



# Feminism and the Invisible Fat Man

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## Introduction

During the 2003 series of the popular television singing competition *Australian Idol* a rather controversial incident occurred when one of the show's three judges, Ian 'Dicko' Dickinson, commented that the dress worn by one of the female contestants, Paulini, did not flatter her size and that she would have been better off 'shedding a couple of pounds' before attempting to wear it. Given the insensitive nature of these comments, it is unsurprising that talk back radio and current affairs programs went into a frenzy over this incident the following day (Leone, 2003). For its part, the audience demonstrated its support by giving Paulini her highest ratings yet and Dicko was publicly castigated on the popular television show *The Panel*, where he admitted that even his wife had refused to talk to him following 'The Paulini Incident'.

We believe the widespread public censure Dicko received following his comments reflects the extent to which popular feminist interpretations that link gender, patriarchy, body image and weight have been taken up. There was clearly a widespread recognition that such public dissections of the female body were inappropriate and harmful to the self-esteem of female contestants. However, it is interesting to contemplate the general lack of response to the same judge's comments regarding the body size of Courtney, a male contestant in the 2004 series of *Australian Idol*, who was grilled about his weight on national television

the following year and asked in extremely blunt terms what he planned to do about it.<sup>1</sup> Aside from a few desultory (and little publicized) statements by nutritionists pointing out that this sort of public interrogation was hardly helpful, the talk back radio shows and current affairs programs remained notably silent regarding Dicko's attack.

The 2005 series of *Australian Idol* continued its tradition of publicly criticizing the weight of its contestants (this time the offender was judge Kyle Sandilands, who commented on the 'tuck shop lady arms' of female contestant Kate), and once again the media response was swift, with Youth Affairs Minister Jacinta Allan stating that the comments sent a dangerous message to young viewers (*Advertiser*, 2005). The question we are interested in exploring in this article is: why was public outrage following the inappropriate comments by the *Australian Idol* judges so much greater for the female contestants than for the male contestant, who was subjected to an even more direct and personal interrogation, and how does this connect with cultural understandings of gender and fatness?

In this article we argue that the complex ways in which gender and fatness are intertwined, understood and experienced have not been fully examined in the extant literature, particularly in so far as they relate to men.<sup>2</sup> We consider the role of early feminist literature in establishing the idea that the fear of fatness is fundamentally tied up with patriarchy and femininity and the ways this assumption continues to underwrite more recent examinations of fatness and gender. Through an exploration of the cultural history of fatness since the 19th century, we discuss the ways in which men have also been caught up in the drive to reshape the body during this period, despite their invisibility in the literature. We critique the notion that men are immune to body concerns and explore the ways in which fatness, muscularity and masculinity are intertwined. The key point we want to establish is that men have long encountered 'the devil in their flesh' (cf. Chernin, 1981) and that reviling fatness is not a peculiarly feminine preoccupation.

### Feminist Scholarship on Body Image and Weight Issues

The earliest and most influential attempts to theorize body weight issues can be seen in feminist scholarship starting in the late 1970s and continuing until the mid-1990s. Although coming from different subject positions and writing with varying degrees of sophistication, writers such as Susie Orbach (1978, 1986); Marcia Millman (1980); Kim Chernin (1981, 1986); Marilyn Lawrence (1984); Carole Spitzack (1990); Naomi Wolf (1990); Morag MacSween (1993); and Susan Bordo (1993) have all argued that the loathing of fatness is deeply gendered.

Fatness itself is not the problem, they write it is female fat that is pathologized. Therefore, in the words of Susie Orbach, 'fat is a feminist issue'. The 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1981) exacts a heavy toll on women and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia are reframed not as individual pathologies but rather as crystallizations of the dysfunctional and contradictory messages that all women are exposed to (see Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 1993: chapter 4).

It is well documented and widely accepted that the scrutiny placed on female overweight is greater than the scrutiny placed on male overweight. Our obsessive monitoring of the weight levels of female celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley is not matched by a similar inspection of male stars. This scrutiny does not only take place at the level of popular culture; it is well documented that health practitioners are similarly fixated on female fat (Schwartz, 1986; Bordo, 1993; Sobal and Maurer, 1999a; Campos, 2004). For example, a study by Ferraro and Holland (2002) shows that women are much more likely to be evaluated as obese by their doctors than male patients – even if the women do not actually have a Body Mass Index over 30. Similarly, in their study of obesity and stigma, Joanisse and Synnott (1999) note that the women they interviewed were more likely to recount stories of abuse and bullying by medical professionals than men. These women were often lectured about weight loss, even when their medical complaints were clearly unrelated to their weight: such as bladder infections, nosebleeds and broken arms. Interviewees also recounted instances of callous jokes and comments doctors made about their weight:

One woman was asked by her gynaecologist how many chairs she'd broken in his waiting room that day. Another woman's complaint that her medication made her nauseous was greeted with indifference by her doctor, who remarked that at least that way she'd lose weight. Gina and Mary Lou were warned by their doctors (both male) that fat was not attractive to men. (Joanisse and Synnott, 1999: 57)

Feminist scholars and writers were amongst the first to challenge the medical models of obesity and their work has been invaluable in demonstrating the ongoing collusion between biomedical and cultural constructions of weight. As Gard and Wright (2005: 153–4) note, 'it is generally agreed that second wave feminism has led the way . . . in challenging notions of the body that simply take it to be a biological object to be studied in the context of the medical and biological sciences'. Moreover, such works paved the way for more recent analyses written from feminist and queer positions, which have directly focused on social constructions of fatness (Gard and Wright, 2005: 160), such as Richard Klein's (1996) *Eat Fat*; Jeffrey Sobal and Donna Maurer's edited collections *Weighty Issues* (1999a) and *Interpreting Weight* (1999b); Mimi Nichter's (2000) *Fat Talk*; Elspeth Probyn's (2000) *Carnal Appetites*; Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen

LeBesco's (2001) edited collection *Bodies out of Bounds*; Kandi Stinson's (2001) *Women and Dieting Culture*; Kathleen LeBesco's (2004) *Revolting Bodies*; and Don Kulick and Anne Meneley's (2005) edited collection, *Fat: The Anthropology of an Obsession*.

However, while the early feminist scholarship has been invaluable in opening up discussion of the ways in which the female body has been constructed, and the rigid requirements to which female bodies have been expected to conform, many of these early works share an underlying assumption, namely, that the fear of fatness is something only women experience. In this literature patriarchy is posited as the central cause for women's fat oppression, and the tyranny of beauty ideals that focus on slimness and youthfulness. Kathleen Rowe (1990: 413) seems to sum up the general tenor of the arguments in her statement that, 'Fatness, of course, is an especially significant issue for women, and perhaps patriarchy nowhere inscribes itself more insidiously and viciously on female bodies than in the cult of thinness.'

It is clear that these writers are interested in exploring the specifically female experience of fatness, which does not preclude the recognition that fat may be a men's issue as well. Indeed, in the preface of her extremely influential book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, Susie Orbach mentions that a concern with thinness affects men as well as women (1978: xvii–xviii), although she indicates that she has not attempted to formulate 'a theory that describes how sexism affects men's body size' (1978: xviii). However, Orbach's effort to theorize female concerns with weight has the potential to undermine any recognition of male body issues. For example, when she (1978: 22) argues that 'fat is an adaptation to the oppression of women', male fat is difficult to conceptualize as anything other than an individual choice or pathology lacking in broader symbolic meaning or political connotations.

A tendency to actively dismiss male concerns with fatness becomes more prominent in the work of Kim Chernin (1981) – who was strongly influenced by Orbach's writings. While Chernin acknowledges that there are men who wish to lose weight, from her description it appears that 'men' positively revel in their fatness. It is worth quoting at length from Chernin to give some sense of her perspective on the male relationship with fat. She writes,

By now it must be evident that the fat man has been spared this burden of negative symbolic meaning [attached to fatness] only because the fat woman has taken it on. One of the great advantages to men, in a culture they dominate, is the ability to assign to those they oppress whatever it is they wish to disown or ignore in their own condition. It is because the fat man believes the imagery his own culture has created that he can gorge himself with impunity and strut about the pool with his bulging belly, while the fat women are all wearing blouses in the water. Because his wife has agreed to carry the general shame our entire culture feels about the

body, he can proudly walk up to the younger women who are absorbed in one another's company; and now he insists upon opening conversation with them, his belly neatly held between his proud hands, as if it too were an estimable possession. (Chernin, 1981: 124)

Other writers do acknowledge more explicitly that men are affected by unrealistic body ideals, although they invariably suggest that male body concerns are of recent vintage and not particularly intense (Millman, 1980; Cash et al., 1986; Wolf, 1990; Faludi, 1991; Bordo, 1993, 1999; Cash and Roy, 1999). For example, Marcia Millman (1980: Appendix III: 233, 237) argues that '... being fat or worrying about weight is a more consequential and meaning-laden issue for women than for men'. On the basis of interviews with five men who became overweight in middle age,<sup>3</sup> she concludes that fat men are relatively unselfconscious about their weight and accord it little importance in their daily lives.

We believe that this focus on fat prejudice as a manifestation of patriarchy has served to disguise more complex dimensions of the ways that fatness has been constructed. As Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002: 6) note, patriarchy is often '... invoked as a catchall word for all systems based on wide-spread inequalities between the sexes'. They point out that the more extreme versions of this approach:

... can fail to take into account cultural and historical differences in relationships between the sexes. They can fail to question the experiences of males, *leaving men as universal subjects even as they try to question the negative stereotypes attached to women as the polar opposition of men* ... And they can make patriarchy seem static, as opposed to something continually undergoing change and being re-created in new ways. (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002: 6; emphasis added)

We would suggest that all of the major feminist approaches to weight issues (e.g. Orbach, 1978, 1986; Millman, 1980; Chernin, 1981, 1986; Lawrence, 1984; Spitzack, 1990; Wolf, 1990; MacSween, 1993; and Bordo, 1993) have similarly failed to question the experiences of males, largely as a result of their commitment to the notion of patriarchy as an overarching framework for their material. Thus, despite the different theoretical orientations of these writers, and the varying levels of sophistication with which they explore the female body, there is a common thread running through each. In their commitment to exploring the feminization of fat they inadvertently create the perception that men's weight concerns pale in relation to women's and are of very recent vintage.

Taking our lead from Michael Kimmel (2000: 5) we intend to build on and review these feminist approaches to gender and body image by also making men and masculinity visible. As Kimmel (2000: 5–6) highlights, 'Men, themselves, are invisible as men. Rarely, if ever do we see a course that examines the lives of men as men.' Indeed, men seldom appear on the pages or in the indexes of texts

dealing with fatness and body image, and we have little sense of their experiences. In this article, we argue that it is important to understand men as gendered as well – especially given that men in general (and white men in particular) enjoy both the privilege and the curse of invisibility. Of course, we acknowledge that an interest in difference and gender systems can pull us away from focusing on the political dimensions of relations between the sexes (cf. Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002: 6). Therefore, we would like to state at the outset that we recognize that women are victimized by the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ (Chernin, 1981) more acutely than men and acknowledging the possibility of male weight concerns does not minimize the findings about women, weight and body issues (cf. Nichter, 2000). Ultimately, however, the picture is far more complicated than this, as this article intends to show.

### ‘The World is Yours . . . But Only if You Aren’t Fat’<sup>4</sup>

#### *Putting Men in the Frame of Fat History*

One of the major assumptions of those feminist scholars who do attempt to consider male body image is that if men are concerned at all with weight, this has been a very recent change (e.g. Chernin, 1981; Wolf, 1990; Faludi, 1991; Bordo, 1993). Susan Bordo (1999: 218–19) tells us it was an implicit assumption of earlier research that men were immune to body image problems. That they have ‘discovered’ ‘the devil living in their flesh’ is, for Bordo, a recent development. She writes, ‘I never dreamed that “equality” would move in the direction of men worrying more about their looks rather than women worrying less’ (1999: 217–18). She argues that increasingly men and boys are being subjected to the same ‘. . . complexly and densely institutionalized system of values and practices within which girls and women . . . come to believe that they are nothing (and are frequently treated as nothing) unless they are trim, tight, lineless, bulgeless, and sagless’ (Bordo, 1993: 32). However, Bordo assumes incorrectly that men’s current concern with their bodies is a new phenomenon. Although it is clear that women have over the last century been subjected to certain ‘aesthetic pressures’ more intensively than men, the latter were not *immune* to these and other pressures.<sup>5</sup>

Three central challenges to the idea that male concerns with body weight have only arisen in the last decade are posed in the work of Hillel Schwartz (1986); Peter Stearns (1997); and Sander Gilman (2004) – each has written illuminating cultural histories on fatness, dieting and weight. As Stearns (1997: 73) notes, writers such as Naomi Wolf (1990) have failed to adequately historicize their examinations of gender differentiation – a criticism that applies equally well to

other feminist scholars such as Faludi (1991); Bordo (1993, 1999); and Stinson (2001). Gilman (2004: 1, 32) levels a similar criticism, adding that while scholarship since the 1960s has focused almost entirely on women's bodies and on patriarchy, the body of the fat boy has, in fact, long been a source of 'fascination, concern, horror, [and] interest' representing as he does 'the outer limits of the performance of masculinity'.

An examination of the broader historical context of current cultural preoccupations with fat reveals that dieting and concerns with fatness have long been with us, most especially in the last 100 years; moreover, these concerns have *not* been limited solely to women (Gilman, 2004). Indeed, while dieting is associated today 'most immediately with women', in the 19th century men were the archetypal dieters (Schwartz, 1986: 16–17). The early prominent supporters of dieting (such as William Banting, Henry Lindlahr and Bernarr MacFadden) were generally male – as were many of their most prominent followers (Stearns, 1997: 74).<sup>6</sup>

In exploring the trajectories of an increasing abhorrence towards fat throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Schwartz (1986) presents a clear sense of the ways in which both women and men in the USA were caught up in a variety of intersecting and at times contradictory discourses and technologies regarding fat and bodily reduction. These increasingly came to focus specifically on fat and fatness, linking it to gluttony (immorality), health, disease and a lack of will and self-discipline.<sup>7</sup> And while ideas about the nature of the gendered body underwrote these discourses and the ways in which fatness was being understood, women and men were exposed to and indeed took up many of the technologies that aimed to regulate the body through dieting, exercise, and measurement.

Stearns (1997) similarly traces the transformations in perceptions of fatness in American society beginning in the late 19th century, when middle-class America began its battle against body fat (between 1890 and 1910 specifically). In this initial period men and women were seen to be equally culpable for their fatness. However, the focus for men tended to center on muscle development as opposed to appetite control, and advertisements increasingly depicted well-muscled, scantily clad men with large but fat-free bodies (Stearns, 1997: 17). As Stearns also points out, 'men left fewer diaries than women did, so we have less direct evidence of how widely they internalized the new injunctions' (1997: 74). However,

*A new men's fashion arose too, as implacably hostile to fat in principle as the growing appeals to female restraint in eating. Though some fashion histories have implied that women alone were squeezed by the new attacks on fat, if only because they alone had to preen for courtship and were somehow distinctively vulnerable to manipulation by mode, men's standards were thoroughly involved as well. The timing was identical, the use of shame and ridicule at least as great.* (Stearns, 1997: 16–17, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, subtle gender differences were clearly evident from this early period. Schwartz (1986: 17) suggests that when men undertook dieting it was understood as a 'muscular, willful act . . . an unburdening, a freeing up, a moral athleticism', while women dieters were seen to have less control, less capacity for such transformations. Reduction campaigns directed at men were framed as 'adventures' that required action for success; those directed at women were framed in terms of the need for watchfulness and nutritional education (1986: 18).

According to Stearns (1997), concerns with fatness did not become strongly gender-differentiated until the 1920s – a period he labels the beginning of 'the misogynist phase' (which lasted until the 1960s). He argues that it is not coincidence that this gender differentiation occurred at precisely the point when many earlier gender distinctions were beginning to be eroded:

The attack on female fat conjoined with the ongoing reduction of motherhood as a physical task and as a cultural emblem for women. There is no question that this reduction coalesced in the 1920s, building on more scattered signals from previous decades. (Stearns, 1997: 85–6)

During this period, the aesthetic standards for women became increasingly rigid, while men were not subject to comparable pressures (Stearns, 1997: 72). However, despite the growing gender differentiation witnessed in attitudes towards overweight people, the pressures on men did not disappear and Stearns warns that gender distinctions should not be exaggerated (Stearns, 1997: 78). He points out that men continued to be subjected to 'demanding bodybuilding imagery' through figures such as Charles Atlas and his muscularity campaign. Indeed, males were exposed to this imagery at a very young age, given the regularity with which Charles Atlas advertisements were featured in boys' comic books (1997: 76). As Stearns notes, 'Though men talked far less about their battles with fat, we need not assume that these did not occur' (1997: 75).

Similarly, Schwartz (1986: 147) argues that the Roaring Twenties were equally the '... ounce conscious, Grim twenties'. In this period gluttony had become linked to fatness regardless of gender and a person's weight was increasingly seen to tell the truth about the self (1986: 147). Scales moved into the home to weigh persons and portions, and Americans in particular began to move towards a more weight-watching and weight-measuring culture (Schwartz, 1986:147).

Although the extensive diet columns that littered women's magazines were not present to the same degree in men's publications, the latter invariably featured slender male models and products which fostered consciousness of body image (Stearns, 1997: 98–9). Men were also affected by changing fashion styles – even if to a smaller degree than women. Like its female counterpart, male beachwear became more revealing as the bathing suit gave way to the bare chest and short bathers. Tapered suits replaced the double-breasted versions and paunches became



harder to conceal (Stearns, 1997: 100). The point is that this intensification of pressure that so very clearly affected women, also affected men (Stearns, 1997: 100). However,

Men carried their concern about fat distinctively. They joined weight control organizations far less commonly. They almost certainly talked less about their anxieties. They may have minimized open expressions of concern, just as some women exaggerated their own worries; the gender cultures were different . . . But the general pressure to keep reasonably trim, and the moral evaluation that underlay it, bore on them as well, which is why the general process of intensification must be discussed from the standpoint of the American middle-class as a whole and not simply its hard-pressed female members. (Stearns, 1997: 102)

By the 1970s, men's eagerness to lose weight had begun to match that of women, and the gendered distinctions that previously existed had started to dissipate – although men's concerns continued to be expressed somewhat differently from women's (Stearns, 1997: 102; Gilman, 2004). This too can be seen in clothing, for by the 1970s running gear and exercise clothes had become everyday attire for both sexes (Schwartz, 1986: 255): fat had to be transformed into 'fit'. Schwartz argues that not only had more people come to believe they were overweight, more people feared fat, were on guard against fat and were doing something about it (1986: 246). Weight-watching was something to be undertaken at every phase of one's life and dieting, fasting, weighing and monitoring became a way of life in itself.

Although their analyses are open to debate, the works of Schwartz (1986), Stearns (1997) and Gilman (2004) clearly pose an important challenge to the idea that the preoccupation with fatness has, until recently, been solely the domain of girls and women. These authors all argue that weight concerns have been evident in both genders, especially in the last century, although male weight concerns have generally been less visible than those of women, and men have tended to manifest their concerns somewhat differently. However, the lack of consideration given to the work of either Schwartz (1986) or Stearns (1997) in feminist accounts published more recently (e.g. Bordo, 1993; MacSween, 1993; Spitzack, 1990; Stinson, 2001) has led to inadequate historical contextualization and the repetition of a simplistic trope which assumes that men were not affected by the growing intolerance towards fat that emerged from the late 19th century onwards.

### **Anorexic Dominance and the Invisibility of the Fat Man**

Without the historical context provided by scholars such as Schwartz, Stearns and Gilman, the decreased visibility of male weight concerns could easily be read as masculine indifference towards weight: an assumption that clearly underwrites much early feminist scholarship on body image. Thus, Marcia Millman (1980: 237)

argues that as ‘almost all of the patients who go to diet doctors or join self-help groups to lose weight are women . . . being fat is still more troublesome to and for women than it is for men’. Kim Chernin (1981: 61–2) also argues that the obsession with weight and dieting affects mostly women because ‘it is women who constitute 95 percent of the people feeling sufficient despair with their bodies to enroll them in a formal program of weight reduction’. Similar assumptions continue to underwrite some of the more recent examinations of weight, such as Kandi Stinson’s (2001) fascinating ethnographic study of a commercial weight loss center in the USA, where the author points out that very few men attended the weight loss center where she conducted her fieldwork. Those few who did were invariably much larger than the women who attended meetings. For her, ‘the gender difference in ranges of overweight suggests that women and men may differ in how much extra weight they can tolerate’ (Stinson, 2001: 38). However, she does not consider the possibility that few men attend meetings because they feel uncomfortable doing so. Indeed, her own findings would appear to support this interpretation, given that she notes that on one of the rare occasions when she saw men at the clinic, ‘of the three men who weighed in, only one stayed for the meeting’ (Stinson, 2001: 32).

Many men engage with weight loss centers and programs like these through female relatives or partners, something that Stinson (2001) notes but does not explore. They eat and sometimes prepare the ‘diet’ meals and record their weights at home. Moreover, WeightWatchers have been campaigning directly to men since the 1960s, with little success. They are not, however, unaware of men’s reservations regarding attendance and have set up interesting alternatives that address this. In WeightWatchers Australia’s most recent campaign, men can ‘weigh-in’, engage in group discussions and compete with one another over kilos lost via an online forum. Thus, while attending weight loss centers may have become the ‘special provenance of women’ (Schwartz, 1986: 210), men’s limited attendance should not necessarily be read as an indicator of a general lack of anxiety about fatness or body size.

Furthermore, the assumption that male concerns with body weight are recent and pale in comparison to women’s is not borne out particularly well by the statistics: either recent statistics or, more interestingly, those that are far older. According to Hillel Schwartz (1986: 246–7), a study from the 1950s indicates that 7 percent of men were on a diet and/or exercising to lose weight in comparison with 14 percent of women.<sup>8</sup> In 1973, 34 percent of men were on a diet and/or exercising to lose weight in comparison with 49 percent of women. While these studies clearly reveal an exponential increase in the numbers of *people* dissatisfied with their weight over the course of the 20th century, the differences

between men and women are not particularly great (a 7% difference in one case and a 15% difference in another). According to a more recent study from 1997 (cited in Cash and Roy, 1999), 52 percent of men and 66 percent of women were dissatisfied with their weight. Once again the trend towards increasing levels of general weight dissatisfaction compared with earlier eras is evident, and the difference between men and women continues to be relatively minor – 12 percent overall. Yet despite the lack of *fundamental* differences in male and female levels of body dissatisfaction, the discursive power of the feminist equation between weight concerns and patriarchy is so great that scholars who cite these very figures, such as Cash and Roy (1999: 213), continue to insist that ‘fat is (mostly) a feminine issue’.

The tendency to overemphasize the differences between male and female perceptions of body image is rather common within the literature. For example, in Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* she argues that the contemporary preoccupation with appearance ‘... still affects women far more powerfully than men’ (1993: 166). Although she qualifies this assertion in a footnote, noting that during the late 1970s and 1980s male concerns with the body increased, she then goes on to state that ‘study after study confirms, however, that there is *still a large gender gap* in this area’ (p. 329: n 4, emphasis added). Yet, one of the key studies she cites (Cash et al., 1986) actually indicates that the differences in levels of male and female body dissatisfaction are not particularly great. Their study of 30,000 survey respondents indicated that only 18 percent of men and 7 percent of women had little concern about their appearance (1986: 30): a difference of 9 percent. When asked to respond to the statement ‘I like my looks just the way they are’, 47 percent of men and 43 percent of women definitely or mostly agreed with it, while 34 percent of men and 38 percent of women definitely or mostly disagreed with it (1986: 32): a difference of merely 4 percent! Moreover, in response to specific questions about weight concerns, their survey revealed that 41 percent of men were unhappy with their weight in comparison to 55 percent of women (a difference of 14%). They contrast this with a 1972 survey which indicated that 35 percent of men and 48 percent of women were unhappy with their looks (a difference of 13%). This study reinforces our earlier points that male and female body image concerns have increased *in tandem* over the past century and that while females have generally manifested more concern with weight than males, the difference has never been more than 15 percent! Therefore, statements about ‘the large gender gap’ between men and women and the ‘far more powerful’ weight fears manifested by women need to be treated with a certain degree of caution.

This brings us to an important point. It is clear that the feminist literature on gender and the body has registered discursive effects – especially given the

widespread way in which popular versions from the late 1970s to the early 1990s have been taken up. Since the 1980s and continuing well into the 1990s eating disorders have been highlighted ‘relentlessly’ in the media (Ambjörnsson, 2005: 119; see also Nichter, 2000). The public has become thoroughly familiarized with eating disorders such as anorexia through documentaries, made-for-television movies, novels, autobiographies (Brumberg, 1988: 14–16) and countless magazine articles (Nichter, 2000: 3). Taking its cue from the available feminist scholarship, much of this coverage has focused on eating disorders as culturally induced illnesses and cultural forms of rebellion or withdrawal (Nichter, 2000). Indeed, these cultural factors ‘exposed’ by feminist scholars are now well known and raised in casual conversation on the topic (Brumberg, 1988: 31). Thus, as Leslie Heywood (1996: 14) notes, these ‘. . . once hidden afflictions are now a part of an everyday vocabulary, part of the discourse of disorder that seems to characterize so much of late twentieth-century cultural phenomena’. Many people now believe that eating disorders amongst adolescent girls are far more common than they actually are, and the available literature has led to an increasing tendency to view the behavior of teenage girls as ‘pathological’ (Nichter, 2000). Thus, ‘If earlier generations of commentators were uncertain of or unconcerned with what pre-occupied girls in their day-to-day lives and conversations, today everyone seems to know what girls do: they obsess, mostly about fat’ (Ambjörnsson, 2005: 119).

The ‘normalization of dissatisfaction’ this popular feminist discourse produced has, according to Fanny Ambjörnsson (2005), had certain effects. She writes,

Although much good has undoubtedly come of all that attention [from feminist scholars and the media], the constant alarms that females were dissatisfied with their bodies appears to have ended up conveying the impression that dissatisfaction is a normal female state. At some point, talk about fat became talk about being a girl. (Ambjörnsson, 2005: 119)

What we (and Ambjörnsson) are suggesting is that while feminist scholarship sought to unpack the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ (cf. Chernin, 1981), its impact has been such that it has now become part of the discursive construction of femininity itself. In other words, this scholarship did not just make ‘visible’ the pressures that women experience in relation to their body shape and size, it actively produced (given the widespread way in which it was taken up) the idea that contemporary femininity is bound up with the fear of fatness. Thus, in the introduction to *Obsession: the Tyranny of Slenderness* Chernin (1981: 1; emphasis added) asserts: ‘this is a book about *woman’s* obsession; in particular the suffering we experience in our obsession with weight, the size of our body, and our longing for food’. As far as Chernin is concerned, she is speaking on behalf of all women. Wolf (1990: 200) similarly asserts that ‘dieting is the essence of contemporary femininity’.

While subsequent feminist writings have tended to be more nuanced, recognizing the different subject positions women inhabit on the basis of class, ethnicity, sexuality and age, the assumption that the fear of fatness is something fundamental to normative femininity underwrites many of the early influential works. This is a message that has clearly been taken up. The comments of Czech model Eva Herzigova on her recent weight loss are a perfect illustration of this conflation between weight concerns and femininity. She states, 'I didn't do anything to lose weight . . . *in a way I'm not a true woman, obviously, because every woman has a weight problem and I don't*' (O'Neill, 2005: 16, emphasis added). Yet, as both Mimi Nichter (2000) and Fanny Ambjörnsson (2005) point out, the now commonplace assertions that most young girls feel ashamed or dissatisfied with their bodies are somewhat simplistic.

In her nuanced and perceptive analysis, Nichter (2000) argues that many of the available statistics on adolescent girls' body dissatisfaction are actually derived from standard surveys that fail to adequately capture the complexity of their behaviors. She writes,

what do the statistics that claim that 60 percent of teenaged girls are dieting actually mean? What do girls really do when they're on a diet? . . . Given the cultural imperative to be thin, are girls overreporting their dieting on surveys because they feel they should be dieting? (Nichter 2000: 3)

Nichter (2000) goes on to discuss a phenomenon she labels 'fat talk' – those ritualized exchanges involving declarations of fatness by one girl accompanied by strong protestations by another. According to Nichter, 'fat talk' plays a complex role in girls' and women's lives. It is a form of social bonding and a key means through which girls demonstrate their sameness to their friends. It is also a call for support from peers and a way for friends to share positive comments as well as build up group solidarity. However, Nichter makes the point that 'talking the talk' is not an accurate barometer of dieting behavior and weight obsession (2000: 67). A number of the girls in her ethnographic study explained that although they didn't really think that they were too fat, they felt they had to complain about their weight in order not to alienate their friends. According to Nichter (2000: 55), 'Talking about her bodily imperfections establishes and maintains a girl's position as part of the group and makes it known that she doesn't consider herself better than any of the other girls.'

Ambjörnsson (2005) makes similar observations in her ethnographic study of teenage girls at a Swedish school, arguing that while talk about dissatisfaction with the body may to some extent reflect real frustration, there is more at work in such assertions. She writes,

Because the girls expect others to share similar concerns about their bodies, the experience of worrying about fat is normalised; it is something you face because you are a girl. Expressing dissatisfaction with one's body becomes, in this sense, an important way of performing one's identity as a girl. (Ambjörnsson, 2005: 117)

This is an element of 'fat talk' that several girls in her study of Swedish teenagers implicitly recognized. As one of these girls notes, 'Don't you think that the problem is that you have to always talk about how you have problems being fat? Cause if you didn't people would find you cocky. So it's really easier to just go on complaining?' (2005: 118). In other words, that women should be dissatisfied with their bodies is perceived as a normal state. As a female, to *not* express discomfort with your body puts you at risk of censure and accusations of conceitedness and arrogance. Indeed, another of the young women in Ambjörnsson's (2005) study, 'Christine', was marginalized by the other girls because she did not express dissatisfaction with her body. According to Ambjörnsson, 'She risked being seen as arrogant, like a boy' (2005: 118).

As we have seen, the idea that to be a woman is to be dissatisfied with one's body has been taken up far more broadly. However, this 'fat is a woman's issue' trope is so powerful that many contemporary examinations of fatness and dieting continue to overlook men. A consideration of male weight concerns remains strikingly absent in much of the literature, aside from studies that explicitly focus on gay male body issues (e.g. Millman, 1980; Atkins, 1998; Bordo, 1999). Indeed, the common assumption seems to be that the only people who have internalized fat oppressive attitudes are those of either sex who wish to be found attractive by men (cf. Klein, 1996: 67).<sup>9</sup> Even when the authors make interesting comparisons between men and women, they invariably use these to highlight female weight oppression, rather than considering what their observations actually say about men's experiences and perceptions of their bodies. Thus, in her recent ethnography of a weight loss clinic, Kandi Stinson writes:

Antifat attitudes affect women and men differently. There is substantial evidence that women are more dissatisfied with their bodies than are men, and that rates of body dissatisfaction are increasing among women. Weight dissatisfaction is particularly central to assessments of body satisfaction. Dissatisfied women almost always want to lose weight, whereas a substantial number of men who are dissatisfied with their weight wish to gain. (Stinson, 2001: 6)

Stinson (2001) seems to assume that a male desire to put on weight is merely evidence that men are less dissatisfied with their bodies than women, and does not explore the interesting questions this desire raises. Cecilia Hartley similarly assures us that when it comes to the tyranny of slenderness, 'Men are under no such size restrictions and are allowed – often encouraged – to take up as much space as they can get away with' (2001: 62). These authors implicitly recognize

that being 'big' is central to masculinity; however, Hartley (2001) and Stinson (2001) simply assume that gaining weight and taking up space involves a relaxation of body controls rather than the application of quite different and often very exacting ones.

While it is apparent that eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are strongly gendered, with the vast majority of sufferers being female, there are a number of men who engage in a quite different pattern of disordered eating and exercise with similarly tragic health consequences. We are referring to obsessive male body builders, known in body building culture as 'bigorexics' (Klein, 1993; McCaughey, 1999). While this is now a recognized medical condition (muscle dysmorphia), as Martha McCaughey notes, bigorexia has not been pathologized in the same way that anorexia has (1999: 133). She argues that this asymmetry exists because, '... we are so accustomed to positioning women as passive dupes of a sexist culture, and men as willful agents who gain meaning and material rewards from their activities, that we have missed the parallels between the two body projects' (1999: 134).<sup>10</sup>

For McCaughey, both anorexia and bodybuilding are equally obsessive and physically damaging (1999: 134). However, as she notes,

women's control issues usually have to do with controlling the percentage of body fat, which is large relative to men's. Given that young men are more likely to look skinny than fat, their bodily control issues are more likely to concern musculature. (McCaughy, 1999: 143)

Nevertheless, despite the desire for complete body mastery that both pursuits entail, and the similarly tragic consequences of each, only anorexics are construed as victims (McCaughy, 1999: 139). Clearly, alternative 'interpretive possibilities' (1999: 134) are generally disguised by the discursive power of the 'fat as a feminine issue' trope. Thus, Cash and Roy (1999: 213) point to studies which indicate that the number of diet articles and advertisements in women's magazines greatly outnumber the diet articles placed in magazines aimed at men, yet make little of the information that one of the same studies indicates that men's magazines contain many more fitness-related articles and advertisements than women's magazines. We argue that given the focus on 'bigness' in constructions of masculinity, these differences should hardly be taken as evidence of a widespread male equanimity with the body.

### Male Bodies: The Experience of Fatness

[As] a man, I'm not supposed to be as preoccupied about fat as women. Women are obliged to consider thin as a precondition for success. A man of course doesn't feel the same pressure, but the pressure is there and it's internalized. Not only does the world mostly hate his fat, he hates it most himself. (Richard Klein, *Eat Fat*, 1996: 36)

As Olivardia et al. (2004: 112) note, ‘The body image concerns of men have not been addressed in the scientific literature nearly as extensively as the body image concerns of women.’ Pope et al.’s *The Adonis Complex* (2000) represents one of the few concerted attempts to systematically explore body image concerns amongst men.<sup>11</sup> In this book they argue that men, like women, are also subject to increasingly unrealistic body ideals – they point out that GI Joe’s body is just as ridiculous and unobtainable for the average boy as Barbie’s body is for the average girl (2000: 40–4). They make a number of interesting points in their book regarding the connection between muscularity and masculinity and the ways that constructions of masculinity have made male body concerns less visible than women’s. The authors point out that men are also dissatisfied with their looks and that men frequently have a distorted body image (2000: 30), but that their concerns tend to centre on a desire to be big and muscular, as opposed to merely ‘thin’.

However, the book suffers from the same sort of flaws that plague the early feminist critiques of the tyranny of slenderness, such as a failure to historically locate their discussion and a tendency to simply invert the feminist position and argue that, actually, men have got it worse than women. In their words:

Although both men and women are besieged with images of unattainably beautiful bodies, there’s an extra twist for men – namely that anabolic steroids can make men far bigger than they could naturally be. Of course, female models can also use various drugs and cosmetic techniques to look better. But women really have no equivalent of anabolic steroids – a chemical that can blast them far beyond the outer limits of what Mother Nature intended. (Pope et al., 2000: 240)

They argue that women have learnt over the years how to confront the impossible beauty ideals that they are confronted with, rather than letting them fester inside. Men, on the other hand, because of the societal taboo against expressing their feelings, must suffer in silence. However, as Gilman (2004: 7) demonstrates in his analysis of a range of historical male figures marked in various ways by their fatness, ‘Masculinity is not simply a parallel construct to femininity but has its own complex [and often contradictory] history, as do the meanings attached to the fat boy’s body.’

Despite the problems with their work, Olivardia et al. (2004) powerfully make the point that the current standards of physical attractiveness are certainly difficult for most people to achieve – whether they are female or male. These body pressures are especially prominent amongst men working in industries focused strongly on the body (especially professional sports, the movie and music industries).

Susan Faludi (1999) provides a revealing anecdote regarding actor Sylvester Stallone’s<sup>12</sup> concerns over putting on weight for the movie *Copland*. She writes,



In August of 1996, I met the actor for a drink in the bar of his habitual Manhattan lodgings, the Four Seasons Hotel. He lumbered in wearing a baggy Hawaiian shirt bunched up over a protruding gut, and shambled across the room with his eyes trained on the floor. His demeanor was only partly related to an effort to stay in the character of the hapless, overweight sheriff. He was also just plain embarrassed. The first month had been the worst, he said. He was ‘cut down to the ground’. He could barely stand to be seen in public with such flab. For weeks he was frantically ‘issuing disclaimers’, as he put it. ‘This isn’t me!’ he recalled telling people. ‘I’m doing this for a film!’ ‘I should’ve gotten a little sign. I started doing it with strangers. “Hi, how ya doing? This isn’t me!”’

In spite of the mortifying stares, Stallone was not sorry he’d put on the weight. The flesh, he felt, freed him from a more humiliating fate: that of a man forever before the mirror. ‘What I was doing was purely – I don’t want to put down working out, it’s good, but you become incredibly self-conscious. You are always aware of yourself; you are just aware of yourself. Do I look as good as I did yesterday? You are always looking for a reflection in windows and things. I don’t think there’s ever a moment, including when you are alone in your own house, when you are not constantly aware of every aspect of how you look’. (Faludi, 1999: 582–3)

While this quote reveals a degree of bodily alienation and self-surveillance that resonates strongly with female body obsessions, Sly’s hatred of his fat – and its emasculating effects – are strongly apparent.

Scholars such as Richard Klein (1996: 56), Ganapati Durgadas (1998), Alex Robertson Textor (1999), Jerry Mosher (2001) and Sander Gilman (2004) have all pointed to the feminizing effects of fatness on men in historical and contemporary imaginings. According to Durgadas (1998: 370), ‘fleshly bulk or stoutness in females implies inappropriate strength or toughness.<sup>13</sup> In males, it represents womanlike weakness or physical impressionability.’ Similarly, Textor (1999: 222) argues that ‘fat men have an uneven purchase on “masculinity” in American culture’.

Importantly, associations between male fatness and femininity are not particularly recent. Paula Saukko (1999: 34) recounts that in the 1920s endocrinologists often diagnosed young chubby boys with ‘Froehlich’s syndrome’, a supposed pituitary dysfunction thought to cause obesity, genital underdevelopment, and an effeminate appearance. Scholar Michael Moon admits that his own adolescent chubbiness was a deep source of concern growing up. He states, ‘It was a deep fear of mine as a twelve-year-old boy putting on pubescent weight that after having been a slender child I was at puberty freakishly and unaccountably developing feminine hips and breasts’ (Moon and Sedgewick, 2001: 292). He discusses his fear of becoming like his aging male piano teacher who was called a ‘fat ass pansy’ (Moon and Sedgewick, 2001: 293) because of his large backside.

Gynecomastia (‘women’s breasts’) – a condition that causes male breasts to become unusually large – is an interesting case in point. It is not uncommon among adolescent boys and is caused by a number of factors, including weight gain, and, in older men, steroid use (Yost, 2004). In the bodybuilding world the

condition is referred to as ‘bitch tits’ and as a bodybuilder on the BBC’s *Body Hits: Sports Junkies* commented, ‘everyone is afraid of this [gynecomastia] the most’ (Marsden, 2005). In the book *Fight Club* (Palahniuk, 1996) ex-bodybuilder and steroid user ‘Bob’ is only able to retrieve his lost masculinity – destroyed through the removal of his testicles following testicular cancer and evidenced by his ‘bitch tits’ – by joining a secret ‘fight club’ where men reclaim their masculinity through violent spectacle.

Many men aside from bodybuilders fear getting larger breasts when they put on weight – as ‘man boobs’ can be a humiliating source of mockery and jest. For example, Australian Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott derisively labeled the ex-Australian Labor party leader Mark Latham ‘Dr Man Boobs’ following Latham’s appearance in tight cricket whites (*Weekend Australian Magazine*, 2004). In a similar vein, former US President Bill Clinton was often hounded by the press over his soft, corpulent, spongy and apparently undisciplined body and his abundant appetite for fast food. For some this created an image of emotionality, openness and enjoyment of life, for others it was more emasculating, indicating a lack of firmness, strength and self-control (Bordo, 1999: 55). Indeed, while John F. Kennedy is remembered for his numerous indiscretions, he, unlike Clinton, is not rendered as an undisciplined ‘boy’ with an unruly appetite (Bordo, 1999: 56).

For many men, having what is seen to be a feminized body, be it from weight gain or steroid use, is greatly feared. As Jonathan Wander writes ‘[i]f you’re a twelve year-old boy with breasts, you’d rather die than suffer the embarrassment of running up the court topless’ (in Gilman, 2004: 232). Indeed, surgeons treating gynecomastia comment that some men also develop Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) and will return several times for more surgery, believing that they can still see breasts (Marsden, 2005).

As Jerry Mosher (2001: 170) notes, this feminizing aspect of fatness can become particularly acute in extremely overweight males, as the penis is reduced in proportion to body size, or is rendered invisible by the stomach. According to Raoul, a man interviewed in *The Secret Lives of Fat People*, ‘All my life I’ve felt that my penis was too small. . . . My stomach is just too big. Even when I have an erection, I can’t see my penis’ (Klingman, 1981: 111; Mosher, 2001: 170). Schwartz (1986: 248) argues that a clear association between fatness, diminished testicles and sexual impotence developed in the 1950s and 1960s, which paralleled earlier arguments linking menopause with an increase in women’s body size and a reduction in sexual desire.<sup>14</sup> Today, jokes about the male ‘paunch’ or ‘middle-age spread’ often centre upon the invisibility of the penis and the imputation of male ‘pregnancy’.<sup>15</sup> As Mosher (2001: 187) notes, the fat male is often understood

and represented as ‘... male but not masculine’; similarly, Gilman (2004: 19) writes, ‘the very notion of a hobbled masculinity seems to be built into the image of the fat man’.

### Complicating the Picture

While fatness may be feminizing and an important focus of self-loathing for many men, we recognize that the meanings of male fatness (and female fatness for that matter) are complex, shifting and often contradictory. Joan Gross (2005) argues that in black rap culture fatness has been lyrically redefined as hyper-masculine. Citing the existence of numerous fat black rappers such as Heavy D, Big Punisher, Fat Joe and Biggie Smalls, she argues that fatness in this context represents an important assertion of masculinity. She writes,

First and foremost in this definition of masculinity is control – being in control of other men, women and financial resources. Through brute force, which is closely correlated with body size, men gain respect and access to wealth. Literally and figuratively they can throw their weight around. Fatness is not viewed as a sign of lack of control but as a means by which control is attained. (Gross, 2005: 67)

For Gross (2005: 76) fatness in this sub-cultural context symbolizes the desire to take up space and be recognized. Moreover, it is clear that this dimension of fatness is also present (if not so starkly highlighted) in its more mainstream cultural meanings. As Richard Klein writes,

It seems clear to me, a man, that my constant dissatisfaction with my fat is nothing like what it would be if I were a woman. In fact, like a lot of men, there are times when I value and appreciate my fat. I don’t feel it diminishes my appeal; it makes me feel bigger and stronger, more impressive and more serious. (1996: 66)

Wayne Johnson, a man interviewed by Marcia Millman (1980: 235) in *Such a Pretty Face*, similarly notes, ‘I like being big. In my head, being big means being powerful.’

However, we would argue that the power connected with fat is *also* present in some female accounts of fatness. In *The Secret Lives of Fat People*, Mildred Klingman (1981: 99) describes Suzanne, a college professor who weighs over 300 pounds: ‘In spite of all its drawbacks, the fat made her feel powerful. When she walked into a room people paid attention to her and, in some cases, deferred to her.’ Another woman, Sheila, described by Cordell and Ronai, similarly states,

I always say I was a small person with a big person inside of me. I never felt comfortable as a small person, I always felt a little self-conscious. . . . I’m more comfortable as a big person. . . . I feel more in charge, more in command. I feel like when I walk into a room people take notice, and not just because I look good, but because they’re looking for something . . . they’re looking for me to do something. (1999: 34)

As more recent scholars writing about fatness have noted, the meanings of fatness intersect with other aspects of identity such as class, ethnicity and sexuality to a significant degree (see Atkins, 1998; Evans Braziel and LeBesco, 2001). Thus, studies have suggested that the fear of fatness is most acute amongst middle-class white adolescent females and that girls from other ethnic groups – particularly African Americans – are more content with their body weight (e.g. Nichter, 2000).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, several lesbian publications and internet forums valorize the fat female form (see LeBesco, 2004: chs 3, 7) and endeavor to eroticize ‘... fat women within a framework of lesbian desire’ (Textor, 1999: 234).

We would argue that the lived experience of fatness is just as complicated and contradictory for men as it is for women – male fat is similarly crosscut by multiple factors such as class, ethnicity and sexuality. However, while scholarship has thoroughly researched the contradictions that emerge from female experiences of fatness and the complex factors that intersect with these experiences, little investigation has been undertaken into male experiences of fatness and the complexities and contradictions they also entail in and through time.

Before closing, we would also like to point out that in this era of the alleged global ‘obesity epidemic’, ‘the predominant discourse about fat ... is a medical one that pathologically constructs fat bodies as “obese”’ (LeBesco, 2004: 29; see also Gilman, 2004). And while Gilman (2004) has argued that ‘obesity as a category ... has always been a means of seeing the fluidity of bodies by defining their ultimate, pathological state’, in the current environment, dieticians and nutritionists have taken up new and more socially sanctioned roles as international ‘fat police’. So widely is the net of deviance and its attendant gaze being cast, that it is impossible to continue to deny or downplay the impact of the war on fat on both women *and* men.

As Campos (2004: xvii, xviii) points out, while this ‘cultural hysteria’ has ‘especially devastating consequences for women’, men are also ‘show[ing] signs of the damage that is done to people when they are told constantly that there is something fundamentally wrong with them’. In the era of ‘globesity’ (as the World Health Organization has labeled the international ‘obesity epidemic’), obese people are seen to be ‘fat’ first, and only secondarily are seen to possess ancillary characteristics (Degher and Hughes, 1999: 13) such as gender – a factor not adequately acknowledged in many recent studies of fatness.

## Conclusion

We have argued in this article that men have also been exposed to the growing malevolence towards fat and fatness that emerged in the late 19th century. How

men have experienced, articulated and responded to these aesthetic pressures has received little attention in the popular and scholarly literature to date. This is due, in part, to a focus on patriarchy as the source of the fear of fatness as well as a notable lack of attention to the cultural history of fat. The assumption that men were immune to body image issues historically and are only now coming to be affected by fat oppression underwrites much of this literature, in which men and the fat man in particular are sometimes seen but rarely heard. This is partly due to the productive nature of the feminist discourse which came to see fat as a peculiarly women's issue.

We have suggested that many men are concerned about fat and weight loss and that this is not merely a recent development. While it may have become more acute in recent decades, fatness has long had threatening implications for men, given the ways it potentially undermines normative forms of masculinity. Clearly, men articulate their weight concerns differently from women and their experiences need to be explored in more detail. We advocate further study to consider the experiences of both men *and* women. While it is important not to overlook the political dimensions of relations between the sexes, studying men and women in isolation runs the risk of fundamentally misrepresenting their experiences of fatness.

## Notes

1. It is especially interesting given the presence of a female contestant of a similar size (Casey) in the same series. While Casey did receive a great deal of criticism regarding her weight on the internet forum set up for fans of the show, the media and the show's judges were careful not to comment on her appearance. No doubt this was partially in deference to her youth – at 16 she was the youngest of the show's contestants. However, if they had commented on her weight it is likely that a flurry of media attention would have followed, similar to that generated by Dicko's comments on Paulini the previous year.

2. Gilman's (2004) *Fat Boys* is an important exception. It provides an insightful albeit sweeping analysis of some of the ways in which the fat man has been imagined, defined and represented in 'Western' culture, literature and medical discourse and how this has affected men's experience of their own bodies and those of others.

3. Although Millman seems to recognize that her ability to generalize based on her interviews is limited (especially given that the men she interviewed all became overweight in middle age, that they were generally older than the women she interviewed, and that many had previously been athletes), she argues that they nevertheless illuminate '... important differences in the experiences of fat men and women' (1980: 237). The implication is that these men are actually representative of *all* fat men.

4. Bordo (1999: 216) argues that 'The world is yours . . . but only if you aren't fat' is the message the media and film industries give to women. We argue that it applies to both men and women.

5. Bordo (1999: 284) does note that men's attitudes towards fat have not been adequately researched; by this she means how men see fat on women, how they are brought up on images of the ideal female body just like girls, and the impact this has. She doesn't buy the argument (she says rumor)

that men are more tolerant of female fat than has been realized. She says that while they might reject the 'Auschwitz thinness' of Kate Moss they mostly want trim, tight and toned girlfriends.

6. Indeed, two of the most extreme groups of dieters and weightwatchers over the last two centuries have been jockeys and pugilists, the vast majority of whom were men (Schwartz, 1986: 17).

7. For a discussion of earlier periods and recurring themes in 'Western' history see Gilman (2004).

8. According to Schwartz (1986: 247), one of the reasons that the market for products was expanding was that more and more men and especially businessmen were dieting. Men's weight-watching, he argues, cut across class lines (1986: 247). 'The image of the man gone to pot, fat and feminine, was increasingly common as appetite and exercise became more important in the 1950s and 60s' (1986: 248).

9. However, even in 'gay culture', the preference for a slim and muscular male body is not universal. The existence of the 'big men's movement' (Textor, 1999), bear subculture and gay 'chubby chasers' (see Millman, 1980: 245–6; Bunzl, 2005) speaks to the eroticization of the large male body that has occurred in some segments of the gay population. Moreover, fatness seems to have taken on increasingly positive connotations with the spread of HIV/AIDS in gay communities, as it comes to signify health and lack of infection (Textor, 1999: 230).

10. Bordo (1993: 151–2) does recognize the parallels between bodybuilding and anorexia to a certain degree; however, she focuses exclusively on *female* bodybuilding. Male bodybuilding does not enter the picture at all.

11. Susan Bordo (1999) has also written a book focusing on the male body; however, she provides little discussion of male weight concerns. Nevertheless, she similarly recognizes that for men, a hard body is a 'take no shit body', a body that makes one feel 'safe, respected and in control', 'radiat[ing] independence, toughness and emotional imperviousness', self control, morality and health (Bordo, 1999: 57).

12. Susan Bordo (1993) actually uses Sylvester Stallone as a perfect (if a little extreme) example of the ways in which men monitor the weight of their partners and the importance of slimness to them. According to Bordo, Sylvester Stallone told his girlfriend, Cornelia Guest, that he liked his woman 'anorexic'. In response, she 'immediately lost twenty-four pounds' (1993: 334, n. 24). However, as Faludi's discussion makes clear, if Sly does have rigid body ideals that he expects his girlfriends to adhere to, these are standards he also enacts just as rigidly upon himself.

13. It could therefore be argued that if fat feminizes men, it inversely masculinizes women, and is therefore similarly stigmatizing for females. However, given the ways in which the female body has been constructed as inferior to the male body (see Martin, 1987), we would suggest that the feminizing dimensions of fatness are more threatening for men than the masculinizing effects of fatness on women.

14. Although it seems likely that this association developed considerably earlier (see also Gilman, 2004). In Ulaby's (2001) discussion of the 1920s film star Fatty Arbuckle's trial for the rape and murder of Virginia Rappe in 1921, similar connections between fatness and impotence were clearly present in the popular accounts of Arbuckle's alleged attack.

15. However, as Texter (1999: 228) notes, the 'beer belly' is also 'overloaded with masculine signatory presence'. In a similar vein, Kapferer (1988: 156) argues that the Australian 'beer gut' or 'beer belly' is viewed as a physical indication of one's capacity to drink and a source of pride for some – although it has fallen into disrepute in recent years 'partly as a result of the cult of fitness'.

16. However, this perspective has been challenged by some. Regina Williams, the chair of the Detroit chapter of NAAFA, believes that there are limits on the apparent 'fat acceptance' in African American communities (LeBesco, 2004: 61).

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