

“A Whole New You”: Internet Weight Loss Diets and the Ideals of Female Beauty

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relations between the disciplinary practices of weight loss diets on the Internet and the changing ideals of female beauty. Moreover, I examine the discourse of Internet weight loss diets and the manner in which cyber space is utilized to create virtual communities which affirm the impossible ideals of beauty that are propagated by popular media. For this task I analyze five weight loss programs chosen with the following criteria in mind: the choice of different diets offered or marketed in the website, accessibility or number of ‘success stories’ presented in the site and the creation of a sense of ‘community’ and ‘support’. Michel Foucault’s views concerning discipline and the discourse of the body which contribute to the formation of the docile body are used to examine the discourse of the diets presented in the websites. Furthermore, Jean Baudrillard’s observations concerning the transformation of the body as an object of consumption is also utilized in order to analyze the implications of the ideals of female beauty on the formation of identity. Thus, this paper highlights the fact that despite a rhetoric of empowerment found in the diet websites, through the discipline and constant self-surveillance women in particular are kept in place within the constraints of impossible ideals of beauty.