's nice/ the hair is nice and
Arielle
mostly I change uhm I plat over my hair often to keep it neat and all of that/ or like if I have to go somewhere like for instance if I have to go somewhere tomorrow I would lose it out and wash it and have it plat over/ and then my clothes would look nice nice nice usually/ I I kind of have this attitude I don't know where I have it from/ like say if I have to go somewhere I don't know I wear a new shoes a new top a new pants or something like that

Neatness and looking new take on a central role in the construction of a sense of personal success and achievement, which is also readily recognised by others. The emphasis on looking new furthermore construes the self in terms of flexibility. It sets the focus on the person's ability to suit the self to the occasion and the here and now and effects a detachment from a self that may be tied down by the past or fixed by life circumstances. The importance of the ability to suit oneself to the occasion is also reflected in the shared adherence to different rules of dress for home, town, and social events. While anything

could be worn at home, nobody would leave the house without taking a considerable

amount of time to prepare themselves[27]:

N
right uhm/ what is it/ what (?)/ like here is quite a difference between if you are home you know you just wear your home clothes/ and then you go to town you make an effort to/ I don't know
Kendra
yea and you yea dress up well in Tobago/ they say uhm does/ she can't dress properly to go in town/ and that old clothes there you know/ so they will/ because if for me if I how I have on this you know/ in away people dress they put on a slippers and they go in town and they look for what they want/ but in Tobago now you go and bathe wash your face put on a little lipstick go in town/ you look nice/ and you come home that is just/ people or some people say she she had on that she can't wear something better to go in town

The focus here is, of course, to a lesser degree on the individualised self than it is on the

possible acts of disrespect through others. Looking neat and beautiful may then also be a

means of delineating self from other and creating a position of superiority and

unassailability. Overall, style could be seen to be used by the young women to emphasise

a number of different subjective positions.

8.2.3   "It doesn't agree with me": Self-Body Attuning

Unlike in the British interviews where the young women saw themselves addressed by the

requirement to engage in the management of bodily needs, the body and its intuitions could

often be seen to be prioritised in understandings of the relation between self and body. For

example, people would often emphasise that they would not expose their body to certain

things or would not eat particular foods because it didn't 'agree' with them. Sometimes

this could mean that the person showed an allergic reaction to certain substance, but most

often this expression referred to idiosyncratic dislikes that were seen to be based on the

body's non acceptance or disagreement with something. Bodily needs were not construed

in opposition to mindful intention but it was rather the self that was seen to be in need of

---

[27] Early on in my stay I asked a girl who I met on the street close to where the taxi drivers would be passing if she was going to town. She replied, bemused by my ignorance, that people would think she had gone crazy if they saw her looking like that in town.

an attuning to the body. This view of the relation self-body can, I would argue, again be seen to be oriented by the thema natural/unnatural that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The body and its needs are understood as a natural force with which the self needs to be brought into harmony. It is therefore important not to deny bodily needs and to push the body against its intuitions. The following extract, in which Mauricia reflects on her conduct as young lady, illustrates this view:

Mauricia
you see they say I inherited most things that what/ they they just like up on me you know/ I don't know the energy I give out most likely/ just like the energy and just how I move you know/ I go out all the time and I know my time limit/ I know my my body/ if my body don't want go want to go further than here I won't push my body to go further than that/ I does I does I know people say people say life is a risk but you take a lot of risk you know it a lot of risk you are taking now

The extract reveals firstly an understating of one's attractiveness in terms of a synthesis of inheritance, energy and movement. Secondly, it is the body which is brought into the foreground in determining the right conduct. The self is attuned to the body, which is conceived as knowing when a risk to its wellbeing becomes too great. In this particular case the reference is to the risk of becoming infected with Aids. Particularly in the context of sexual disease and teenage pregnancy the prioritising of bodily needs could however, also create a dilemma. At the same time as the body is understood to know when something may cause ill health or the loss of wellbeing, to release sexual pressure regularly, to have sex naturally i.e. without condom, and to refrain from taking the pill could also be seen to be linked to a view of bodily needs as natural. These are positions that are in need of negotiation and an adjustment of meanings. For example, although control was not generally addressed by the young women in Tobago, in a context in which reputation and a risk of being used or misled by others was foregrounded, the body could also be perceived as being under control. In response to my inquiry about a notion of 'loss of control' the following reply was given:

N
do you ever feel you are not in control like you feel out of control sometimes or days like
you lost control over yourself or your body or your
Miriam
naa I always feel in control

In conclusion, bodily needs were not addressed as a problem in the Tobagonian texts and the interaction of self and body were construed in terms of an attuning of needs. As my participants pointed out in response to questions about weight management and a satisfaction with one's size, 'you have to like yourself for who you are' and you should 'treat yourself the way our body will like to be treated'. These understandings of the self-body relationship also take a central position in understandings of eating and diet, to which my discussion will now turn.

8.3   Eating and Not Eating: Social Enactments

I have proposed that bodily needs were foregrounded in understandings of the relation self-body. In connection to this perspective eating constituted an important aspect of the young women's day-to-day bodily practices. Being perceived in terms of a basic need, eating was closely associated with looking after oneself and treating the body well. The focus was therefore often on cooking, as the term 'food' in Tobago is generally understood to refer to a cooked meal, and excludes other types of food such as sandwiches and fast food. Not eating could therefore also mean that somebody did not eat food, as this interview dialogue illustrates:

N
because you just said when you don't eat/ what does it mean here/ or when a girl doesn't
eat
Kendra
when she doesn't eat well I don't know/ but it have some people doesn't eat at all
N
it have people here that don't eat at all
Kendra
they just
N
for what reasons

Kendra
some of them just/ they just don't like food/ just like junk they go in the shop and they see snacks and they eat snacks whole day/ while some might just eat potato salad whole day/ some might eat pie whole day/ some might eat rice whole day/ some might eat chicken whole day and chicken and chips / they mightn't even eat food at all

The taken for granted assumption was consequently that to maintain a level of wellbeing, one had to consume a 'properly' cooked meal regularly. The emphasis is thereby on 'properly', as the practice of cooking and eating could be seen to be embedded in a strictly adhered to order of procedures and rules. Eating, I would argue, was largely a socially enacted activity. A more individualised practice of eating could be seen to be constituted through the consumption of snacks and sweet drinks (locally produced or international brands of soft drinks). While food was represented in terms of a complete nourishment of the body, snacks were seen as something extra the body feels for and as a mixture of everyday necessity and luxury. Sweet drinks for example, were often regarded as an important daily commodity – in a sense even part of one's national identity (see Miller, 1998). Although snacks were widely recognised for their fat content and consequently avoided by some, dieting in the sense of a watching of calories and daily fat in-take was reserved for the elderly and ill. Diet, then, was more closely associated with the unnatural.

In the following two sections I will explore in more detail two dimensions of eating to which both everyday interactions as well as the reflections of my participants could be seen to be oriented towards. These dimensions corresponded moreover to the duality of proximity and distance that marked the social representation of others which I discussed in Chapter 6.

8.3.1 Eating as a Social Practice

In the Tobagonian texts, eating was made sense of mainly on two levels: on the level of socially enacted everyday procedures of food preparation and consumption, and on the level of an exchange of food at socio-cultural events and holidays. On the level of everyday practices, cooking was still considered to be primarily the domain of women. Although almost all men would know how to cook, their engagement in food preparation (unless they lived on their own) was mainly restricted to the cooking at festivals and the male only 'cook out' that often accompanies a lime. My participants' reflections on eating were consequently framed by a responsibility for being able to cook properly. The following extract illustrates this aspect of female identity:

> **Candis**
> yea but still there are some guys who can cook really good still/ but for a woman a woman must know how to cook/ if she is gonna get married or not get married she still she must know how to cook thing/ is very important you know
> **N**
> so it's all like the women's responsibility as well
> **Candis**
> mmhm that's becoming/ that's when you are a wife you must know how to cook mhm/ no matter what it is it can be just like cooking the corn beef and cooking some rice that's still cooking you must know how to cook it properly
> **N**
> properly
> **Candis**
> yea
> **N**
> there is always a proper way of doing these things
> **Candis**
> it's not just cooking but knowing how to do it properly you know

The provision of food for others has traditionally been associated with the female role also in Western societies and this gender division is maintained up to today albeit maybe to a lesser degree or in a more subtle form (see Bordo, 1993). The significant difference however, lies here in the emphasis on knowing how to cook properly. To take cooking seriously is not only a precaution in a subtropical climate but expresses a relation to life. It is firstly oriented to the importance given to life teachings and life experience. To understand how to cook properly, one has to show a certain level of maturity and the

ability to apply the knowledge that has been passed on through one's social context. Furthermore, taking cooking seriously is part of a more general concern with the adherence to a strict order in regard to all household things. This includes the way the area around the house is organised and kept clean, the washing of clothes and wares, the way one proceeds in the bath. I would like to argue that the household gains these particular meanings through its juxtaposition with an understanding of life as unpredictable and unfair (see 6.2.1.2). It can therefore be read as a response to a perception of the wider social and material environment as being beyond the individual's control. Moreover, it must be understood in relation to a historical context in which depravity and survival constituted a core thema. In opposition to these threatening and destabilizing factors a concern with a strict household order takes on a stability producing function. Finally, it interconnects with the notion of purity and pollution that I have discussed in my analysis of the juxtaposition of body and self.

Eating could moreover be seen to have a close association with the proximity to others. Everyday eating habits for example, were structured by jointly enacted practices of what to eat when. For example, as all my participants informed me, Saturday is considered to be a soup day and a day on which one would bake bread; Sunday is the day on which cooking is considered a must and involves several hours of food preparation. Two of the main festivals of the year, Harvest and Christmas revolve mainly around the offering of food to others. As reflected in my interviews, eating thus also maintained its value as a form of social exchange.

Taken together, the representation of eating in the Tobagonian texts could be seen to be marked by the intersection of the theme natural/unnatural with an orientation to life

experience and an understanding of one's social and material context as being unpredictable and unfair. While eating gained meaning on an individual level in terms of the attuning of self and body and an emphasis on the theme of purity/pollution, eating was made sense of largely as a socially enacted activity.

8.3.2   Eating Dangers

'Not eating' in the sense of denying oneself food with the intention of losing weight did not constitute a meaningful concept in the interviews with my participants from Tobago. Nevertheless, 'not eating' was made sense of in relation to the recognition of a number of eating dangers. For example, a reason for not eating certain foods, particularly meat, was for some of my participants that these foods contained too many chemicals and hormones that would cause abnormalities in their body. However, the main association of 'not eating' was with the danger of polluting or otherwise causing harm to the self in the context of a proximity to others. In other words, not eating could constitute a means of establishing a self-protective distance to others. I will draw on the following three interview extracts to explore this relation of not eating, self and other in more detail:

> (Abigail has been talking about not eating from people)
> **Abigail**
> a lot of people in the Caribbean believe in witch craft/ and witch craft is a very powerful thing here in the Caribbean/ and they believe in not eating from people because of that you know/ will be/ you like somebody and you go by their house they does be frightened to eat/ because they will say uh they will tie me/ because of the food/ I don't know how they does it I have no idea I have no idea how they does whatever they do/ that is a reason why most people don't like to eat/ some people say especially you know you may have something against that person like say I don't like you and I come by your house and they say what she doing here she ain't like me and she come by my house to eat/ they go and work up their thing quick quick quick and put it into your food and that is it

> (Danielle responds to the question 'who would you eat from?')
> **Danielle**
> I eat from my family and you ha to get a good good friend friend that is real close to you/ cause you could have friends and they could give you poison to eat/ and then you could be liming good with friends and they could give poison to you
> [...]
> sometime you and you boyfriend could fall out and then he could do anything with the food if he is cooking it/ if he is cooking the food he could do anything with the food you never know because if me and my boyfriend fall out if he cook food I wouldn't eat any

(Akina responds to the question what would determine her decision to eat from somebody)
Akina
me yea I study/ I watch/ I could come here and watching around/ watch your cleaning/ how you act with yourself/ your outside yard/ you know all that people watch/ once they don't know you they will be watching that

The representation of the 'other' as not trustworthy in intersection with the theme of purity/pollution constitutes the dominant perspective in these interview extracts. Not eating is explained in terms of a fear of Obhea and a fear of the un-cleanliness of the other. In reference to Obhea (extract 1 and 2 above), others, including others in the role of friends, are perceived to be acting with the intent to harm or to gain power over a person through the offering of food. Besides the use of Obhea against enemies or in the context of a falling out between people, the most frequent reference was to a use of Obhea for the creation of love ties between people. Hence, a reason to not eat from somebody was the fear of being tied into a permanent relationship with a person irrespective of one's consent. This use of Obhea was seen to be mainly the domain of women and some of my participants would therefore refrain from eating from a boyfriend's female relative. Again, it should be pointed out that whether or not one believed in the power of Obhea practices, the exchange of beliefs and stories about Obhea reinforced a notion of distance to the other. Not eating then, was understood as a means of establishing this distance, a means of maintaining a state of purity, and most importantly a state of freedom.

8.4   Body and Eating in the Context of Health and Illness

Increasing attention has been laid on the problem of obesity in the Caribbean over the recent years and warnings about the consequences of a fatty diet have by now also entered into everyday conversations. The problem of allowing too much fat in one's diet was indeed addressed by my participants. There was however, no strong connection between the concept of dieting, the 'thin' or 'fat' body and health for the young women. The

concept of diet maintained a close association with illnesses that afflict a person particularly at a later age, such as heart disease or diabetes. The core health precautions that were considered by my participants were the taking of tonics and vitamins to strengthen the system, regular check ups at the doctor, and the keeping clean of the inside. Ill health on the other hand, was more clearly seen to be connected to a person's body weight. Here it was however, the 'thin' body that connoted most clearly a notion of illness for the young women as I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

8.4.1   Strengthening and Purging

'Strengthening' is an important notion in Tobago and refers to the use of specific foods and drinks that are meant to re-strengthen the body, restore a person's fitness and ward of illness. For men, the emphasis is on restoring one's sexual fitness and a number of foods are consumed regularly for just that purpose. For women the emphasis is to a lesser degree on the strengthening of sexual fitness, as this is not deemed necessary. Yet the women in my study pointed out that they would also take care to take strengthening every once in a while, for example through the consumption of foods such as granola, fish broth, peanut punch or Guinness beer. Overall strengtheners were considered to be foods or drinks that were seen to be particularly rich or high in protein. Complementary to the practice of strengthening was seen to be the practice of purging, in other words the cleaning out of your body. To keep oneself healthy, I would propose, was therefore understood in terms of the maintenance of a flow of energy, which was upheld through the putting in of strenghtening substances alternated with a regular flushing out of toxins and dirt that may have been accumulated in the body. The following two extracts illustrate this importance of keeping the body clean in the participants own words:

> (We have been talking about how to treat or look after one's body)
> **N**
> what about the inside

246

Kenisha

inside mmm/ your body yea always clean out your inside/ visit the doctor often/ always keep your inside clean/ to always go and check up yourself

N

check up/ take a regular check up yea

Kenisha

cause you don't know what you/ you don't know what could/ you don't know what could be growing inside of you/ you might feel a pain here and say oh that a normal thing but when you go and check it you really know what could be going on/ (?) coming to get a heart attack or something like that/ (?) inside keep your inside clean you know yea

(Marissa has been talking about attractiveness)

Marissa

well skin is not a issue for me but a lot of people have pimples on their face and I believe that is a result form what they eat/ because we have a high spicy kind of thing here in that we eat a lot of grease and spices/ and I believe the system needed to be flushed more often/ but the things to do that is not really affordable so you find the majority of women and people in general would not have the access to the the stuff you need to do a clean out and that kind of thing

N

all right/ what would that be/ I not so familiar with that

Marissa

that is uhm like a colon cleanser is to clean your intestines/ clean out all the waste that cause toxin in the body right/ they are normally stored up there and that causes high stomach that kind of thing/ and you find that the grease and stuff/ you don't have time to use it up and more is added so you find that is contributing to the overweight and obesity kind of thing in this society

In these extracts the problems of heart attack and obesity are understood and explained in terms of familiar themes. The strengthening and cleaning out of the body resonates with a theme of movement that could also be found in the young women's expressions of their attractiveness as well as in interpretations of life as a whole. Cleanliness, rather than a strict diet or loss of weight, is further set against the unhealthy state of obesity. The strategies of strengthening and cleaning out highlight the influence of noxious substances that enter into the body from the outside as a core aspect of ill health. The parallels of this understanding of health with understandings of the relationship between self and others is evident. Here health information can be seen to be applied through its representation through a familiar and socially meaningful set of categories.

8.4.2 Getting Fat and Getting Small: Meanings of the Thin Body in the Context of Disease

While we could see the 'fat' body problematised in an understanding of healthy behaviour in the interviews with my British participants, it was the 'thin' body that was seen to imply ill health and irresponsible conduct in the interviews with my Tobagonian participants. In general, 'getting small' in contrast to 'getting fat', as I already discussed above, could be seen to be read as an indicator that something was not right in a person's life; getting small was more closely associated with an unnatural development. In addition to this association with the unnatural, getting small still maintained a strong association with Aids. My participants' reflections on losing weight were clearly informed by this interconnection of getting small and "having the virus" that imposed onto them the stigma of sexually transmitted disease.

The meanings of loosing and gaining weight could further be problematised for the young women through an orientation to the opposed value systems of reputation and respectability (see 5.1.2.3), and thus an orientation to a set of expectations that others held in a 'young lady'. Consequently, while getting small could mean to have a disease, getting fat could similarly be read as a sign that the young woman was pregnant. In both cases, the judgement of others could be seen to imply the involvement in unrespectable and irresponsible conduct and therefore a devaluation of the young woman. In the interviews however, these meanings were negotiated through a representation of others as an unavoidable interference that needed to be resisted. By way of example:

Danielle
sometime when they see you getting fat they say you pregnant or something/ if they see you getting small they say you/ sick I really does not know what to say anymore/ them does find a answer for everything/ you getting fat they say you making baby

248

Safiya

so we tend to like in Tobago here/ I don't know like/ once they know you they are minding your business/ or even though they don't know you they will try to mind your business you know/ it have some of them actually just out to just mind your business mind people business/ that is like their that is their life/ they are doing it if like how I looking here now in a month time or two month time if I just strip of size they say how she get small she got Aids/ that's the first thing they say/ if I looking a little fat she making baby/ or you know they must find something to say/ so you can't be too fat/ you can't be too/ or if you are too fat you gonna get a chance/ you might get a chance you know

As one of my participants pointed out the only answer to the dilemma of becoming an object of people's unavoidable 'commess' was to "see about yourself". By shifting the focus to the invasive nature of others and the foregrounding of a need of self-demarcation, negative socially conceived meanings of losing and gaining weight could be seen to be resisted. Overall, my analysis has made evident that in relation to a context of health and illness losing weight was not positively associated with being healthy.

8.5   Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that women's positive appraisal of the 'fat' body and a lack of concern with dieting cannot be explained solely in terms of a male preference for fuller female shapes. Meanings of the body as well as eating/not eating were formulated in intersection with representations of self and other and a negotiation of the proximity and distance to others. In a context of femininity representations of the body were firstly marked by the opposites natural/unnatural. Through a foregrounding of the body's natural potency an appreciation of diverse female shapes was possible. Of the binary natural/unnatural the dimension of natural further interlinked with religious notions (a God given) and a notion of idiosyncrasy. In this context the body could be understood as an inseparable part of the whole that represents 'me' as a person rather than in terms of a primacy of mind. Body size was addressed as an integrate part of affirmative self-expression in the co-definition of identities during face-to-face interactions.

The 'thin' body could be seen to be associated with either meanings of freedom or dependence and constraint relative to which position of a young woman was foregrounded. In a context that underlined the notions of reputation/respectability and young girl/big woman the 'thin' body implied possible acts of disrespect and a constraint of agency. In intersection with style, enjoyment, and consumption the 'slim and trim' body could, however, be a means of affirming one's freedom. The body was further foregrounded in understandings of the self through the notions of idiosyncrasy and purity/pollution. The neat clean body here became a metaphor for the ideal self.

The association with self and purity further stood in stark contrast to an association of others with the notion of pollution. It was mainly in relation to the risks of being exposed to others that the notion of not eating became meaningful. On the whole not eating or dieting was more closely associated with the unnatural. Finally, it was found that representations of health were anchored in the themes of movement, purity/pollution, and reputation/respectability. In Tobago as in the UK, the meanings and uses of the body were multilayered and changing in interrelation with socially enacted conditions recognition and disrespect.

Chapter 9

9. Conclusions

9.1 A Social Representational Approach to 'Body' an 'Eating'

In this thesis I have offered a reading of women's engagement with 'body' and 'eating' that was informed by social representations theory and a research paradigm based on dialogism. I have argued that a social representations perspective allows an analysis of women's concerns about the body that overcomes some of the shortcomings of research in this field. Before highlighting the contributions that could be made in the present thesis, I will briefly summarise the rationale for the proposition of an alternative theoretical approach.

The implicit assumptions that underlie research that has sought to clarify women's problematic relationship to body weight and eating have not only limited our understanding of the nature of the problem but have also detrimentally affected women's understanding of themselves. Research on 'body image disturbance' and 'eating attitudes' rests on a conceptualisation of the individual that is derived from Cartesian/Newtonian concepts of reality. What is implied by a Cartesian/Newtonian paradigm is the mechanistic interaction of separate and distinct entities and the belief that phenomena can be explained when reduced to their universal elements. In social psychology the prevalence of this model has led to the measurement of the environment's influence on behaviour. In research on eating disorders it has led to the proposition that women engage in unhealthy weight control behaviours due to an interaction between socially transmitted information about thinness ideals, personality traits and dysfunctional cognitive processing.

Psychosocial models of eating disorder aetiology have sought to overcome this limited focus but have not superseded assumptions of the positivist paradigm. Research on cultural differences aimed at clarifying the interrelationship between femininity, gender and social context and has proposed that women's body dissatisfaction is linked to levels of Westernisation. My criticism of this research has been that it conceptualises culture and social knowledge in a simplistic way and again neglects to inquire into the lived contexts of women. At its worst research on cultural differences has reverted to racial and ethnic stereotypes, such as the suggestion that women of African descent do not experience body image dissatisfaction because black men prefer women of a larger size. A conceptualisation of the media as the core sociocultural causal factor in the development of body image disturbance can result in a trivialisation of women's concerns and reduces them to passive recipients of social messages. And finally, the Cartesian/Newtonian paradigm finds a continuation in health promotion programmes, which have bee criticised for the stigmatisation of obesity and the legitimisation of unhealthy dieting practices.

To overcome these limitations it is necessary to reconsider how we study social phenomena. In adopting a social representational framework based on the principle of dialogism, my empirical exploration of 'body' and 'eating' has been guided by the following theoretical positions: First, the interdependence of individual and social thought. In their sense-making, evaluation, rejection and manipulation of the body women drew on and were positioned by social forms of knowing. Social representations are interpretations of reality that enable us to communicate with each other. They are fundamental to the way we, as human beings, relate to each other and understand our environment. As interpretative devices they not only familiarise and stabilise but they also constrain. Yet, they are not rigid schemas in the minds of individual people. Social representations are socially enacted and negotiated meaning constructs that happen in the meeting point between individual and social. They are an activity between opposing partners.

Second, meaning is an expression of a relationship between self, other and object. Meaning arises in relation and contrast to something else. It is constituted through the ongoing dialogic exchange constituted through a difference in perspectival positions. This means that we cannot conceptualise meaning as mechanistic, linear, and stable but need to understand its nature to be marked by ambiguity, fluidity, and relativity.

Third, self is not a relationship. Self emerges in relation to others. This is an important difference if we want to overcome the rigid dichotomy between subjective and objective, inner and outer. While cognitive psychology has focused on the centric and unified individual, post-structuralist social psychology has substituted the self with discourse. In dialogism and social representations theory the individual and social are not reducible to each other. Self is not constituted uni-directionally through the eyes of the other but is an active agent in the mutual reacting between co-authors.

Fourth, taken together these presuppositions emphasise context, contradiction, ambiguity and change in the process of meaning construction. I have consequently rejected core and periphery as a model for the organisation of social representations. Instead, social representations have been understood as fields of meaning patterns. In the present study the central organising principle (motif or coda) of this representational field was the thematic opposition of recognition and disrespect.

The analysis of women's relationships to 'body' and 'eating' from the perspective of this social representational approach could make a number of contributions. Using the thema recognition/disrespect as an interpretative frame that guided the further analysis of the interview texts meant that attention was paid to the way self and other were addressed in the experiences of the young women and thus brought the interaction of self and other into the analysis. As a result it was shown that differences in the representation of 'self' and 'others' in the two cultural contexts were related to differences in the way women regarded their body. Understanding representations as fields of interdependent meanings called for an inquiry into the different perspectival positions that were taken up in the interview dialogues. It meant to focus on how representations worked in different subjective contexts. I have shown in the analysis that the 'thin' and 'fat' body could take on a variety of meanings depending on which configurations were evoked through the idiosyncratic positions of the young women. What was highlighted through the contrast between meaning patterns in Tobago and the UK, was that despite their variation these configurations of meanings resonated with a specific socially shared context.

Both the theoretical principal of dialogicality and the notion of a struggle for recognition meant that women were also considered as active participants in the construction of their experiences. I have shown that women negotiated constraining or contradictory demands

of femininity and that they re-presented themselves through the construction of alternative identities. Women's positions in the UK as in Tobago were not unambiguously fixed through representations but open to more than one interpretation.

9.2   Body, Eating and Recognition/Disrespect: Common Starting Points, Persisting Social Representations, and Diverging Thematisations

The basic thema of recognition and disrespect was found to interlink with the way young women in the UK and Tobago made sense of their relationships to others, their bodies, body weight, and eating practices. In both cultural contexts women's dialogic constructions of themselves were marked by a negotiation of condition of worth as well as the proximity and distance to others. The body, and in the UK more specifically body weight, were understood as significant markers of self-worth. Despite their different historical and socio-environmental backgrounds the young women shared an awareness of denigrating representations of women, and for all the themes of freedom/restraint and independence/dependence took up a central position. For example, a common starting point in the young women's accounts of becoming a woman was an experience of menarche marked by shame and embarrassment that foregrounded representations of women as disordered and polluted. Experiences of restraint and a sense of vulnerability were shared by the otherwise very different young women. This finding demonstrates that old representations of femininity persist in the minds of people in a relatively stable form and continue to structure our everyday interactions despite the changes that modernity might otherwise have entailed for women. A further commonality was found in the way the young women represented themselves as a person. Contrary to the expectation that Western and non-Western or modern and traditional societies can be differentiated along the binary of individualism/collectivism, self-understandings in both cultural contexts were underlined by a notion of individualism.

Despite these similarities, my analysis discerned distinct representational patterns for the British and Tobagonian interview texts. The different subject positions and interconnections of meanings in the interview accounts pointed to a fundamental difference in the way the antonyms of recognition and disrespect have been thematised. While recognition could be seen to be problematised through contradictory conditions of worth in

the UK, it was the notion of 'disrespect' in interrelation with the demarcation from others that was foregrounded in the young women's reflections in Tobago. Let me begin with the experience of becoming or being a woman. In the interviews with my British participants, denigrating representations of femininity interacted with representations of a mature androgynous individual and the ideals of self-determination and personal choice. They constituted contradictory subject positions between which the young women had to mediate in the quest to maintain a positive recognition of their female identity. Being ambiguously defined as women, the young women in the UK appeared to have a greater need to seek acceptance and self-affirmation through others. In Tobago, constructions of women's identity could be seen to be underpinned by socially acknowledged truths. It was here through the juxtaposition of the identities 'young lady' and 'big woman' that the moral space of good and bad and the conditions of recognition and disrespect were defined for the young women. Both identities could be deployed to overcome disrespect or dependence relative to the meanings and counter-positions that were eventuated through the dialogical context.

It was also found that within each group, subjective positions interconnected to form specific patterns of assumptions and expectations in 'self' and 'others'. In the British texts the themes of authenticity, success/failure, control and self-esteem constituted recurring reference points along which the self was constructed. While there was a strong sense of hierarchical differences between self and others, there was a notable orientation to the establishment of the proximity to and recognition of others. I argued that this pattern could be seen to be partly reversed in the Tobagonian interview accounts. Representations of the individual self that sought demarcation form others were formed against the background of a close proximity to others in everyday life. The prioritisation of a strong sense of idiosyncrasy, self-demarcation and high self-esteem, I hypothesised, could be linked to a socio-historical context that demanded the securing of relatively independent sources of self-worth.

My analysis has demonstrated that in order to understand the differences that have been observed in regard to women's feelings about their appearance and their eating practices, it is necessary to understand identity as a representational project that is aimed at the negotiation of ambivalent conditions of worth. Thus I have shown that women's engagement with the body could become problematised in relation to socially enacted

representations of femininity, a desirable and undesirable self, the proximity and distance to others and ideological notions of health and illness. In the UK both the 'thin' and the 'fat' body were problematised in a context of contradictory demands that revolved around being too womanly or not sufficiently feminine. The 'thin' and 'controlled' body could become an important outer expression of self-determination and personal worth, while the 'fat' body connotated a weak personality and positioned the self in distance to others. In the Tobagonian texts, in contrast, 'control' only emerged as a meaningful concept in the context of self-demarcation but not in relation to body weight. Representations of the 'thin' or 'fat' body, in contrast, were anchored in notions of natural/unnatural and the idiosyncrasy of the 'whole me'. Body size was therefore understood as an integrate part of affirmative self-expression. Rather than seeing a lack of control over one's eating as a risk, eating dangers were mainly perceived in relation to a representation of others as polluting.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that women's experiences and perceptions of their body are a function of a complex interaction of always ambiguously fixed subject positions and cannot be reduced to biases generated within the individual minds of women or men's preference for larger female shapes. Women's dissatisfaction as well satisfaction with their bodies needs to be understood in relation to a multilayered social interactional meaning context.

9.3   Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the present study offered a contribution to the existing literature by providing an in-depth exploration of women's sense making in two distinct cultural contexts, several methodological limitations should be addressed. The research is firstly limited by a lack of researcher triangulation, as it is based on the subjective sense making of only one person. Triangulation and reflexivity could have been increased by making the research process more participatory, i.e. by returning the analytic product to the participants for validation. The samples in each country could have been recruited from more distinct socio-economic backgrounds, i.e. more groups could have been included for the analysis with and between countries. A further limitation of the present research is the lack of comparison to men's experiences. Although I aimed to gain an insight into my participants life context the

overall contact with participants was limited to roughly a 4 week period. Future research could aim at developing more complete life stories by conducting longitudinal interviews. A longitudinal approach could also provide insight into the changing nature of social representations, which is an aspect of social representations theory that has only been marginally addressed through the present research. Future research should also explore how the insights provided in this thesis could be used in health promotion, e.g. in the sense of providing a starting point of resistance and the destabilisation of persisting social representations.

9.4   Contributions Made

The present study offers first and foremost a critique of existing approaches to the psychological study of women's relationship to body and eating. It aimed to demonstrate that health prevention and intervention strategies that rest on simplistic notions of culture and focus on the provision of expert information will have limited applicability to the lived experiences of young women. My analysis further issued a notion of caution against the uncritical use of the concepts of 'control' and 'self-esteem' in the skills training approaches that are frequently adopted in health promotion programmes. Overall this research has sought to shift the focus away from individual level sense making to a macro-level perspective of health behaviours. Finally, by speaking of different knowledge systems, meanings as changeable, challenges to truths and insights into underlying ideological notions, I hope to have raised the visibility of alternative social realities and contributed to avenues towards the facilitation of women's agency and empowerment.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Participants

Participants - Tobago

Name	Age	Occupation
Akina	16	Secondary school student
Miriam	16	Secondary school student
Kendra	16	Secondary school student
Kenisha	17	Secondary school student
Mauricia	18	College student
Arielle	18	College student
Jamelia	19	Shop assistant
Danielle	20	Textile crafting
Safiya	21	Catering assistant
Candis	24	Restaurant supervisor
Abigail	25	Hotel catering assistant
Marissa	26	Admin assistant

Participants - UK

Name	Age	Occupation
Laura	16	Secondary school student
Rhona	16	Secondary school student
Melanie	16	Secondary school student
Nicole	17	Secondary school student
Emma	19	Catering assistant
Linda	21	University student
Helen	22	Catering assistant
Caroline	22	University student
Claire	22	Admin assistant
Fiona	23	University student
Naomi	23	Admin assistant
Christine	23	College student
Zerena	24	College student
Marie	24	Support worker

African and African-Caribbean Participants – Pilot Study UK

Name	Age	Occupation
Sharon	21	University student
Michelle	23	University student
Patricia	23	University student

Information-Consent Form

I am currently in my second year of doing a PhD by research as a postgraduate student in social psychology at the University of Stirling (contact address below). With your participation in the interview you are contributing to my doctoral research project, which focuses on representations of body, eating, and femininity. Not having been brought up in this culture myself (I am originally from Germany) I am hoping to gain insight into other women's experiences in regard to body and eating. I will not focus on medical criteria, but wish to contribute to a socio-cultural understanding of women's food and body worries through listening to women's voices themselves. My interest is in hearing what are salient issues, what are positive and negative issues for them. The focus of the interviews that I wish to conduct will therefore be on women's own memories of past experiences, their ways of acting, their values and understanding, as well as their feelings about the body and issues relating to it such as appearance and eating.

The style in which these interviews will be held, will therefore be conversational and the questions semi-structured (I will be using a topic guide). You should feel free to talk about anything that comes to your mind in regard to the issues that are briefly outlined above, I am not looking for any right or wrong answers. Given the nature of the method that I have chosen the interview material cannot be converted into scores, and I cannot measure your answers against a scale. A content analysis of the material will be carried out, and a search will be conducted for similarities and differences between the answers of the different women that participated. This will be used to gain a contextualised understanding of the issues that are most important or problematic for the participants and to see how these link with broader socio-cultural issues of our time.

The interview in which you would participate is designed to take place over four sessions or meetings, with the first and the last meeting lasting approximately half an hour, and the second and third meeting approx. one hour. I have applied to my department for research money for participants and can now make a reimbursement of £15 (approx. £5 per hour) for participants' time expenditure.

In regard to the content of the four interview sessions, the first meeting will be used to give you a verbal account of the background of my study, the research method and procedure, and to receive your feedback in regard to these. The focus of the next meeting will be on issues relating to the body, and the focus of the third meeting will be on issues relating to eating. In our final meeting I would like to follow up questions or answers that I think I have not properly understood yet and would also like to give you some feedback on my understanding of what you have told me in the previous sessions.

All sessions will be audio-taped and if you wish I can make a copy of the recording available for you after each meeting. It is very important to me to include your own reflections on the research process in my analysis and I have therefore provided you with a note-book, which I would like you to use for writing down notes after (or as well during) each meeting with me. I consider important particularly what came to your mind during or after the meeting, how you felt about the research topic and the research process, if you are

worried about something, your impression of me etc.. I will take similar notes and would then like to exchange and discuss these with you in our final meeting.

The signature that you will be asked to give below will state that you have given your initial consent to participate in the study as outlined above. I would like to point out to you again, however, that you have the right to withdraw from the research at any point during the research process, should you wish to do so for any reasons. Given the semi-structured nature of the method the exact content of the interview cannot be predicted, but you should be aware that you have the right to refuse to talk about any issues that you are uncomfortable with.

Finally, with my signature below I will confirm that your anonymity will be protected at all times, i.e. the interview material will be presented in a way that your identity remains unknown to any others and audio-tapes, notes, and transcripts will be stored securely with only me having access to them.

_____

(Place, Date)

_____   _____

(Nike Dorrer, PG)   (Participant)

Should there be any other issues that you would like to discuss with me, please feel free to contact me.

Nike Dorrer
Postgraduate
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Office 3B127
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Stirling FK9 4LA
01786 467545
e-mail: n.c.dorrer@stir.ac.uk

If there is anything in regard to the research project and your participation in it, which you would like to discuss with somebody other than me, please contact

David Fryer
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University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA
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or
Centre for Women's Health
The Sandyford Initiative
2-6 Sandyford Place
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0141 211 6700

Information-Consent Form

I am currently in my second year of doing a degree by research as a postgraduate student in social psychology at the University of Stirling in the United Kingdom (contact address below). With your participation in the interview you are contributing to my research project, which focuses on meanings and practices relating to the female body, appearance and also eating. My study aims at a socio-cultural comparison of women's experiences in regard to body and eating. The focus of the interviews that I wish to conduct will be on women's own memories of past experiences, their ways of acting, their values and understanding, as well as their feelings about the body and issues relating to it such as appearance and eating. In many countries women experience these as problematic and a source of worry and distress.

While I will be using a topic guide (a summary of the main issues I am interested to hear about) I would like these interviews to be conversational and you should feel free to talk about whatever comes to your mind in regard to the questions. The aim is to gain a better understanding of those issues that are most important or problematic for the participants and to see how these link with broader socio-cultural issues of our time. In my final analysis of the interviews I will be looking for similarities and differences between the experiences and accounts of the different women that participated from different cultures. The interview in which you would participate is designed to take place over four sessions or meetings, with the first and the last meeting lasting approximately half an hour, and the second and third meeting approx. one hour. I have applied to my University for research money for participants and have been granted some money so that I can now make a reimbursement of $45 (approx.$15 per hour) for participants' time expenditure.

In regard to the content of the four interview sessions, the first meeting will be used to give you a verbal account of the background of my study, the research method and procedure, and to receive your feedback in regard to these. The focus of the next meeting will be on issues relating to the body, and the focus of the third meeting will be on issues relating to eating. In our final meeting I would like to follow up questions or answers that I think I have not properly understood yet and would also like to give you some feedback on my understanding of what you have told me in the previous sessions.

All sessions will be audio-taped. It is very important to me to include your own reflections on the interview process in my analysis and I have therefore provided you with a note-book, which I would like you to use for writing down notes after (or as well during) each meeting with me. I consider important particularly what came to your mind during or after the meeting, how you felt about the interview topic, the way I have interviewed you, how you felt about talking about yourself to me, what came to your mind during or after the interview. I will take similar notes and would then like to exchange and discuss these with you in our final meeting.

The signature that you will be asked to give below will state that you have given your initial consent to participate in the study as outlined above. I would like to point out to you again, however, that you have the right to withdraw from the research at any point during the interview process, should you wish to do so for any reasons. Given the semi-structured nature of the method the exact content of the interview cannot be predicted, but you should

be aware that you have the right to refuse to talk about any issues that you are uncomfortable with.

Finally, with my signature below I will confirm that your anonymity will be protected at all times, i.e. the interview material will be presented in a way that your identity remains unknown to any others and audio-tapes, notes, and transcripts will be stored securely with only me having access to them.

_____
(Place, Date)

_____   _____
(Nike Dorrer)   (Participant)

Should there be any other issues that you would like to discuss with me, please feel free to contact me.

I will be staying at Miss Cami's until the 6th of June, Mt St George, phone 660-2213

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Interview Guide – Body

I am interested in that change, when we move from being a girl or feeling like a girl to being a woman or to being more like a women. Often it is whilst we are teenagers that we first start to think of ourselves as becoming a women. Is that something you experienced? Could you tell me about your experience of that time?

Could you tell me about particular times or about an event that you remember about this change?

Can you remember times when you felt others treated you differently, more like a woman than like a girl or a child?

How did you experience developing, in terms of bodily development? Can you tell me about your memory of that development?
How did you feel about talking to others about these bodily changes or others noticing the development?

Can you tell me something about how you related to other girls and boys when you were little? Did that change when you got older?
Do you think 'being a girl' was different from 'being a boy'? Do you remember if the boys your age were treated differently from the girls?
Were there girls that you admired and what did you admire in these girls?

Can you tell me something about how you and your friends felt or talked about appearance and looks when you were a girl?
Were you conscious about your appearance, your body shape?
Did you have an ideal of how you wanted your body to be?

Could you tell me something about how you feel about your body now?

Would you like your body to be different? How would you like it to be different? Do you have a body ideal?

If you could have that (ideal) body just now, how, do you think this would make you feel about yourself or in relation to others?

How much do you think appearance influences how people react to you?
Do you think appearance tells something about who we are? Do you think appearance is important?
Can you tell me something about times when you feel you look especially nice?

Are there instances when you feel feminine? What makes you feel feminine?

How do you feel about 'being overweight'? How do you feel about 'fatness'?

When we get older it is quite normal for women to put on more weight, to lose shape, your body starts to sag. How do you feel about your own body growing old?

Do you think a lot of women just 'let go' when they get older?

How do you feel about exercise?

How do you feel about having a fit, toned body?

What does exercise mean for, you in terms of how do you experience it, how does it make you feel?

When you don't manage to exercise, how does it make you feel? How does it make you feel in relation to others?

What do you think a fit toned body reflects?

Do you think everybody has the responsibility to look after one's body?

Is there any particular way in which we should look after our body, any particular way in which we should treat it? What is most important?

Interview Guide - Eating

I would like to start this session with an early memory. What I would like you to do is the following. I would like you to close your eyes and then try to remember the kitchen in the house where you lived as a child. If you can I would like you to describe the feelings and sensations you have to this memory.

Can you tell me something about the role of food or eating in your family, your families eating habits? Do you have a memory of what it was like in your family?

In every culture people relate to food differently, or eating plays a particular role in every culture. What role, do you think, eating plays in this culture, what does food mean to people?

Going back to what we talked about earlier, the change from being a girl to being a women, when you changed from being a girl to being a woman as a teenager, do you think that this changed how you felt about food, how you felt about eating? How did that change? How did you feel about eating when you were a teenager?

If you think back, was food or eating an issue amongst your friends? Can you remember any talk centred around eating? Can you remember episodes were 'being fat' was an issue? Can you remember episodes were dieting was an issue? Do you think everybody was honest when they were talking about eating, dieting, or 'being fat'?

How do you think those were regarded that were not really slim (but that did not talk about it or did nothing about it like eating less)? How on the other hand were girls regarded that were really skinny (and seemed to be able to eat what ever they wanted)?

How did your relationship towards food and eating change over the years? How would you describe your relationship towards food now? How would you describe your eating habits?

What do you like best about eating?

What do you like least about eating?

What is 'good food' for you?
What is 'bad food' for you?

What does a good eating day look like for you?

What does 'diet' mean for you?

Were there times when you restricted your eating with the purpose of losing weight?

How do you feel when you manage to stick to your diet rules?

Are there times when food and eating fulfil other functions for you than just providing you with nutrients? Can you tell me something about the meanings or functions that food can have for you?

Are there times when you have something like a craving for particular foods?

Do you think there is desire food, like sensual or love food?

How do you feel about food when you are on a diet?

Can you remember times where you have not been able to stick to the rules that you set yourself? How did it make you feel, how did you react?

Can you remember times where you eat more than usual?

How does eating 'bad' foods make you feel?

How do you feel about fat foods?

Do you think everybody should watch over or exert control over what they eat?
What do you think are the benefits of exerting more control/watching over what we eat?

Can you describe somebody who you see as healthy and somebody who is unhealthy?

Appendix 4: Topic Guide

Topic Guide - Body

Experience of Change
Treated differently
Experiencing development
Relating to girls/boys
'Being a girl' 'Being a boy'
Perfect girl
Talking about appearance
Conscious about appearance
Body ideal

Body now
Body different
Body ideal others
Appearance social recognition
Appearance identity
Importance of appearance

Looking nice
Feeling feminine
Being overweight
Fatness
Old body
Exercise
Toned body
Looking after the body

Topic Guide - Eating

Kitchen in the house where you lived as a child
Role of food and eating in your family
Role of eating in your culture
What food means to people

Change in eating
Eating when a teenager
Eating an issue amongst friends
'Being fat' talk
Talking about eating, dieting
Big and skinny girls

Change in eating over years
Relationship towards food now
Eating habits

Best about eating
Least liked about eating
'Good Food'
'Bad Food'

Good eating day
Meaning of diet
Times of restricting eating
Sticking to diet rules

Other functions of eating
Desire food
Food when on a diet
Not sticking to rules
Times when eating more than usual
Eating 'bad' foods

Everybody should watch over
Benefits of

Appendix 5: Thematic Frequency Tables

Table A5a: Frequencies of thematic categories used to code text passages in the interviews with British participants (in descending order).

Thematic Codes	Frequencies
self	209
body//looks - appearance	189
body//weight - size	163
others	118
self-other//boys-men	102
body//exercise - active	85
self//age	80
self-other//girls-women	78
eating//not eating	75
self-other//parents, family	68
eating//eating (positive)	66
self-other//friends	66
self-other//feeling left out – bullying	65
identity//feeling or being like a woman	59
health-illness	58
eating//eating healthily	53
eating//thinking about food/diet	52
body//physical changes	52
body//body ideal	50
eating//diet	46
body//feeling bad about my body	46
self-other//social eating	43
self-other//social eating habits	41
eating//bad food	40
eating//good food	40
self//mature-adult	40
body//feeling good about my body	38
eating//cooking	36
self-other//expectations	34
self-other//being treated differently	30
body//sex - sexuality	28
identity//going out	24
body//keeping healthy	24
self//personality	24
body//attractive	22
self//life experience	21
money	20
eating//buying food	18
self//childhood	17
eating//feeling bad about eating	16
eating//fast food	16
eating//snack	16

self//freedom	15
eating//fruit and vegetables	15
body//ageing body	15
self-other//eating dangers	14
body//dance	13
self//shame-embarrassment	11
self-other//trust	10
identity//tomboy	10
eating//trying different things	10
self//attitude	8
self//independence	8
self//cleanliness	7
self-other//restraint	7
body//body exposed	6
self-other//eating from people	6
religion	6
self//responsible	5
self-others//they do what they want	4
self-others//greediness	4
self//keeping to yourself	4
identity//house duties-work duties	3
identity//pregnancy	2
identity//privileges	1

Table A5b: Frequencies of thematic categories used to code text passages in the interviews with Tobagonian participants (in descending order).

Thematic Codes	Frequencies
self-other//boys-men	184
body//looks - appearance	173
self	120
self-other//girls-women	112
others	110
body//weight-size	108
self-others//parents, family	93
self//life experience	86
body//sex - sexuality	87
eating//eating (positive)	81
self//age	78
eating//social eating habits	62
eating//cooking	56
body//exercise - active	54
self-other//commess-confusion	54
identity//young lady, girl	52
self-other//restraint	50
body//physical changes	47
money	43
health-illness	42
self//childhood	41
identity//feeling or being like a woman	39
identity//going out	38
identity//house duties-work duties	38
self//other//friends	38
eating//good food	37
eating//not eating	35
body//feeling good about my body	34
self//cleanliness	33
eating//eating healthily	31
eating//diet	30
self-other//social eating.	30
identity//pregnancy	30
eating//bad food	28
self-other//being treated differently	26
self//attitude	26
religion	25
self/other//feeling left out – bullying	25
self//responsible	24
self//keeping to yourself	23
eating//snack	23
identity//big woman	21
identity//tomboy	20
self-other//eating from people	20
body//keeping healthy	19
self-other//trust	18

self//independence	18
self-other//eating dangers	18
eating//fast food	18
eating//fruit and vegetables	18
self-other//they do what they want	18
identity//privilege	17
eating//thinking about food/diet	17
body//body exposed	17
self//freedom	16
body//dance	15
self//personality	12
body//attractive	12
self//shame-embarrassment	12
self-others//greediness	12
eating//natural	12
eating//buying food	10
carnival	10
body//body ideal	8
self//mature-adult	8
body//ageing body	6
self-others//expectations	4
body//feeling bad about my body	2
eating//feeling bad about eating	1