Healthy Eating and the Anti-Diet: The Weight Watchers Approach to Weight Maintenance'

By

Saskia Ann Jarvis, B.A.

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Abstract

This study examined the practices and philosophies of the Weight Watchers program. The main goals of this study were to compare and contrast Weight Watchers with other popular diet plans, and to explore why this particular weight control program has continued to be successful in a society with a plethora of weight-loss programs. This study indicates key characteristics of Weight Watchers that both distinguish this program from other diet plans, and contribute to its success. The Weight Watchers program appears to be flexible, so that individual members may adapt the program to fit their own needs and lifestyle. This study highlights the importance of the community support element in Weight Watchers, comparable to that found in twelve-step self-help programs, and members' ability to retain some control over their consumption and themselves, as opposed to other diet plans which may be more prescriptive and restrictive in governing member's consumption.

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Introduction

Contemporary North American society is inundated with discourses of 'self-help' and 'health'. In recent years, these discourses have become increasingly interconnected, as societal emphasis on health, and in particular on weight and fat, has become pervasive in North American culture, and individuals in great numbers have turned to self-help programs for help controlling their weight. Discourse surrounding self-help and health has proliferated to the extent that these ideas affect millions of individuals on a daily basis, in both their actions and their interactions with other individuals, from family and friends to coworkers and outside organizations offering specialized services in these fields. Millions of individuals are looking to various self-help programs in attempt to change, control, and monitor their weight, often in the name of good health.

This project is an exploration of one such program, Weight Watchers. For more than forty years, Weight Watchers has been one of the most prominent 'diet' plans, claiming to teach individuals how to modify their consumption and their lifestyle, in accord with 'healthy eating' and 'healthy lifestyle' philosophies. In this project I will explore the Weight Watchers program, looking at how the program itself works, as well as looking at the significance of the program in comparison to other popular diet programs. I will argue that the Weight Watchers program is unique in its approach to weight control and as a result continues to flourish, maintaining support from existing members as well as attracting new consumers.

In this project, I will compare Weight Watchers with existing self-help programs, particularly twelve-step programs, to demonstrate that the strong community support element that twelve-step programs are predicated upon is also found in Weight Watchers.

However, I will also argue that the power relations within Weight Watchers differ significantly from those found in twelve-step programs, as Weight Watchers allows for an element of self-governance in the structure of the program. This paper will use governmentality literature to argue that this unique combination of community support and individual control works to ensure that Weight Watchers continues to be an effective choice for individuals looking to a program to help control their weight.

This project is organized into six sections. This first section will provide an overview of the topic, outlining the importance of undertaking this project, and providing a brief introduction to self-help programs. Chapter one, Introduction to the Weight Watchers program, will explore the Weight Watchers program itself, discussing the *Points* system that the program is predicated upon and how the program is actualized. This chapter will highlight the important components of flexibility, individual choice and control that Weight Watchers espouses, as well as outline its focus on regulating changes in the lifestyles of its members, as opposed to solely being concerned with governing the consumption of its members.

The second chapter, Self-Help Programs, will discuss the differences and similarities between 12-step and non 12-step self-help programs, as well as look at the benefits of self-help programs. This chapter will focus more in-depth on twelve-step programs, examining the disease model of addiction that twelve-step programs advocate and the element of spirituality that is found within these groups. Here, I will use the twelve-step model, Alcoholics Anonymous, to consider self-help programs from a governmentality perspective, applying theories of self-esteem and expert knowledge to AA.

The next chapter, The Shift to Healthy Living, will argue that contemporary society has witnessed a shift from 'traditional' diets to more of a focus on 'healthy eating' and 'healthy living' and will investigate anti-diet philosophy. In this section I will argue that Weight Watchers can be considered as an example of an anti-diet, and discuss the significance of the program being framed in this philosophy.

Chapter four will argue that Weight Watchers can be considered one of the most successful programs to address controlling one's weight, and will explore some reasons why Weight Watchers has continued to thrive for so long. I will argue that in part its successfulness derives from the community component found within the program, in which members find a strong sense of group solidarity and support, similar to the support found in twelve-step and self-help programs. Also, I will claim that Weight Watchers remains profitable as a result of the unique philosophies and power relations that the program is built upon. In this chapter I will conclude that the sense of community, and the unique power relations within Weight Watchers continually work to reinforce the program, ensuring its longevity and success.

The following chapter will conclude this project, outlining some implications of the Weight Watchers program, and offering some suggestions for further related research.

Methodology

To conduct this study of the Weight Watchers program, I collected data from online message boards found on www.weightwatchers.ca, the Canadian online version of Weight Watchers. These message boards provide a forum for individuals following the online Weight Watchers program to interact with other members. The message boards are

significant in that they allow for members to communicate without being in the presence of leaders. So, as an alternative to conversing with other members at meetings, where there are leaders present, the message boards are more of an informal and unstructured arena for communication. The informal nature of the message boards is evident as the subjects members discuss range from topics dealing directly with Weight Watchers to personal concerns that are beyond the scope of the program.

At the start of this project, I began reading the message boards three or four times a week, generally reading through the new messages every other day. I continued to monitor the boards in this manner throughout the duration of my project. In addition to reading the new messages that were posted, I would also look through previous messages if I was searching for information on a particular topic. Although the website initially displays all messages posted in the past two days, it is also possible to view past messages. While only paying members themselves are able to post messages and respond to messages on the website, the message boards can be accessed and read publicly.

I utilized the message boards for two purposes. When I began this project I started reading through the messages that were posted, and the responses, to explore how members were interacting with each other, what topics were being discussed, how members felt about the Weight Watchers program, as well as looking at the relationships members had with one another. My findings from reading these message boards are what enabled me to make the conclusions presented in this thesis. Specifically, these message boards allowed me to draw conclusions as to the strong community support element found between Weight Watchers members, in terms of members offering both advice for following the program, and interacting with other members on more personal levels. In

addition, reading the posted messages allowed me to examine how members perceive the program, and to what extent members believe, as well as espouse, the philosophies of Weight Watchers, including its long-term, lifestyle-change approach to healthy eating and living.

As my project progressed, I would also use the message boards in attempt to validate ideas or inclinations that I had about the program. Thus, I would search the message boards for supportive material to confirm questions and ideas that I had. This allowed me to explore any questions I formed about Weight Watchers during the course of my work in addition to continuing to search the newly posted messages. Thus, using the message boards as my main source of data collection was very helpful in that the website is accessible at all times, allowing for a very accommodating research process.

In addition to monitoring the online message boards, on several occasions I have informally spoken with several individuals who either currently are, or used to be, members of Weight Watchers. These conversations were not specific to this research, but did allow me to gain some insight and information in areas where the message boards did not suffice.

Self-Help Programs

Self-help programs continue to increase in popularity in North American culture as established groups continue to increase in membership, and new groups are created with new methods and new focuses. Katz (1993:2) asserts that new groups are formed when a small number of individuals have a common need that is not currently being met by existing organizations or professional services, and which they feel they can

effectively address in some respect by forming a group together. Thus, individuals may join self-help groups to interact with others who have common needs or shared experiences (Sobal & Maurer 1999:6).

In a neo-liberal society in which individuals are increasingly responsible for their own individual problems, self-help groups are now found to address almost any ailment or concern, and new found problems are continually looking to the self-help movement for assistance. Katz (1993:71) holds that two of the most important factors in the rise of self-help groups are the need for being part of a community, and the importance of self-activity, self-reliance and self-management.

In addition to turning to self-help groups for the benefits of group support, self-help groups have increased in the past 10-12 years due to massive cutbacks in the welfare-state, resulting in cutbacks in human-services leaving individuals to find alternative solutions to deal with their problems (Katz 1993:71). As well, some individuals have turned to self-help groups as an alternative to professional help with problems, when they feel that professionals have de-emphasized their clients' self understanding, self management, and self reliance, and in some cases have had too little experience with particular problems to understand their nature. Thus, many self-help groups have been formed to fill this void, as well as to encourage professionals to call attention to the particular issue at hand.

The original self help program, and perhaps the main model for many contemporary self-help programs, is Alcoholics Anonymous. Established as the 12-step prototype to deal with alcohol addiction, AA advocates a developmental process that each individual member must go through in order to stop drinking, or in the cases of off-

spring programs to manage whatever the particular problem that can be constituted as an 'addiction' that ails the individual member (Katz 1993:11). These programs view the addiction as a disease, as something that is beyond the control of the individual afflicted with it, and a component of recovery is for one to admit that he/she is powerless to control the disease (Lester 1999:144). The twelve-step philosophy espouses an element of powerlessness, as the addicted individual is seen to need the help of a higher power in order to overcome his/her addiction, rather than conceptualizing recovery as something the individual can achieve on his/her own.

Self Help and the Weight Watchers Program

This proliferation of self-help programs is useful in understanding the creation of a multitude of programs addressing weight control. Ideas of health and body image are omnipresent in contemporary society, and as a result new diets and help programs are constantly emerging, claiming to help individuals achieve the particular weight or body shape which they desire. Many argue that body image is an important component of one's self-concept and accepting oneself, and claim that society as a collective works to govern individuals' bodies (Cash & Roy: 1990). Ideas of body image and health have at times become conflated, so that one's body is sometimes used as a determinant of one's overall health. As a result, the emphasis individuals may place on the size and shape of their body has led many, a disproportionate amount women, to turn to programs, such as Weight Watchers, to lose weight or modify their body shape.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Weight Watchers Program

Introduction

Contemporary society is infused with a myriad of diet and weight-loss programs, all of which claim to enable individuals to effectively lose weight. Weight Watchers is one such program that has emerged, targeted primarily at women aiming to change their eating habits. However, the Weight Watchers program is unique in its approach and philosophy, and claims to offer a flexible approach to weight maintenance that can be tailored to fit the needs of any individual. The Weight Watchers plan is advertised as a lifestyle change, in that dieting is seen as one component of long-term weight maintenance.

The Weight Watchers program emerged in 1963, and since then has attracted more than 25 million members (Torrens 1998:32). The program began in Queens, New York, with founder Jean Nidetch, and has grown to include chapters in 30 countries around the world. Its success can be seen in its large membership numbers and its international expansion, as well as in term of its financial success.

In this chapter, I will explore the Weight Watchers program and its philosophies. I will examine how the program works, looking at the *Points* system that Weight Watchers is predicated upon, weekly meetings that members attend, and the online Weight Watchers program. I will also discuss the idea of flexibility that is central to Weight Watchers' mandate of lifestyle modification, advocating healthy eating and healthy living.

The Points System

The Weight Watchers program is based on a *Points* system, in which all foods are assigned a particular *Points* value. *Point* values are calculated according to the serving size, number of calories, fat grams, and fiber grams in the food (Weight Watchers 2000a:5). Members are given a *Points* range to guide their consumption, so that they must control the amount of *Points* they consume to stay within their range. *Point* ranges are allocated according to weight, as the program is based on the idea that the more you weigh, the more you need to consume to lose weight in a safe and healthy manner. Thus, a member's current weight determines the amount of *Points* she is able to consume each day.

For instance, an individual weighing between 175 to 199 pounds is allotted a *Points* range of between 22-27 *Points* per day. They must therefore consume foods which add to a minimum of 22 *Points*, and a maximum of 27 *Points*. Individuals are required to eat at least the minimum *Points* range value everyday, however they do not necessarily have to eat to the maximum *Points* value. By consuming at least the minimum *Points* value it is claimed that members will keep their metabolism fueled while losing weight at a safe rate.

Current Weight in Lbs.	Daily Points Range
Less than 150	18-23
150 – 174	20-25
175-199	22-27
200-224	24-29
225-249	26-31
250-274	28-34
275 – 299	29-34
300 – 324	30-35
325 – 349	31-36
350 +	32-37

There are modifications to daily point ranges made for growing teens (females under 16, males under 19) who are supposed to add 2 extra *Points* to their daily range (Weight Watchers 2000a:6).

Members can purchase guidebooks that specify the *Point* value of most foods. The Complete Food Companion is a book of almost 300 pages that lists the *Points* value of most foods, including Caribbean, Canadian, Cajun, Chinese, English/Irish, French, Indian, Greek, German, Italian, Japanese, Jewish, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese dishes. The Complete Food Companion also includes foods listed by brand name, so that members can find the *Points* value for foods they consume that are found pre-made in the grocery store. As well, members can purchase the Canadian Fast Food Guide, as compiled by Weight Watchers, which gives *Points* values for many common fast foods, including food from McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and Tim Hortons.

In addition, members are given a '*Points-finder*', which allows them to calculate the *Pointage* of foods which are not already listed in the given guides. The *Points* finder uses the nutritional information on packaged foods labels to determine the amount of *Points* in a serving or in a recipe one wishes to make. The serving size is important to factor in when calculating the *Points* value of a food item, as serving sizes are heavily regulated in the program. This is pertinent to the program, as Weight Watchers members must stay inside the given *Points* range if they are to lose weight. The program heavily emphasizes the use of a journal for tracking daily *Point* intake. Thus, by writing down everything that one consumes, members are likely to be more accurate in calculating their *Points* intake and to remain within their *Points* range. Please see Appendix One for a list of some common food *Pointages*.

As well as ensuring that consumption remains within the given *Points* value range, members are also given nutritional guidelines to abide by. This helps to ensure that

individuals are spreading their *Points* over the required food groups, and thus they are more apt to be healthy while on the Weight Watchers plan. Members are urged to eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, as Weight Watchers asserts that a variety of fruits and vegetables is key to successful weight management, and provides benefits, such as reducing the risk of heart disease (Getting Started: 2001:12).

Members are advised to consume at least two servings of milk and milk products a day, three for teens and members over 50, therefore allocating 4-6 *Points* daily for dairy products (Getting Started:14). Weight Watchers recommends members include additional protein-rich foods in their diets, and gives some suggestions for how vegetarians can work the Weight Watchers program to suit their diet needs. All members are required to drink at least 6 glasses of water each day, in an attempt to curb one's appetite with zero-*Point* servings of water, and the program advocates taking a daily multi-vitamin supplement to ensure members' nutritional needs are being met.

For example, an individual who weighs anything less than 225 pounds should spread their *Points* among the food groups as follows to have a balanced diet:

	Balanced Plan	Higher Protein	Higher Carbohydrate
Fruits and Vegetables	0-3	0-1	0-3
Milk and Milk Products	4-6	4-6	4-6
Protein-Rich Foods	6-8	8-10	4-6
Grain-based Foods	6-9	4-8	9-12
Added sugars, added fats, and alcohol	2-3	2-4	1-2

Significant here, is that in moderation, the program allows for *Points* originating from added sugars, fats and alcohol, as opposed to more traditional weight reduction programs which may cut these out altogether or as much as possible. As well, the Weight Watchers program allows for, and actually encourages, a balanced portion of

carbohydrates in one's diet. This can be contrasted to many contemporary, very popular carbohydrate reduced or eliminated diets, such as the Atkins diet or the Dr. Bernstein diet. The higher protein and higher carbohydrates plans allow for members to cater their diet to their own personal preferences.

If a member does eat not the maximum amount of *Points* designated in her range, she can save those *Points* to use another day that week. Here, members can vary the amount of *Points* they eat each day, within their range, so as to allow for special occasions and times when "you simply don't have enough *Points* in your daily *Points* range to get through the day", by eating less one day to save *Points* for another. Thus individuals can use saved *Points* from previous days in order to "let your appetite, schedule, and weekly weight loss guide you"

(<http://www.weightwatchers.ca/plan/flex/index.aspx>).

However, although the individual member is said to be in control of her own consumption, choosing the foods she consumes, there are still guidelines within this that members must adhere to. In addition to eating within the given *Points* range, members are also required to attend weekly Weight Watchers meetings and weekly weigh-ins to track their progress, while diligently recording their consumption in a journal. While Weight Watchers proposes that individuals are able to eat any foods they choose, so long as respecting their minimum and maximum *Point* range levels, the reality of this claim is that it is often very difficult for individuals to consume a wide variety of foods. The foods that are typically denied by other, more rigid weight-loss diets, are often very high in *Points*, and therefore if eaten the individual is severely restrained in what she is able to consume for the remainder of the day, or even the remainder of the week.

For example, an individual weighting between 150-174 lbs is permitted to consume from 20 – 25 *Points* per day. One slice (1/8 of an 18 inch pizza) of deep dish plain cheese pizza is 10 *Points*, therefore if an individual were to consume one piece of deep dish cheese pizza, they would be limited to only 10-15 *Points* for the rest of their day. If the individual ate two slices, they would have from 0-5 *Points* remaining. Should the example be changed from a plain cheese deep-dish pizza to a one-meat topping pizza, the *Points* value increases to 11 *Points* per slice. Should the deep dish slice be changed to a cheese only thin crust slice, it would drop only one *Point*, from 10 *Points* to 9 *Points* per slice. Thus, the claim to flexibility in the Weight Watchers program, while allowing members some control over their own consumption, is somewhat more restrictive than it claims to be due to the limitations imposed by consuming some particular foods.

These *Point* range restrictions necessitate a strong emphasis on planning. In order to ensure that one's consumption adheres to the given weight restrictions specified by the program, it is necessary for one to plan at the start of the day what one will eat, or more precisely, how many *Points* one will consume and when. This is especially necessary if the individual is going to be outside of the home during the day, for example if they go to the workplace, and has to take with them what they will consume for lunch or their meals outside of the home. Here, it is necessary for an individual to plan ahead to ensure the food they have access to will remain in their *Points* range and fulfill the necessary nutritional requirements.

Members must as well ensure that the weight, or portion size, of the foods they consume is in accord with the number of *Points* they have allotted for it. Thus, the preparation time members need in making meals is increased, as they may have the

additional responsibilities of weighing and measuring their food. This adds increased difficulties for members who wish to eat at a restaurant, or purchase pre-made foods, as they must attempt to determine the portion size to calculate the foods' *Point* value.

BMI

In addition to specifying the *Points* range members should eat in, the Weight Watchers program as well recommends appropriate weight ranges for individuals, which are based upon the Body Mass Index (BMI). The Body Mass Index is a chart that emerged from the NHANES III study, which was conducted from 1988 to 1994 as a statistically representative national probability sample of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the U.S., in which height and weight were measured as part of a more comprehensive health examination (Kuczmarski et al 1997). The BMI is a weight-to-height ratio score that provides an index of relative weight, taking into account only individual differences in height (Lafrance et al 2000:232). Thus, BMI cross references weight with height, and provides a ratio score which is then used to determine if the individual's weight is in a healthy range.

The BMI distinguishes between underweight, healthy, overweight and obese ranges, and is therefore prescriptive in that it tells individuals that there is a specific range which their weight should fall into in order to be considered 'healthy'. Thus, the BMI can be understood as a technology of governance in that it constructs a limited weight range that works to constrain the legitimate weight and size of the individual through the discourse of health.

The BMI has been criticized as a determinate of ideal weight on many different levels. The BMI scale does not account for changes in the body as a result of ageing, however with age, body fat tends to increase and muscle tends to diminish (Prentice & Jebb 2001). Therefore, an individual's body weight and body mass index can stay the same, even though she is accumulating more fat, suggesting that the BMI may not be an effective indicator of problematic weight as it fails to differentiate between fat and muscle. As well, the BMI does not account for differences in race and ethnicity, which can be problematic as body types can be varied amongst racial lines. In addition, the BMI does not take into account differences between males and females, which is extremely important as the location of fat differs between the sexes. Women tend to have more fat in their hip and thigh regions, rather than their upper body, which is important in assessing health risks based on weight. The ideal weight guidelines advocated by Weight Watchers thus should be taken with caution, in light of these flaws inherent in the BMI, which serves as the basis of the WW guidelines.

Weight Watchers members themselves have noted potential problems of relying on the BMI scale as a sole determinant of a healthy weight range. The following messages are taken from the Weight Watchers website (www.weightwatchers.ca), and indicate the hesitancy of members to accept the BMI ranges. Here, one member has posted a message expressing her concern with the BMI, and other members have responded stating their agreement with the validity of her concern.

Post:

19/01/2004 7:45:32 PM

ok I just checke dout the bmi web site and for my height I would have to weight 130 and there is no way my bady could do that. I am at 212 and trying to get to 180 for a start. I could never go to 130. my son has a doc appointment so I am going to ask her

what I should weight and forget the bmi chart. anyone else have this problem with their body type?¹

Responses:

19/01/2004 9:14:42 PM

Apparantly, BMI's are not the best guidelines to follow. This is b/c according to the BMI limits set by the US just about 3 years ago, over 60% of the US population was considered "obese". also, it doesn't take into account bone density, or frame, or muscle density. I take BMI's with a grain of salt. You don't want to starve yourself just to be in the target. Use it as a guide, but follow what your body tells you...

19/01/2004 10:52:20 PM

definity don't worry about your BMI! I'm not sure of exact numbers here, but Michael Jordan-one of today's top athletes, is over his BMI. There are many factors that are not accounted for. Do what you feel comfortable doing. All that matters is how you feel right?

19/01/2004 11:34:59 PM

I've looked at many o'charts for weight, WW says I should be between 116-145 lbs (the 145 being the max if I'm over 45 years old, which I'm not) and another one from Nutribar that says the range is 118-145 lbs for all ages...so, use the BMI and weight charts with a grain of salt! See your doctor and trust them, you can choose a healthy weight for you with her help.

The notions of biopolitics and ethopolitics can be employed to analyze the BMI.

According to Foucault, biopolitics refers to forms of governance in which political authorities, in alliance with many others, have taken on the task of the management of individual life in the name of the well-being of the population as a whole, and of each of its living subjects (Rose 2001:1). Rose (2001:18) argues that biopolitics merges with ethopolitics, which is the politics of life itself and how it should be lived. Ethopolitics is concerned with "the ways in which the ethos of human existence – the sentiments, moral nature or guiding beliefs of persons, groups, or institutions – have come to provide the 'medium' within which the self-government of that autonomous individual can be connected up with the imperatives of good government" (Rose 2001:18). Thus, ethopolitics is concerned with the self-techniques by which individuals should judge themselves and act upon themselves for self-improvement.

¹ All messages taken from the Weight Watchers website appear in this project in their original form.

Using these concepts, the BMI can be understood as a tool used to control the weight of individuals, in that it claims to improve their health as well as the health of the population as a whole. Rose (2001:5) notes how contemporary society has defined the importance of individual health in terms of its consequence for the national population, involving economic implications such as the costs that those in ill-health pose in terms of missed work and increased health care payments. He claims that the idea of good or bad health comes to be framed in moral terms as national health indicators measure aggregates of the health status of individual citizens and families, rather than of the population as a whole (Rose 2001:6). Thus, the intensification and generalization of health-promotion strategies serve to enhance the obligations that individuals and families have for monitoring and managing their own health, emphasizing the active role every individual must take in securing their own well-being (Rose 2001:6).

Rose also utilizes the concept of risk as a way of thinking and acting with respect to calculations about probable futures in the present, followed by interventions in order to control the future (Rose 2001:7). He claims that demands for biopolitical risk management are proliferating and globalizing, by identifying high-risk groups in order to intervene upon individuals in these groups in a preventative manner (Rose 2001:8). In the case of weight, individuals designated as overweight, or high-risk, may be advised to make changes to their behaviour, diet, or lifestyle, or may be preemptively placed on a drug regime intended to reduce their risk of further illness. Thus, through constructing ideal weight ranges, the BMI dictates to individuals that there is a specific weight range that they should fall into so as to not be at risk, herein promoting a program such as

Weight Watchers for individuals who actively attempt to conform to this given ideal weight.

Flexibility

The notion of flexibility is central to the philosophies of Weight Watchers. In this program, individual members are not required to follow a structured, rigid diet plan dictating what to consume for each meal, but rather they are said to be free to choose, to a certain extent, what they wish to consume, and when they wish to consume it. Rather than being deprived entirely of certain substances deemed unhealthy, members are able to consume any foods they so choose, within limited quantities. This is significant in that Weight Watchers can be understood as an alternative weight-loss program, which may have better success rates than more traditional, rigid diets, since it does not leave its members feeling deprived of the foods they enjoy consuming, or as not in control of their own bodies.

In addition to being able to choose what they wish to consume, members are also entitled to choose when they wish to eat. The Weight Watchers program acknowledges that not all members have similar eating patterns, and that members have different lifestyle patterns that do not allow for the program to have a universal eating pattern. Thus, Weight Watchers allows for individual members to set their own eating schedules and patterns, and provides some sample meal patterns for those who choose to eat three "square" meals a day, as well as for those who eat more "mini-meals" throughout the course of the day. The program gives the quiz "Finding your Eating Pattern," to help members determine what eating pattern fits best with one's lifestyle, and therefore aids

members in adapting the program to fit their needs. These sample meal patterns indicate both how *Points* should be distributed among the different nutritional groups, and the attempt of Weight Watchers to personalize the program to fit the lifestyle of the individual member, making it easier for them to remain on the program.

A sample meal plan for 3 "square" meals:

Meal One	<i>Points</i>	Meal Two	<i>Points</i>	Meal Three	<i>Points</i>
Juice/ Fruit	1	Meat/Poultry/Fish/Legumes/Eggs/Cheese	2-4	Garden Vegetable soup	0
Cereal	1-2	Bread/Grains/Pasta	1-4	Meat/Poultry/ Fish	3-7
Milk (low-fat)	2	Vegetables	0	Bread/Grains/ Pasta	3-5
Bread/Roll/Bagel	2-3	Garden Vegetable Soup	0	Vegetables	0
Spread(margarine cream cheese, jam)	1	Milk/Yogurt/Pudding/Fruit	2	Fat(butter, margarine, dressing)	2
				Fruit	1-2

Total *Points* used for the day: 22-37.

A sample meal plan for 6 "Mini-Meals"

Meal One	<i>Points</i>	Meal Two	<i>Points</i>	Meal Three	<i>Points</i>
Juice/Fruit	1	Vegetables	0	Garden Veg. Soup	0
Bread/Roll/ Bagel	2-3	Salad Dressing	1-2	Meat/Poultry/Fish/Eggs/ Cheese	2-4
Spread margarine, cream cheese, jam)	1			Bread/Grains/Pasta	1-4
				Vegetables	0
Meal Four	<i>Points</i>	Meal Five	<i>Points</i>	Meal Six	<i>Points</i>
Milk/Pudding/ Yogurt	2	Meat/Poultry/Eggs/Legumes/ Cheese	3-7	Cereal	2
Fruit	1-2	Bread/Grains/Pasta	3-5	Low Fat Milk	2
		Fruit	1-2		

Total *Points* used for the day: 22-37.

The emphasis on flexibility in the Weight Watchers program has recently been furthered with the introduction of 'flex-Points', as an alternative to the 'banking' *Points*

system. *Flex-Points* are reserve *Points*, which can be used throughout the week should an unplanned event present itself. Thus, if a member has planned out her week according to the *Points* system, but a situation arises which does not adhere with the program, she can use her 'flex-Points' so that she remains within the given range of *Points* she is allowed to consume. For instance, a member might go to work one day to be informed that she must attend a lunch hour business meeting, where there are no foods available to her that conform to the limited amount of *Points* she has set aside for her lunch that day. In this case she can use her flex-Points to cover her high-Point value lunch, and thus can avoid having to alter her planned intake for the rest of that day or that week. Flex-Points can be seen as even more flexible than the banking system because members do not have save *Points* from one day to use another, making it easier to handle unexpected situations, as well as lessening the amount of time a member must spend calculating the amount of *Points* one must save to allow for upcoming occasions.

Lifestyle Modification

The flexible nature of Weight Watchers allows the program to advertise itself as being adaptable to fit the lifestyle of any individual. The emphasis that is placed on sensitivity to adaptability presents Weight Watchers as being significantly different from more traditional diets that demand rigid compliance with strict guidelines. This notion of lifestyle is central as it dictates the attempt of Weight Watchers not only to regulate what the individual members consume, but how they live their lives on a daily basis.

The Weight Watchers program does not claim to be just a 'diet'. Rather, the program emphasizes changing one's eating patterns for the long term, and indeed there

are lifetime maintenance members, who remain in the program well after they have lost the initial amount of weight they set out to lose when they joined. Thus, while an individual may take on another diet, such as a low-carbohydrate diet in order to lose a set amount of weight and then go back to a non-regulated consumption regime, in Weight Watchers this is not the case. The program defines itself as a lifestyle modification program, in which members can learn to eat and live in a healthier manner, not just to lose twenty pounds, but to be a healthier eater for the rest of their lives. As a result, the program is geared not strictly towards regulating consumption, but rather it extends into other aspects of its members' lives

Activity Points

Weight Watchers' mandate to change the lifestyle of its members, advocates an additional focus on fitness in bettering the personal health and well-being of its members. Weight Watchers states that "experts" declare that the best way to lose weight is to combine eating less and exercising more (Weight Watchers 2000a:20). The program also espouses other benefits of exercise, such as enhancing one's mood and health. Thus, members are encouraged to take up practices of exercise, and those who do so, in congruence with forms and lengths of exercises specified by the program, are rewarded with additional *Points* they can add to their daily intake range. After exercising, Weight Watchers members can calculate how many *activity Points* they have gained, depending on their weight, the type of exercise completed, and how long the exercise was undertaken. Hence, the more an individual exercises, the more *activity Points* she acquires and her ability to consume increases.

Members can gain activity *Points* by doing all forms of exercise, from light activities that do not make one sweat, such as walking leisurely, to high-level activities, such as running and biking. So, a 200lb individual who runs for 30 minutes will gain 5 activity *Points*, whereas if that same individual goes for a leisurely walk for an hour they would gain 2.5 – 3 *Points*. Members use the given "*Points* booster" calculator to determine the *Points* value of their given activity.

Activity *Points* gained through exercise can be traded for food *Points*, so that one earned activity *point* becomes one extra food *point* to be added to the daily range. However, Weight Watchers warns against using activity *Points* as a way to 'overeat', and suggests that members not use more than four activity *Points* in exchange for increased consumption. Activity *Points* can be banked, in order to save for another day, in the same manner that unused *Points* in the higher portion of the daily *Points* range can be. Activity *Points* indicate how incorporating fitness works to effect the lifestyle of its individual members, working on their actions as well as their consumption. An alternative solution to using 'flex-*Points*' for a special meal or occasion could be to partake in more exercise than usual that day to gain additional *Points*.

Activity *Points* can also be understood as part of the healthy lifestyle mandate in that members who exercise stress paying attention to positive changes in their physical body, rather than simply using one's weight to determine the successfulness of the program. Excerpts from the Weight Watchers website read:

Post:**03/11/2003 1:47:52 PM**

Only lost .5 lbs last week and now 0 this week.....PLEH ! I hate that - what a bummer.....Oh well - I am off to do my pilates and drink some water - I am wondering if it is due to my AF - she came yesterday ????

Responses:**03/11/2003 3:15:07 PM**

Girls, I only have one advice : take your measurements ! everytime the scale has slowed down for me, I was training and getting inches off my body by building muscle ! muscle takes less space than fat, for the same weight. let me give you a good example. I lost weight 5 yrs ago on another program, but didn't exercise. I wore a size 12 at 129 lbs. I now wear a size 7-9 at 142 lbs. I am so much smaller, and toned, even if I weigh more. so measure yourself, arms, bust, waist, hips, thighs and calves, and check about once a month. I must have lost about 6 inches off my waist since the beginning... so keep it up, the scale will eventually go down again. good luck !

03/11/2003 7:33:25 PM

I also measure myself. I have been doing this for 1 month and the astonishing thing is that I lost 11.5" off of my body. Measuring your body lets you know what is happening even if the scale is not dropping.

"Weight Watchers Tools for Living"

The lifestyle orientation of the Weight Watchers program extends beyond consumption and exercise and includes a mental or emotional aspect, offering "a powerful set of strategies that can help you manage your thoughts and feelings so that you get what you want" (Weight Watchers 2000b:3). Here, Weight Watchers offers eight "tools" that members can use to deal with challenges they encounter while in the program. In order to determine what "tools" might be useful, members can complete a few quizzes, which are meant to highlight for them the areas where they could use some help.

The first "tool" is called "winning outcomes." This tool is said to help a member identify what exactly they want to accomplish by outlining goals that are positively stated, specific, within the control of the member, and a good fit with that member's lifestyle (Weight Watchers 2000b:7). This tool is said to be helpful for individuals who

need to "better understand what you want from your weight loss," as knowing what you want is said to be not only pertinent for weight loss, but for any endeavor one might undertake (Weight Watchers 2000b:4). Thus, members are encouraged to set goals such as 'I want to lose 25 pounds by Christmas', rather than something more vague such as 'I want to lose weight'. This tool is based on the idea that clarity is necessary for success, and that the reason individuals may not have reached their goals in past attempts at weight-loss may be because they lacked a specific foundation for their efforts (Weight Watchers 2000b:4).

The second 'tool' is "Empowering Beliefs". This tool is to be taken on by those members who have identified their goals and are in the process of forming new eating and activity habits, but yet they still require more motivation (Weight Watchers 2000b:5). The idea behind this tool is that members need to strengthen their beliefs if they are to reach their goals, so that they need to work on believing that "your weight goals are desirable and worth it, you are capable of achieving your goals, you deserve to achieve them" (Weight Watchers 2000b:8).

"Storyboarding" is the next 'tool' the program offers. This is meant to help members who are feeling overwhelmed in the program, through creating drawings outlining the steps that the member must take in order for them to achieve their 'winning outcomes' (Weight Watchers 2000b:9). Storyboarding is thus meant to be a step-by-step guide of responsibilities, such as keeping track of *Points*, going to weekly weigh-ins, and earning activity *Points*, that each member must carry out. Weight Watchers also advocates "Mental Rehearsing" so that members realize their goals and turn them "into positive, lifelong habits" (Weight Watchers 2000b:5). This tool appears to consist of

practicing being assertive and refusing to take part in activities that may jeopardize one's diet.

"Anchoring" is to be used by members to "put you in touch with your inner resources so that you can face the challenges you encounter" (Weight Watchers 2000b:6). Here, members are urged to remember situations in their lives when they were able to achieve desired results because they were determined, and to find a method to draw upon that feeling when they are feeling tempted (Weight Watchers 2000b:11). Similarly, "reframing" is encouraged to help members conceptualize their actions in a different way so that negative behaviours, which prevent a member from reaching their goal, are replaced with positive behaviours that help to achieve goals (Weight Watchers 2000b:12). Thus, if an individual has problems with snacking at night, they are encouraged to take on other evening activities in lieu of snacking, such as going for a walk, having a bath, or playing a board game (Weight Watchers 2000b:12).

For members who are losing motivation or becoming discouraged because of a set-back they have encountered, "motivating strategies" can be used to help them get back on track with their long term goals. Here members are encouraged to envision themselves having already reached their goal weight, and "experience the good feelings that come from reaching your goal" (Weight Watchers 2000b:13). The last tool, "positive self-talking" is similar, as it advocates turning negative thoughts into positive self-talking, so as to be less likely to become discouraged, and more likely to reach your goal. Here members are encouraged to make lists of successes they have had in life, to congratulate themselves at the end of the day for their accomplishments, all in attempt to increase members' "can-do power" (Weight Watchers 2000b:14).

These tools emphasized by Weight Watchers are all aimed at developing members' mental or emotional capacities so that they are aligned with the goals of the program. Thus, the program includes guidelines not only for altering consumption and encouraging exercise, but there is also emphasis placed on modifying the way in which one conceptualizes the program and their goals. These "tools for living" can therefore be understood as one of the ways in which the program is not just a diet, but a lifestyle modification program.

Quizzes – Personal Assessments

As well as determining the 'right' eating pattern for the individual, as previously discussed with respect to the sample eating patterns, the Weight Watchers website hosts a series of quizzes that engage with various aspects of individual lives, providing tips for a range of lifestyle facets. For instance, there are quizzes that pertain to personality, fitness style, shopping style, and 'are you really ready for the new you?', all of which claim to 'assess' the individual in the span of a few questions and to then offer advice on what one can do to improve oneself. For instance, the quiz "Do you love your body?", goes through eight questions, assesses how one feels about one's body image and offers advice on what steps one can take to improve one's conception of their image since "you're responsible for your own self-image". There is an element of irony involved with some of this quiz, as it is questionable whether somebody who loves their body would be a member of Weight Watchers.

Success Stories

The success stories offered by Weight Watchers can be understood as another technology used to indicate the perceived effect of the program in modifying one's entire lifestyle to be healthier. For instance, one story on the website details how a woman who joined the program detected colorectal cancer due to the high-fiber diet Weight Watchers encourages. She claims that if she had not joined the program she would not have had the symptoms or seen the signs. Another details a woman's unsuccessful struggle to lose weight throughout her entire life, trying every new diet that came along as well as diet pills, and who was finally able to maintain her weight loss with Weight Watchers. These success stories document improvements in the lives of members in terms of their employment, their family and their personal relationships, advocating an all encompassing better quality of life as a result of their enrollment in the program.

Like anyone else, Cindy has had weight-loss struggles. By sharing them in Meetings, this passionate Leader gets even the most resistant members to open up — and lose weight.

I've had other jobs in my lifetime, but with Weight Watchers, I've found my true calling — I live and breathe it. My mission is to help as many people as possible learn to use food as energy, and not for emotional purposes. Why? Because that's how the Program helped me. Weight Watchers saved my life.

My most effective tactic is to get people to open up by being honest about my own struggles — no one wants a Leader who is perfect. Some members are defensive at first because they don't see the 88-pound heavier person inside me. So I share my stories, like my "ah-ha" moment, when I saw a photo of myself holding my son and wondered who that obese person was. That's when I joined.

Support Goes Both Ways

Losing weight was as hard for me as it is for anyone else, but the support of the group made it possible (and it still does — I rely on my Members for motivation as much as they rely on me). Exercise, for instance, was painful for me — I was a prisoner of my body. When my husband and I first walked a half-mile together, my body was in shock. Now I walk 5.5 miles every morning with a group of seven, whom I found by standing up in a Meeting and saying I didn't like to walk alone.

Battling Emotional Eating

My biggest weight-loss battle was emotional eating, and now it's something I discuss

at great length in my Meetings. I never realised the extent of this problem until I talked about it with the group. There's more to being overweight than just "I eat too much" — there are behavioural and self-esteem issues at play. I tell Members to think "why" when they reach for food, then to write down their thoughts and to feel free to call me anytime about them. I used to sabotage myself by throwing in the towel when I'd eaten just a little too much. Now I focus on forgiveness: Beating yourself up is not going to solve a problem; learning why you did something and planning for the next time will. After September 11, I realised how lucky I was: Life is too short not to be doing something you love. And this is a legacy I'm passing on to my kids. When they choose broccoli over ice cream, I'm proud: They may never have to deal with the pain I went through. My goal is to be able to say the same about my Members.

(www.weightwatchers.ca/success/art/index.aspx?sc=19)

The Weight Watchers Website

The Weight Watchers program has recently become even more flexible with the introduction of www.weightwatchers.ca. The introduction of an online WW program has made the program somewhat more flexible as it has eliminated the need to physically attend meetings. Rather, with the online WW program, one can use the program at whatever time is convenient, and from any location. The online program allows for all the information and tools that are presented at the Weight Watchers meetings, including all the information regarding *Points*, tools for calculating *Point* values, activity *Points*, etc. The website offers success stories and recipes for members to share, and to learn from.

Perhaps the most useful and interesting tool the website offers is message boards for online members to chat with other online members. Here, there is a wide variety of message boards available, ranging from a general daily board to discuss anything, to boards specifically geared for members of particular ages or certain weight-loss goals, to lifetime members and special populations. Thus, there is a wide variety of topics discussed by a supposed variety of individual members on the website, making it very accessible for members to gain information and insight into the program from other

members. If one member is interested in any particular facet of the program, they can post a message which will generally receive numerous responses in a short period of time.

The online version of Weight Watchers has had much positive feedback and support from the members who utilize it, although there are some members who feel the meetings are a necessary component of the program for them. For example, the following postings and responses were taken from the online message boards:

03/11/2003 3:57:09 PM

I have decided to join WW again but would like to try the online version as I'm not sure how to fit the meetings in to my schedule. I would appreciate any feedback on the online program and any pros or cons too! Thank you in advance for your advice.

Responses:

03/11/2003 4:05:48 PM

I go to meetings only (I'm don't use the on-line tools). I wouldn't miss my meetings for anything. I like the accountability I get from stepping on the scale each week. I like the motivation I get from my leader and my meeting buddies, and we all have a lot of fun. I'm on maintenance and the only change I've made from when I was trying to lose weight is eating a little more.
I hope this helps. :o)

03/11/2003 4:19:40 PM

I, on the other hand, am an online only member. I do not miss meetings at all. WW online is here for me whenever I need it. I weigh myself once a week and record it online. I am accountable to me and so far that's been good enough. It's cheaper than attending meetings (if that's a factor). I am much better at journalling now that I can do it online. I actually went to a meeting last week as a guest and I almost decided to join. Then I realized '\$15 a week' and changed my mind. We had some good chats but nothing that I can't get online.

In the end, only you know what works for you. Some people really need that accountability of going to the meeting. Some don't. It really comes down to that.
Good luck!

03/11/2003 4:35:29

I have done meetings and heard the same stuff over and over and over again. I prefer the on-line, you get the weekly topic which is the same things they talk about, you get meal plan ideas every week, which is good if you like that, you get the on-line tracker which is great, but best for me is it is here for me all the time, but when I do meetings, I kind of get "lost" from focus during the week. Good luck - try on-line first you have nothing to lose but weight

03/11/2003 4:42:28 PM

I wouldn't miss my meetings. I, too, need to be accountable and have tried so many times at home and never succeeded. However, since returning to WW a few weeks ago and "discovering" this website and these boards has been a blessing. I love getting on here

and talking to people and it has been such an inspiration. I really think it is making a huge impact on my weight loss and I log on as much as I can. Good Luck.

03/11/2003 5:24:26 PM

It really depends on the type of person you are. I am an online only subscriber, have been for 7 months now and LOVE the site and the boards especially!! As others on here have said, online offers a great amount of support and it's here for you 24 hours a day. I love the journal, the other etools, the weight trackers and the menus... and it's a lot cheaper too! But if in doubt, go to a meeting or 2 as a guest, try out here for a month or so, then decide what you prefer.

Good luck!

03/11/2003 6:52:06 PM

go online, cheaper better, friendlier, 24 hour service. lot more info when you need it. i am glad i changed to online only

03/11/2003 9:32:36 PM

I also do only online and it has been fine for me. I like being able to do things when I want. As for accountability..if I cheat I am only cheating myself is the way I look at it. I journal faithfully every day, read the boards, jump in whenever and weigh in every week. I started the end of June and am down 37 lbs so guess for me it works.

These messages illustrate members' feelings towards joining the traditional Weight Watchers program and attending meetings versus the new online program. The postings indicate that choosing to attend meetings or not is an individual choice that each members must make in accord with her lifestyle and what she requires to achieve her goals. Thus, some members prefer to attend meetings and weigh-in with their leader, as they feel they need an element of accountability to an outside party. Whereas others prefer the online program due to its convenience and reduced price. Significant in these postings is that the members themselves advocate that each individual must find their own place in the program, determining what works best for them, highlighting the attempt Weight Watchers makes to fit the program to each members' lifestyle.

As well as using the message boards to share information, members use the boards for companionship and support from other members. Here, some members might post a message if they need some encouragement and support.

Post:**03/11/2003 7:55:19 PM**

I am so unhappy with myself. I have totally eaten my way into oblivion this week. I don't know what on earth gets into me....I totally lose it!! I love the feeling of being in control, and then I go and blow it like this, and feel absolutely sick!! I am an 'all or nothing' person, in almost everything I do. I either follow everything to the letter, or else I blow it completely. It shows in other areas of my life too. I want so much to change this. Does anyone else have this problem?? Any solutions.....

Responses:

Good grief! Don't be so hard on yourself! My way of thinking is "When I become perfect, I'll send a memo. Until then, expect me to have all the normal human frailties".

Look at your stats! You're awesome! So you've had a tough week. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and keep on goin'! We're all going to get there!

(My version of Tough Love!) :)

03/11/2003 8:08:31 PM

You have done so well, and now you're beating yourself up! I challenge you to find even one person on this journey that can tell me they haven't given up or "thrown in the towel" at some point. You should be so proud of yourself, sure you had a set-back but you are aware of it and you know exactly what to do about it. So get back in the game with the rest of us...we're all in for the long haul! Best wishes.

These postings are significant in that they reveal how members offer support to other members. The message boards provide a forum for online members to engage with other members, so that even though they do not attend weekly meetings, they are still able to receive tips and inputs from other members, as well as receive encouragement and advice from others going through the same process. Thus, regardless of a members' choice to join the traditional Weight Watchers program and attend meetings, or to join online, all individuals have access to communication with other members.

Leadership in Weight Watchers

Leaders in Weight Watchers are individuals who have gone through the program themselves. In order to become a leader one must be a lifetime member within ten pounds of one's Weight Watchers goal weight, and must remain within this range for the duration of their leadership. The main responsibilities of leaders are to conduct meetings, to weigh members on a weekly basis, to explain to members how best to follow the Weight

Watchers plan, and to motivate members in achieving their weight loss goals (www.weightwatchers.com/about/ldr/index.aspx). As will be discussed later in this project, it is significant that all Weight Watchers leaders have partaken in the program themselves, and must remain within ten pounds of their goal weight.

According to Weight Watchers, "the leader is our primary role model for meeting member success" (www.weightwatchers.com/about/ldr/index.aspx). This appears to be confirmed by members, as it seems that members often choose which meeting they attend based on the leader, as opposed to on the basis of time or scheduling. In addition, leaders appear to be influential in members' choices to attend meetings, versus joining the online Weight Watchers program.

6/12/2003 9:22:28 PM

a very good point....the leader makes or breaks it. I have been to WW several times before (always to meetings) and the other times the leader just didn't motivate me enough....it was kind of like being in school again and going to a lecture!!!!!! This time I also joined the meetings but this time the leader is INCREDIBLE.....as are all the other people at the meeting. I actually had to miss my meeting today and it totally threw me off!!!!!!!!!!!!!! But I do know that I can come here for support if I need it!!!!

12/01/2004 11:19:36 PM

There are GREAT leaders, good leaders, not-too-bad leaders, and a few downright awful leaders! I know, I've met all types over the years. I'm a lifetime member, since 1987, and when I returned to WW last summer I decided to check out all the leaders at our local WW. I went to my first meeting on a Wednesday evening and the leader was OK. The next week I went on a Thursday and the leader was awful. She herself was VERY overweight and continuously talked about what a struggle it is for her. Not motivating to me at all! (There weren't many people at her meeting either.)

The next week I went on a Saturday morning and the leader was absolutely THE BEST!!! She's LOUD and FUN and super motivating. She acknowledges everyone in the room and her meetings are jam-packed! Of course I made Saturday mornings my regular meeting time. I still go every week, even though I made Lifetime (again!) in September and only HAVE to WI once a month

13/01/2004 3:54:17 PM

I reached my goal pre-WW.ca. I like going to the meetings and I still go as often as I can. I also need the accountability of the scale too. I like my leader, she is very nice, and our meeting is a blast. There are some leaders I don't care for and don't attend their meeting.

But I do love the message boards for added support and encouragement when I need it.

27/12/2003 11:06:11 PM

WW on-line has a one week free trial period now, so you can test it out b4 you commit. Give it a try and see how you like the on-line program.

I think which ever you decide depends on you and your lifestyle. Also, the amount that you yourself get out of a meeting is also a consideration. Some leaders are fantastic, others are just OK. I believe you can just go to a meeting (w/o weighing) to see what it is like. Either way it is up to you to make it work for yourself.

And you can always use the boards for extra motivation.

06/12/2003 7:29:35 PM

It is what works best for yourself.

I need a meeting. Going once a week keeps me "regular". I live a busy hectic life and making time to go to a meeting really makes me think throughout the week.

Trying to loose weight without face to face contact for me would be difficult. maybe once I am down to goal weight again I may venture to online living. I do that for most everything else in my life.

06/12/2003 7:38:06 PM

When I originally joined WW many moons ago I did it thru meetings. I found the leader a real motivator and she made me feel accountable for not exercising or going OP. I got my LTM.

Then after children....I tried twice to rejoin. First I was leanient with myself as I knew I only had to wi once a month (asLTM). Second time, I pre-paid for weekly passes, hoping that it would encourage me to go. It did for a while, but I think the biggest deterrent (other than myself) was the Leader. She just didn't do it for me.

This time I am on-line only. Have been here just over 2months and have lost almost 22lbs. The biggest contributor are the boards! 24/7 with all the support you could ask for. The easiness of journalling and the receipe builder. I find the on-line fantastic

These postings from the Weight Watchers website illustrate the importance of leaders for Weight Watchers members, and how leaders can be influential in members' decisions and success with the program.

Conclusion

The flexibility of Weight Watchers is a significant component of the program.

Weight Watchers advocates the individual being in control of her diet, and therefore being in control of herself, rather than the program itself dictating or controlling the individual. The Weight Watchers approach to weight loss is presented as flexible not only with respect to choice surrounding consumption, but also as flexible in terms of being adaptable to the needs of any individuals. Thus, the program may be appealing to

individuals who were not able to achieve their goals with other weight-loss attempts, as the Weight Watchers program takes an alternative approach to restrictive diets.

The principle of healthy lifestyle found in Weight Watchers, as a lifestyle modification program rather than a 'diet', is as well crucial in the appeal of the program. As Weight Watchers moves away from a traditional conception of diet, which is much more rigid and structured, to a more encompassing alteration of the subject, it is claimed that members will be more apt to keep off the weight they lose after reaching their goal and seeking to maintain their weight. The *Points* system itself is a claim to the ability for any lifestyle to accommodate the Weight Watchers program, as the significance of every food having a calculable *Point* value is that any food at all can be consumed. Thus, while traditional diets specify a limited type of food that can be consumed, with Weight Watchers individuals are free to indulge in whatever foods they desire, in moderation. Weight Watchers is therefore presented as an alternative to strict, rigid rules of eating and celebrates this ability for open consumption.

The Weight Watchers program can thus be understood as a turn away from traditional diets, to a more expansive lifestyle modification approach to healthier eating and living.

Chapter Two: Self-Help Programs

Twelve Step Self-Help Groups

Introduction

The establishment and longevity of self-help programs continue to be significant in the non-professional recovery movement. As the older, more established twelve-step, self-help groups continue to grow, the range of problems and issues being addressed by self-help groups continues to expand, so that in contemporary society, there is generally several self-help groups available to deal with any problem an individual may have (Gartner & Riessman 1984:17-19). Katz (1993:1) claims that in the U.S. there are at least 500,000 to 750,000 self-help groups with at least 10-15 million members. The success of these self-help groups appears to be their ability to provide group support, reinforcement, and norms, and to provide feedback and occupy the individual's time, so that it is not spent in activities related to the problem they are attempting to overcome (Gartner & Riessman 1984:20).

In this chapter, I will review the existing literature concerning twelve-step programs, including the principles of twelve-step programs, how the meetings are run, the disease model of addiction the group is premised upon, and issues of spirituality that are inherent in the program. I will also include some specific information pertaining to Overeaters Anonymous, which is a program to address overeating, based on the AA tradition, and explore some key differences found between twelve-step self-help groups and other self-help groups. I will then analyze self-help programs from a governmentality perspective, arguing that we can understand self-help programs as techniques of power

that work to constrain the actions of individual members. Theories of self-esteem and expert knowledge will then be related to these 12-step self-help groups.

Twelve-Step Programs

Alcoholics Anonymous is the prototype for twelve-step programs being the largest and oldest (Katz 1993:10). In 1994, Alcoholics Anonymous consisted of over 90,000 groups (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:16). The first Alcoholics Anonymous group occurred in Akron, Ohio in June of 1935 when two alcoholics, a New York stockbroker and an Akron physician, discussed the stockbroker's sudden spiritual experience, which had relieved him of his alcoholism six months earlier (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976: xv). Together, they developed a program of twelve steps, which they considered to be a developmental process, that each addicted individual must go through in order to stop drinking. These twelve-steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Katz 1993:11-12).

These twelve-steps are said to provide, to addicted individuals, a set of practical guidelines for healthy change (Dupont & McGovern 1994:13). Thus, the twelve-steps are not understood as having to be perfectly adhered to, but rather are to serve as guidelines to progress (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:60). It is the responsibility of each individual member to follow these steps, as there exists no formal disciplinary mechanism for dealing with a member who breaks one (Dupont & McGovern 1994:26).

Since the birth of Alcoholics Anonymous, twelve-step programs have expanded to address a wide range of issues, including narcotics and eating problems. The diverse range of these 'recovery fellowships' offer free membership to everyone, and the groups do not accept any public or private funding. The only money collected is on a voluntary donation basis from members, which is used to cover the expenses incurred in having meetings (Dupont & McGovern 1994:25). Part of the idea behind the programs being free is to preserve the anonymity of members. In twelve-step programs there are no formal application process and no formal membership records are kept (Dupont & McGovern 1994:25).

The emphasis on anonymity within the program is highlighted in dealings with the public. The twelve-step program is not run by professionals, does not seek the support or approval of any individual, group, or bureaucracy, and is not affiliated with any particular religious group (Dupont & McGovern 1994:xix). The AA philosophy holds that the promise of anonymity the program has enables a trusting relationship even with

total strangers, and makes possible feelings of mutual support and inclusion through common experiences (Dupont & McGovern 1994:13).

This group dynamic is an important dimension of the program, as twelve-step programs are dependent upon an honest and human connection and cooperation among members (Dupont & McGovern 1994:12). Here, the program intends to help members attain positive social integration and relief from self-destructive behaviour through this interaction with other members who can empathize and identify with the participant (Dupont & McGovern 1994:13). The programs seek the use of positive reinforcement and supportive attention by fellow members to encourage the socialization of group members to pro-social cultural norms (Dupont & McGovern 1994:13).

Individuals joining a twelve-step group are required to take a sponsor, from whom they are said to benefit from in terms of support and guidance (Dupont & McGovern 1994:42). A sponsor is a stable twelve-step member who develops a personal relationship with the new member in order to help them learn about the process of recovery and how to access the twelve-steps. The sponsorship role is unwritten and informal, and should be filled by a member who has been sober for one year and is a member of the same sex (Dupont & McGovern 1994:43).

Disease Model of Alcoholism

Alcoholics Anonymous, and all its offspring twelve-step programs are founded upon the disease model of addiction. Here it is held that the addiction ailing the member is something that exists above and beyond the control of the individual, and thus the individual is powerless to the addiction. The first step of AA "We admitted we were

powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable" emphasizes the disease model. Dupont & McGovern (1994:1) explain this idea by stating "Addiction is slavery – slavery to behaviours and to the feelings these behaviours produce". Here, it is meant that there is nothing inherent in the individual addict that will allow him/her to overcome his/her addiction, but rather he/she must admit themselves to a higher power in order to recover.

The Alcoholics Anonymous "big book" holds that its purpose is "to show precisely how we recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:xiii). The book includes a letter from Dr. William D. Silkworth, who was seen as a great help to the original founders of AA in overcoming his problem with alcohol. In this letter, the Doctor states that in alcoholics, their disease can be conceptualized as being like an allergy, in that these people cannot start drinking without developing a craving, indicating that there is a strong physical component to the disease (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:xviii). So, when an alcoholic consumes alcohol, something happens to him/her both mentally and physically which makes it "virtually impossible for him to stop" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:22).

Alcoholics are seen to have lost the ability to control their drinking and can never recover control. They are afflicted with a progressive illness which appears to have no treatment that will allow them to consume alcohol as other "non-alcoholics" are able to (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:30). Thus, the only way for "alcoholics" to get relief from their disease, is to completely abstain from consuming any alcohol whatsoever. The popular AA catchphrase, "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic," indicates the conceptualization of alcoholism as an incurable disease.

The solution advocated by AA to cope with alcoholism is spiritual in nature. The "big book" of AA claims:

"We have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:25).

Recovery from addiction is thus conceptualized as changing one's lifestyle to maintain abstinence, not as an actual 'cure' for the addiction. Thus, twelve-step programs are not 'treatment' programs, but rather are "fellowships that offer a program of recovery that an individual may use in lieu of or to complement and enhance professional treatment" (Dupont & McGovern 1994:xix). Relapse in overcoming one's addiction is understood as an unfortunate occurrence in the recovery process that members incur, not as a failure (Dupont & McGovern 1994:39). Thus, a member who has relapsed is still welcomed and encouraged at the meetings.

Meetings

AA meetings are held everyday of the year and usually last about one hour (Dupont & McGovern 1994:26). Members are free to attend whichever meetings they choose, and may attend as many meetings per week as they feel they need. Some new members may attend meetings on a daily basis, while long-term members with good sobriety continue to attend two or more meetings each week (Dupont & McGovern 1994:39). In times of stress, or if a member feels that their abstinence is for some reason threatened, members will often attend more meetings than they usually would.

Leadership functions at meetings are usually filled by elected or appointed volunteers, as twelve-step programs do not personalize, or define leadership in a traditional manner. Rather, AA rotates its leaders so as to preserve anonymity, as well as providing opportunities for members to enhance their own recovery by helping others in their leadership role (Dupont & McGovern 1994:27). Thus, leaders are usually changed each meeting, and as a result groups have the least possible amount of organization (Katz 1993:61). This helps to ensure that problems, such as personal conflicts, or the chance of self-serving individuals running the organization in a manner that might alienate members, will be reduced or not occur (Katz 1993:64).

AA meetings customarily begin with a reading of the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference" (Katz 1993:13). This may then be followed by reading part of a formal statement defining the group and its goals. New members to the group are then introduced, and some members may read some statements of AA principles and organizational policies governing individual member behaviour and local unit guidelines (Katz 1993:13).

Following the introduction to the meeting, a veteran or experienced member from another unit may deliver a speech, generally autobiographical in nature and with an inspirational message (Katz 1993:13). Following, other members are free to give 'pitches', during which they talk about a personal event, significant article they read, or the like. This segment of the meeting is intended to encourage participation, as members are free to share their personal experiences with the group (Katz 1993:13). Either before or after the pitches, recognition is given to members who have remained clean of their

addiction for a certain length of time, often taking place in the form of a 'birthday cake' or small token for anniversary members. The end of the meeting is signaled with announcements, coffee, and general socializing (Katz 1993:13).

The idea of group companionship and support is a significant element of twelve-step programs. The Alcoholics Anonymous "big book" illustrates the difficulty alcoholics may have addressing their problem with doctors, partners, and friends, and advocates instead for the help of other alcoholics:

"...the ex-problem drinker who has found his solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished."

Thus, AA advocates that the aid of another alcoholic is necessary for an alcoholic to gain control over his/her drinking.

Meetings may vary considerably between individual chapters, as a result of the lack of centralization and control in the group (Katz 1993:13). In some meetings the beginning procedural steps, prayers, readings and speakers, may be omitted so that the entire meeting can be devoted to pitches or 'dumping', which occurs when members speak of their difficulties and frustrations encountered following the program (Katz 1993:13). This flexibility allows members to sample different groups until they find the one most helpful to them.

Spirituality

Meetings may also differ in terms of the degree of spirituality advocated by the group. The spiritual aspect of twelve-step groups has been controversial since the onset of

the program, and is often confused for a practice of an organized religion (Dupont & McGovern 1994:57). In fact, the spiritual nature of twelve-step programs is not a religious spirituality, but a spiritual philosophy (Dupont & McGovern 1994:57). Twelve-step programs do not appeal to one single concept of a deity, but rather look to a higher power that is to be defined by each individual member himself/herself. Thus, for members with a traditional religious background that higher power can be a conventional one, while for others it can take on more personal characteristics (Dupont & McGovern 1994:59). Alcoholics Anonymous (1976:46) holds that "To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek". Dupont and McGovern (1994:58) claim that some members are content to believe that the higher power is actually the twelve-step group itself.

Meetings attempt to keep specific religious beliefs or references to a minimum, and it is emphasized that while spiritual experiences are essential to the recovery process, discussion of specific, personal religious views is inappropriate at meetings (Dupont & McGovern 1994:59). Thus, twelve-step programs do not actually conform to any one definition of an established religion, and do not utilize a codified belief system. Katz (1993:13) holds that at some meetings references to a higher power are only heard when reciting the twelve-steps, and that these chapters may accept agnostic or atheist members, so long as they strive to follow the other tenets of the program in their recovery.

Alternative recovery groups loosely based on the twelve-steps and open to any, or no, belief system have been formed to extend the model to individuals with alternate religious beliefs, such as the Secular Organization for Sobriety (SOS), and Methods of Moderation (MOM).

The AA "big book" claims that "something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics", so those who do not identify with organized religion should not dismiss the benefits of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976:44). The book claims that if these individuals were able to realize their lack of power, and in turn were able to find a higher power to live by and follow the other steps in the program, then they too are able to refrain from drinking.

Overeaters Anonymous

An offspring of the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve-step model, Overeaters Anonymous is premised upon the twelve-steps as they pertain to eating addictions. The most basic tenet of OA is that compulsive eating is undesirable, it makes one miserable and thus one should attempt to alleviate the compulsion to overeat (Lester 1999:143). The Overeaters Anonymous program is based on the model provided by Alcoholics Anonymous, and therefore accepts the disease model of overeating and asserts that the compulsion to eat is beyond the control of the individual (Goldner 1984:67).

As in AA, individual willpower to stop overeating is seen as meaningless, and the individual must seek to rearrange his/her life in such a way that the compulsion is not activated (Goldner 1984:67). The disease of overeating is seen as progressive and incurable, and to recover one must admit that one is powerless to control not only his/her compulsion today, but everyday, because it is a disease uncontrollable by human means (Lester 1999:144). Lester (1999:144) quotes this excerpt from the OA literature

"We believe that no amount of willpower or self-determination could have saved us. Times without number, our resolutions and plans were shattered as we saw our individual resources fail. So we honestly admitted to ourselves that we were powerless over food.

This was the first step toward recovery. It followed that, if we had no power of our own, we needed a power outside of ourselves to help us recover....the more total our surrender, the more fully realized our freedom from food obsession."

This passage demonstrates the notion of surrender found in OA, and how the addiction or disease is conceptualized as part of oneself. An overeater is what one is, and thus one must accept a new and different perspective of one's life and problems if they are to change how they experience and interpret life (Lester 1999:144). Here, as in AA, there is an emphasis on building a new self-identity in the process of recovery.

Lester (1999:145) claims that in OA, the compulsion to overeat is primarily an emotional and spiritual disease and the overeater is in a state of denial, lacking self-awareness. This self-awareness can only be achieved through self-honesty about one's life and one's faults, and admitting these shortcomings before God and the OA community, steps 4-5 of the twelve-step program. Once the self has been humbled in this respect, "true" self-awareness can be attained, repairing one's relationship with God, as it is the compulsive eater's "false" sense of personal power that impedes the development of the spiritual relationship between the individual and God (Lester 1999:145). Thus, Lester (1999:143) holds that in OA, one's accounts with food are used to represent one's relationship with God, both before entering OA and after recovery.

Thus, the real recovery in OA consists of spiritual and emotional recovery (Lester 1999:146). The physical recovery of losing weight is thus not the focus of the program, although it usually occurs as a result of healing. The fact that it is inner healing that is at the core of the twelve-step program is what serves to make it applicable to whatever problem is at hand. The subject here can be seen as disembodied, as he/she is told his/her

disease is one that is spiritual and emotional, not physical (Lester 1999:155). Lester (1999:155) argues that this does not adequately explain why one turns to food instead of another substance, and as well omits a gender analysis of the problem.

As in AA meetings, there is no specific leader, or individual in charge, but at each meeting somebody is selected, or volunteers, to guide the meeting by sharing their personal story with the group (Lester 1999:146). The purpose of this sharing is to force each member to take an honest look at his/her life "in disease", so that he/she can "dismantle the sick self and a healthy self can emerge". It is claimed that by telling your story, you are able to both reorder past experiences and adopt a new frame for interpreting your new experiences, as well as provide an interpretive model for newcomers to the group (Lester 1999:147).

Proponents of Overeaters Anonymous argue that the program is unique in that it allows the addicted individual to see others in various stages of recovery, and that this type of evidence is beneficial in dealing with the addiction (Goldner 1984:68). Similar to the AA tradition, in OA every individual is considered to be "just another addict", and status within the group comes only with seniority, as it is experience with the addiction, not necessarily success, that is seen as significant (Goldner 1984:71). OA holds that the majority of pain in an individual's life stems from a denial of his/her feelings, a lack of self-awareness, and a lack of honesty with oneself and others (Lester 1999:146).

Proponents of twelve-step programs argue that being part of an optimistic recovery fellowship offers an advantage over a solitary attempt at recovery as the quality of life that is achieved by supported abstinence strengthens the odds of long-term recovery (Dupont & McGovern 1994:39).

Non twelve-Step Self-Help Groups

Introduction

Non twelve-step self-help programs have been created for similar reasons as twelve-step programs, and share many common features in terms of their programs and activities (Katz 1993:18). Non twelve-step groups also emphasize regular group meetings and as well as providing information and material help, they provide an opportunity to learn to think differently about one's problem and one's role in the problem (Katz 1993:18). These programs also emphasize learning new attitudes and coping skills from others while sharing experiences with other members (Katz 1993:18). Similar to twelve-step programs, non twelve-step programs assert that improved self-esteem often results from being in a position to help others from personal experience, or helping the group by taking on some needed tasks or responsibilities (Katz 1993:18-19).

Differences Between twelve-Step and Non twelve-Step Programs

Katz (1993:19) holds that the most important difference between twelve-step and non twelve-step programs is that twelve-step groups have a strong ideology based on the idea that personal change can only be achieved through spiritual belief or conversion, whereas non twelve-step groups tend to be non-ideological. Thus, non twelve-step groups do not normally expect their members to pursue a path of personal growth and change, although it is generally hoped that change in the member will occur (Katz 1993:19).

The idea of powerlessness that is found in twelve-step programs is generally not replicated in non twelve-step programs. Twelve-step members are expected to admit a

personal powerlessness over their addiction, and a need for spiritual help from an outside source, however defined, is expected of every new member in order to form new attitudes and behaviour (Katz 1993:19). However, non twelve-step members do not have to accept a fundamental idea in order to participate, as any change that is hoped to incur is without spiritual connotation, and emphasized instead are learning and sharing coping skills through the group process, mutual support, practical information and advice (Katz 1993:19).

Katz (1993:20) states that non twelve-step programs are concerned that accepting the notion of being powerless over an addiction could inhibit individuals from exercising their maximum efforts in doing things for themselves, arguing instead that by not admitting powerlessness one can gain greater control over his/her own body and therefore over his/her life. Twelve-step programs, in response, claim that admitting powerlessness does not imply passivity (Katz 1993:20).

There is as well a difference between twelve-step programs and non twelve-step programs with respect to the temporal element. In twelve-step programs members are expected to remain in the organization for a long period of time, perhaps even be lifetime members, whereas members of non twelve-step programs often think of membership as temporary while they are dealing with a crisis or problem that will sometime be resolved, at which time the member will leave the group (Katz 1993:20). Thus, in non twelve-step groups, once the member has come to terms with the loss or change, the group may not be needed anymore and individuals are free to leave without stigmatization, whereas in the disease model of addiction, individuals are never viewed as 'cured' and often never leave the organization.

Twelve-step and non twelve-step self-help groups also differ in their approach to sociopolitical action and change. Twelve-step groups are prohibited from taking any position or action on political issues and other outside issues (Katz 1993:20). This prohibition can be seen partly as an attempt to preserve the anonymity of members, and partly to avoid any subjects or activities that different members might disagree on, thereby avoiding jeopardizing the unity and single goal of the organization. In contrast, many non twelve-step programs may openly support legislation and political candidates who would help their cause, and may engage in lobbying and demonstrations (Katz 1993:20-21). Katz (1993:104) holds that many self-help groups have influentially shaped public attitudes and policies regarding the values of mutual aid, social support and taking personal responsibility for change through participation in groups.

Governmentality

In neo-liberal society, self-help programs can be understood from a governmentality perspective. Foucault's conception of governmentality has inspired a new understanding of the intricate ways in which power relations are manifested throughout society. Governmentality studies advocate a decentralized conceptualization of power, investigating micro, localized power relations that penetrate into all areas of life and stem from a variety of sources. For Foucault, governmentality is "an ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit complex form of power" (Miller and Rose 1990:2). Thus, a governmentality approach allows an alternative to traditional, top-down conceptions of government that focus on how the State acts on

individuals and social interaction. Governmentality thus conceives of practices of governing as heterogeneous and pervasive, penetrating into all areas of life from numerous different types of agencies (Dean & Hindess 1998:2).

Studies in governmentality are useful as they allow us to investigate the ways in which individual subjectivities are created and regulated. Governmentality is interested in the 'conduct of conduct', understanding government as "acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively, so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves" (Burchell 1993:267). This approach focuses on the processes, or 'how' of governing, examining what gets done, by whom, by what means and with what consequences (Hunt 1997:174).

According to Rose (1996:42), governmentality is not to be understood as theoretical, philosophical or moral, but rather should be "analyzed in terms of the strategies, techniques, and procedures through which different authorities seek to enact programmes of government in relation to the materials and forces at hand and the resistances and oppositions anticipated or encountered". O'Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997:3) hold that a governmentality conceptualization of government is beneficial in that it considers links between political rationalities and technologies of the implementation of rule, thereby looking at elements of both the theory and practice of governing. From a governmentality perspective, a power relationship is a mode of action that works upon the actions of others, so as to guide possible conduct by structuring the legitimate field of action (Foucault 1983:221).

In a neo-liberal regime, governance is realized through the free conduct of rational-economic individuals, in which individuals are conceived of as freely conducting

themselves through individual choices. Here, individuals may be conceived of as active consumers in the sense that they seek to 'enterprise' themselves and maximize their lives through rationally calculated choices (Rose 1996:57). However, Burchell (1993:271) claims that in actuality individual freedom is "a technical condition of rational government rather than the organizing value of a utopian dream". Burchell is arguing that in order for neo-liberalism to work, individuals must exercise their 'freedoms' in particular ways, fostering specific technologies of the self that advocate adopting specific individual characteristics that are conducive to a market economy. Rose (1996:58) holds that through these rational choices, a plethora of technologies of government that are outside of the formal State apparatus are working to shape and govern the capacities and desires of individual subjects.

This conception of neo-liberalism entails a new understanding of freedom. Governmentality understands freedom under neo-liberalism as a technology of government as individuals are governed through the exercise of their own freedom in their own personal choices. Freedom is necessarily intertwined with government, and hence relations of power and freedom operate together. Dean (1999: 156-7) holds that this conception of freedom is based on the market and advocates virtuous, disciplined, and responsible autonomous citizens, so that through observing rules of conduct one learns how to exercise his/her freedoms. Thus, to act freely an individual must first be shaped, guided and subjected as an individual capable of responsibly exercising freedom as a subject of needs, desires, and choices (Dean 1999:165).

Governmentality is interested in examining instances of governing at a distance, through technologies that effectively transfer the objectives of political authorities onto

the free choices of individuals who come to internalize these objectives as goals of their own. It is therefore possible to link calculations at one location with actions at another, as actors are encouraged to take up particular actions to solve their problems. Here, the regulation of conduct is realized through individual's own self-government, through the actions and choices they partake in freely, in striving towards their own happiness and fulfillment.

Understanding Self-help Programs from a Governmentality Perspective

The emergence of the self-help genre as a whole can be understood here as an example of neo-liberal governing from a governmentality perspective. In neo-liberal society, where individuals are encouraged to actively govern themselves, self-esteem has surfaced as a concept underlying a multitude of various problems. The 12-step model acknowledges the role that self-esteem can play for an addicted individual. Alcoholics Anonymous (1976:64) argues that when completing step four of the program, each member making a searching and fearless moral inventory, in "most cases we found it was our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships were hurt or threatened". Thus, low self-esteem is understood by Alcoholics Anonymous as a contributing factor for addictions.

The concept 'self-esteem' was first used by psychologist William James, who defined it as "the ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities" (Ward 1996:8). Self-esteem is a dimension of "self-concept", or "one's perception of his or her own worth" (Battle 1990:22-23). Battle (1990:23) claims that self-esteem consists of an integration between two concepts, self-confidence, confidence in one's ability to think,

judge, and acquire knowledge, and self-respect, the morals one invokes in making judgments. In today's society, an individual who does not have self-esteem is seen as lacking in terms of their health, self-sufficiency and personal effectiveness, and are thus at risk of being underdeveloped, this in turn effecting the quality of their life (Battle 1990:24).

Ward (1996) indicates that the self-esteem movement should not be taken as natural or without consequence. He argues that the idea of self-esteem has a history of development, and that it is something that has been constructed, that did not always exist, and discusses the process by which an idea or statement, such as self-esteem, can be created by one, or a few, individuals and mobilize into something seen as fact or truth (Ward 1996:2-3). Ward (1996:1) states that "truth-making can be seen as an ongoing process involving the mobilization of human and non-human actants and the construction of an encompassing network of truth". Thus, language and discourse serve not only to represent an object or an idea, but they actually work to create it. While a discourse may begin with a small number of individuals, as it spreads and mobilizes both human and non-human allies and becomes accepted as true, and as part of the natural order (Ward 1996:6). We can therefore understand self-esteem as beginning in psychology, and eventually mobilizing enough allies to become a prominent idea in popular self-help literature and groups, rather than as something that exists in and of itself.

Self-help programs can be understood in terms of governmentality in that they are techniques that seek to control the actions of their members. One of the functions of self-help group meetings can be understood as working to constrain the actions of members. If members are at meetings, they are not able to pursue other activities in that time frame,

such as drinking or engaging in the particular activities related to their problem. Thus, self-help programs can be understood as techniques that work not only mentally and emotionally to deter individuals from engaging in addictive behaviours, but also as physically deterring them.

Self-help groups are an example of a technology of power that works to shape its members subjectivities. Placing self-esteem at its core, the self-help movement addresses multiple addictions and problems by way of claiming to better the individual. Simonds (1996:15) claims that the self-help literature presents all individuals as "damaged merchandise, as potential insatiable consumers of new and presumable better identities, but also as redeemable from within. Thus, individuals are conceptualized as being responsible for their own successes and failures, as they are the ones that can build their own self-esteem (Ward 1996:13).

Barbara Cruickshank (1996:232) refers to the way in which self-esteem is constructed as a cure-all for diverse problems within society so that a lack of self-esteem is advocated as the cause of individual and social problems. Experts on self-esteem argue that when individuals recognize their personal and social responsibility to be part of social solutions, they can realize higher self-esteem, thus being safe from many of society's ills. The discourse surrounding self-esteem serves to construct problems as a matter of personal responsibility to be treated by the individual rather than the State, therein fostering a process of self-governance in which individuals are encouraged to adopt specific attitudes and rely on themselves in dealing with problems. Cruickshank (1996) argues that the discourse surrounding self-esteem is a contemporary form of governance in that it is an example of how subjectivities are shaped and constituted by

power, so that the self is the product of strategies and technologies that are developed to create the neo-liberal citizen.

In a neo-liberal, self-help society, it is advocated that individuals take responsibility for themselves to ensure that each person manage their life in accord with the well-being of the entire population. Cruickshank (1996:329) argues that the goal of the search for self-esteem is "to estimate, calculate, measure, evaluate, discipline, and judge ourselves" in order to understand how we are responsible for the problems in our lives. It is through this process that individuals become governable.

In the case of AA, members are required to continually govern their actions. Step 10 requires members to continually keep a personal inventory, and in doing so to promptly admit when they are wrong. Thus, even once a member has managed to get his/her addiction under control, he/she is still required to continually monitor his/her behaviour. Alcoholics Anonymous (1976:84) claims that through this self-monitoring, individuals will "grow in understanding and effectiveness" as they ask for "freedom from self-will". Here, the twelve-step program can be understood as a technology of governance that works to incite members to continually monitor their own behaviour in accord with what is seen as appropriate by and for the larger society.

Expert Knowledge

Rose notes the importance of experts or expert knowledge in the formulation of individual choices, as the advice experts often offer works to shape individual goals and define the enhancement of individual life. Experts are individuals ascribed with authority for judgment on the basis of some specialized truth that they are believed to hold (Miller

& Rose 1990:2). Rose and Miller (1990:19) claim that experts serve to disseminate the idea that the fulfillment of an individual's personal capacities can be actualized in accord with socially desirable goals, hereby promoting specific rational knowledges and techniques that complement governmental objectives (Miller & Rose 1990:19).

Hunt (1999:218) argues that liberal governing has become increasingly technical in nature and vested in the hands of experts. Individuals are encouraged to engage with expert knowledges in order to become 'experts for themselves', promoting a reflexive project of the self which encourages individual self-regulation (Hunt 1999:218). Hunt provides an example of this reflexive self-regulation in the dissemination of self-help texts, which he argues subjects individuals through the process of their own autonomous search for self-fulfillment (Hunt 1999:218).

Here we can see the influence that self-help groups would have over their members. The 'experts' in the twelve-step program are those who have successfully managed their own addiction with the help of the twelve-step program. Thus, here the role of expert is not gained through education or status, but comes from experience. One becomes a leader in the twelve-step program because he/she is supposed to have learned valuable information in coping with his/her addiction, which can be shared with others to help them overcome the same problems. As a result of these individuals being able to successfully handle their addiction, they are seen as a valuable source of knowledge and expertise, who can aid others in the same manner. The twelve-steps themselves can be seen as an example of expert knowledge, as they have been compiled on the basis of the experience of two alcoholics who claim to have been able to successfully manage their alcoholism with help from a higher power. Here, members may look not only to their

'leaders' as experts, but might actually look to their higher power as a source of expert knowledge.

Step 12 of the twelve-steps states "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs". This emphasizes the important role of experience in acquiring expertise, as those who are successful with the program are to spread the program to other addicted individuals. Simply going through the program here enables one to espouse its benefits to others. Alcoholics Anonymous (1976:89) claims that "you can help when no one else can –you can secure their confidence when others fail", indicating the important role of the now-sober member.

Twelve-step programs promote the idea that individual members must surrender themselves to a higher power and follow the twelve-steps in order to handle their addiction. Here, the twelve-steps provide a set of guidelines by which individuals should conduct themselves in order to effectively manage their addiction, better themselves, and work to correct any problems that they have caused to the larger population. Thus, from a governmentality perspective, the self-help program is a technique that works to conduct the conduct of its members by constraining the legitimate field of action afforded to its members. Alcoholics Anonymous members are required to conduct themselves in accord with the outlined 12-steps, and their behaviour therein becomes regulated to conform with these guidelines. This regulation should not be understood as a coercive regulation, as members choose to join the program and adhere to its principles, but rather we can understand this regulation as a form of self-governance the individual chooses to engage with in an attempt to better the self.

Conclusion

From a governmentality perspective, twelve-step and self-help programs can be understood as technologies of governance as they work to conduct the conduct of others and of the self. Members are provided with a set of guidelines to orient their behaviour around, but are expected to monitor their own behaviour. With the exception of their sponsor, who is said to guide and encourage them, members are accountable only to themselves and their higher power. The anonymous nature of twelve-step programs means that individual members are responsible for ensuring that they attend their meetings and fulfill the program requirements, as no official records can be kept for this. The emphasis placed on self-esteem is significant in self-help programs as it highlights the personal nature of the problem or addiction, rather than looking to outside or societal factors and influences. Techniques, such as the expert and the self-help and recovery movements, encourage the individual to take up practices within themselves to manage their problem. Thus, the self-help movement works in alignment with neo-liberal practices of governing that encourage individual solutions to addictions and problems.

Chapter Three: The Shift To Healthy Living

Introduction

Contemporary society has recently been undergoing a shift in how dieting and weight-loss is conceptualized. We are seeing a shift away from 'traditional' rigid diets to more of a focus on 'healthy living'. This chapter will focus on the move away from strict, rigid weight-loss oriented diets that control and constrain what an individual is permitted to consume, towards weight-maintenance programs that allow the individual members themselves more choice and control in regulating their diets. These weight-maintenance plans work not only to alter one's diet in attempt to lose weight, but advocate changing one's lifestyle in accord with 'healthy-living' characteristics. Here, the shift to healthy living entails altering not only one's consumption, but focusing on achieving both better physical and psychological health.

In this chapter, I will first outline some characteristics of traditional diets, highlighting the restrictive and regulative nature of these diets. I will provide some examples of what is entailed in following a weight-loss diet centered around controlling consumption, and how dieters have conceptualized these diets. I will then explore the shift away from these diets to 'healthy living' weight maintenance plans and 'anti-diet' philosophy. Here, I will examine how these approaches differ from more traditional conceptions of diets. I will conclude the chapter by arguing that the Weight Watchers program can be understood as an example of a healthy living, weight maintenance approach to weight control.

Traditional Diets

Traditional conceptions of diets have tended to center around restrictive eating plans, which dictate to dieters strict rules governing what they can and cannot consume. Often dieters must follow a strict program outlining what they must eat for each meal, at particular times throughout the day. Typically, these diets allow for only particular types of food to be consumed. For example, some diets advocate eating only foods with little or no fat, while, conversely, others prescribe eating little or no foods that are high in carbohydrates and sugars, but allow fatty and high protein foods. At either extreme, traditional diets tend to be characterized as setting strict and rigid guidelines, and denying specific categories of food to the dieter.

For example, the Mayo diet (<http://members.fortunecity.com/cookiebomb>) is an eating plan that completely eliminates starches and sugars from one's diet. The Mayo diet claims that these substances are lipids, which form fat, and therefore should be eliminated so that one does not acquire more fat. However, it argues that consuming fat does not form fat, but in fact it helps to burn fat, so dieters are encouraged to eat foods that are high in fat. For instance, individuals are told that they can fry their food in butter, and use butter generously on their vegetables. The Mayo diet claims that by following this diet plan you should lose 52 lbs in two months.

The eating plan is given as follows:

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
½ grapefruit or 8oz grapefruit juice	½ grapefruit or 8oz grapefruit juice	½ grapefruit or 8oz grapefruit juice
2 eggs, any style	Salad, any dressing	Meat, any style any amount
2 slices of bacon	Meat, any style, any amount	Vegetables, any green or red, or Salad
		Coffee or Tea, 1 cup

Bedtime Snack – 8 oz. glass of tomato juice or skim milk

When following the Mayo diet, nothing can be eliminated from the given eating plan. Nothing is to be consumed between meals, and it is claimed that if one follows the combination of foods as listed they will not get hungry. The diet holds that it is eating this particular combination of foods that burns fat, and that the grapefruit is important as it acts as a catalyst that begins the fat-burning process. The given eating plan lists the minimum amount that is to be consumed, and dieters are told that they may eat until they are full or cannot eat any more, as the more you consume the more weight you are said to lose. Also included with the diet plan is a list of what vegetables may or may not be consumed, so that one does not consume any starches or sugars. This diet plan is supposed to be followed for 12 days, and then for two days the dieter is permitted to consume other foods of his/her choosing.

Another example of a strict, rigid diet plan is the Southbeach diet, introduced by Dr. Arthur Adatston (www.pendragonexpress.com). This diet focuses on one's fat and carbohydrate intake, and claims not to eliminate these altogether, but to teach one to rely on eating the right carbohydrates and the right fats. However, the diet is divided into three phases, and in the first phase carbohydrates are completely eliminated from the meal plan. It is claimed that in the first two weeks dieters can expect to lose between 8 and 13 pounds. This diet espouses health benefits in addition to weight loss, such as claiming to improve the health of one's heart.

The first phase of the diet "Banishing your Cravings" involves eating normal sized portions of meat, chicken, turkey, fish, vegetables, eggs, cheese and nuts. However, the dieter is restricted from eating any bread, rice, potatoes, pasta or baked goods. A sample meal plan for this phase is:

Breakfast	Morning Snack	Lunch	Afternoon Snack	Dinner
6 oz. tomato juice	skim mozzarella stick	Chicken Caesar Salad(no croutons)	½ cup low-fat cottage cheese	Mahi Mahi
Scrambled eggs		2 tbs. Dressing	½ cup chopped tomatoes and cucumbers	Vegetables
2 slices bacon				Arugula Salad
Decaf coffee/tea				2 tbs. Balsamic vinaigrette
				Lemon zest ricotta creme

The Southbeach diet claims that after the first two weeks, one will have lost weight, and that internally one's body will have corrected the way it reacts to the foods that made one overweight. At this point, individuals move on to the second phase of the program "Reintroducing Carbs", where dieters are occasionally able to incorporate some carbohydrates in their diet. A sample meal plan for phase two is:

Breakfast	Morning Snack	Lunch	Afternoon Snack	Dinner
1 cup strawberries	1 hard-boiled egg	Mediterranean Chicken Salad	1 wedge laughing cow light cheese	Spinach-stuffed salmon
½ cup oatmeal			1 Fresh pear	Vegetables
Decaf coffee/tea				Tossed Salad
				Chocolate-dipped strawberries

This second phase plan is not radically different from phase one in that there is minimal reintroduction of fats and carbohydrates. The dieter remains in phase two until they have reached their target or goal weight. At this point one moves into phase three of the program, "A Diet for Life". This is the maintenance phase of the program, in which it is claimed that one's blood chemistry will have been altered to the long-term benefit of one's cardiovascular system, improving one's odds of living longer. At this stage, it is claimed that individuals are able to consume "normal foods in normal-sized portions". A sample meal plan given for phase three is:

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
½ grapefruit	Roast beef wrap	Moroccan grilled chicken
Egg white omelet with salsa	Fresh apple	Asparagus
1 slice multi-grain bread		Cous cous
Decaf coffee/tea		Salad
		Strawberries with vanilla yogurt

In the given sample meal plan for the maintenance phase of the Southbeach diet, there is still a minimal amount of carbohydrates and fats found.

Both the Mayo diet and the Southbeach diet can be understood as restrictive in governing consumption. Although the Mayo diet encourages individuals to eat as much as they wish at mealtime, they are restricted in the foods that they choose from here, as well as with respect to the times when they are allowed to consume. Similarly, although the Southbeach diet claims to only eliminate carbohydrates and fats for the first phase of the diet, the reality of the sample meal plans is that consumption of these foods is rarely advocated, even in the maintenance phase of the diet.

In her study of 'old' and 'new' ways of dieting, Chapman (1999) found that women describing their experiences with traditional diet plans often expressed them using words like control, deprivation, sacrifice, restriction, cheating and guilt (Chapman 1999:76).

She quotes one woman as describing her experience with dieting as:

"Restricted food intake. Low calories. Like when you go out with people, you don't drink, you probably don't have deserts, [or] anything high [in] calories. So you got to really watch what you eat. [I feel] deprived a bit."

Here the words used to describe the diet highlight how deprived this woman felt being on a restrictive diet that dictated to her what she could and could not consume. This account

goes beyond a description of the diet itself to explain some of the effects the diet has on other aspects of the dieter's life beyond her consumption, as she outlines the effects the diet has on her social life, as well as emotionally.

Chapman (1999:76) found that the women she studied often talked about becoming obsessed with food, being always conscious of what they were consuming. Many also highlighted feelings of deprivation that resulted from their inability to follow their bodies' internal cues and signs of hunger, as a result of following the restrictive diet plan. Many found that this restriction, and the resulting feelings of deprivation, often ended in the dieter actually overeating, resulting in weight-gain rather than weight-loss as a final consequence of dieting. Feelings of guilt after 'cheating' on their diets were commonly found in the accounts given by those interviewed.

As well as discussing feelings of deprivation as a result of restricted consumption, the subjects discussed how adhering to traditional diets could take away one's ability to control themselves as they ate according to external rules, rather than listening to their bodies (Chapman 1999:76). Thus, the power relations that are manifested in traditional diets can be understood as taking power away from individual subjects in that they replace the ability of the individual to decide what they consume and the actual diet itself assumes this role. Thus, the diet works to control and regulate the consumption of the dieter. Some subjects discussed the effects of their diet in terms of the effect it had on their self-esteem, claiming that as a result of not meeting their goals they felt as though they were continually failing (Chapman 1999:76).

The author concludes that:

"old-fashioned fad dieting meant a regulated, restrictive eating plan that caused feelings of deprivation and took away their sense of

control over their eating habits. Caused them to monitor their eating behaviour to try to "be good", to feel guilty when they did not behave, and to ultimately feel like a failure when they were unable to achieve or maintain the body they wanted" (Chapman 1999:77).

This conception of dieting signals a negative conception of traditional diets, highlighting a negative self-conception of dieters who feel as though their diet has impaired their ability to control their own body, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy.

The "Healthy Lifestyle" Approach

Increasingly, these traditional diet plans have been attracting less consumers as people are turning from restrictive approaches to weight loss towards new ideas of weight control that do not necessarily include characteristics of conventional dieting (Sobal & Maurer 1999:5). Contemporary American culture has seen an increase in institutions addressing women's health, with the proliferation of a range of health institutions including specialized clinics, gyms, spas, weight reduction programs and cosmetic surgery (Spitzack 1990:1). Spitzack (1990:3) claims that these new approaches to weight loss differ significantly from traditional approaches as they appeal more to ideas of health rather than disease, and to individuality rather than conformity.

These newer programs take a broader approach to weight maintenance and control than traditional diets do. These approaches can be referred to as 'healthy lifestyle' approaches because they encourage each individual to alter her lifestyle so as to live in a healthier manner, as opposed to being solely concerned with losing weight. In addition to addressing consumption, these plans often emphasize exercise as an integral component

of the "healthy lifestyle" plan, herein advocating that altering one's consumption patterns alone is not sufficient to achieve and maintain 'good health'.

Healthy-living approaches may also include a psychological component. This would serve to allow individuals an opportunity to attempt to assess underlying reasons for their cravings or overeating, as well as learning to listen to the signals their bodies are giving them (Chapman 1999:78). This is in significant contrast to traditional diets, in which individuals are prone to ignore the signals that their bodies give them in favour of following the diet plan their program dictates. A significant element of these new approaches is that if weight loss occurs at all it is expected to be gradual and permanent, as opposed to losing large amounts of weight in a short period of time. The new plans are concerned with long-term weight maintenance, rather than quick results, which is more likely to occur when weight is lost at a slower, more stable rate than when it is lost more rapidly as a result of radical changes in one's diet (Chapman 1999:78).

Healthy living approaches to weight maintenance often claim that 'diet' programs do not work because of the "yo-yo effect" that dieting has on one's metabolism and internal organs (Torrens 1998:32). The yo-yo effect occurs when an individual's internal system attempts to compensate for rapid weight loss by lowering the metabolism. However, once the individual goes off the diet, and their consumption again changes, their metabolism remains at this lower level, causing them to actually gain weight as consumption returns to a higher level at a lower metabolism (Torrens 1998:32). The individual will then often turn to another diet to address the resultant weight gain, which in turn will again lower the metabolism. Thus, healthy living approaches emphasize long-term health as a goal, rather than a quick solution to weight loss, and stress the

importance of the combination of proper eating combined with exercise and a healthy and positive attitude.

The healthy-living approach can be understood as based on anti-diet philosophy. Anti-diet philosophy stems from the belief that traditional diet-based weight loss efforts fail because they are incompatible with human physiology (Spitzack 1999:12). Anti-diet thought advocates that because many women have tried numerous weight loss methods that have not been successful, women are apt to be in a relationship of discord with their bodies (Spitzack 1999:15). As a result of this conflict that results from dieting, proponents of anti-diets advocate that permanent weight loss is dependent upon conceiving of oneself as a non-dieter, and therefore not seeing oneself as fighting against their own body (Spitzack 1999:16). Proponents of anti-diets claim that eating must occur in congruence with life habits, and therefore discredit diet plans that force individuals to alter their normal lifestyle routines. Thus, they claim that diets fail because they are incompatible with the everyday life and eating habits of individuals, ignoring the diversity that exists among the eating patterns and lifestyles of the population. Successful weight-loss is therefore dependent upon implementing an approach that allows the individual to maintain some choice and control over their consumption.

In Chapman's study, the descriptions offered of experiences with "healthy lifestyle" plans were significantly different from the descriptions given about dieting. The participants tended to describe these approaches as more "common sense", and had a more positive outlook of their eating habits under these new approaches (Chapman 1999:78). Here, participants expressed feeling that the healthy living approach to weight control was not only easier to adhere to, and thus more encouraging, but was better for

their bodies in the long-term. Participants thus understood healthy living approaches as advocating weight control as necessary not simply to enhance appearance, but to achieve overall well-being, as a healthy body is associated with better physical and psychological health (Chapman 1999:81).

A key difference can be noted with respect to how the interviewees conceived of power and self-concept in the healthy lifestyle approach as opposed to traditional diets. Here, rather than the diet controlling the individual subject, by providing general guidelines rather than a specific eating plan the healthy lifestyle approach stresses individual responsibility, self-control and personal decision-making (Chapman 1999:79). Thus, here the subjects view themselves as active agents in regulating their own consumption, as opposed to having their consumption patterns dictated to them and chosen for them as is done in traditional diets.

While Chapman's study is useful in outlining the changes involved in moving from a traditional diet to a healthy lifestyle approach to weight maintenance, she does note one similarity between the two, motivation for partaking in these programs. She holds that although the participants interviewed referred to the new approach to weight control as "being healthy", rather than as losing weight, their motives for partaking in the programs remained the same. Some of the reasons given for enrolling in a healthy lifestyle plan were "to fit into clothes, to look good in a bathing suit, to get skinny, or to keep from getting fat", the same motives cited for going on a 'diet' (Chapman 1999:78). She notes that there was some mention of health and diseases when discussing the new approaches, but the primary motivation usually remained as body weight or appearance. In addition, discussion among the participants still included concerns surrounding

consuming foods that should not be eaten, and not eating foods that are advocated (Chapman 1999:79).

Weight Watchers as an Example of the "Healthy Lifestyle Approach"

The Weight Watchers program can be understood as an example of a healthy-living approach to weight maintenance. In order to argue that Weight Watchers adheres to the basic principles of anti-diet philosophy and healthy-living approaches to weight maintenance and control, I will use excerpts from the message boards found on the Canadian weight watchers website (www.weightwatchers.ca/community/mbd/index.aspx). These postings serve to illustrate how Weight Watchers members conceive of the program, as well as the effects that the program has on the lives of its members.

Weight Watchers and 'Anti-Diet' Philosophy

The Weight Watchers program can be conceptualized as an anti-diet, in that it turns away from conventional notions of restrictive diets, and subscribes to the idea that any action taken to secure weight control or weight loss must be functional with that individual's lifestyle. The Weight Watchers plan is actually understood as not being a 'diet', but rather is seen as a way to modify one's eating patterns in a manner that will allow them to remain healthier in the long term.

16/10/2003 10:53:13 AM

You're on the same page as I am. I've done em all and now am watching others try Atkin's, Cabbage Soup, etc etc. The one aspect of this plan is that it's not a diet!! This is a plan that we can follow for the rest of our lives. Can you imagine eating Cabbage Soup for the rest of your days??? Kudo's to you and all of us for realizing that "WW is the ONLY plan for me"!!!

This members' posting demonstrates the understanding that Weight Watchers does differ from other diet programs that restrict what members are able to consume. Here, Weight Watchers is contrasted to the Atkins diet, which advocates eating high protein and high fat foods only, and the cabbage soup diet, which allows unlimited quantities of cabbage soup, to be eaten with only a small amount of restricted other foods. This posting is significant in that it clearly states that the Weight Watchers plan "is not a diet!". Members identify the anti-diet philosophy behind the program, realizing Weight Watcher's claims to be a program to modify one's consumption for "the rest of our lives".

Adverse effects of dieting, resulting in dieters actually gaining weight as opposed to losing weight, is also cited as a reason why members have chosen to follow the Weight Watchers plan after failing with more traditional diets. One member states:

16/10/2003 10:40:44 AM

A little background. I joined WW in the fall of 1997 to lose my baby fat after my son was born. Took me 1 ½ years to lose a measly 15 pounds but I wasn't eating all that great, cheating way too much, estimating my *Points* etc....Just basically being lazy!! I was at goal, stopped going to my meetings ("I don't need to go anymore, I am am to do this myself", I told myself). Well after 6 years of trying it on my own from Schwarzbein Principle (low carb), and South Beach Diet (also somewhat low carb), I had gained 15 pounds from actually *dieting*!!! Anytime, a diet tells you you cannot have this, I wanted it all the more!! For instance, with low carbing you should only have 15 grams with each meal. So there I was dying for a couple of pieces of fruit and couldn't have it. To make a long story short, I binged sooo much on sweets to compensate for all the carbs I couldn't have hence the weight gain. Now, I am so much happier I can have whatever I want!!! And, to top it off, I finally have some energy (low carbing gave me NO energy!!) Just want to share.

Here we can see how this member 'binged' after being denied foods while on low-carbohydrate diets in which she was not able to consume foods that she craved, and her actual weight gain that resulted as the outcome. This posting is significant in that it exemplifies the reverse effect that denying or restricting foods of a particular category, or food group, can have. This member ends her post by espousing some of the benefits she has found from adhering to the Weight Watchers plan, including feeling better both

emotionally and physically. Many messages found on the website illustrate positive reactions to the Weight Watchers program as opposed to other weight-loss programs because Weight Watchers does not deny any specific categories of foods. They as well depict Weight Watchers members as subscribing to the anti-diet philosophy, specifically noting that the program is not a 'diet'.

The Weight Watchers program is thus a great example of an alternative to strict eating plans that allow only certain categories of food to be consumed, while almost completely prohibiting others. The *Points* system allows for members to consume any foods they choose, so long as their daily *Points* total remains in their given range. Thus, members are perceived to be in control of what they eat insofar as they make the decision to consume something or not to consume. This gives members the ability to listen to their bodies and follow an eating pattern that is consistent with the cues they receive from their bodies. The individual self-governing element of Weight Watchers is illustrated in the Meal Time booklet that is given to Weight Watchers members to help them determine what their eating pattern style is (Weight Watchers 2000d).

Here, by taking the quiz "Finding your eating pattern" members can assess themselves to determine how the program can be adapted to fit their lifestyle and eating pattern. Members are assessed to determine if they should be eating either 3 "square" meals each day, 4 "mini-meals" or 6 "mini-meals" throughout the day to have the best possible success with the program (Weight Watchers 2000d). This demonstrates control over when one consumes. Members ability to chose what foods they consume, and at what times, allows members more control over their consumption, potentially leading to higher rates of success with Weight Watchers, as opposed to other weight loss programs.

Flexibility and Lifestyle

Whereas individuals following a traditional diet may experience feelings of guilt after 'cheating' on their diets, Weight Watchers members are encouraged to expect circumstances to arise in which they will not be able to adhere to their planned consumption. Here, the use of 'flex-Points' in the program can be understood as allowing members to veer off their diets without experiencing these feelings of guilt. Discussion surrounding flex-Points on the website often encourages members to make use of their flex-Points without feelings of guilt resulting from this indulgence granted to members.

08/10/2003 10:013 AM

Using flex *Points* is not "blowing it" – that's why you have them. They let you eat in the real world! Enjoy!

08/10/2003 10:00:47 AM

If you haven't used all your flex *Points* you have NOT repeat NOT blown it. Even if you did spend *Points* on french fries, that's ok!!! Your flex *Points* are there for you to use – as long as you're getting your nutritious stuff in, the french fries are ok if you have *Points* over to cover them!

03/11/2003 1:47:55 PM

I know what you mean about feeling guilty, but my leader said something this past week that sort of hit home. Weight Watchers would not have given you the Flex *Points* if they did not know that you could lose weight on them! Number one, and think of it this way... The more you eat and lose weight, the more you will be able to eat in order to maintain your weight. This so hit home for me. Although I always use my Flex *Points*, I try to use them with healthy food. My big downfall is chips, and lately Chocolate icecream. And everything is about choice. Anyway, hope you work through the guilt and get over it, because you can eat them without that negative response sprouting it's ugly little head!!.

03/11/2003 2:45:30 PM

I'll just add this to the previous response – my leader said that my best weeks were when I was into the flex *Points*. After that, I was not keen on using them and the loss of weight slowed down. I've started consuming them again and had a better weigh in. True enough – they should be used wherever possible for health food choices – but we aren't perfect and will have treats, so if it fits why not?

03/11/2003 5:10:33 PM

maybe you're just feeling guilty about using your fp's on something that isn't all that healthy (smarties). Would you feel guilty if you used them on a fruit salad or a bowl of nutritious soup? Because smarties is something you eat when you're nibbly, not hungry, so maybe you're just feeling guilty because you're eating when know you really don't

need to be eating. I don't know. But I remember posting a long time ago, before flex *Points* came out that it would make some people feel guilty to go over their targets. I think it goes back to the old diet mentality, that eating anything over your target is in a way cheating, because it's not within your target *Points* for the day. I think you have to realize that those *Points* are there for you to eat if you need them. I've given myself a kind of guideline, which pretty much follows the bank system, by saying I'll not use more than 3-5 flex*Points* a day, in a normal week. It's not a rigid rule, but I find it's a nice guideline to have while I'm planning/living my day, so when I do write in my journal I won't feel guilty because that hot chocolate, I really didn't need lol but wanted, put me over my target by a couple of *Points*.

31/10/2003 4:50:45 PM

I find that the flex*Points* ensure that I will be able to stay OP (and enjoy it) over the long term. Depending on how you use them, it may be slower to lose, but if I honestly think about how much I ate before WW, compared with now even if I ate all my flex*Points*, it's way less now. The weight does come off. Rather than thinking week to week, I think of where I'll be in 3 months, 6 months, or even a year from now!

These postings indicate how Weight Watchers has included flex-*Points* in the program so that members can deal with situations that arise in life without having to cause them to be off program, nor to feel guilty about it, as individuals following stricter diets often do. They also indicate how it is important to be able to listen to signals from your body regarding consumption, and shaping your diet to your own lifestyle.

The Physical and Psychological Components of Weight Watchers

The Weight Watchers message boards also indicate how members have internalized both physical and psychological elements of the program, illustrating the ability of the program to go beyond governing consumption and modify multiple aspects of members' lives. The use of activity *Points* in the program incites members to become more active in their lives in exchange for increased *Points*. On the message boards, members do encourage other members to gain and use activity *Points* in the pursuit of health.

28/10/2003 10:05:08 AM

The suggestion is just to apply 5 extra *Points* a day to give yourself a range that is perfectly legit – and may be helpful for those who are uncomfortable "dipping into" their

FPS. But don't look on your use of FPS as an indicator of weakness on your part. They are a "fit", to be used or not as you see fit. Use all, or some, or none at all – you will still lose. More importantly, earn and then eat up Activity *Points*. You should always eat APs before FPS – and they should be good, nutritious fuel foods, not junk food. You are providing your body with extra nutrition for extra activity – all leading to improved health.

This message indicates the importance that members place on earning activity *Points* in order to increase the healthiness of their bodies. Members also encourage each other to take up practices of exercise through discussing exercise programs that they use, and by posting 'challenges' for other members to complete, adding an element of encouragement and support.

06/12/2003 12:41:06 AM

I've been doing the elliptical trainer for about 1 year now on a regular basis. It's very difficult at first, but when you get going on it, it's addictive. I could only do about 10 minutes when I first began, but now I often do 30-40. It doesn't take that long to increase the time, just try to do an extra minute each workout and you'll gradually increase your stamina. I also use the rowing machine, stationary bike and treadmill sometimes. They all work different muscle groups and in the end, will make you stronger. You'll really feel a difference and although you may not lose pounds, you will lose inches because you're conditioning your body.

04/12/2003 8:47:58 AM

Well, went to the gym last night - yay! I did 20 mins on the elliptical machine, only 5 mins on the bike (it hurts my knee) and 20 mins on the treadmill. Yes Sharon, I did my weights! :) I only did 1 set of each, but of the full circuit they have in the gym, but I did them. I have my muscle toning class on Saturday's, so that'll give me a lot of the weights I need. :) I'm going back to the gym again tonight, and I'm gonna try and get more weights in this time. The plan for tonight:

- 30 mins elliptical
- 20 mins treadmill
- 10 mins bike
- 30 mins weights

Just thought I would let everyone know! Hope everyone is doing great!

P.S. It feels SO good to be able to post on this board again. I can't believe how much I MISSED working out and how much more energy I have again. It's GREAT!!! :)

06/12/2003 6:19:57 PM

Body For Life is an intensive weight training/cardio program from a book of the same name by Bill Phillips- it is a 12 week program. It includes nutrition- but those of us on the fitness challenge board doing it do ww nutrition (he sells protein powders and bars- which we do not buy) You exercise 6 days a week alternating 3 days cardio for 20 minutes, 3 days weights for 46 minutes, alternating upper and lower body. There is a contest where you can win money as well. He has a website www.bodyforlife.com and under training are the exercises and under registration the contest and rules. I just finished my first challenge. Come visit us on the fitness challenge board

06/12/11:28:00 AM

Good morning Challengers,

You can join in the December Challenge at any time! Just post an intro to the group! The major objective is to get some extra motivation to carry us through the holidays and to make sure that the occasional divergence from plan doesn't sabotage our long-term efforts.

Daily Mantra:

- * I will drink at least 2 litres of water each day
- * I will PLAN for special meals during the holidays by using *Flex Points* and keep my *Flex Points* for those special occasions
- * I will get at least 2 AP's in per day and aim for at least 3 days a week with 4 APs
- * I will report in daily to the challenge group to renew my commitment to stay OP and share any tips and strategies I've learned on my own weight loss journey
- * I will remind myself that the BEST holiday gift I can give myself is to not have seconds and to make the best choices I can given the circumstances
- * For meals I am responsible for preparing, I will find lower calorie and healthier versions of high-fat, high-calorie foods where possible.
- * Before shopping for gifts or food, I'll make sure to have a healthy meal before. Therefore avoiding the fast food concessions and buying junk food.

In these messages, members are encouraged to incorporate added physical elements to improve their health. Significant in these postings is the group support component, as well as an element of accountability that members have to other members participating in the challenge.

In addition to the physical component of the program, the Weight Watchers message boards also contain messages which address a psychological component to the program. Here, members are often seeking to discover their reasons for bingeing or overeating, and looking for solutions to these reasons. The following posting illustrates how members engage with the psychological component of the healthy lifestyle plan, as this member is attempting to discover the reasons why she is overweight.

30/09/2003 11:34:36 AM

I went to WI this morning, and I stayed the same. As I mentioned a few days ago, things were going on in life and I had abandoned my meetings, so I felt as I should come clean with you all and let you know that I managed to stay the same.

I was feeling very desperate and anxious yesterday about this excess weight and I decided to make an appointment with one of the local herbal weight loss clinics - always looking for a quick fix....anyways I slept on it and spoke to several people asking their opinions, and I just cancelled the appointment. I so desperately want this weight off, but yet I have been punishing myself by not making it a #1 priority.

As I mentioned, I bought Dr. Phil's new weight loss book, and follow his show. I have come to the conclusion that my weight is a fat suit to hide my body and personality, because I am afraid of attracting men. This probably sounds very vain of me, but I spoke to my husband for 2 hours last night about this, and he believes that I'm right. You see, when I was growing up I had a very strict Catholic upbringing and was not allowed to date, or wear makeup or nice clothes; I was a chubby girl, and I believe now I was fat so I would be unattractive. I lost the weight with hard work and exercise all by myself when I was 18, then I got married, and I probably subconsciously figured that I should put my fat suit on so I wouldn't attract any attention. It's taken me this long to figure it out, and I now realize that this is a huge piece of the puzzle of why I'm overweight.

I now just need to keep myself true and honest to myself, and do what I know I have to do in order to lose the weight. Like my husband told me last night, I'll never know what's on the other side unless I try. I might be afraid of failure, but I think I'm more afraid of success.

Thanks for letting me share.

This message as well displays a psychological component. This member discusses her self-esteem, and how she is used to dealing with being hurt or upset by turning to food. Her message is significant in that it demonstrates how the Weight Watchers program affects your mind as well as your body, as she now has to find alternative methods for dealing with her emotions, rather than continuing to turn to food for comfort.

28/09/2003 4:36:07 PM

Hi Everyone,

Ok basically this is a post so that while I type I am away from the kitchen!! Have had an extremely stressful day with some disappointments thrown in. I am trying so hard to deal with things without food being in the picture.

Had something happen this morning that really really took a beating with my self esteem. I am trying to get past it and move on. So far I have made great choices food wise today but I just can't get over the "hurt" and am in a "sad" mood.

It would be so easy to open the cookbook and pick out a favorite recipe to cook/bake. I love to bake and find it a stress relief however I also love to eat what I bake. Or to drive to the store ALONE and buy JUNK to consume on the way home.

Sometimes I feel like my family just doesn't understand and I find myself trying to comfort myself with food. I know that I can't do that but boy is it hard!!!

Today I have been terribly emotional and right now I think that I will actually go to bed as early as I can to avoid all the temptations of food calling my name. Will hope that things are better in the morning.

Sorry for the rant but somehow just typing this out helps. Turning to food is a coping mechanism that I have used for years to fill the "hurt/void" that happens in life. I don't like how I feel afterwards so am choosing NOT to put myself in that position.

I hope that someone out there will understand this post about when emotions are making you want to eat!

Lifestyle Modification and Weight Watchers

In addition to highlighting the specific focuses on the physical and psychological elements of the program, these messages are significant in that they illustrate how the Weight Watchers plan extends beyond governing consumption to incite change in other areas of the members' lives. Here, the program can be understood in terms of lifestyle modification, meaning that it seeks to modify the entire lifestyle of the individual to be healthier in the long-term.

03/11/2003 1:24:13 PM

Remember that it is a lifestyle change, which means that even when you "finish" you never do. It is hard to incorporate everything into all our social obligations and business obligations, but eventually you can get used to it. Good Luck and I bet you will look fantastic in that little black dress.

02/01/2004 2:15:32 PM

First of all it isn't a DIET... It is a Lifestyle Change. If you follow the program it works. This message indicates the long-term temporal element of the program. Here, members do not conceive of Weight Watchers as a diet that they are adhering to for a limited period of time while they achieve a weight loss goal, but rather they view the program as providing guidelines to continue to live their lives in accord with.

04/11/2003 8:23:38 AM

I tell everyone. I think the whole world should know about WW. If everyone in the world ate like WW teaches we would be a healthier society, restaurants would focus on healthy eating, not massive portions and all you can eat buffets. The more people who know and understand my goals, the more support I have. And if I can inspire just one person to lead a healthier lifestyle that's a great accomplishment.

This message exemplifies the belief that individuals should modify their lifestyles to be healthier. This message can be compared to the twelve steps of the 12-step model for dealing with addiction in which members are advised to spread knowledge of the benefits of the program, and their success with the program, to other alcoholics. Here, this member voluntarily espouses the benefits of the program to others, in the belief that society as a whole would be healthier if others followed the same program.

The extent to which the program can be seen as effective in other areas of its members lives can be demonstrated through the message postings on the Weight Watchers website. Here members engage with each other regarding numerous topics, including topics that are not relevant to the 'diet' or consumption. Members give and receive advice regarding a large range of topics, and there is a strong sense of support and companionship evident in the messages. This advice and help may be in regard to aspects of the program itself, or may extend to topics outside of Weight Watchers.

Post:

03/11/2003 11:59:13 AM

I am wondering what do you like to weigh in, and why?
I liked Sunday but WW online doesn't let you weigh in on Sundays, so I decided to change it to Friday. My reasoning is that since I like to relax a little on weekends with what I eat, I could weigh in on Friday and not have a false water gain from eating a bit more on the weekend (for some reason when I eat a bit more I gain with water... dunno' why). When do you like to weigh in? and why?

Responses:

03/11/2003 12:03:28 PM

I was weighing in on Tuesday nights, but found that was too soon after the weekend for those times where you do tend to be a little more lenient. We are now changing to Thursday or Friday night which is better as in a normal world, you can be very disciplined through the week and indulge (a little) over the weekend and not have to worry about water retention, false weight gain, etc. I'll be keeping an eye on this post as I'm interested in what everyone has to say.

03/11/2003 12:04:26 PM

I like Mondays, because I love the leader and the ladies in my meeting. I had to go to Saturday meetings for awhile and didn't enjoy it much. There were way more people and even though I enjoyed the leader very much, it didn't seem as close knit as the smaller meeting. Also I like Mondays because then I can't just eat whatever I want over the weekend, so Monday WT's keep me accountable.

03/11/2003 12:07:32 PM

I like Mondays as well. Yes, it keeps you accountable over the weekend. But the added bonus is that if you feel need additional support, you can attend any other meetings that week for free, once you've paid for that first meeting. Sometimes it's nice to get a different leader's perspective.

03/11/2003 12:53:36 PM

Friday mornings, same reason as you I like to relax a bit over the weekend and this allows me to have a treat during the weekend at some point.

03/11/2003 12:57:29 PM

I WI on Mondays as well. This is the day I started on WW. I find mentally this is when my week begins and ends..plus I find it works best for my flex pts for Saturday and Sunday when I may be more inclined to use them.

03/11/2003 2:03:24 PM

I weigh in on Wednesdays in the afternoon. It is just the center of my week and I always feel motivated to do well over the next couple of days and Monday and Tuesday are normally really good days. I also like the leader, weigh-in people and the group. I also run my week in the journal from Thursday to Wednesday.

03/11/2003 3:07:27 PM

Fridays for me also! I do WW online, started off on Monday mornings but I find on Fridays I can get weigh-in over with and then treat myself a little bit that day, on Saturday and Sunday. I keep journaling but I feel I have more freedom.

03/11/2003 3:57:21 PM

I WI on Mondays also...for some of the reasons already mentioned. Keeps me accountable over the weekend, and it's easy for me to remember to WI when the week begins!

This post and its responses deal with an element of the program. Here, one member is interested in hearing others' explanations for when they weigh-in, to consider these opinions in evaluating what might work best for her. As well as providing information with respect to various aspects of the program, many questions found on the message boards often deal with issues not directly related to the program.

Post

03/11/2003 2:30:49 PM

remember the post a few weeks ago about ways to be rid of stretch marks? Just a little update. I mentioned I had started using pure Vitamin E oil on my stretch marks. After 4 weeks, they are beginning to fade! They're still there, but I can see a noticeable difference. Slowly, slowly they are fading. Just wanted to let you know - it does work!

Responses:

03/11/2003 2:43:20 PM

Where did you buy the oil and what else does it have in it? I ask the ingredients because I have quite a few stretch marks on my tummy and upper legs. I'd like to try and get them to be less noticeable but I had a bad reaction to coconut oil one time and won't use any products (body stuff) that contains it. Can you give me the details?

03/11/2003 3:46:07 PM

I bought the pure vitamin E oil (nothing added) from Walmart. It is in the same area as the vitamins and stuff. Ask the pharmacist if you can't find it. In my Walmart, there were two strengths. A small bottle that was more expensive as it was more potent. I larger bottle that was less expensive as it was not as strong. I bought the bigger bottle for less \$ because I didn't know if it would work. I apply it on my stretch marks after my shower every day. You don't need a lot. It's feels similar to baby oil. So far so good. Like I said,

no miracles, but a noticeable lightening so far.
Hope that helps!

03/11/2003 5:22:58 PM

We were given a sample of Nivea Q10 firming lotion at our WW meeting a couple of weeks ago. I've been using it on my stretch marks, and find it's making a difference too.

Here, members are offering help and advice on another matter of beauty, stretch marks, which is not related to consumption, but is still in the realm of women's health. Postings on the message boards regularly take the form of questions and answers in this manner, often, though not always, concerning matters of health, food or cooking, and exercising.

Companionship and Support

In addition to acting as forums for questions and answers, individuals on the message boards offer encouragement and support to other members who are struggling with the program, or other personal issues. Many turn to the message boards for some inspiration and kindness when they are having difficulties following the program.

Post:

03/11/2003 10:17:40 AM

Ok. I'm already feeling like I want to quit, and I've barely got started. To be honest, I don't think I've been tracking my *Points* too well - but I've had to eat out a lot. I still weigh the same (although I had lost some weight) as I did when I started, and I am feeling like I am going to be a cow forever. My husband I just bought a house, and I caught a reflection of myself in the mirror. I didn't recognize the reflection, because the person staring back was a lot larger than I had previously thought. I am embarrassed about how I look (most people have known me as my usual, thinner self), and I am deeply ashamed of how I look. I know I'm going through a lot of stress (the job I LOVED is going to be gone as of December because of a company take-over), and when I'm stressed I just want to EAT. I'm not exercising, and I feel totally and completely deflated when it comes to inspiration.
Having a very bad day, and very low.

Responses:

03/11/2003 10:29:36 AM

I'm sorry you're feeling stressed and low...Have you tried an action plan....Are you using the on-line tracker?? I find it works well....It's important to reconize what you could be doing. Take a big breather, tommorow is a new day and you can do this! I can honestly say I've felt like you do and stress if a big thing with success in weight loss. Have you tried reading Dr.Phil's new book??? Walk away the pounds are great workout tapes and they are easy to follow....and great stress reliever!! Chin up, make sure your goals are in baby steps...I hope you feel better soon!

03/11/2003 10:30:03 AM

Don't be so hard on yourself! You're going through a lot of changes and that means a lot of stress. I think most of us have that food/stress relationship. DON'T GIVE UP! You can do this! Take it one day at a time, one point at a time, and promise yourself to track your *Points*. If you fall, get up and dust yourself off...tomorrow's another day. It's hard, I know, but nothing ever worth having or doing is ever easy. Come often to the boards, it will really help. As someone else on the boards has already said, "Together we CAN do it!"

03/11/2003 10:38:47 AM

I know how you feel. The more stressed you get, the more you eat, the larger you get, the more stressed you get. Right? You are very hard on yourself. None of the stressors you have in your life there because of you personally. So try not to take them personally. WW is a great resource, have you been to meetings? It takes a great resolve to loose weight, smile, and exercise and laugh. Good luck, please don't let this stress dictate your life.

03/11/2003 10:39:53 AM

Thanks so much for the kind words of support! - it's nice to talk to people who truly identify with what I'm feeling, and the struggle involved with losing weight. It's amazing how strangers become friends so quickly - I think that this message board alone will help me get through this. Losing weight is so hard!!!! I'm back to tracking my *Points*, and will take it all ONE DAY AT A TIME, and will try not to look at it as a longitudinal goal. Baby steps, right?? One day at a time. I really hope I have happy news to report at the end of this week - that I've lost weight!
Thanks again you two - it means a lot.

03/11/2003 10:55:15 AM

Yesterday I was feeling a little low and just wished that the weight would be gone ... I was mad at myself for letting it go this far.... I was talking to DH during dinner and he's very proud of me and was telling me you know honey I'm so proud of you ... it felt good to hear that and then I realized there is no quick fix no magic wand.... I'm losing not gaining and that's what's important...and I repeated this him..I look at my body in the mirror everyday and you know I'm discusted but it's pushing me more and more to want to be closer to my goal. I come here for inspiration and it helps so muchI read everynight!! Post away my dear you need all the support you can get and you will feel better!!!

Providing a forum to offer support to members who are struggling with the program itself, the message boards are also used to offer sympathy and encouragement to members who are struggling with other aspects of their lives, and how this effects one's ability to remain on the program.

Post:

05/11/2003 10:21:21 AM

My mother passed away 1 week ago battling a short bout of cancer. I am having a very hard time staying OP. All I want to do is eat and I have no get up and go to do any exercise. So if anyone can please help me with ideas of how to deal with this I would greatly appreciate it. Thanks in advance and God Bless You all.

Responses:**05/11/2003 10:27:13 AM**

Sorry for your loss. My mom died a year ago after battling cancer so I can empathize with you. I was not OP last year when she died. I think of her often and know that she would be proud of the changes that I'm making for my health now. It took a few weeks for life to get back to "normal" following her death. You'll probably feel more like getting back OP once family visits, funeral, etc. are over with. Take care of yourself.

05/11/2003 10:52:18 AM

I lost my mom on May 1 this year after a year battle with cancer. She was not only my mom but my role model and my friend. In the first couple of weeks after she died, I really didn't have an appetite but during her last week when we were on 24 hour watch at the hospital, I certainly wasn't OP. What helped me through was that I wanted to have a higher probability of being around for my kids and grandkids and losing weight would lessen my chances of heart disease, diabetes and all the other diseases that overweight people suffer from. Now that 6 months have gone by and I am on my way to my goal, I know that she would be proud of me and I can just see her saying "I knew you could do it, my girl". If you need to chat, my email address is in my profile.

05/11/2003 11:00:23 AM

You have my sympathies for your loss. This is not meant in any way to be harsh, but have you thought maybe your problem right now isn't so much Plan related but deeper? Maybe you need some time to deal with all the emotional stuff right now. Maybe you need some help to sort it out (grief counselling). We aren't programmed to automatically deal with the death of a loved one. None of us do it the same, and none of us do it well.

05/11/2003 11:07:33 AM

lost 2 brothers in one week three years ago. My sympathies go out to you. It is always difficult to lose a family member. I had a tough time for about a year. I did go see a grief counsellor and I went to a retreat in Niagara Falls for two weekends. It is run by the Carmelites and it was exactly what I needed. Everyone needs to grieve and you must do it in your own way. I wouldn't worry too much about your weight at this time but deal with your emotions later. If you need someone to talk to try joining a group. It does help. I feel for you

These postings illustrate a sense of support as well as friendship between Weight Watchers members. These messages seem much more personal than typical messages addressing components of the program, and although I have withheld any names included on the message boards, I did observe that in these more emotional messages, members were more inclined to include their names at the end of the message, whereas other postings tend to be more anonymous and impersonal.

Conclusion

The Weight Watchers program can be understood as an example of a healthy living approach to weight maintenance informed by anti-diet philosophy. Contemporary society is witnessing a shift away from traditional, rigid diets that work to govern the consumption patterns of the dieter, towards less regulated programs that work to incite an element of self-governance within the dieter.

The Weight Watchers program is a significant example of this shift as it determines certain boundaries within which consumption must occur, but within these boundaries each member is able to decide for herself what she will consume, and when. Thus, while outlining a program for each member to act in accord with, the Weight Watchers program allows for itself to be modified to fit with the lifestyle of each of its members. As well, the effects of the program extend beyond governing consumption to influence multiple areas of members lives, aimed at improving their overall health, not solely addressing weight-loss.

Although this chapter has presented Weight Watchers from a positive members' view, there is still evidence that some members experience the same frustrations and feelings of guilt that are indicated from dieters following stricter programs.

03/10/2003 9:44:08 AM

I too feel like I'm losing control. I used 32 of my flex *Points* on Wed. My WI day is Tues, so that's the start of my week and they're GONE! Took my daughter to Mamma Mia then out for dinner, really splurged, but no I can't get back on track. I feel like I've already blown the week. I used too many *Points* yesterday (thurs) and am in serious trouble already today and it's not even 10 am yet. I did go for my walk this morning, but it's only making me eat more. I feel that if I stray from program the first few days after WI, I tend to blow the entire week. I cant' get my head straight and tell myself that today is a new day, forget about yesterday. That just doesn't seem to work for me. I think the weather has something to do with this. It's been dreary and rainy for the past 4-5 days now, I just can't get out of this "I'm failing" mode. What can I do?

03/11/2003 7:55:19 PM

I am so unhappy with myself. I have totally eaten my way into oblivion this week. I don't know what on earth gets into me....I totally lose it!! I love the feeling of being in control,

and then I go and blow it like this, and feel absolutely sick!! I am an 'all or nothing' person, in almost everything I do. I either follow everything to the letter, or else I blow it completely. It shows in other areas of my life too. I want so much to change this. Does anyone else have this problem?? Any solutions.....

03/11/2003 1:10:21 PM

Good afternooon all...

I am officially freaking out about my weigh in tonight. I WILL go - but I am afraid of the results. In all honesty, even with the halloween goodies, I don't think I went over my allowed flexPoints, but I am still dreading that scale and what it is going to tell me. I am so afraid that if there is another gain I will loose sight of my overall goal and just give up... Say - never mind this spending money each week to see no change int he scale - or even worse - see a gain. I am just so frustrated with this last ilttle bit - and dissapointed in myself for not getting to the goal quicker.

I know people keep on reminding me "look how far you have come!"... but all I can see is how far I have left to go - and until I get there -I just feel like a failure.

Does anyone have any advice?

These postings illustrate that members still encounter negative experiences with the Weight Watchers program, as they do with other diets. Unique here is that with the Weight Watchers website these postings are all replied to by other members with messages of support and encouragement to help ease members through periods of difficulty and frustration.

While I have discussed a shift away from highly-regulated diets to more individually-regulated programs, it is important to note that there is simultaneously a proliferation of heavily-regulated programs. The success of the Dr. Bernstein Health and Diet Clinics illustrates the preference some individuals have for a diet that provides intense regulation. This diet is said to be the largest medically supervised diet in Canada, rapidly becoming the recognized clinical standard, and serving over 150,000 patients. The Dr. Bernstein diet (www.drbdiet.com) is an extremely strict diet plan in which members are monitored at least three times a week by a doctor or registered nurse. Participants are said to lose an average of 16-20 pounds a month following the Bernstein plan.

The diet itself is a calorie-reduced plan consisting of 800 -900 calories a day. To supplement this minimal consumption members are given both oral vitamins and receive injections of vitamins B6 and B12. It is claimed that high levels of these vitamins in fat cells help the breakdown of fatty tissue or triglycerides. Thus, by injecting vitamins they bypass the intestinal tract, resulting in a higher concentration of vitamins in the fat cells. The low amount of calories needed is said to be a result of this process in the fat cells, as here the fat cells are releasing 3000+ calories a day, which the body can then "eat" from. Because individuals are losing fatty tissue on this diet, it is claimed that they will not gain back the weight they lost after they complete the diet, and the doctors/nurses claim to help patients reintroduce old foods after they have reached their goal weight.

A significant element of the Bernstein diet is that it is run by doctors and registered nurses, adding a heightened emphasis on the role of expert knowledge. In addition to regulating one's consumption, the doctors/nurses will as well monitor other medical problems members may have, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. The Bernstein plan exemplifies the extreme end of regulated consumption, as members have very little, or no, input over their diet, and in fact the amount of food consumed is so minimal that it must be supplemented with injections.

Chapter Four: Healthy Living and the Anti-Diet: The Weight Watchers Approach to Weight Maintenance

Introduction

As a weight maintenance program that has attracted more than 25 million members over the past forty years, the success of the Weight Watchers organization can be seen in its continued ability to attract new individuals and retain existing members. In this chapter, I will argue that Weight Watchers can be considered one of the most successful weight-centered programs as evidenced by its continued growth and success internationally, as well as the support it receives from its members. I will demonstrate the strong internal support found between members of Weight Watchers, and how this support works to ensure the continued success of the program. I will argue that this strong element of member support has materialized as a result of two unique features that characterize the Weight Watchers program setting it apart from other popular diet plans: the dedicated community that has formed amongst Weight Watchers members, and the dual-level power relations manifested within the program.

Using the work of Beck, Gusfield, and Maffesoli, I will discuss how contemporary society has witnessed a decline in traditional forms of community, such as faith, class and family, and as a result individuals must look to other arenas for a sense of community, companionship, and support. The strong community element that has been built into the Weight Watchers program can be considered as an example of an opportunity for individuals to attain an experience of community. In addition to providing an important social environment for many members, I will argue that the Weight Watchers program is built upon unique power relations which allow members to retain a component of self-governance, within a governed environment. Here, I will draw upon

Foucault's work on governmentality and confession in exploring the power relations between the Weight Watchers program and its members. This chapter will conclude that the community support and power relations within the Weight Watchers program work to continually reinforce the program and guarantee its continued success.

The Successfulness of Weight Watchers

As mentioned in the previous chapter, members of Weight Watchers tend to remain faithful to the program, often criticizing other popular diet plans in favour of the Weight Watchers lifestyle. Online members often post messages comparing Weight Watchers to other diet plans, claiming Weight Watchers to be the best weight maintenance program as a result of their own past experiences, as well as what they have read or been told of other diets. In one example, a member posted a message stating that she had been thinking of taking up the Atkins diet, and asking for any information or advice other members could offer. The responses to this post were numerous, and all advocated remaining on Weight Watchers over Atkins.

21/01/2004 10:38:28 AM

Stick with WW, it's better for you.

21/01/2004 10:41:18 AM

Did Atkins last summer...dropped 12 lbs in my first 2 weeks, then as soon as I started to introduce "regular/healthy eating habits" I gained it all back (AND MORE)! Been on WW 4 months, have lost almost 30 lbs, and feel fantastic/eating healthy (and HEARTY) meals! WW is definitely the way to go. Man...and I'm not even getting paid for that plug!!!

21/01/2004 10:44:37 AM

Atkins isn't safe for everyone, and it's certainly not a lifestyle you can practice forever. It's not a natural way to eat, and I tried it for one day and was so hypoglycemic I had to get off it. There is an induction phase in which you put your body into ketosis with ABSOLUTELY NO CARBS, a fat burning state. This lasts at least 2 weeks but months for some. You can't have caffeine, and you are encouraged to eat saturated fat. Problem is this isn't a natural state of the body. I know a doctor and another nurse I work with who did it, lost, then gained all of it and more back. Stick with finding a balanced plan with less calories and activity...it's tough...but nothing worth having comes easy. Best wishes.

21/01/2004 11:02:24 AM

I feel compelled to post here... Atkins is not NO carbs, it is low carbs, which by the way WW has now introduced. The difference is that on Atkins your first 2 weeks of induction they say you should eat no more than 20 grams of carbs. After that you begin OWL or ongoing weight loss where you gradually increase the number of carbs you eat until your body stabilizes. Go onto Atkins.com and read about the program if you are interested in it. In my opinion though, I've tried it, and did not feel healthy eating the way they describe. I feel WW teaches you healthy eating for life. I'm not convinced anyone can do Atkins for life. The South Beach program, I think is a bit easier to follow, but does follow some of Atkins principles.

I've read both books and tried all the plans, I say stick with WW but follow the new low carb approach in the quick track booklet.

Some people's bodies respond well to low carb and some do not. You need to see where you fit.

21/01/2004 12:01:43 PM

I did atkins and lost 30lbs and put back on 50lbs once I went off. It is good to loose weight fast but it is hard to stick with for a long period due to what you are eating. I found snacking very hard because you have to cook almost everything on it because it's mostly protein. WW seems to be the most giving because you can eat the things you crave (just to keep track of the *Points*) with the atkins if you go off ketosis (which is where your body is burning the fat) it takes 2 days to get back into that mode again. so everytime you go off it takes 2 days to get going.

These responses to one post regarding the Atkins diet illustrate the hesitancy of Weight Watchers members to adopt a diet plan that does not appear to be a 'balanced', or healthy eating/living plan, in which particular types of food are eaten and others restricted. These responses highlight the successfulness of the healthy living and eating philosophy of Weight Watchers, as it appears from these messages that members have not only adopted this attitude, but are espousing these beliefs to other individuals who are interested in considering other diet plans.

19/01/2004 4:15:39 PM

Atkins advises dieters to eat smaller steaks – NY Times

New York , Jan 18 (Reuters) – Promoters of the popular low-carbohydrate, high-fat Atkins diet are saying that people should limit their intake of saturated fat by cutting back on Atkins staples such as meat, cheese, and butter, The New York Times reported on Sunday.

Responding to criticism from scientists that Atkins could lead to heart disease and other health problems, the director of research and education for Atkins Nutritionals, Colette Heimowitz, is telling health professionals that only 20 percent of a dieter's calories should come from saturated fat, the paper said.

Beef, pork, lamb and butter were on the list of "foods you may eat liberally" in diet founder Dr. Robert C. Atkins' book "Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution," first published in 1992. Atkins, who died last year, always maintained that people should

eat other food besides red meat, but had trouble getting that message out, the paper said.

This message was posted online by a Weight Watchers member and serves to illustrate the members' concern with issues of health, not simply weight loss. The responses to this post by other members as well demonstrate the importance members place on adopting a weight maintenance plan that is not simply a 'quick fix' for weight loss, but that is best for improving their wellbeing in the long-term. These messages indicate how members work to reiterate that Weight Watchers is a lifestyle change, rather than merely a solution for weight-loss.

19/01/2004 4:21:28 PM

Boy am I glad you shared that. My sis-in-law has lost over 40 lbs. with Atkins and I must admit – I was a bit tempted to try it after seeing how great she looked at Christmas. But this is a lot more healthy with emphasis on lifestyle change – not severe restrictions. And all I have to do is see articles on people that have lost even more on WW to know what's best. Thanks for sharing. I have been back on WW for less than a week and have already lost 3 lbs.

19/01/2004 4:27:44 PM

Two deaths in the US, including that of a 16-year-old girl, have been attributed to following the Atkins diet.

Just though I'd share...

Apparently, it's quite easy to develop a severe potassium deficiency, which can lead to cardiac arrhythmia.

All for want of a banana...

19/01/2004 4:31:51 PM

i heard on the news something about the low carb diets can lead to gout, that the illness is making a comeback.

I didn't catch the whole thing, but sounded interesting. Anyone else hear that?

19/01/2004 11:23:21 PM

My husband and I tried Atkins for awhile too. I think we only lasted two weeks, he gained and I felt horribly ill, that got worse as the days went on!!! Dizzy, headaches, sick to my stomach, pasty look to my skin... it was GROSS! I will never be an Atkins believer again.

Good post, sometimes the easy quick fix isn't what we should be looking for I guess.

Previous posts included in this thesis highlight a preference for Weight Watchers members who have tried not only the Atkins diet, but also the Southbeach low-carb diet, and the Dr. Bernstein plan. As well, members have documented partiality to Weight Watchers over the weight-loss plan offered by Richard Simmons.

18/01/2004 8:37:26 PM

Yes, I tried the richard simmons plan. I had lost 60 pounds on it but gain it all back for some reason. I've been maintaining on WW. Personally, I prefer WW than Richard Simmons. My opinion. Wishing you the best of luck.

In addition to advocating Weight Watchers over other diet plans, the faithfulness of members to Weight Watchers can be seen as they encourage other members, who are struggling or frustrated with the program, to remain on program. Often, online members will post a message claiming that they are frustrated with themselves and the program, or feel as though they have 'failed' and the program is not working for them as they have not remained within their daily *Points* target. The responses given by other members appear to always encourage members to stay with the program, again espousing messages of encouragement and of the benefits of the program. An interesting note is that although these messages of failure or frustration are very common and generally appear on the website daily, they still tend to be responded to by many members, often being the posted messages that receive the greatest number of responses.

05/01/2004 8:39:29 PM

I feel like such a failure. I have been attending WW for two years this January, and had lost a total of 70 lbs. Well, this holiday season, I lost it completely, and have been eating everything in sight. I feel like I have totally undone anything that I have learned. I have no willpower at all, it seems, and I just can't get it together. I woke up this morning, determined to get back on track but failed by noon. I have lost the desire to try, or to exercise, which I was so faithful at doing before. Everything feels tight, and I feel like _____!!!! Weigh in is tomorrow, and I really don't want to go. I am sure I am up 10 or so pounds. Too embarrassing.....don't think I can do it. Sorry, feeling horrible, and needed to vent.

05/01/2004 8:45:19 PM

Oh Please, don't do that to yourself! What would you say if one of your friends came to you and said what you just said ..that they ate too much and fell off the wagon. I dont know you....but I dont think you would call them FAILURES! So,take a walk, earn some activity *Points* take, gulp down some water and consider it a bad week or two - if you lost 70 pounds you know you have got the will power to just keep going. 70 pounds is amazing - so even if you have gained a few back - while I know how demotivating that can be (having gained and lost the same pounds over and over and over) dont be too hard on yourself. You can get back on track. Good Luck, and dont get too down about it!
Best wishes for 2004

05/01/2004 8:48:15 PM

I would only say you are a failure if you don't go to weigh in tomorrow and decide that you won't even try to get back on track. So what if today you blew it again, it took me almost a week before i was 100% back OP. I took it meal by meal, and if i screwed up then i would punish myself with another bottle of water! I had every intention of sticking to my *Points* over the holidays but alcohol got the best of me and a few peanuts and this and that, but i can honestly say that i am at day 3 of being back on track and all 6 lbs or so that i gained over the holidays is now gone.

A little strength and determination on your part and the holiday weight will be gone and you won't feel so bad again.

GO TO YOUR MEETING, face the scale, who cares what it says! Get back on track and remember how far you have come already, and if 10lbs over the holidays makes you feel like \$hit imagine what all 70lbs back on will feel like if you give up.

Now go drink some water LOL

05/01/2004 8:57:49 PM

(((((hugs)))

wi tomorrow, face the music and move on from there! You are soooooo close to goal! You can do it! You have amazing stats so don't give up now! Just take it 1 meal, 1 workout, 1 cup of water at a time...start doing some internet searches on success stories (they always inspire me), chart your progress to date (I have an excel workbook I could email you which has a chart feature)...reevaluate your success so far, really think about how far you have come and how close you are to the brass ring...and get that mojo flowing again! You Can Do It!!!!

06/01/2004 9:02:08 AM

I wrote a similar message yesterday! and everyone here said the same thing that they are saying to you..Please don't give up. I know how you are feeling right now. I was totally out of control over the holidays and I was disgusted with myself. I did go to my meeting last night and to my surprise I only gained 2 lbs over the holidays. I truly think that you CAN and WILL get back on track..just remember that there are ppl here that will help you if you need it. I love this site...cause we're all in the same boat! and we can share our experiences.

Good luck at your weigh in and no matter what that number says...just suck it up and get back on track. You'll see in no time that those numbers will be going down!!

These messages are telling in two respects. First, the messages are influential in encouraging members to stay on Weight Watchers through difficult periods, therefore working to reinforce the program. Here, members use experience as a determinant of expert knowledge, as members refer to their own rough periods, and advocate reading others' success stories not only a source of inspiration, but as proof that members who feel like a "failure" can in fact succeed if they remain with the program. In addition, these responses exemplify the strong mutual support element found within the program.

Members frequently use the message boards as a medium for communication, as they are confident that their message will be met almost instantaneously with encouragement and support.

Weight Watchers as Community

The success and longevity of self-help programs has previously been documented in this study. Although there are key differences between self-help programs and the Weight Watchers program there are significant similarities between them. The Weight Watchers program remains successful in part because of some of the defining characteristics it has in common with self-help programs, in particular sharing group support and encouragement. In this section I will draw upon the work of Beck, Gusfield, and Maffesoli concerning the idea and importance of community to demonstrate the significance of group support in contemporary society.

Similarities Between Self-Help Programs and Weight Watchers

The group support and companionship found in self-help programs is as well prominent in the Weight Watchers program. A strong element of group support is built into the structure of the Weight Watchers program through the weekly meetings that members are to attend, as well as in the online version of the program through the message boards members use to communicate with each other.

12/01/2004 11:00:11 PM

Hey there... I do go to the meetings.. However I had to find my place.. I tried a few different meetings.. and finally found a wonderful group of ladies as well as the most supportive positive leader ... now I enjoy my meetings so much more and I know I couldn't make it this far without going to them.. They are great to help you stay on track or have any questions... remember the leaders have been where we are... they really do know what they are talking about! Good luck hope u decide to try a meeting out You might even find a new WW buddie! Good luck

13/01/2004 11:06:53 AM

I personally enjoy going to the meetings for the sake of actual interaction with other WW members. I think it's totally up to you and what kind of will power you have! I also love these message boards, but I am not the type of person that is able to do it on my own, i find i have to be accountable to that person at the scale every week!

07/12/2003 8:04:34 AM

I go to meetings! If I were to do this myself I wouldn't maintain it...that's the biggest thing. To acheive Lifetime and then still be accountable to someone to maintain that goal!

I lost 15lbs before joining w.w. then joined to lose the balance and maintain.

I think if we could all do this ourselves we wouldn't need w.w. and we'd all be the size we wanted. I believe it helps to be accountable to someone. This is just MHO

I go to meeting for support but I also come to these boards for support AND inspiration. There are so many amazing stories on these boards I'm so glad I am here!

13/01/2004 11:32:43 AM

it's more an open meeting. the leaders have topics every week that they discuss, but you always get input from the other members. You get stickers and ribbons and magnets at the meetings and you don't get lectured!

13/01/2004 11:44:51 AM

My leader always *Points* out that she is first a member and despite having planned material every week we do talk about other things, problems and so forth, it is informal...

14/01/2004 10:06:57 AM

I like the support from the meetings. There are so many people who are going through the same struggles as you and you don't feel so alone. Sometimes the meeting message itself is really helpful and I get a lot from them. Try it on your own to start and if you are having difficulties, i would suggest going to the meetings to see if it makes a difference.

Here, there is a sense that members are more likely to be successful if they are accountable to their leader through their weekly weigh-in. It appears as though it is felt that members have a better chance of being successful in losing and maintaining their weight if they are responsible to their leader, not only to themselves. Thus, by attending weekly weigh-ins, members are accountable to someone other than themselves, their leader.

06/12/2003 7:28:09 PM

I reached goal in April 2003 and going to meetings was the reason that I did so well. The support on these boards is great but it cannot take the place of the face-to-face

support that I get at my meetings. Also being weighed every week by someone else is extra motivation to stay on program. Even though I have been lifetime since the spring I still go to my meetings. They are a lot of fun. Another benefit of meetings is that you can get lifetime status. I can now go to meetings (and get all the program material) for free....you don't get that online

However, members are not always in favour of their weekly weigh-in, as sometimes the practice of confessing their weight to another individual can be difficult, particularly during times in which members are struggling with the program. Here, practices of confession may invoke emotional responses from members.

06/12/2003 7:05:41 PM

I personally like doing the online better. I did go to meetings before but I was reluctant to go if I knew I had a bad week. Maybe it's just me but I do much better if I have a rough week knowing I don't have to admit defeat in front of someone else (just myself). When the scales weren't in my favour I just wouldn't go and that led to not following the program. Mentally for me it's easier this way. I also like being able to go online at any time and getting inspiration from all the wonderful people on this site! I wish you luck whichever way you choose.

07/12/2003 12:15:45 PM

Hi. I agree with everyone else...the choice is yours. From my experience I did attend meetings before. They didn't do it for me. My leader was great but for some reason getting on the scale in front of someone was a little too emotional for me. If I gained I felt really upset and would want to just go home and have a good cry...not sit through a meeting holding it together. If I gained I was unable to concentrate through the meeting anyway. At home I can weigh myself and going through the emotions if I need to. I find I am much happier using the online tools. I post a lot on the boards and I feel like I have to prove myself to the people I chat with. Plus money is a factor as well...a lot cheaper online. Good luck either way!

The flexible structure of the meetings for both 12-step programs and Weight Watchers is accommodating in that it allows individual members the opportunity to discuss the particular difficulties that they may be having following the program. Here the leader of the meeting, as well as other members are able to offer suggestions and support to the individual concerns or difficulties members are having, deepening the element of support available. While the support offered at Weight Watchers meetings is highly praised by many members, there are as well members who claim that they receive

all the support and information they require through the online program alone, however, still emphasizing the strong element of support from the online program.

13/01/2004 11:15:34 AM

Personally i find the meetings useless.

Its always the same people who talk, its hard to get information and they are boring. I would get WI and leave. I love online, and i use these boards as my meetings. They just happen to be 7 hour meetings everyday.

04/04/2004 5:14:00 PM

I have been an on line member for over 2 years. I am not interested in the meetings as that is not the kind of support I need. The on line allows you to journalize with the computer, has the food *Points* and restaurant *Points* on line. The community boards are wonderful with everyone sharing information and advice. It gives you access to recipes and allows you to track your weight and gives you graphs to follow. I would recommend it to anyone!

04/01/2004 62839 PM

I lost 54 lbs with WW online. I am not a joiner and with my crazy life, meetings would never have worked. I loved the online tools, the journals, the recipes, the calculators ... but most of all these boards for ideas, support and encouragement. The only thing is, you need to have self-discipline --- because the only person you have to look in the eye at weigh-in is yourself in the mirror! To my mind, that is still the best form of accountability.

Good luck

05/01/2004 5:46:55 AM

I used to do meetings but it was too much of a pain to schedule it into my work schedule, find new meetings in new cities (I travel a lot and then to motivate myself to go. I went to meetings once for about 2 months and I hated them. I didn't develop any relationships and felt very unsupported. Some people did find relationships with other members and were happy but not me. That is why I joined online. I love getting to know everyone on the boards and it saves the hassle of trying to go to meetings. Love WW online! And I am at my lowest weight in 3 years.

This group support component is an important element in ensuring the longevity of Weight Watchers. As members turn to other members when they are struggling with any element of the program, rather than an outside source such as a non-member friend or family member, it works to reinforce the program as it encourages continued participation in Weight Watchers. The advice and encouragement offered by other members generally tends to reinforce the strengths and benefits of Weight Watchers, re-

stating the success individuals have had with the program, and the importance of the principles and philosophies of Weight Watchers.

This type of reassurance found in Weight Watchers, is comparable to the group support of 12-step programs. As Weight Watchers members attend weekly meetings and post messages online to their fellow members for support, 12-step members as well attend meetings and take on a sponsor to help them adjust to the program. Sponsors are said to be stable members who work to help the new member learn about the process of recovery, and support them during times of distress and difficulty sticking with the program. This is similar to what takes place between two members of Weight Watchers, as in both cases individuals turn to other members, that is, within the organization itself, for help with their struggles. Hence, help is located internally, as opposed to seeking alternative aid or solutions outside of the program.

Significant in the leadership in both 12-step programs and Weight Watchers is that all leaders are individuals who were once members themselves, and have therefore experienced the process of the program firsthand, becoming experts through experience. Thus, one becomes an authority on the program through successfully remaining on the program. This type of authority is noteworthy as leaders serve to provide not only a success story, but an example of the last stage, or maintenance portion, of the program. This is essential in that both Weight Watchers and 12-step programs advocate remaining with the program for the duration of members' entire lives.

The Significance of Group Support

In his book Democracy Without Enemies, Ulrich Beck (1998:33) argues that modern society has witnessed a rise in individualism, in that traditional sources of meaning, such as faith, class, gender roles, and family, have declined, and as a result individuals must determine for themselves their own ways of life. Thus, where traditional patterns, or ways of life, once forced individuals into togetherness, Beck claims that contemporary society requires individuals to build and live a life of their own (Beck 1998:34). The result of this fundamental societal change is that individuals are not necessarily automatically involved with traditional forums of community, and must therefore seek these forums for themselves. Beck states that communal spirit is no longer something that is predetermined from the top down, but rather is something that now must be agreed on, negotiated, and justified as well as experienced (Beck 1998:35).

Beck (1998:36) asserts that as a result of this change, the relationship between community and locality has been transformed so that there are now localities without communities, as well as transnational communities not tied to a specific location. In a similar approach, Joseph Gusfield distinguishes between two types of communities: territorial communities, which are defined in terms of physical geography, and relational communities, those that are based on human relationships without reference to location (Gusfield 1975:xv-xvi).

We can locate the community formed by members of Weight Watchers as a relational community, in that members interact with other members not as a result of geographical proximity, but as a result of an initial common interest, their involvement with Weight Watchers. However, with time this involvement extends as members come

to engage with each other on a wide range of topics, outside of the scope of Weight Watchers. While frequently these conversations are related to diet information, such as conversations regarding types of exercise and dining out, often the discussions between online members vary across many different outside topics.

Gusfield (1975:34) holds that members of a community tend to experience a "consciousness of kind", in which individuals tend to behave in specific ways because they are members of that community and therefore appeal to a common identity. He argues that members of a community may include individuals who see themselves as having common experiences and shared attitudes towards past and present events. Thus, there is a sense of collective experience. Here, emphasis in examining the community is placed on the actions of its members, rather than on the physical area in which the action occurs.

Gusfield (1975:39) claims that that nature of social bonds is not something that is fixed and given, but that it is a result of historical situations between actors. Thus, the group is a socially defined and constructed category, and groups are continually in flux as new groups emerge and old groups reduce in size and cease to exist. Communities can therefore be understood as emerging in particular situations, rather than as groups to which individuals naturally belong. In our pluralistic society individuals may belong to several different communities, each invoking different loyalties and purposes for that individual.

Maffesoli's work The Time of Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society (1996) is useful here in understanding how relational communities, such as the Weight Watchers community, are formed. Maffesoli argues that in modern society

individuals associate themselves with tribal groupings, rather than identifying with more traditional, or established, groups, such as the family or political affiliations. Maffesoli claims that modern society is composed of intersecting tribes, which together make up the whole of society (Maffesoli 1996:77). Membership in tribes tends to be fluid, and individuals may experience membership in a multiplicity of tribes, which shape a person through his/her identification with the tribes he/she engages with. Social life is determined in relation to the tribes that the individual belongs to, as tribes "are the central feature and key social fact of everyday living" (Sheilds 1996:x).

For Maffesoli, tribes are interest-based collectivities, or groups that are distinguished by shared lifestyles and tastes amongst its members (Sheilds 1996:x-xi). Similar to Gusfield, Maffesoli holds that through tribes individuals experience a common faculty of feeling and experiencing, and tribes provide a means for individuals to recognize themselves (Maffesoli 1996:77). Maffesoli espouses the hypothesis of sociality, "the fact of sharing a habit, an ideology or an ideal determines the being-together and allows the latter to act as a protection against any imposition, from whatever outside source" (Maffesoli 1996:92). Society is thus experienced and organized through encounters, situations, and experiences in the various groups to which an individual belongs. Individuals are therefore bound to communities through culture, communication, leisure, and fashion.

The work of Beck, Gusfield, and Maffesoli is useful in understanding the importance of the community element of Weight Watchers. A relational community, members of Weight Watchers initially engage with each other as a result of their common involvement with Weight Watchers. However, through the online message boards or

attending meetings, it is evident that this group has become more than merely a number of Weight Watchers members. The online message postings reveal the friendships that have developed amongst Weight Watchers members, as members turn to each other for help and support and expose intimate details about themselves to other members.

Maffesoli's work can be applied to understand how members of Weight Watchers cross geographical boundaries to engage with other individual's who hold similar interests and a shared lifestyle. The Weight Watchers community can be considered an example of a tribe, as it appears that, with respect to particular issues, members come to view themselves, and identify as, Weight Watchers members. As demonstrated through online messages that illustrate members adopting Weight Watcher's principles, members understand and experience essential components of their daily lives, such as consumption and exercise, through the lens of the Weight Watchers philosophy. Thus, with respect to applicable facets of their lives, members share a common world-view that may distinguish them from other individuals. This in turn works to reinforce a sense of common identity for Weight Watchers members, as they relate with the experiences of other members, and come to see themselves as a member of a defined group set apart from other groups in society.

We can also apply the work of Gusfield here to understand how this shared sense of experience and understanding is important, as he claims that in contemporary society individuals must locate their own forums of community and interaction with other individuals. Due to the decline of traditional forums of community, it is in these interest-based communities that individuals experience a form of companionship. Thus, members of Weight Watchers become the Weight Watchers community as a form of interaction in

which they identify with the experiences and feelings of other members, and experience society from this shared perspective.

Governmentality

Although there are similarities found between 12-step programs and the Weight Watchers program, the two are radically different in terms of how they conceptualize the issue at hand. For 12-step programs, the 'addiction', or issue, at hand is understood using the disease-model of addiction. As documented earlier regarding self-help programs, the disease model views addiction as something that is beyond the control of the individual, and as something that the individual can never be entirely cured of. It is for this reason that the addicted individual must abstain from any consumption of the problematic substance(s) in question. This restriction stems from the belief that an individual is unable on his/her own to control his/her addiction, and must submit to the aid of a higher power in managing the addiction.

Here, the Weight Watchers program is premised upon radically different principles than 12-step programs. Weight Watchers does not use the language of addiction or take a disease-model approach to what is deemed problematic consumption, but rather advocates a lifestyle-change philosophy towards eating, wherein members are taught to "eat healthy", as well as "live healthy" in all areas of their lives. Here, emphasis is placed upon members learning to eat in a manner that is claimed to be healthy, wherein everything can be eaten in moderation. Thus, members are not required to give up any particular types of foods altogether, but are able to determine for themselves what foods they will consume, choosing from all types of foods that are available to them.

This difference between the two programs is significant in that Weight Watchers members are able to retain control over what they consume, to the extent that they stay within their given *Points* range. Thus, while 12-step programs advocate the inability individual's have to control their own consumption and their own selves, turning to a higher power for a sense of control, Weight Watchers advocates that each member retain an element of power in determining herself what she consumes.

The power relations within the Weight Watchers program can be understood using Foucault's concept of governmentality, as previously discussed. For Foucault governmentality refers to the ways in which power relations work to guide the actions of others through structuring their possible field of action. Freedom is understood as a technology of government, in that individuals are governed through the exercise of their own freedom by their own personal choices. In formulating personal choices, individuals are influenced by the rules and conduct they observe, and thus takes these into consideration when exercising his/her freedoms. Dean (1999:165) holds that in order to act freely individuals must first be shaped, guided, and subjected as individuals capable of responsibly exercising freedom as a subject of needs, desires and choices.

In the case of Weight Watchers, by being given a *Points* range to structure their consumption, while individual members are in fact deciding what they consume their decisions are made in accord with the boundaries or guidelines that have been determined for them by the program. Thus, members are exercising personal decision making, or personal freedoms, in governing their consumption, however they are doing so in accord with a program that has first worked to constrain, or limit, their choices.

Confession

Foucault's work on confession is useful in understanding how these power dynamics work within the Weight Watchers program. For Foucault, the confession is a technique of power in that it works to make individuals governable. Foucault claims that the ritual of confession is itself a power relationship, in that one does not confess without the presence of a partner. However, this partner is not simply an uninvolved party, but is actually an authority who requires the confession so that he/she has the necessary information to be able to "judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault 1978:61-2). Thus, through the process of revealing information about oneself, one becomes governable by an external source, who is then able to cast judgment on the confessing individual, and in doing so works to modify the confessor's thoughts and actions.

In the case of Weight Watchers, Foucault's analysis of confession can be applied to both members who attend weekly meetings and weigh-ins, as well as to a portion of online members, who individually choose to participate in practices of confession.

Weight Watchers members who attend weekly meetings and weigh-ins practice techniques of confession as they report to their leader on a weekly basis to assess their weight-loss progression in the program. Each week members are required to be weighed-in by a leader at Weight Watchers, so that the organization can keep a record tracking the weight loss of each member. Armed with this information, the leader is then in a position where she is able to judge the progression of weight loss in the member, and evaluate what steps that member then needs to take to realize success with the program. So, the leader is able to use the information they receive from the weigh-in to determine if that

member is acting in proper accord with the program, or whether the member needs to modify her consumption to achieve the desired results. The weigh-in is thus necessary in making the member governable, in that without this information the leader would not be able to assess her progress and determine what action the member must now take.

In addition to techniques of confession that take place at the weekly Weight Watchers meetings through weigh-ins, these practices are also taken up freely by online members through the message boards. Here, members may choose to confess to other members how they will adhere to the program for the day in which they post their message.

30/09/2003 5:35:22 AM

Today I pledge to
Walk the threadmill before going to work
I will drink my water at work
I will journal all my *Points*
I will have grilled veggies with my supper tonight

09/10/2003 11:18:31 AM

I am feeling really proud of myself this morning – last night I had a big disappointment, the kind that would normally have sent me out to the kitchen to comfort myself with food (this, by the way, was something I had totally gotten away from but has come back in the last few months, so a new battle). Anyway, last night I realized that I was in danger, so I called my best friend and told her exactly what I was afraid of doing, and we laughed, and I didn't fall into temptation! About things getting easier with time – they do, and then they don't. For 4 ½ years I had absolutely no trouble maintaining. I'm not sure what has changed, but it has been a real battle for almost a year. Feeling good and strong right now, though, and confident that will continue. Ideas? What if we reported on what we ate? For breakfast today I had 1/3 cup 1% cottage cheese and ¼ cantaloupe, plus a couple of cups of tea with milk. I woke up early so ate early, and finding myself feeling a little hungry now I've just eaten ½ my peanut butter sandwich (made with 2 slices whole wheat bread with 1 tbsp regular Kraft crunchy); I'll eat the other half at lunch, with the nice crisp juicy apple that I brought from home. Keep up with the commitment – and thanks for including me!

These postings illustrate members confessing to other members what they will consume over the course of the day to remain within their point range, and also admit how they are incorporating other aspects of the program, such as the exercise and

journaling components of the program. These online postings are significant in that they represent practices of confession that members use as a measure of accountability to other members, in hopes of ensuring that their accountability to another individual will help them to remain on program.

This practice of confession can as well be found in 12-step programs. Step four of the twelve steps requires members to "make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves", emphasizing members being honest with themselves concerning the activities relating to their addiction. Here, 12-step programs advocate that self-awareness can only be realized through admitting one's faults and shortcomings before the 12-step community, and a higher power. For this disembodied subject, recovery from addiction is conceptualized as a spiritual and emotional recovery, rather than as primarily a physical recovery.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the long-term success that has been realized by the Weight Watchers organization has in part been due to members of Weight Watchers reinforcing the program. This success is also due in part to unique characteristics of Weight Watchers, which sets it apart from other popular diet plans. The strong support network within Weight Watchers works to ensure that members are encouraged to remain on the program. The power relations between Weight Watchers and its members allow for members to decide what they will consume, within set limitations, thus allowing for each member to retain some control over their own plan. However, through setting these

limitations, and engaging in practices of confession, members are governed by Weight Watchers as their personal decisions are subject to an element of control and restriction.

Conclusion: Implications and Considerations for Future Work

This project has examined the Weight Watchers program, considering both operational aspects of the program, and as its philosophies. As a weight-maintenance program with over forty years of success in thirty different countries, I have explored how this particular program has remained so successful in a society which offers a plethora of weight-loss and diet programs for consumers to choose from.

I have argued that the ability of Weight Watchers to remain successful is due in part to the sense of community members experience within the Weight Watchers program, and in part due to the ability of individual members to retain a degree of control over their own consumption. These two aspects differentiate Weight Watchers from many other popular diet plans that are more restrictive and prescriptive in regulating consumption, and which do not include a group participation component. Weight Watchers can also be understood as offering more than guidelines for consumption or weight-loss, as its lifestyle approach means that it works to modify other areas of its members' lives, including emotional and psychological components.

I have attempted to demonstrate that these unique characteristics distinguish Weight Watchers as radically different from other weight-loss plans, especially those which do not allow specific types of foods, and is therefore a viable program for individuals who have not been successful in other weight-loss attempts or who do not wish to eliminate entire categories of food from their diet. The ability of Weight Watchers to present itself as a non-restrictive eating plan that is flexible to the needs and lifestyles of each individual member, has thus allowed the program to maintain continued success.

In this chapter I will present some implications of following the Weight Watchers plan examining the idea of empowerment in Weight Watchers, Weight Watchers as an example of neo-liberal governance, and Weight Watchers as a business. Following this, I will consider some areas for future research related to weight-loss programs.

Implications

Although this paper has approached the Weight Watchers program in a manner that emphasizes the successful aspects of the program, it is important to note that there may also be other implications for individuals following the program, as well as implications for society at large. While individual members may feel as though they have much to benefit by following the Weight Watchers program in terms of learning how to eat and live healthy, it is important to note that members are learning how to eat and live in a manner that reflects the Weight Watchers approach towards health. Thus, Weight Watchers is promoting one particular definition of healthy eating and healthy living. Members should consider that this is only one interpretation of health when they are contemplating aligning their eating and lifestyle habits in accord with Weight Watchers philosophies.

Empowerment in Weight Watchers

Weight Watchers is unique in that it presents itself as a weight maintenance program which allows its members to retain a degree of control over their own consumption, rather than dictating to members what they can and cannot consume. It is each individual member who decides what and when they will consume, as opposed to

other weight-loss programs which may dictate consumption to its participants. This sense of control may be seen as empowering as it allows members to maintain a sense of control over their consumption, allowing them to retain more control over their own selves.

Bainstow argues that taking control over one's life is increasingly becoming an ethical obligation of today's citizen, and that as a result "not being in control of everyday living arrangements, your time, your diet, your body, your health, your children, and the satisfaction of your needs suggests that there is something seriously wrong with your ethical constitution" (Bainstow 1994/5:37). Here, empowerment in terms of regulating oneself is viewed not only as something that is good for you, but as something essential to leading a better life.

Bainstow *Points* out that literature concerning health promotion focuses on "promoting the development of cognitive strategies and behavioural skills which will enable people to experience themselves as being in control, of being able to make a difference to their own lives" (Bainstow 1994/5:36). She argues that the idea of empowerment embedded in current discourses of health also has important regulatory implications for those individuals who take up these ideas (Bainstow 1994/5:34). Her work can here be applied to Weight Watchers, in that the program does work to promote particular ideas of healthy living, which work to modify not only the consumption, but the actions of its members in multiple areas of their lives.

Provided on the website, Weight Watchers offers success stories to illustrate the ways in which successful members have credited the program with positive changes in

other areas of their lives, which have resulted from the control they gained over themselves from following the Weight Watchers plan. To illustrate,

Patti credits Weight Watchers with giving her not just a new body but a new life. The 5'8" 45-year-old says, "I was so physically lethargic and emotionally stressed that I was out of control. I was too young to feel that bad." In April 2001 she started attending Meetings. By December she'd gone from 169 to 145 pounds. She's now 140.8 pounds. Patti says enthusiastically, "If you'd have told me a year ago that I'd be a certified personal trainer, incredibly into nutrition and living a healthy lifestyle, I'd have thought you were hallucinating. But I've never been happier."
(<http://www.weightwatchers.ca/success/art/index.aspx?sc=17&SuccessStoryID=1711>).

Patti's success story implies that through allowing her to control her weight, the Weight Watchers program has also enabled her to improve her career and her entire lifestyle. The success stories as a whole offered on the website tend to follow a similar pattern, offering examples of how the Weight Watchers program has affected the entire lives of each featured member, not only changing their lifestyles, but improving upon them.

Weight Watchers as well utilizes celebrity endorsements to promote the idea of control and empowerment within the program. Sarah, the Duchess of York, is the official spokesperson for Weight Watchers, and as well advocates the ability of Weight Watchers to enable an individual to affect change in all aspects of her life, empowering the individual member through her ability to control multiple areas of her life.

I was a different person in early 1997 when I first signed on as Weight Watchers spokesperson. I had just released my biography, *My Story*, and was still living amid bitter criticism in the UK, made worse by negative coverage in the British tabloid press. My confidence was badly shaken and my low esteem made it difficult to imagine what my future might hold. I had lost quite a bit of weight before through a regimen of careful dieting and exercise, but keeping the weight off was still a daily battle.

At first, the very idea of representing Weight Watchers in North America was extraordinary. Though I'd been a Weight Watchers member in London when I was 19 years old, I wondered how I could possibly be a credible role model for successful dieting after so many years of yo-yo dieting. But it was my difficulties with weight control that made Weight Watchers approach me to be their spokesperson. That relationship changed

my life, marking an important turning point when my weight, health, personal life and finances all started to come under control.

Today, I'm fit and trim, having reached my goal weight in December 1997 and becoming a Weight Watchers Lifetime Member in January 1998. I am so grateful to North Americans who have accepted my new life as working mother. After years of criticism and bad press in England, my work in the U.S. helped me to regain my confidence and rediscover my talent as a communicator. I've become a passionate advocate for women's health issues.

Thus, it appears as though some individuals turn to Weight Watchers for similar reasons that one may turn to other self-help programs, because there is a sense of a loss of control over one's body, and perhaps over other areas of one's life as well. It seems as though for some this loss of control over one's body may make one feel a loss of control over themselves, or other areas of their lives. However, this feeling of loss of control may be reversed as individuals see changes in their body as a result of following the program, as it appears that once one understands themselves as in control of how they look, they can as well exert increased control over how they feel and how they act.

Cruikshank (1994:30) takes up Foucault's work on governance, and argues that relations of empowerment are in fact power relations in and of themselves. Relations of empowerment are power relations in that they work to "constitute and fundamentally transform the subject's capacity to act: rather than merely increase that capacity, empowerment alters it as well" (Cruikshank 1994:32). Thus, using Foucault's conception of government, a relation of empowerment also works to act upon the current actions of individual subjects, as well as on their future actions. Relations of empowerment can thus be understood as a technology of government, in which governance is actualized through the actions of individuals acting upon themselves.

Cruikshank draws on the work of Nikolas Rose who demonstrates that the ability to govern is dependent upon knowledge, so that government is dependent upon the "production, circulation, organization of truths that incarnate what is to be governed, which make it thinkable, calculable and practicable" (Cruikshank 1994:40). This idea is applicable to the Weight Watchers program in that it is an instance of the ability of particular philosophies and truths to govern, through their ability to structure the possible field of legitimate actions of its members. The ability of Weight Watchers to promote a particular ideas of healthy eating and healthy living, can thus be considered a technology of government in that these ideas work to modify the thoughts and actions of individual members who take them up, so that they are in accord with a particular understanding of health.

Implications for a Neo-Liberal Society

In contemporary North American society, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and their problems, and are urged to seek individual solutions to many issues that may be social or political in nature. Greenberg (1994:2) argues that the 'recovery' movement is concerned with providing a guideline for what constitutes 'the good life', rather than proposing a cure for the particular problem at hand. In his discussion of self-help books he claims that these texts are inscriptions of particular cultural understandings, which work to instruct individuals as to how to lead a moral life, and as to what kinds of selves individuals should seek to be. He claims that standards of sickness and health can be understood as "a quality of life to which we ought to aspire" (Greenberg 1994:104). Thus, he argues that the reason an individual may be "eating oat

bran or exercising 3 times a week is a matter of prudence, something we 'ought' to do in order to be 'healthy'"(Greenberg 1994:102).

The discourse surrounding empowerment can as well be understood as one example of this move to encourage individuals to actively govern themselves. As Bainstow argues, the discourse surrounding empowerment claims that individuals should look to themselves for solutions to problems they may have. Thus, the idea that 'good' individuals should take up practices of healthy living takes on a moral connotation, and those who do not engage in practices of healthy living may be presented in negative terms.

Similar to Cruickshank, Greenberg as well refers to the work of Foucault, as he suggests that this is a demonstration of how power relations work to determine the everyday practices and beliefs which hold sway in a given culture (Greenberg 1994:102). Thus, as a society it is necessary to be aware of the potential outcomes of endorsing specific definitions of health, and what the consequences of taking up particular practices of health may be both for the individual and for society as a whole.

Weight Watchers as a Business

The diet industry is a pervasive and competitive market in contemporary society, as various weight-loss programs and supplements are readily available in many communities. Torrens (1998:312) claims that in 1990 the diet industry as a whole attained a profit of thirty million dollars. Weight Watchers International, which is traded publicly on the New York Stock Exchange, has realized substantial profits as well. In 2000 Weight Watchers had a gross profit of \$133 million, in 2001 a profit of \$337 million, and

in 2002 gross profit had increased to \$439 million

(<http://finance.yahoo.com/q/ks?s=WTW&annual>). Thus, not only has Weight Watchers been generating large revenues, but this revenue has actually been increasing over the past several years.

Weight Watchers is presented as an individually-oriented weight maintenance plan that caters to each individual member, and thus may be interpreted as prioritizing the interests or needs of its members, however, Weight Watchers is a business. According to Torrens (1998:32-3) the average weight-loss client is female, between the ages of 35 and 50, involved in a profession either inside or outside of the home, and has significant resources and disposable income. Thus, weight-loss programs cater to a population which has the ability to spend the necessary money not only to initially join the program, but to be able to continue to spend the money required to remain in the program. In her study of the Jenny Craig weight-loss program, Torrens concludes that "the goal is profit, not supporting the self-actualization and self-fulfillment of North American women" (Torrens 1998:44).

Similarly, in the Weight Watchers program, one may question the extent to which the program is concerned with the interests of each of its members. In one discussion on the online message boards regarding Dr. Phil's new diet book and plan, one member noted a common reason behind the implementation of all popular diet plans: money.

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To be honest I think Dr. Phil is in this for the same reason all those other programs (including WW) are – the MONEY. What a coincidence that he just "had" to write another book to tell people how to eat only a few short months after the first weight loss book came out. My how timely. If he's so darn smart and has really helped as many people as he claims he has in the past successfully change their lifestyles & lose weight, then he would have known enough to include the info in the 2nd book with the first. But he is smart enough to know that people are suckers and will shell out more money for the 2nd book. Plus he tells people to eat whole foods more often but then sells supplements and shakes. Hmmm again.

His first book claims that he's got an 80% success rate, compared to the 5% other programs have. I would like to see a show where several people he helped 5 or 10 years ago come on with before & after pictures and tell their stories about how they've kept the weight off. I've kept 35+ pounds off for almost two years and know how easy it is lose weight & how hard it to keep it off and would like some inspiration from his so-called successes. Just call me an ex Dr. Phil watcher, but after yesterday no more!

This message is significant in that it demonstrates that members themselves are aware that the primary goal of weight-loss programs is profit, and that Weight Watchers should be considered as a business. Thus, one should question the extent to which Weight Watchers is concerned with profit versus the individual health interests of its members.

Considerations for Future Research

This project has been an initial exploration of how the Weight Watchers program works, and as such has opened up many avenues for further investigation.

While I used the Weight Watchers online message boards as my primary source of data collection, it would as well be interesting to participate in the program itself, attending weekly meetings and weigh-ins, therein gaining the full experience of participating in the program. As well as gaining a sense of how it feels to actually go through the program, here one would as well be able to engage on a personal level with many members of the program, and with the leaders. This would open up avenues for further discussion concerning aspects of the program I have explored, as well as introduce new areas for investigation.

As well, for the purposes of this project I have assumed that the majority of Weight Watchers members are female, and have used a female model throughout my work. However, I feel that it would be beneficial to explore a gender analysis of the program, which may be facilitated through participation in the program itself or in

observing actual meetings and interviewing participants to determine differences and similarities between male and female participants. A historical analysis would as well be beneficial, tracking changes that have been made to the Weight Watchers program, and the reasons for these changes.

I feel that it is extremely significant to monitor the long-term effects of popular weight-loss plans, particularly those that have only recently become popular, such as the Atkins and Dr. Bernstein diets, which have reduced or eliminated carbohydrates from members' diets. While these programs are very popular because they allow individuals to lose a significant amount of weight in a very short time period, they espouse radically different consumption patterns than those advocated by the Canadian food guide to healthy eating, and as such need to be monitored to consider long-term health consequences. The high-fat and high-protein content of these diets differs significantly from traditional ideas of healthy eating and may pose serious health risks for individuals. As an end result of undertaking this project, I feel that there is a strong need to monitor changing definitions of health and healthy eating, as well as the consequences of following existing and new weight-loss plans.

Appendix

Some Common Food Point Values

Food	Point Value
Animal Crackers (13)	3
Apple, Fresh – 1 small	1
Baba Ganosh (1/4 cup)	3
Bacon (cooked, crisp, 3 slices)	3
Bagel – Any type, 1 small or ½ large	3
Banana	2
Baked Beans - ½ cup	5
Beans, Green – cooked, 1 cup	0
Beef – Lean, ground, ½ cup	4
Beer, regular, 1 bottle or can	3
Pita Bread – 1 small or ½ large	1
Broccoli, 1 cup	0
Buffalo Wings, 3	9
Butter, regular, 1 cup	51
Caesar Salad, 3 cups	7
Cashews, 14	4
Cereal, 1 Cup	2
Champagne, ½ cup	2
Cheese, Feta – ¼ cup crumbled	3
Chicken, white meat 1 slice	2
Chicken, sweet and sour, 1 cup	10
Chicken breast, without skin and bone	3
Chicken Salad, ½ cup	6
Cinnamon bun, 1 large	6
Chocolate – ½ candy bar	4
Club Sandwich	15
Cookies – gingersnaps, 2	1
Corn, kernels, cooked, 1 cup	2
Corndog, frozen	5
Crackers – fat-free, 7	1
Cream Cheese, light, 2Tbsp	1
Eggs, 1 large fried	2
English Muffins, 1	2
English Muffins – light, 1	1
Fajitas, chicken, 2	8
Fish sticks, 4	4
Frog legs, fried, 2	4
Fruit-Flavored Pieces, 1 package	2
Fruit Salad, 1 cup	2
Garlic Bread, 1 slice	5
Grapes, 1 cup	1
Gravy, chicken, canned, ¼ cup	1
Ham, cooked, lean, 1 slice	2
Hamburger bun, 1	3
Hummus, ¼ cup	3
Licorice, 1 oz	2
Liqueurs, any type, 1 jigger	2
Macaroni and Cheese, 1 cup	9
Macaroni Salad, 1 cup	6
Meatballs, without sauce, frozen, 6	6

Food	Point Value
Melba Toast, 4 slices	1
Milk, fat-free, 1 cup	2
Mushrooms, cooked 1 cup	0
Onion Rings, fast food, 8-9 rings	7
Onions, uncooked, 1 cup	0
Pancakes, any type, from mix	1
Pasta, cooked, 1 cup	4
Pasta sauce, bottled, ½ cup	2
Peanut butter, 1 Tbsp	2
Peanuts, 40 (1 oz)	4
Peas, green, cooked, 1 cup	3
Peppers, bell, 1	0
Pepperoni, 1 oz	4
Pesto Sauce, 2 Tbsp	4
Pickles, 1 large gherkin	1
Pina colada mix, ½ cup	3
Popcorn, light, butter-flavor, 3 cups	2
Potato chips, baked, 1 oz	2
Potatoes, ½ cup	2
Quesadillas, chicken, 1	6
Raisins, ¼ cup	2
Rice, white, cooked, 1 cup	3
Saltines, 6	2
Sausages, beef or pork, cooked, 1 link	3
Scone, 1 small	3
Sorbet, ½ cup	2
Soup – bean and ham, 1 cup	3
Soup – Cream of chicken, made with fat-free milk, 1 cup	4
Soup – vegetable, 1 cup	2
Spinach, cooked, 1 cup	0
Sports drink, 1 cup	1
Squirrel, cooked, 1 oz	1
Tacos, beef, 1	5
Tomatoes, canned, 1 cup	0
Tortilla chips, baked, low-fat, 12	2
Tortillas, flour, 2 small or 1 large	2
Trail Mix, ¼ cup	4
Tuna, canned in water, drained, ½ cup	3
Turkey, ground, cooked, ½ cup	3
Turkey Burger, frozen, 1	5
Turnover, fruit	5
Veggie Burgers	2
Wine, ½ cup	2
Yams, 1 large	3

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