



**Maynooth
University**

National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Department of Sociology

Maynooth University Special Topic Thesis

***What Shapes the attitude of young women living in
Ireland today on the topic of Obesity?***

23 April 2020

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Special Topic: Life after the Crash

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Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank my supervisor Patrick Gallagher for his continued hard work, support and guidance throughout this project despite some difficult circumstances due to the Corona Virus restrictions. These thanks extend to all members of the staff across the Sociology Department in Maynooth that have contributed to my education and motivated me to explore the world through a sociological lens over the three years.

Abstract:

This research was conducted to investigate what shapes young women's attitudes on obese bodies in Ireland. It will question the powers in place that shape outlooks of individuals on the topic of obesity. It will describe influential structures that include neoliberal ideologies, government administrations and media outlets. The investigation reveals how these structures influence individual attitudes, precipitating these assumptions into 'social norms' and bringing them into everyday life. Therefore, the research argues that social structures play a fundamental role in shaping the habitus of young Irish women and cultural representation of obese bodies. In response to this enigma, society prioritises one body type over the other and stigmatises those in obese bodies because they go against the social norm. Despite the influence of cultural assumptions being brought into everyday life, there is some evidence that people resist these norms by aiming to gain weight, rather than losing it, as encouraged by the society around them. The study uses qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews with eight young women in their early twenties to get an in-depth analysis of the chosen topic. The research question addresses the debate in the social science on what forces shape social action, agency or structure, contributing to our knowledge on the dynamics between the two during the Neoliberal era. The exploration focuses on the themes of Neoliberalism, governmentality of the body, the effects of media on body-conscious society and then emphasises the presentation of the self by the individual and how one responds to the normalisation of a thin body-type.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

The obesity epidemic is a highly contentious topic that has been significantly debated throughout the world and in response to this, comes a corresponding culture of weight stigma. This thesis will question what shapes young women's attitude on the topic of obesity in Ireland today. According to Oliver and Lee (2005), little is known about the factors that shape public attitudes towards obesity as a social concern. To address this debate, it is important to see the scale of the epidemic. Du Brun, McCarthy, McKenzie and McGloin (2014) stated that the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (2011) found that roughly 24% of the Irish population are obese and 37% are overweight. Therefore, in total 61% of Irish Adults are carrying excess weight and only 39% of Irish adults are carrying a normal BMI. Despite the significant number of individuals who are overweight, the discussion in question is why people are obsessed with achieving the ideal 'thin body' when most of the population are carrying excess weight. The research is specifically interested in identifying the unique role of young women living in Ireland, and their beliefs about obese bodies and if this corresponds with conventional public attitudes as seen in public policies and the media. There are cultural assumptions that being obese is deemed as morally wrong and are stigmatised as being lazy and lacking will power as a result which relates to Goffman's (1936) notion of stigma where it links individuals to a negative stereotype that results in others viewing them as tainted or shameful. Obese people are held responsible for their weight, with common perceptions that weight stigmatisation is justifiable and may motivate individuals to adopt 'healthy behaviours' (Puhl and Heuer 2010). The project aims to enquire whether the responsibility of weight gain is on the individual and their agency or is it through macro structures such as institutions, governmental bodies and the

media. It will question the ideology of neoliberalism and investigate how free the individual is when making this choice? Furthermore, It will interrogate where this ‘idealised view’ of the perfect body came from that shapes attitudes of people around us with a primary focus on theorists such as Foucault (1979), Goffman (1959), Beck (1999) and Giddens (1991).

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The following literature is split into five sections: Firstly, I will discuss high-level powers with reference to liberal ideas about freedom which will be discussed in ‘The body and Neoliberalism’ section. Secondly, I will signify how these ideologies are interlinked to the governmental powers indicating a possible influence of the state through the Governmentality of the Body. The next section will relate to social media and how it functions as a mechanism which these influences are spread from one young person to the next. This will be under the title of ‘Social media and the Body Conscious Society’ and the ‘Presentation of the Self’ section. The literature review will then narrow these influences down to the individual, where it will discuss ‘Gender and Femininity’. Finally, I discuss the sociological debate between the contribution of agency versus structure in influencing individual action. Each section looks at how this range of theory has been adopted within contemporary sociological studies of body image and beyond. Most of the literature does not question the difference between genders, therefore, in my analysis, I will focus on young women. Furthermore, the next chapter will discuss how these ideas shape the attitudes of young women living in Ireland today and relate them to the data collected.

2.2 THE BODY AND NEOLIBERALISM

An essential ideology promoted by neoliberalism is the endorsement of personal freedom to choose. Harvey (2005) describes Neoliberalism as a set of beliefs in the value of strong private property rights and minimum government interference in markets and trade. It encourages the individual to have their own choice in markets, rather than being influenced by external forces

such as the Government. Moreover, it is believed that to achieve welfare through the liberation of the individual entrepreneurial abilities with an institutional framework characterised by 'property rights, free market, and trade' (Harvey 2005:2).

The increasing commercialisation of health through neoliberal policies of privatisation creates a situation where profitable incentives are collectively accepted as part of contemporary medical education and medical care. For example, the idea of being overweight is promoted within the health industry as morally wrong and unacceptable in society. Not many articles were available that linked neoliberalism with the stigmatisation of obesity. However, Harjunen (2016) argues that the expertise of public health officials is challenged by new kinds of market-orientated health experts which means that, more than ever, health is a constant debate between a wide variety of areas, from health policy and promotion to popular media and culture. With the rise of privatised bodies endorsing a certain body image come aspects of choice where people can get information from a range of different areas such as media and health policy. This suggests the body is a project that drives individual responsibility as a form of neoliberal rationality endorsed by media and higher platforms. Individuals have responsibilities that are an important principle of neoliberal governance that requires that one can exercise their choice freely which means "one must be shaped, guided and moulded into one capable of exercising freedom" (Dean 1999). This becomes tantamount with health and body image is regarded as a choice and personal responsibility according to this ideology.

2.3 GOVERNMENTALITY OF THE BODY

Neoliberal ideologies are often linked to governments as it acts as a possible influence on the state. For example, within the asserted literature, the importance of individualisation as a neoliberal rationale focuses on the responsibilities of schools, families, and individuals to 'do the right thing'. This relates to Foucault's (1991) concept of 'Governmentality' which offers a

different form of power. It captures the relationship between state power and the population as a subject. When discussing the ration of responsibility, Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality questions people's dependence on procedures to indorse individual choice and its approach of responsibility on young people (Share and Strain 2008). Governments try to regulate how much risk is involved which influences what choice is made within policy. Beck (1999:19) defines this 'risk' as the choice of making individual inseparably with the political and technical environment is presented for choice. Often these choices of policy are reflected on what ideologies are run by the state, in this case, neoliberalism. Therefore, governments form the privatisation of risk which is seen in the individualised dietary strategies that are set up as not only to increase the potentials of individual choice but, also, to introduce a technique by which the government can 'manage' consumer behaviour to mould heir subjective states and inner desires in accordance to cultural norms and social institutions (Share and Strain 2008). This technique is described by Foucault (1978) as 'Bio-power'.

Michel Foucault is one of the earliest theorists that focuses on the role of the body in society. He developed the concept of 'bio-power' which he defines as "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques [that is predominately employed by the modern state] for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1978:140). Through Biopower, weight-related stereotypes are therefore welded into incorporations about 'non-normative' bodies. For example, the government established the BMI cut by defining any BMI over 25 who was labelled overweight, over 30 labelled "obese" and over 40 "morbidly obese" (Wann 2009). People socially accept these guidelines as correct, which can be illustrated through the technique of 'biopower' by monitoring body image. Therefore, Obesity is a scientific concept that has been defined and distributed among medical professions. This form of biopower established that although people are free to choose, they often find themselves obligated to sculpt their subjective states and inner desires in accordance to cultural norms and

social institutions (Share and Strain 2008). In response to this, Governmental interferences do not control individuals, but form subjects, through instructing a specific type of conduct. This exposes how institutions influence the social meaning of what is declared as obese or as 'unhealthy' through the technique proposed by Foucault.

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE BODY CONSCIOUS SOCIETY

Social Media functions as a mechanism where influences can be spread from one person to the next. The literature asserts that, in recent years, media has become a widespread phenomenon that is more prevalent due to the rise of globalisation. The increase in accessibility and popularity of the medium offers a window into public discussions and beliefs (De Brun et al. 2014) which gives scope to build an opinion around a certain topic such as body image. Linking to the last section, Foucault's (1979) concept of biopower is critical when understanding the media. The media acts as a broad platform where disciplinary practices that are endorsed by the health care system are promoted. This is a powerful mechanism to affect moral judgments that are promoted by central anti-obesity dialogues with a promotion on weight loss (Holland, Blood, Thomas and Lewis 2015). The media frames topics such as Obesity as morally wrong and makes people cognisant of the weight they gain. Saguy and Ameling (2008) cite Entmann's (1993:52) definition of framing by saying it is the 'selection and emphasis of some aspects of perceived reality to promote a particular problem definition. These external influences create the 'Body Conscious' society (Crossley 2004) which shapes peoples on opinions on what is seen as morally bad. An example is where media socially constructs the social meaning of the body is displayed in advertisements promoted by the media itself. Feminists scholars have debated that the fashion industry endorses images of ultra-thin female bodies encourage women to lose weight (Bordo 1993) by promoting beauty ideals (Saguy and Ameling 2008). People are afraid to gain weight in fear that they are being judged by another individual. Alternatively, Crossely (2004:224) argues a resistance towards the 'body-conscious

society'. He contends that people have agency in the choices they make when it comes to a 'healthy lifestyle' and argues that people have a choice to be obese as they are responsible for what they consume.

Due to the expansion of neoliberal capitalism, social media is easily accessed by all, and it gives scope for one to use this platform to their advantage. Banet-Weiser (2017) discusses that for girls and women, the body has become associated with discourses of empowerment that is both cultural and economic such as seen in bloggers where they overtly suggest that viewers discipline their bodies according to the tutorial to "transform their face and body for their fan base in exchange for material compensations" (Banet-Weiser 2017:275). Therefore, a certain 'look' is endorsed in these platforms that are accessed by thousands of young people. Moreover, Elias & Gill (2017) argue that neoliberalism exaggerates the likelihood that people in this culture engage in self-surveillance and self-monitoring. They contend that beauty apps such as Instagram are "transforming the arena of appearance politics" through their binding of "the contemporary focus on digital self-monitoring and self-tracking with a society structured by neoliberal and postfeminist ethics to produce an intensified surveillant and regulatory gaze upon women" (Elias & Gill 2017:17). Young people are exposed to this platform and are forced to self-shadow themselves to fit into a certain body image which further intensifies the body-conscious society.

2.5 PRESENTATION OF THE SELF

The previous sections have discussed macro influences upon the body, this section links these external influences on the individual from a micro perspective. As discussed, many platforms may influence an individual on how to feel about a certain subject. These external influences give scope to stigmatising obese or abnormal bodies. In response to this, individuals are actors that have the power to alter their self-presentation to fit into the perceived norm. An important

theorist for self-presentation is Goffman, where he uses theatre as a metaphor to recognise the reproduction of social life in everyday life. He also questions how individuals purposely develop performances to create a certain impression. This approach reflects how modernity forms subjects as internally self-controlled and able to produce performances in a theatrical manner (Elias 2000). Therefore, people shape their actions following the perceived norms.

Through media and governmental influences, obese bodies are perceived as against the norm. The ideal self can be seen through advertising, television and social media give "promise of the perfection of the body" (Arnold 2009). This targets women in terms of many models being a size 8 or below. For example, in America, the average salaries paid to celebrity endorsers of major weight-loss programs is between \$500,000 to \$3 million (ABC News 2012). Incoherence to this, Puhel and Heure (2009) argue that obese individuals are stigmatised for having an 'abomination of a body' because they are perceived to be less attractive than their thinner counterparts. The literature reflects that individuals are blamed for having obese bodies as their fault and described as having a lack of will power and self-control (Fee and Nusbaumer 2012). Goffman (1973) contends that the stigmatised body can say something about the moral character too, this is where the fat body gets labelled as lazy and lacking will power. In retort to this, self-presentation is strenuous. It has a 'certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every point of time' (Goffman 1990:32). Furthermore, Frost (2001) argues that within cultures, there are rules about what individuals should look like, or what is considered as beautiful. Effectively, this perceived body image disciplines the subject to become something of an 'actor' through a form of discipline to achieve this perceived beauty. In return, people alter their performances which are described by Goffman as the 'Front Stage' to fit into these norms. This can be seen in stages such as social media platforms such as Instagram which is described as the 'personal front'. For Goffman, part of the personal front may include "insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex,

age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like" (1959:14-15). These properties of the personal front expose signals in everyday interaction and are fared by the individual so that they may advance the control over their self-presentation.

2.6 GENDER AND FEMININITY

This form of stigmatisation of the body is further explored when presenting the ideal female body. This can be reflected through an analysis of the literature that asserts a feminist perspective of the female body. According to Darwin (2017), society treats women who claim the feminist label as pariahs as a result of the ideological construction. She explains Schippers' 'pariah femininity' concept as proven to be popular among various stigmatised femininities including lesbians and fat women. Within this article, she discussed a content analysis of the Dove advertisement of 'real women' from 2004, where it outlines the Western Beauty Ideals excluding women with hair and bigger bodies. Once again, due to the expansion of neoliberal capitalism, certain images are being sold to cater to the ideal image. Given this evidence, Darwin (2017) reflected on the gender ideals that society produced and compares it to Goffman's (1979) stigma typology that reflects the pariah femininity hierarchies due to the stigma of women's body hair, and how having too much body hair is perceived as unfeminine and very masculine. This interlinks to Butler's (1990) concept of 'heterosexual matrix,' which is the oppositional construction and valuation of genders within a heteronormative society. It defines the womanly characteristic that complements the relationship to a hegemonic masculine so that the man can be dominated to the women. Darwin (2017) argues that Goffman (1963) differs from the notion of hegemonic femininity, given that certain stigmatised expressions of femininity receive more social sanctioning than others, such as woman's body hair and their body fat.

2.7 AGENCY VERSUS STRUCTURE

A major theme within the literature is the utilisation of the agency-structure debate as a framework for building a healthy lifestyle. Cockerham (2005) argues that an essential but undeveloped area of theoretical dialogue in medical sociology relates to the comparative contributions of agency and structure in determining health. In his argument, he cites Weber (1958) and emphasises that macrostructure is an essential “top down” fashion showing how social institutions and widespread belief systems were powerful forces in shaping the thoughts and behaviours of individuals (Sibeon 2004). In relation to this thesis, these widespread belief systems can be addressed as being conformed by neoliberal capitalism that shape outcomes of individuals. Cockerham (2005:61) expresses that choices and chances operate in tandem to determine ‘a distinctive lifestyle for individuals, groups, and classes.’ He also argues that these life chances, or otherwise known as structures can constrain or enable the choice or agency of the individual. Cockerham (2005:55) defined agency as a process in which individuals are “influenced by their past but also orientated toward their future and the present, critically evaluate and choose their course of action”. The question is how much agency one has and how structures can constrain the outcome of individuals, for example, how institutions such as government policy on obesity has power to constrain individual action and to enable people to adapt a healthy lifestyle. Cockerham (2005) also demonstrates Bourdieu’s notion of habitus and explains that it represents an innovative conceptualisation of ‘the internalization of external structures in the mind and perceptual processes of the individual.’ This results in a list of outlooks to act in the ways that are routinely homogenous and are made up of lifestyles that result in their reproduction of the habitus. Cockerham (2005) argues that even though Bourdieu allows agency some autonomy, his emphasis on structure with respect to routine operations of the habitus clearly designates a lesser role for agency than the individualist health lifestyle paradigm. Therefore, agency is still relevant when discussing the repressive structures in place.

2.8 CONCLUSION

There are a significant selection of theory and literature that is pertinent to the topic of obesity. This chapter outlined high-level powers of neoliberal ideas, and how these ideas were spread through governmental and social media platforms, and finally how these ideas are brought down to the individual and presented as a choice to what is morally correct or wrong. Through this analogy, it will help me question the traditional view of obesity through this lens of neoliberalism that enables me to reframe how attitudes of obesity are shaped through cultural production. In my thesis, I would like a justification to investigate the topic of attitudes on obesity and the external influences for young women. To do so, I conducted a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with young women living in Ireland. This helped me conclude with a theoretical framework that aided me to explore the different influences on attitudes characteristic of obesity.

Chapter 3:

Methodology

3.1 CHOOSING A RESEARCH METHOD:

This research explores how young Irish women's attitudes are shaped on obese bodies in contemporary Irish society – particularly in the context of neoliberalism. My main objective is to investigate why obese people are held responsible for their weight and how weight stigmatization is justifiable in society and finally, if it motivates individuals to adopt 'healthy behaviours'. In order to explore young Irish women's experiences and engagements that motive the perseverance of body types on and offline I will adopt an explanatory research design. This form of research is defined by Chambliss & Schutt (2016:10) as a way in which "seeks to identify causes and effects of a social phenomenon and to predict how one phenomenon will change the response to variation in another phenomenon". Throughout this research, I will use a constructivist paradigm where I will acknowledge many forms of social reality defined by individual bias, which is best understood through analysing the individual experience. Taking this into account, the best approach for this research model is the qualitative method which will allow me to define social reality to answer the research question.

A qualitative study is suitable when the research aims to explain a phenomenon by relying on the insight of a person's experience in specific situations (Stake 2010). Within this qualitative research, the opinions and views of young Irish women are considered. It allows me to acknowledge one's response to a social phenomenon, that is, obesity. Creswell (2005:396) argues that it generates the theory that explains a 'broad conceptual level, or interaction about the substantive topic'. This relates to my project as it will help to answer my exploratory research question to differentiate the meanings that everyone can attach to their lives. I did this through performing face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with eight females who were aged between 20 to 22. It allowed me to link this group to the social problem of obesity and the attitudes that come along with that by young women. I recorded the interviews by audiotape and transcribed and backed them up via USB. I gathered extensive data among this particular

social group. I was also aware of the chance of low generalizability due to the lack of diversity of age and background due to the limited area of the research. Despite this, the research I conducted was valuable information that allowed me to explore the topic.

Through qualitative research and interviewing the participants, it permitted me to explore other aspects of the study I did not predict to meet. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) proposed that qualitative research is less structured in the description because it formulates and builds new theories. This was the case for me as there was variance in opinions between participants which allowed me to explore different theories that might explain my chosen phenomenon. Moreover, due to the rapid increase of images of bodies found in online life, as well as media in general, it motivated me to explore the discourse of the rising pressures that come along with neoliberalism by the marketization of certain body types. The interviews brought this ideology to real-life terms. Additionally, the data gathered from the face-to-face interviews allowed me to acknowledge the body language and expressions of the interviewees, to get the in-depth experience of how they feel about this issue and allowed me to ground an analysis. It also allowed the participants to expand their thoughts on the topic. Through other forms of research such as surveys and content analysis, this recital would not be available. There were little negatives when doing this procedure, although one may argue that it may produce large amounts of information that require extensive time and effort to code and evaluate (Becker, 1989). This offered some irrelevant information making some discussions difficult to compare too.

3.2 CHOSEN SAMPLE:

Selected interviewees:

Name	Age	Gender
Emma	22	Female
Orna	20	Female

Emma	21	Female
Colleen	21	Female
Zave	21	Female
Laura	22	Female
Cobhla	20	Female
Ailbhe	22	Female

The chosen interviewees were purposely selected. The idea behind this qualitative research was to purposefully select participants that fit under the title of 'young women living in Ireland'. This is due to their 'unique position' that is non-probable due to it being selected for a reason (Chamblis & Schutt 2016:105). This was done through "backyard" research which involves studying my friends or immediate work setting (Glesne and Peshkin 1992), in my case, my college setting. I chose my friends to interview, then I asked for my friend's contacts to see if they would permit me to interview them, therefore I used the 'snowballing effect' technique. It allowed me to streamline the criteria to concurring young women who experience variations of pressure towards a certain body image. This approach worked particularly well as it aided me to configure a study on place-bounded behaviors. It allowed me to comprehend a clearer picture of the link between their attitudes and obesity body image.

3.3 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH:

The research was conducted by interviewing a female participant who fit the criteria of being a young Irish woman and were key informants within my investigation. I had a personal relationship with the first few informants, so there was a chance that validity and reliability would be disrupted by biased opinions. Reliability is an important aspect of research (Baily 2007) I was aware that there was a fear that some relevant information would be hidden due to embarrassment and I would not get all the data that I originally would have wanted. After this, I changed my criteria towards a 'snowballing effect' where I asked one of my participants to recommend another young woman who would be willing to interview with me. This enabled

me to create a variance within my data. As addressed earlier, I feared that with a small sample, generalizability would be difficult, but I found with a limited time scale I was restricted with the number of people I could interview.

All the interviews were taken place within Maynooth University Library in a private room. This allowed the participant and I to be in a quiet space that was easy to locate as well as being cost-efficient. The questions I inquired were open-ended, so this allowed the participant to expand on their answers which created interesting conceptions of the topic as well as opening new doors to other questions. Thankfully, each of the participants was open when speaking and gave in-depth personal data and were relaxed talking about their bodies as well as the societal opinions of the body.

The limitations I encountered stemmed from the number of participants that were involved within the research, along with their age range. As a result, it could not be generalised to the whole category of 'young' women living in Ireland. However, the objective of this study was to consider what influences that these young women encounter in their daily lives which was clearly acknowledged within the interviews.

3.4 ETHICAL MANAGEMENT:

The nature of the project is concerning personal opinions of body image, therefore ethical issues were considered. Before each interview, the participants were made aware of the intent of the research and were granted complete confidentiality. Along with this, I asked for permission to record the interview and they signed the consent form. The recorder was locked underpin in my phone, so nobody had access to it. When interviewing, the response is open to interpretation for the researcher, it is important to take the information in a non-bias format so ethical procedures will be adhered to. It is important to avoid Qualitative generalization where the determined of this type of inquiry is not to generalize findings to individuals, sites, or places

outside of those under study (Gibbs 2007). Participants were also made aware that the completion of the questions was completely optional. This thesis also went through ethical procedures where each work is referenced correctly and avoided plagiarism.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected aided me to develop subjective meanings of individual experiences and attitudes of body shape. Throughout my interviews, I 'informed listened' meaning I had background information based on theoretical readings I had read before the day. I then organized the interview data by coding. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Rossman & Rallis 2012). Firstly, I created separate files for each of the interviewee's transcripts. Each transcript was then printed off and I categorized and highlighted the important data by theme which was linked to the theory found within the literature review. This allowed me to acknowledge the differences and similarities between each of the participant's opinions. This endorsed me to discover the findings that were focused on the themes. I did this through 'Thematic analysis', which is a method for identifying and examining patterns of meaning in a dataset (Braun & Clarke 2006). It demonstrates which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study (Daly et al., 1997). It highlighted the most significant patterns in the dataset. I then connected each theme into a storyline which allowed me to link it to multiple theoretical models. I organized the findings from each method into four sections, the body and neoliberalism; self-surveillance or Governmentality; Gender and Femininity and finally media and the body-conscious society. I found that when discovering the themes, the interviewees had complex and differential opinions on the given topic, I then recognized that the social world is complex and that each theory is contradictory. This allowed me to synthesize the data correctly for the discussion section.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This section outlined how the research was set up using qualitative methods to explore what shapes young women's attitude in Ireland in relation to obesity. The research explanatory design conducted eight interviews with young women who attended college in Ireland. Once that data was gathered, it was coded and went through a thematic analysis which allowed me to explain patterns within the data that may or may not link to sociological theory. The interviews were an accessible and suitable qualitative method to conduct within the study. I used a constructivist paradigm where I acknowledge many forms of social reality defined by individual bias. For as standard ethical management, it is essential to avoid bias throughout the research. The interviews allowed me to explain the phenomenon of obesity and the prevailing attitudes by relying on the insight of young women's experience in everyday life.

Chapter 4:

Findings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter demonstrates how young women's attitudes are shaped in Ireland on the topic of obesity. Although obesity is increasingly common, it is often stigmatised and subject to discrimination (Puhl and Heur 2009). The following discussion will be split into five sections: 'Neoliberalism and the marketisation of the body', 'Self-Surveillance of the body,' 'Media and the body conscious society', 'Governmentality and biopower', and finally 'The Feminine Body'. This chapter draws on theories from Foucault (1978) such as 'Governmentality' as surveillance techniques, and Goffman's (1959) performative analogy of the presentation of the self as a way of constructing a favourable body type and contours debates between agency and structure. The analysis will discuss the contradictory ideology of neoliberalism where there is an underlying assumption that the individual has the power to decide what is seemingly right or wrong. Therefore, neoliberal capitalism has framed the 'obese body' as morally wrong and 'irresponsible' (Goffman 1968) and in order to do the responsible thing, one must resist from the selection of choices and indulgences to deter from the obese body type. The fundamental argument of this research is that the obese body has become subject to neoliberal ideals, which is further endorsed by Governmental structures, social media, media and the self.

4.2 NEOLIBERALISM AND THE MARKETIZATION OF THE BODY.

Neoliberal rationalities have been a significant theme within this research. As stated in the literature, Neoliberalism is an ideology that endorses the responsibility of the individual and encourages them to act upon their own free choice. This assumption has been curbed, challenged and deliberated throughout these findings. Neoliberal ideals have acted as a social directive to endorse the ideal, thin body. The findings suggest that Neoliberalism is divided into two subjective arguments. The first explains the endorsement of the ideal body type in

order to construct the ‘healthy’ citizen. Neoliberal principals then sell this body image and disguise this as individual choice by targeting the responsibility of obesity is on the individual. There is a debate between the indulgence and reluctance of consuming a certain body type derived by these rationalities. One of the main aspects of neoliberalism is marketing in order to make a profit, so while individuals are told to fit into this ideal image of the thin body, they alternatively are offered cheap, ‘unhealthy’ foods from the take away industry which acts as a contradiction to the original promotion of the healthy lifestyle.

According to Peck (2010), the defining characteristic of neoliberalism is the reliance on the market-based arrangements and norms in the interest of monopoly capitalism through active use of state power. These powers are evident through the research when discussing various structural powers that were acknowledged in the interviews relating to guiding food choices. For example, Ailbhe states that there are structural issues that affect the affordability of food due to heavy taxes and fiscal factors.

“I feel people go towards something like takeaways for convenience. There is a limited amount of natural stuff that is easily accessed and is convenient, as well as that, everything natural is not only difficult to find but also so expensive”

Interestingly, her view is mirrored in the literature review, when Share and Strain (2008) argue that price of food affects food choices, for example, they contend that ‘tax systems keep fast-food prices low, and this increases consumption as cheaper, convenient foods that do not comply with dietary guidelines’, they also admit this makes it difficult for those in a lower class background to afford healthier options. As I am researching young Irish women who happen to be attending college, the cheaper option seems to be most relevant in their life. For example, Cobhla states that healthy foods are ‘*expensive, and more of an effort than getting a takeaway or a pizza*’. This was a common theme within the interviews, as many participants argued that their time is limited in college to make ‘healthy food’ as well as having a tighter budget.

Therefore, due to the structural constraints of affordability of food, their agency is limited to buy healthier alternatives because of the price differences. This form is described as ‘dietary of Globalisation’ which Otero et al., (2000) argues that there is a marketized element that increases fast food outlet through cultural shifts and processes, making fresh food, vegetables and leaner protein far more expensive. Dean (1999) argues that this notion of ‘choice’ originated from neoliberalism by following the notion rights to consume. This marketization theory makes fast food the go-to option for people with a lower budget and a busy lifestyle and therefore the structure in place controls their agency. Neoliberalism governmentality produces contradictory impulses that influence individuals to be emotionally compelled to participate in society as well as being a controlled consumer and a self-controlled subject that can achieve a healthy, thin lifestyle.

Now that I had an idea of why the participants ate unhealthily, I wanted to discover what shapes their attitudes on going towards a body type despite external structures affecting their actions on what they consume. Neoliberalism maintains specific attention about control and deservingness for individuals. According to Dean (1999:155), in order to exercise choice freely, one must be ‘shaped, guided and modeled into a person capable of exercising freedom’. Keeping with the theme of marketing, Neoliberalism has had a major impact on the exposure of body image on media as a form of advertisement that shapes people into a certain image. Consumer culture further sells an ‘image’ through contemporary sources of power such as the celebrity. Weber (1966:27) predicted that modern capitalism would generate this new form of power, which is now known as the celebrity. For instance, Colleen demonstrates how modern celebrity culture promotes a thinner and leaner body image that is advertised on media.

“If I see a Victoria secret model, I am like, damn, that is what I want. And, if a boy sees a football player, they’re also like that’s the muscles I want”

Colleen reveals how people look up to celebrities, as if they offer a certain prestige and guide body choice. As prophesied by Weber, it is a 'recognised form of power over others' (1968:241). In this sense, celebrities embody the two dominant ideologies of neoliberalism, which are individualism and market capitalism (Ferris 2007). This means that celebrities have the power to influence individual choice through marketing a certain body type and selling it online. Therefore, the body is used as a tool on the media to buy a certain way of life. This meant that people's agency is led by those who are seen to have greater power. Emma describes her social media feed as being full of '*weight loss apps being promoted by celebrities and bloggers*'. Furthermore, media offers seasonal advertisement which was also alerted in Zave's interview where she pointed out that "*Every season has something, like Easter, they argue you can't eat too many eggs, then Summer, they promote workouts and eating right so you can achieve the perfect Summer body*". Celebrities endorse what they see as the best way of life, as well as 'healthy' enactments where they replicate this idealised persona and tries to sell this image by advertising on media and online. This endorsement and marketing scheme are dominant to the ideology of Neoliberalism and are key to the causal explanations of losing weight that is engraved by celebrities and promoters into everyday cultural norms and beliefs. Therefore, the structure in place for media promotes an idea that exerts young women to try fit into this romanticised image by pressuring them to lose weight, and, consequently it influences young women's agency as a result of the composition in place.

4.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE BODY CONSCIOUS SOCIETY

Social media endorses into the social subtleties of obesity and reproduces the cultural representation of the 'Body Conscious Society' which was a significant theme in the findings. By the media promoting this venerated thin body image, it shapes the social meaning of obesity and replicates this meaning into individual lifestyles (Crossely 2004). Therefore, it creates the

‘body conscious society’ that encourage individuals to replicate this image. Emma reiterated this idea when she explained that:

“Media has such a big influence on the way we look at ourselves. If I didn’t have access to the media, I would know no different. I would look at my friends and see all shapes and sizes, and would be like, Oh grand!”

As addressed in the literature review, many scholars have debated the fashion industry promoting extremely thin female bodies to embolden women to lose weight (Bordo 1993) by promoting them as beauty ideals (Saguay and Ameling 2008). In response, the ‘body-conscious society’ is created. The ‘body conscious’ agents, that is, young Irish women in this case, get told to fit into the slim, healthy and toned body image and resist from gaining weight or being fat. As a result, many of the participants urge to be *“thin and toned”* as described by Orna. Others emotionally responded by stating they would *“probably cry if I gained more weight overnight, you would have to roll me out of bed”* (Laura). Many of the participants responded negatively when thinking about the idea of gaining weight due to the stigma attached to it. This reinforced Foucault’s notion of governmentality, where not only are norms being regulated by the state and media but also by the individual. These structures of power are therefore normalising the thin body, so that agents such as young women will buy into this way of life and if they cannot, they are disappointed in themselves and their body image. Foucault (1978) described this as the ‘conduct of conduct’, it is an attempt to manner behaviour in particular ways to conform to these social norms.

Media is cited as a major contributor to the marketing of thinner body types as the ‘healthier option’. This can be explained by Goffman’s theory of ‘framing’ obesity as a disease and reinforcing stigma (Goffman 1963) associated with fatness and it then frames fatness as a disease (Saguay and Ameling 2008). This is described as the stigmatisation of the body through

the meso-realm of interaction between the media and individuals which is extensively described by Goffman's 'Labelling Theory'. Goffman regards stigma as a 'pervasive two role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, the normal, and the stigmatised, and they are not persons, but rather perspectives (Monaghan 2017). Goffman (1963:3) defined stigma as an attribute that is deeply discredited to its possessor and reduces that individual from a 'whole person' to a 'tainted, discounted one'. Therefore, these perspectives of the fat body are being displayed on media as wrong and immoral which reinforces the stigma attached to larger bodies. Lupton (2004) argues that the mass media is made up of one of the most essential sources of information about health. It has the power to educate knowledge to the outwards population and can tell you what and what not to eat. Media also promotes fast food outlets and 'unhealthy' alternatives as a form of paid advertisement. Therefore, it plays a contrasting role in society as it shapes the rationalities about the body yet reinforces the ideas of individuals and freedom through marketing procedures.

4.4 GOVERNMENTALITY AND BIOPOWER

There was a contradiction within the research that administrated ideas between individual's own free choice and state power of guiding the choice about their body. The research debates whether gaining weight should be individual responsibility in accordance to neoliberal rationalities or should the government have the power to force these choices into a certain direction. When differentiating the various powers, many opinions were subject to change. When I asked about should the government be responsible to display a body type to the public to follow there were many personal arguments. Laura claimed:

"I think it's good if the government have a strategy in place, like, they should have something in place in schools by setting certain standards and get them to exercise"

Colleen agreed this claim, as she believed it was a *'big requirement for the Government to promote healthy living in the school.'* Similarly, Ailbhe believed it was the government's role to make people aware of healthy eating, by endorsing *'posters, documentaries to make people knowledgeable'*. This integrates with Foucault's (1991) concept of Governmentality as a form of power is extremely relevant as its question's people's dependence on procedures outlined by the government. Much like what Colleen and Laura said about the responsibilities to control choice in schools, Share and Strain (2008) believe that governments monitor schools as a form of social control to optimise the population. These dietary strategies are introduced as a technique by the government to manage consumer behaviours, and in return, they mould people's subjective states and inner desires in accordance to cultural norms and social institutions (Share and Strain 2008). It shapes attitudes on what is deemed as correct in terms of health. This is because of the concept of 'risk' in society tries to shape individuals into active, appropriate citizens as those in power are concerned with the management of people in civilisation to maintain the status quo.

Beck (1991:37) defines risk as to where 'the choice making of individuals are inseparable to the political and technical environment and are presented with choice'. It is where the Government endorse forms of schemes as a form of monitoring the population and present it as a choice where families, schools and young people endorse this scheme upon the individual to 'do the right thing' (Share and Strain 2008). This is known as the individualisation of risk. As a result, Share and Strain (2008) argue that everyone is at risk as part of Neoliberal societies. Neoliberalism shifts this responsibility to the individual and rations free agency towards individuals and as a result, they are accountable for their failures. Risk assessment by the state tries to shape the conventional citizen. This is why Giddens (1991) contends that "we are all on a diet" because we are continuously being overwhelmed with information about food and its risks, therefore it forces people to make choices on what they should eat, versus what they

want to eat. Arguably, Neoliberalism displays these techniques as a form of choice, but really, it can be understood as a form of social control to mould the population into cultural norms and values. This can be often done through techniques of social control by government powers, where Foucault describes as bio-power.

As a form of social control, the government uses various techniques which are described by Foucault (1991) as a form of 'biopower'. Biopower is a 'set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of a political strategy' (Foucault 2009). This can be seen as a form of social surveillance by the government (Crossely 2004). Interestingly, despite many agreeing that it is the government's responsibility to guide these attitudes of bodies, many people argued against the use of Body Mass Index (BMI) as an indicator of the ideal body type. Many of the participants responded emotionally and felt passionate about the issue raised. Cobhla explained how she hated the BMI scale, that it made her '*self-conscious*' as it says that she is overweight, even though she doesn't feel it. Ailbhe fervently responded by arguing it is a bit like a '*dictatorship by telling people what you can and cannot eat, it rationalises your food*' and believed that people had the right to eat what makes them '*happy*'. Others questioned the role of BMI and used an example of their past experiences. Zave expresses her previous experience with anorexia, and how the BMI scale misjudged her the first time around when she went to the doctor about being diagnosed. Zave argued that the doctor misjudged the disease because he went by the BMI scale, rather than her emotional symptoms of the disease, he simply ignored her cry for help because she was not below a certain number. As a result, she explains, '*six months later, I lost around three stone because they ignored my emotional symptoms and focused on my physicality, which was wrong. They believed it was all about the number and nothing about my mental wellbeing*'. Zave is an example of how society promotes that being the opposite spectrum of obese is okay and ignored a lot. Emma also describes the experience of girls in her class becoming obsessed with

the BMI scale, and how this inevitably made them lose too much weight. Through the techniques of biopower, it encouraged these young women to exert these social norms by losing weight that was encouraged by the BMI scale. The body, therefore, is seen as a commodity of severe self-discipline and self-governance and its values measured by productivity (Harjunen 2016). Both are an example of how powerful self-disciplinary practices can and have the capacity to create “Docile Bodies” such as anorexia. Docile Bodies are “something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body [from which] the machine required can be constructed” (Foucault, 1978:135). Bordo (1989) reveals how it is an exaggeration of how people conform to these norms and how docile bodies are objects that are subject to power. This is a vehicle that drives neoliberal ideologies to become the ideal citizen as the ideas are mediated through governmental techniques that influence the individuals to act a certain way.

4.5 FEMININE BODIES:

The research featured a reoccurring theme of performative femininity (Butler 1990). As argued in the literature, normative body weight is closely linked to gendered issues of beauty ideals and health, as well as responsible citizenship, moral behaviour (Cairns and Johnson 2015) which are endorsed by self-surveillance of individual routines. Like the ideal body type presented in the research argument, femininity is a socially constructed concept that explores the way how men and women should act as different sexes. The participants expressed their desires towards the ideal feminine body. Colleen argues that “*Girls want to be slimmer and boys want to be bigger with muscles*” Emma also contended that “*to be the ideal girlfriend, you must be small, thin and pretty, and if you’re not like that, people are like, why are you with her?*” There was a reoccurring motif of women being pressured to have smaller bodies than their male counterparts. As addressed earlier in relation to Goffman’s self-presentation theory, often women alter their image so that they can fit into this romanticised image.

This idealised image of the feminine body is regurgitated by Elias and Gill (2017:17) in the literature review where they argue that especially in social media, there is a "the contemporary focus on digital self-monitoring and self-tracking with a society structured by neoliberal and postfeminist ethics to produce an intensified surveillant and regulatory gaze upon women" (Elias & Gill 2017:17). Neoliberalism enforces these feminine ideals by constructing them as norms, and in response it pressures women to self-regulate themselves to perform a certain way. Bordo (1993) states that a set of normative expectations that constitute an ideal body type for women is described as the thin, slender, youthful and 'healthy' body. This can be explained by the stigmatization of the obese body and where women try to alter their appearances online to present themselves in a faultless manner. Many participants displayed their best self on social media, hiding the parts of their bodies that were not seen as to be 'ideal' or 'beautiful'. Cobhla admits that "*Everyone is going to put up their best photo*", Emma replicated this idea by saying "*If I am not happy with my arms in the photo, I won't put it up on social media*". Bordo (1993) points out that there are considerable social pressures placed on women to avoid being seen to be overweight and /or fat. This underpins Goffman's theory of presentation of the self. Social media is a stage metaphor that positions social identity as a performance which makes the construction of physical appearances as part of an act. This act is then applied by the participants and many others on social media to conform to these norms that are presented as appropriate. This analysis is interesting as people who are precipitating these norms as a way of presenting themselves are therefore regurgitating these attitudes on the body type that is not only displayed by macro and meso forces like the government and media but also it is reinforced by the individual self in everyday life. Social media, therefore, acts as a stage and gives individual agency to show their best self in order to imitate these norms. Everyday life is infused with relations of power, order and regulation through social media and presenting the 'normalised' body. Therefore, how women's bodies fit in and how they present themselves

in society are key aspects of the idealised normative femininity which women are framed and frame themselves in society.

This phenomenon can be explained by Butler (1990) where she argues the distinction between sex and gender as unimportant. She remarks that “perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always gendered with a consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (1990:9). Butler argues that deserting the idea of gender as an identity does not take away the potential agency on behalf of the woman. This meant that the identity is constructed, which is neither arbitrary or free, nor completely determined which leaves room for re-structuring and for disrupting the status quo (Ryan and Morganroth 2018). For example, concerning this, there is some resistance to the ‘body-conscious society’ despite the idea of the perfect female body is thin and toned. The experience and environment of losing weight is not fixed. Most participants expose the desire to lose weight due to this social construct of femininity, but others, are not so bothered. This can be rendered in Crossely (2004:224) argument to a resistance towards the ‘body-conscious society’ where he contends that people have agency in the choices they make when it comes to a ‘healthy lifestyle’ and a responsible for their own weight. For instance, both Zave and Ailbhe expressed their drive to gain weight to achieve a more ‘*curvy bigger figure*’ but also expressed many challenges because everyone around them was trying to lose weight and this often-attached stigma them trying to gain the weight. This is a powerful critique of Foucault’s argument on disciplinary power and governmentality. His theory does not include an important aspect of the individual which is agency and the power to choose their path. Although the thin body is normalised society through different structures, agency plays an important role that has been left out by many theorists such as Bourdieu (Cockerham 2005). Zave and Ailbhe’s decision to gain weight can relate to neoliberal ideas that individuals are

free to choose, rather than having to conform to a particular route in life. This illustrated that the social world is not distinct, but instead, complex and varied.

4.6 CONCLUSION:

This chapter presented the findings gathered that help explain where attitudes of the obese bodies came from relating to young women living in Ireland today. The first section discusses neoliberalism in terms of marketization theory of the body. The study highlights how neoliberalism offers a choice to individuals to work on their bodies and to build the ‘ideal self’ which is suggested to be ‘thin, toned and healthy’. While, subjectively, it offers unhealthy processed foods such as takeaways as the cheaper, more accessible option for lower incomers or students. This is contradictory as although external powers endorse into the ‘healthy’ body, structures act as a barrier on agency for individuals to conform with this norm. This body image is promoted by meso-structures such as the media and endorsed by celebrities which shapes the cultural representation of the womanised ‘thin, toned and healthy body’ rather than the ‘lazy, unhealthy and obese’ body type which does not conform with gendered norms. Media structures socially construct obese bodies as morally wrong through the legacy of normalisation. They reinforce these ideas that are built by higher structures and shapes opinions of the individual on a micro scale. In response to this, many individuals try to replicate this normalised way of life by performative measures, such as what Goffman (1979) described as ‘presentation of the self’ on media platforms. The findings also exposed a macro analysis of governmentality powers. There is an emphasis on the social policy and how it constructs the meaning of the body, based the government approach by framing the experience of interactions between institutions, organisations and the individual through surveillance techniques. The findings suggest that a continuum exists between the power of agency and structure, and that interventions may lie anywhere in between.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Obesity is constructed as social problem in western societies, where there is an obsessive focus on the body and exposes a negative cultural and social representation of ‘fatness’. Chapter three outlined the methodology, where the study outlined eight semi-structured interviews with young women in their early twenties to help gather qualitative data around the topic of obesity.

Empirically, the stories analysed by the participants illustrated dominant ideas of weight management and womanhood in relation to weight gain and weight loss in society. Through this extensive research, the study found that society operates by a range network interaction flowing at different levels and through various communications. Through these interactions, the 'body conscious society' is socially constructed and therefore effects the cultural representation of the obese body. The study acknowledged the effects disciplinary bodies such as the government who implements various policies and disciplinary techniques such as the BMI to shape the social meaning of how obesity is morally wrong and, therefore, creates docile bodies to correspond with this. Other structures such as media reinforce this idea by promoting thinner body types and presenting them as the ideal way of life.

By Individuals interacting with these structures, they bring them into everyday existence by presenting themselves under this conventional process of engaging with the thinner body and therefore normalising this process. These networks shape the agent's relationship with society, and at times, one can be uncomfortable with their body as a result. Through the study, the interaction between macro, meso and micro forces helped understand the power of neoliberalism ideologies that shape attitudes through these social processes. Neoliberal ideologies presents themselves by offering a choice to individuals through marketing techniques. It promotes the 'healthy, toned and thin' body image through structures such as media and the government and sells it to the individual. Conversely, Neoliberalism also endorses fast food and 'unhealthy' options as a way of accumulating money. Therefore, it acts as a guide in the process of choice on what body shape to acquire. The study found that neoliberalism predominantly focused on creating the 'ideal citizen' by supporting the 'best way of life' (the thin body), so, individuals were found to be tightly constrained by policy and structure as a form of social control to mould the population into cultural norms and values. Therefore, Neoliberalism tells individuals to have all they want, to have as much as they want

as a good consumer, but also people are told to ‘consume less’ and ‘eat less’ in order to be a good citizen.

Despite this principle, there is also evidence that individuals have some form of agency on what path they choose, despite cultural norms and pressures going against their views. This was delegated in the interviews when Ailbhe and Zave opted to gain weight as opposed to losing it. This was known to be a resistance against the ‘body conscious society’. The subjective opinions on body image mirror how the social world is complex and with one opinion comes a contradiction. Therefore, neoliberalism beliefs are not a totalizing order, but a contested order. Despite structures acting as a barrier for many, women still are offered some agency to assign their own path in what body type they want.

In future, I would be interested to focus on how the attitudes of body shape have altered over time. A historical lens would aid our understanding of where this idea of body image came from. I would do this with a bigger sample to comprehend the intersectionality between race, gender and age.

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Appendices:

APPENDICES 1:

Interview Consent Form:

Special Topics Consent Form 2019-2020

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my assignment for my [Special Topics](#) module in the department of Sociology at Maynooth University, NUIM. My research is designed to explore

what shapes young women's attitudes today living in Ireland.

This interview will take up 15 minutes and with your permission I would like to tape record the conversation. A copy of the interview tape will be made available to you afterwards if you wish to hear it.

All of the interview information will be kept confidential. I will store the tapes/notes of our conversation safely i.e. promptly removed from mobile devices and kept in a secure manner. Your identity will be

kept confidential and I will use a code number/pseudonym to identify your interview data. Neither your name nor private information will appear in the final research project.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions or may stop at any time. You may also withdraw at any time up until the work is completed.

“I have read the description above and consent to participate.”

Signed _____

Date _____

APENDICES 2:

Interview Guide:

Social Attitudes:

Q1. What is your ideal Body type?

Q2. What Shapes your Attitude on Weight?

Q3. Is gaining weight seen as a positive thing or negative thing in society in general?

How do you feel about weight gain?

Q4. In your opinion, what are the major influences of gaining and losing weight?

Government / Structures:

Q5. Why do you think there is an increase in weight in recent years?

Q6. What are the reasons why people eat ‘unhealthy’?

Q7. What are the reasons that you eat unhealthy food? How do you feel about it?

Q8. What do you think the government's responsibility is in relation to tackling the obesity epidemic?

Q9. What is your opinion on the use of the 'BMI' scale as an indicator of body weight?

Q10. Should there be a scheme in place to tell people what is right and wrong to eat?

Q11. Does society favour one body type of the other and if so why do you think that is the case?

Gender aspect

Q12. Do you believe that gaining weight or losing weight is gendered?

Q13. Does one sex prefer a certain body image over the other and what are the reasons for this?

APPENDICES 3:

Transcript of Interview [March 2020]:

Interviewer: What is your ideal body type?

Respondent: Hourglass figure with nice proportions, not too skinny and not too big. I feel like I'm quite skinny so I would love bigger hips, like Kim Kardashian.

Interviewer: What shapes your attitude on weight?

Respondent: I think like, seeing social media, seeing influencers and their body. Like I would be like, well in too skinny I need to put on weight. Media in general

Interviewer: Do you think gaining weight is seen as a positive thing or negative thing in society?

Respondent: I feel like now, it is more of a positive thing. Because people want to have that ideal hourglass body type. For me, I would have to get that by gaining weight. SO I feel like sometimes, it is more of a positive thing. But, I feel like for certain people it is seen as a negative thing. If they get 'too big'.

Interviewer: How do you feel about weight gain?

Respondent: Em, I would love to gain weight, I think it is a positive thing, as long as it is healthy, there is nothing wrong with it.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what are the major influences of gaining and losing weight in society?

Respondent: I feel like losing weight would be stress, and I think if I were to gain weight, it would be stress, but sadness, trying to cope maybe?

Interviewer: So, in relation to the obesity epidemic, why do you think there has been an increase in the average population weight in recent years?

Respondent: I feel like our food now a days are full of preservatives, especially fast food. I feel like people go towards it rather than cooking something healthy. Especially meat eaters!! It's not very healthy for you. Other reasons I feel like people can't help it like if they have a thyroid problem or something, but overall, its unhealthy eating, like when we don't know what's in our food. Takeaways are not organic or natural, there is limited amount of natural stuff around us because they don't make money off it. It's all about making money, and the fastest way of making money is fast food chains where they make money and that's where people gain weight.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about your diet, do you eat healthy food?

Respondent: I think I am quite healthy, I just don't eat junk food if I don't buy it, because if I buy it, I know I will eat it all in one sitting. Yet sometimes I miss breakfast, so as a result I snack a lot. But most of the time I am healthy.

Interviewer: What are the reasons you would eat unhealthily?

Respondent: I would pig out if I'm stressed, I just want chocolate and crisps. I would feel guilty, but I would also feel content and satisfied. My need to binge it.

Interviewer: Do you feel that's related to be a student?

Respondent: 100%, I would never binge eat a share pack of minstreels and crisps if I wasn't a stressed student. But I do it all the time now in college, because I am so stressed as a student

Interviewer: Do you think it is the Government's responsibility to govern what we eat, should there be a strategy in place on healthy eating? Or should it be on the individual?

Respondent: I feel like it is a bit of both. I feel like the Government should make people aware of healthy eating. Not something like tax on sugar, that's stupid. They should be informing people, make posters, documentaries, active effort so people would be more aware on what they are eating. Especially this should be the case for children. Parents that are feeding their children junk food, it's their fault, and they need to look after their child. SO it goes both ways, blame needs to be split in both parties.

Interviewer: What is your opinion on the BMI scale?

Respondent: I don't really know, see, I hate it. It makes me really really self-conscious. You see, it considers me severely underweight. But I would consider myself healthy enough, so it is kind of upsetting when you see that coming back. Well, I don't feel like im underweight. It just really hurts more when you see it in figures. It is not a nice thing to see. Like, you need to go to the doctor, you need more food, like, I just think I understand they need it for clinical purposes, but it is not nice for a normal person to see that. Just because you base yourself around a number. And that's not fair. It does destroy people's mental health and view of themselves. I hate it. You don't know where the weight is distributed, you don't know anything about them, you don't know their age, gender.

Interviewer: Do you think there should be something in place to tell people what is wrong and right to eat?

Respondent: I feel like it can take away a person's right to choose and be free, like they can see this group isn't necessarily healthy to eat, but, I don't think you should ever say you can't eat that, you can't eat a bar of chocolate because its not good for you. I feel like a person's going to eat whatever they want to eat anyways. I feel like if you put out the facts saying what is unhealthy, but they shouldn't tell you that you cannot eat that. Or that you have to eat a bowl of lettuce a day. People won't listen, people feel like they are being restricted. And also, in my view, it's a bit like a dictatorship by telling people what you can and cannot eat. Its like your rationalising food, you can't do it in today's society, people have right to eat what makes them happy.

Interviewer: Do you think society favours one body type over the other?

Respondent: I feel like they do, even if you look at the fashion industry. It is so very clear that they favour women that are stick thin, and they are completely cutting out women of 'normal' size, or women carrying more weight. Like our age group prefers women with bigger hips, so that's actually cutting out two groups, really skinny girls and then bigger girls. Its difficult for people to deal with that. Even with boys, girls are like I don't want a skinny boy, but really, what's wrong with a skinny boy? Or vice versa. Its really cruel. Social media has a massive influence, we are constantly seeing thing, such as the like of Kendall and Kylie Jenner, where they expose their body, and we all what that, and then boys want that. It creates a pressure of girls to look that way. Social media and tablets form the 'ideal thing' that you strive to be.

Interviewer: Do you think there is a gendered aspect of gaining and losing weight?

Respondent: I feel like boys prefer girls with curvy figures with bigger boobs and bums, like skinny girls is almost out of trend, unfortunately for me. The girls want the in-between for boys too, not too big or small, muscly, but not too muscly, the perfect in-between.