THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S BODY IMAGES AND PRACTICES: FOUCAULT, THE PANOPTICON, AND SHAPE MAGAZINE

This study demonstrates how the metaphor of the panopticon, a particular prison structure that renders prisoners self-monitoring, offers a useful way of understanding the mechanisms that inculcate an unrealistic body ideal in women. Foucault's notion of panopticism and a critical approach are used to show how textual mechanisms in two issues of Shape magazine—a women's fitness glossy—invite a continual self-conscious body monitoring in women. An analysis of two panoptic mechanisms, “The Efficacy of Initiative” and “Feeling Good Means Looking Good,” is supplemented with a discussion of Foucault's notion of confession/shame, and specific features of Shape's discourse are analyzed for their panoptic content.

An adequate understanding of women's oppression will require an appreciation of the extent to which not only women's lives but their very subjectivities are structured within an ensemble of systematically duplicitous practices. The feminine discipline of the body is a case in point: The practices which construct this body have an overt aim and character far removed, indeed radically distinct, from their covert function.

—Sandra Bartky (1990, p. 76)

In sport studies, the body is the ground for any investigation of sport or physical activity. But sport scholars have until recently taken the body as a given without really exploring our experience of our bodies, our lived bodies. This is especially problematic when we study sport in relationship to women, many of whom have an anguished relationship with their bodies. This relationship profoundly shapes female participation in sport and physical activity. So before we can understand the experience of sport and physical activity for women, we must begin with the female body.
As Sandra Bartky so eloquently argues, the feminine discipline of the body is characterized by duplicity. This discipline is constituted by practices such as exercising, dieting, comporting one's body in "female appropriate" styles (e.g., taking up as little space as possible), applying cosmetics, shaving, dressing in constricting clothing, curling or straightening one's hair, submitting to plastic surgery and/or liposuction, and so on. All of these practices are designed to alter or shape the body in conformity with a feminine ideal, perhaps best exemplified by fashion photographic models, such as Cindy Crawford, Kate Moss, and Naomi Campbell. Yet for many women this ideal is so far removed from their biological endowments that it is nearly impossible to achieve the look naturally. Thus these practices, because they artificially simulate the desired look, are duplicitous.

Yet there is another sense in which feminine bodily practices are duplicitous. As Bartky (1990), Coward (1985), Wolf (1991), Faludi (1991), and others have argued, although the overt function of female body discipline is beauty, the covert function is female disempowerment. The pursuit of bodily beauty encourages women to channel great quantities of energy and money into emulating a rigorous beauty standard. This frantic pursuit of bodily perfection depletes women of the resources that might otherwise be used to combat real political inequities.

How is it that such a body standard is inculcated in girls and women? What sorts of mechanisms install this female body ideology within girls and women in our culture? How does it disguise itself so that the real issue, female disempowerment, is obscured? The purpose of this study is to show how the metaphor of the panopticon, a particular prison structure that renders prisoners self-monitoring, offers us a way of understanding the mechanisms that inculcate such an unrealistic female body ideal.

I focus on two "panoptic mechanisms," or devices that invite a continual self-conscious body monitoring in women. Underlying both mechanisms is the ideological conflation of public and private. An analysis of these mechanisms reveals how what seem to be women's private, idiosyncratic responses are governed by the public sphere in social and cultural mandates regarding femininity.

Here I do not mean "private" in any absolute sense but use the term to signal an ideological construct that is central to our Western economic and political system. "Private" describes the taken-for-granted assumption that each of us is an individuated self with particular, personal qualities that differentiate us from everyone else. "Private" emphasizes our separateness and splits us off from the "public," which is shaped by shared social and cultural influences. I use "private" here as an analytic category to mean one's sense of embodied experience.

The look or gaze is perhaps the best exemplar of how public and private are ideologically conflated in women's body practices. I use "gaze" in a meta-
phorical sense. The gaze is not only a visual act, it is an economy of surveillance that operates on many levels and via many forms of media. Women in contemporary Western culture are socialized to regard themselves through the (masculine) eyes of others, to train their evaluative gaze on themselves so that they are both spectator and spectacle (Berger, 1972; Spitzack, 1990). In the position of spectator, most women learn to compare their appearance with that of the patriarchal feminine ideal and thus become objects for their own gaze. The feminine ideal for White middle-class women is tanned, healthy slenderness, with no unsightly bumps, bulges, or cellulite, and bodily and facial perfection that result from hours of labor: exercise, makeup use, and hair care (see, e.g., Coward). However, most women learn to think of this ideal as one springing from their innermost selves. The gaze that they train on their bodies seems to be an expression of their own personal quest for perfection, and they learn to see their bodily shortcomings as private failures (Spitzack, 1990). How is it that the gaze, which is culturally and socially mandated, disguises itself as private? Foucault’s (1979) metaphor of the panopticon may help us to understand the dynamics of the gaze and how it works to preserve the feminine body ideal.

The panopticon is a prison structure that places a guard tower at its center and positions prisoners in a circle around that center. From the tower, the guard can observe each prisoner in his or her cell, but the prisoners cannot see the guard. The effect of this arrangement is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). Thus the guard need not even be present in the tower; the mere possibility of surveillance renders the prisoners docile. Power in the form of observation makes the prisoner his or her own prison guard and encourages the continual surveillance of the self; every wrongdoing is then made visible, allowing the possibility of punishment for each transgression.

In an analogous way, women are exposed to the panoptic gaze, which surveys women for possible “transgressions” against the patriarchal ideals of femininity. The panopticon functions so effectively because it does so via private self-monitoring. Women internalize the gaze and turn it against themselves, although their surveillance of themselves seems to originate elsewhere. Bartky (1990) points to the covert, duplicitous nature of the panoptic gaze when she declares, “Where and who are the disciplinarians? The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular” (p. 74). The disciplinarian is a disembodied authority. The invisibility and ambiguity of the source of that gaze encourage women to believe that the body standards they apply to their own bodies are personal and private standards. Thus women may blame themselves—instead of social institutions and public practices—for their anguished relationships with their bodies (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1989; Spitzack, 1990).
The panoptic gaze is enstructured into many forms of media—magazines, film, newspapers, television, books, radio—and functions on many levels—textual, institutional, psychic, and so on. Because panopticism renders the social forces of patriarchy invisible, it is extraordinarily difficult to pinpoint it and thus difficult to resist.

Discourse studies, especially those concerned with the operations of patriarchal ideology, need to explore how various texts work panoptically. This is something that few sport scholars have done; this omission is all the more surprising given sport scholars’ interest in the body, experiences of the body, and media portrayals of the body. Furthermore, very few sport scholars have examined the discourses and practices of the body as they relate to the ideological conflation of the public and private. Ingham (1985) argues that this conflation sometimes operates to serve the interest of class, as does Harvey (1983) in his sociological study of physical educators in Quebec. However, neither author specifically focuses on the linkages to gender. This is another crucial omission. My study incorporates both goals by analyzing how sporting texts operate panoptically through the ideological conflation of public and private.

**Panoptic Mechanisms**

One of the ways the panoptic gaze works is through the public discourses of health, fitness, exercise, dieting, and beauty. In both the general women’s magazines, such as *Glamour, Cosmopolitan, Mademoiselle*, and *Seventeen*, and the fitness-oriented women’s magazines, such as *Shape* and *Women’s Sports and Fitness*, how to become healthier, fitter, thinner, and more attractive are recurring themes with variations. These themes are rhetorically framed in ways that make them “panoptic mechanisms.” In this article I focus on two such mechanisms. The first, “The Efficacy of Initiative,” suggests that personal initiative and commitment are all that are needed to make major changes in one’s body and its appearance, and this suggestion is predicated on the assumption that all readers will naturally want to reshape their bodies much like the models on the pages of women’s magazines. The second mechanism, “Feeling Good Means Looking Good,” emphasizes the importance of health but links feeling good to looking good so that real health issues are subordinated to beauty issues. The discourse of shame and confession fuels both of these mechanisms by deepening motivation and imparting a sense of moral urgency to personal commitment and the achievement of health.

These mechanisms ideologically conflate private and public by exhorting women as private individuals to commit to “worthy” body changes (always under the guise of finding one’s own “right” weight and body shape, a body regime tailor-made for that person). And they urge women to commit to a healthy lifestyle (again, under the guise of discovering the healthful routines that
fit one's unique personality and predispositions) while functioning to ensure women's compliance to a public and monolithic feminine body standard, that of slenderness and beauty. In other words, although panoptic discourse professes a concern for individuals' most intimate and private problems, it imposes rigorous public mandates and admits no shirking, regardless of one's particular circumstances or biological heritage.

THE TEXTS

I describe how the panoptic gaze is encouraged in women via these mechanisms by analyzing the texts of a recurring feature, “Success Stories,” in the magazine Shape. I have chosen Shape because it is a popular, successful glossy oriented around body and fitness concerns. The title is revealing: “Shape” suggests both fitness (what kind of shape are you in?) and physical appearance (the shape of one's body—its muscles, curves, bulges, and so on).

I selected the September 1992 issue for analysis because it is the magazine's 11th anniversary issue and therefore likely to be a vivid and explicit embodiment of the Shape ideology. I also wished to include a typical issue in my analysis, so I examined the following month's issue (October) as well. Although this sample is quite limited, given the goals of my analysis it is appropriate. This is a textual analysis study, not an audience reception study, and I am not arguing that women must or, indeed, do interpret Shape in a particular way. Only audience reception studies can assert how readers actually interpret texts. Rather, textual analyses like this one can suggest plausible interpretations of texts and offer compelling ways of thinking about social phenomena.

Thus I wish to emphasize that the point of this study is to show, using the metaphor of the panopticon, how these two Shape texts invite women to internalize a rigid, unrealistic body standard. My argument centers on the efficacy of this metaphor (panopticism) and critical (Foucauldian) approach for understanding some of women's body practices. Two issues provide many examples of how the panoptic gaze is encouraged by the text.

Most poststructuralist media theorists (e.g., Barthes, 1977; Benjamin, 1968; Eagleton, 1985; Morley, 1980) contend that texts carry multiple meanings and that those meanings are constructed by both the texts and the readers or viewers themselves. Although there are “preferred” meanings invited by texts, all texts contain the possibility of their own subversion, and some readers may find pleasure in resisting those preferred readings. Thus there may be some Shape readers who resist the panoptic gaze, or who focus on the strength and power of the body ideal presented therein rather than on the beauty/slenderness motive. My goal, then, is not to argue that every reader uncritically accepts the body beautiful ideology, nor is it to argue that every Shape article is potentially disempowering, but I do wish to demonstrate that there are compelling discur-
sive mechanisms that encourage the Panoptic gaze and yet conceal its source and motives from "view."

THE EFFICACY OF INITIATIVE

The first mechanism is the magazine's use of the rhetoric of personal initiative (Coward, 1985; Faludi, 1991; Spitzack, 1990), which disguises as a purely personal motive the fact that what is being urged is compliance with the public, societal feminine ideal. This discourse implies that all one needs to do to get healthy, lose weight, sculpt muscles, and become beautiful is to make a private commitment to a new regime. Then the hoped-for results will automatically ensue. For example, "One solemn promise to yourself is all you need to get started. Follow it up with sound information and a solid plan of action and you hold the formula for success. Just eight weeks from now, you could witness similar changes in yourself and be well on your way to a fitter, healthier, happier you!" (September, p. 69).

In the September and October issues, each Shape "Success Story" contains pictures and narratives of individual "reader-models," a term used by the magazine to describe readers whose fitness regimes have been profiled on its pages. These reader-models have reshaped their bodies and (the magazine implies) their lives by losing weight, toning their muscles, changing their eating habits, and upgrading their exercise routines. Each featured reader-model offers up the particular details of her body dilemma and is presented as an individual with special challenges to confront and special problems to solve. Nevertheless, every reader-model ends in the same formulaic way, with a public moral: Do what I did, and you'll be healthier and happier.

Editorial comments (captions, introductions, etc.) invite the reader to take note of these inspiring examples of personal initiative. Personal choice and commitment are presented as the keys to a perfect body, which is within the reach of every individual. The text suggests that so long as one wants this private conversion experience, one can have it. What the text fails to point out is that the body shape being advocated is cut from a single, public mold. It is a slender, toned fashion model shape free of flab and cellulite, with only minute variations allowed.

For example, on the September cover, superimposed over the images of three reader-models clad in spandex are large letters proclaiming "We did it! Reshape your body with our 8-week program." The subtext here is that if we did it, so can you. This is a perfect example of how the public and private are conflated. The cover models embody the (public) feminine ideal: slender, toned, glamorous. At the same time, readers are exhorted to take charge of their (private) lives and model them after the (private) individuals (Shape readers like yourself) who embody this (public) ideal.
The September cover text encourages female readers to survey themselves privately for figure problems. Noteworthy is its concealed (public) assumption that virtually all women's bodies are deficient and in need of improvement—and every reader should strive to improve her Shape. The cover caption "Reshape your body with our 8-week program" is not qualified (e.g., "If you're overweight or weak, reshape your body . . .") but is, rather, a blanket invitation to all readers to assess their bodies for their flaws and reshape their bodies accordingly. The real issue here is not flab, fat, or cellulite but power. Women who continually monitor their bodies for imperfections, who constantly diet, and/or who exercise to extremes are both physically and psychologically disempowered.

The inside text of the September issue continues the personal appeal made to the reader: "Shape readers Leslie Yoakam, 27; Jodie Sawyer, 25; and Kristy Puppo, 26; are anything but typical Success Stories, but they may have a lot in common with you" (p. 66). Here, notice Shape's emphasis on the individuality of its cover models (they are anything but typical—just like you!). And yet, as they benefited from Shape's intervention, so can you.

The text continues along these lines:

Just a few months ago, these women were living proof there's more to fitness than body-fat measurement. Since then they've made some dramatic changes in their lives by committing to more healthful habits, undergoing fitness and nutrition assessments and investing eight weeks of hard work in a get-started program . . .

Intrigued? The next 17 pages will show how they did it, and how you can too! (p. 66, emphasis added)

Here the suggestion is that, like the reader, the featured models were once unhealthy, unfit, and imperfect. However, by dint of personal initiative and choice, they became fit and beautiful, thereby turning their lives around, just as the reader can. According to this rhetoric, regardless of figure problems, the reader, too, can benefit from Shape's expertise, if she'll only make the effort.

Throughout this cover story, the Shape discourse resonates with "can do" fervor. "One solemn promise to yourself is all you need to get started. . . . You hold the formula for success" (p. 69, emphasis added). All one needs, the text implies, is the gumption to commit oneself to the worthy cause of figure reshaping/life revamping. According to this rhetoric, merely making the private commitment ensures results: "You hold the formula for success" (p. 69, emphasis added). The implicit flip side of this rhetoric is that you and you alone must take the blame for any bodily shortcomings if you fail to make the commitment or if you fail to measure up to the (public) feminine ideal. This discourse makes one take personal responsibility for a public, patriarchal value. Reshaping one's body, it seems, is solely a matter of initiative and choice on the part of the individual. In suggesting that anyone can achieve a healthy, beautiful body, the magazine
discourse sets women up for a lifetime of self-monitoring, exercise, and weight control.

Underlying the idea that anyone can reshape her body—just as the reader-models have done—is the notion that it is very desirable to do so. *Shape* continually reaffirms the health benefits of exercise and dieting. Yet these benefits are coupled with beauty in an insidious way so that health ends up being featured as a means to beauty. This is the second panoptic mechanism.

**FEELING GOOD MEANS LOOKING GOOD**

Although health is consistently promoted in the discourse of women’s magazines, it is often linked to feeling and—more saliently—*looking* good. Whereas health may be a private condition that varies from individual to individual, beauty is a social, public standard that admits few variations in our culture. Therefore when beauty is advanced under cover of the rhetoric of health, its appeal to the reader is persuasive, yet duplicitous: How could we not be concerned with something as intimately connected to our private well-being as health? How could we ignore the authoritarian voice that suggests our personal health is at stake? Nonetheless, although the overt focus is on private health, the covert focus is on (public) norms of appearance: the Vic Tanny/Cindy Crawford body: thin, toned, perfectly groomed.

Throughout *Shape*, the theme of health is de-emphasized while the theme of beauty is foregrounded. For example, “Success Stories” contain “before” and “after” photographs of these reader-models so the audience can gaze upon the old versus new and improved bodies. In the October issue, the “before” pictures are all candid shots and are usually out of focus, poorly lit, or unflattering. For instance, one subject is pictured at the beach with rumpled wet hair, squinting at the camera (p. 62); another wears a shapeless bathrobe (p. 64). The three models are carelessly dressed: bathing suit, bathrobe, running shorts, and too tight T-shirt. They look unhealthy, tired, sloppy. In the “after” pictures, each model wears clingy spandex exercise attire so that every contour is exposed to scrutiny. The models appear more healthy, energetic, and well-groomed. We are likely to notice the visual contrast and to see that healthier bodies make for more glamorous, more attractive appearances.

The magazine’s written text reinforces the panoptic gaze established by the photographs. A chart arraying vital statistics accompanies pictures of the reader-models. Age, height, pounds lost, percentage of body fat lost, and before and after measurements of bust, waist, hips, and thighs are presented for the audience’s inspection. In this way, every personal physical detail is exposed to the reader’s scrutiny. The reader is led to think that the loss of inches in one’s hips, waistline, thighs, and the loss of pounds must invariably lead to enhanced health. Why else would *Shape* document these measurements? Furthermore, these
charts invite the reader to compare her measurements to those of the model. The implicit message: How well do YOU measure up, compared to our healthy, lovely model?

Yet if health were the real issue, wouldn’t different kinds of statistics be more pertinent? How about statistics such as resting heart rate, recovery of heart rate, blood cholesterol, VO2 Max, or even measures of strength and flexibility? Yet nowhere do we find such tables. Instead, the evidence all hinges on appearance, pointing to beauty as the covert yet central issue. Changes in the measurement of one’s bust probably have little to do with one’s overall fitness or health but much to do with public beauty standards.

Both the photos and the statistics implicitly encourage readers to be highly conscious of their own appearance and measurements. Yet while readers may intend to take their own measurements for health reasons, the very act of weighing and measuring oneself is an invitation to panopticism. These practices encourage obsession with one’s shape and appearance and comparison with the public ideal embodied in the photographs and charts. The panoptic gaze thus functions as the enforcer.

Thus, in the October issue, reader-model Mary Guthmiller is pictured “before” in what is clearly a candid family snapshot (p. 64), shown from the torso up set against the background of her hospital bed, clad in a Shapeless bathrobe, holding her newborn baby. The “after” shot (p. 64) is a full-length portrait of the newly slender Guthmiller, posed in her form-fitting aerobics leotard, angled toward the viewer in a three-quarters profile. Here she is beautifully coiffed and made up. The before-and-after photo juxtaposition thus invites an evaluative gaze, encouraging the reader to note figure defects in the “before” shot (the plump face, the double chin), to note the beauty improvements in the “after” shot (the lean face and neck, the more fashionable hairdo, a lighter shade of blonde). The suggestion is that fat is unhealthy (even though adipose tissue is actually biologically necessary for childbearing). And the contrast in glamour suggests that one’s appearance naturally improves with the healthy loss of pounds or inches.

Specific sections of the written text that constitutes “Success Stories” more explicitly point to the health-leading-to-beauty message. For example, in the September issue, reader-model Kristy Puppo concludes her narrative with this passage: “I have so much more energy when I have a good workout regimen. Let’s face it, if you feel good energywise you’re going to feel good mentally, and the fringe benefit is looking better” (p. 70). Note that the last item in this chain of causality is looking better; in this statement, the final summation is that exercise makes one look better. Here the “you” seems to be directed at me, the individual; I am, in fact, drawn in by her personal address to me. Kristy speaks with the voice of authority, so I had better go pump some iron.
The introduction to the three featured “Success Stories,” wherein some disembodied authority seems to reside also underlines this message: “As Kristy, Jodie and Leslie have discovered, the better you treat yourself, the better you look and feel. Whether you want to lose 5 pounds or 105, cut your body-fat percentage to a healthier level or add a few muscular curves, being a Success Story means taking great care of yourself” (p. 66, emphasis added). Thus “taking great care of yourself” is transmuted into becoming healthy and beautiful. The editorial comment on Kristy’s exercise and diet plan success reads, “[Kristy] worked to establish strong exercise and nutrition habits and in the process rebuilt her self-esteem, emerging from a period of depression looking and feeling better than she had in years” (p. 69, emphasis added). Here, the equation between feeling good and looking good works in reverse. Look becomes a sign of feel, so if you look good you must therefore feel good (and be healthy).

Two October “Success Stories” also sound this health-as-beauty refrain. Reader-model Andrea Joy Delea ends her story of weight loss and exercise on this note: “Hello to an entirely new outlook, a positive attitude about myself that I never thought I’d have—and a healthy, strong, beautiful body” (p. 62, emphasis added). In a less explicit way, reader-model Marguerite Digaetano tells us that she is more attractive after losing weight through a strict diet, exercise, and stress management plan. She concludes her personal narrative by declaring, “Now I can smile confidently at the thought of facing my 40’s fit rather than frumpy” (p. 60, emphasis added). Her choice of words here point to the conflation of health and beauty, as “frumpy” conjures up images of dowdiness, dumpiness, unattractiveness. If its opposite is “fit,” then being fit implies being attractive.

In short, Shape’s before-and-after photographs, the display of body statistics, and the written text itself constitute the health-leading-to-beauty message, which is one mechanism of the panoptic gaze. The discipline of constant surveillance, exercise, and dieting is thereby transmuted into “taking great care of yourself,” that is, becoming healthy and therefore beautiful. The subtext is the fitter you are, the better you look. Disguised as health, beauty becomes a worthy, achievable, private goal, one engaged in for its own sake. If one fails to attain this exalted form of health, then one has only oneself to blame. For many women, the experience of shame that comes from not living up to beauty disguised as health encourages confession in a way that reinforces the authority of the panoptic gaze.

SHAME AND CONFESSION

Foucault (1979) argues that confession is bound up in power relationships, and it is generally the confessor who is disempowered and the authority who is empowered. Revealing one’s deficiencies renders one vulnerable to the judgment of a higher power. In Shape, although reader-models consistently...
point to their successes in reaching their body goals (loss of weight, loss or gain in inches, etc.), they always do so within the context of private confession: disclosing the most intimate details of their “former” lives, their earlier bodily deficiencies—cellulite, flab, fat, lack of muscle tone—and revealing the temptations to which they have succumbed—pasta, junk food, binging, and so on. Given the difficulties of achieving the female body ideal in our culture, it is probable that at least some members of the audience identify with the models’ “problems.” By lending a sympathetic ear or eye, the audience is also drawn in to the confessional context. After all, here is a woman confiding in us, revealing her secret problems and personal struggles, establishing an atmosphere of intimacy. We may immediately think of our own individual imperfections and weaknesses, the struggles we have in common with the reader-model, the private confessions that we could or should make.

Confession also suggests a frank acknowledgment of the truth; that one has engaged in sinful, immoral acts against her better judgment. The confessional atmosphere established by the confiding tones of the models encourages us to freely confess our own bodily shortcomings, the “truth” that our bodies do not measure up, that we have not stuck to our diets, that we have eaten hot fudge sundaes. We confess our sinfulness, our bodily inferiority to our friendly reader-models, to the mirror or to the disembodied authority who resides everywhere and nowhere. This is no doubt the intention of the producers of *Shape*, as selling their magazine is predicated on producing feelings of shame in women about their bodily deficiencies.

The discourse of shame/confession adds urgency and morality to the stories that populate the pages of women’s magazines, whether *Woman’s Day* (“Can This Marriage Be Saved?”), *True Confessions*, or *Shape*. This discourse deepens the ideological conflation of private and public. Although confession is allegedly a private practice (hence the anonymous confessional booths of the Catholic church), private disclosures go public when published in women’s magazines. And private individuals are encouraged to conform to public standards, although those public standards are characterized as private; for example, in the context of *Shape*, “Look your best” actually means “Look like Cindy Crawford.” Sin—a personal spiritual crisis—lurks behind confession, along with the notion that sin involves nonconformity to an accepted public standard. Sin must inevitably lead to social sanctions, public isolation, or exposure to public condemnation, as the writers of *Shape* are quick to suggest.

Each of the reader-models featured in *Shape*’s September issue confesses her problems in the narrative section of “Success Stories.” Kristy Puppo’s narrative begins on a confessional note, as she describes her family upbringing, which strongly shaped her eating habits and led her into sin: “My family is Italian, and I was raised on fattening foods—loads of sausages, oily peppers and pasta”
Puppo admits to feeling ashamed of her weight: "When I struck out on my own at 21, I weighed 155 pounds. One day, some guy said to me, 'You have such a pretty face, it's really too bad. . .' " (p. 70). Here we have both confession and an illustration of how the gaze may work in practice: men who imply that weighing 155 pounds is a public, social tragedy, particularly when one has a pretty face.

Later, we learn even more intimate details that support the confessional mode: "I really started going downhill when my husband and I separated. For the first two months I was so depressed I couldn't go to the gym—I could barely get out of the house" (p. 70). However, in a dramatic turnaround, this story, like the other confessional narratives, has a happy ending. In this case, Puppo's happiness is achieved with the help of a personal trainer and a personalized exercise and diet program set up by Shape. Puppo's description of her success resounds with the enthusiasm of the converted (which is an important aspect of confession—enthusiastically embracing one's "true" self, the new, improved self). It is in this mood of almost religious fervor that Puppo claims, "I have so much more energy when I have a good workout regimen. Let's face it, if you feel good energywise, you're going to feel good mentally, and the fringe benefit is looking better" (p. 70).

Like Puppo, Leslie Yoakum in the same issue confesses her unhealthy eating practices: "I grew up on fad diets. At a young age, I learned about 'good' and 'bad' foods and developed a guilty conscience about eating. I got caught up in the insanity of dieting" (p. 69). Note that here as previously eating is presented not as a normal bodily desire but as original sin, about which one may develop a guilty conscience. Yoakum admits to eating and exercise obsessions, intimate details indeed: "I wanted to be healthy, but as my love for competitive sport grew stronger, so did my body-image obsession. In college my eating disorder reached its height and I reached my all-time low" (p. 69). Later she confides that she joined a support group where she learned that she starved herself and overate to block her emotions (p. 69).

There is a sad irony that Shape should feature a woman with exercise and eating disorders—the very conditions that such a magazine reinforces through its panoptic gaze—and then "rescue" her from these excesses. Like Puppo, Yoakum describes her conversion with missionary zeal:

I heard that Shape was looking for people who wanted to reshape their bodies and lose fat. I quickly applied and was thrilled when I was chosen. I met with the State of the Art Fitness trainers who put me on a weight-training program and a sound, 2,000 calorie-a-day nutrition plan. The results amazed me. . . . By eating more and being less strict, I lost inches and body fat in a short time. It's incredible how well my body works when I fuel it properly. I no longer crave sweets, my energy has increased and I've finally found the balance I've sought for so long. (p. 69)
In the October issue, “Success Story” Mary Guthmiller continues the confessional tone. She begins her narrative in this way: “Nine years ago this summer, at 23 years old and 233 pounds, I decided to invest a year in myself, one devoted to learning all about nutrition, finding some sort of exercise I liked and mending my shattered self-esteem” (p. 64). From the very beginning, this story sets the stage for confession—and consistently reveals the innermost secrets of Guthmiller’s life, such as her binging and vomiting (p. 64). Even the more private details of her marital life are open to public inspection: “During my pregnancy I gained 65 pounds. My husband informed me on the day of my daughter’s birth that if I didn’t lose all my weight he would divorce me. That’s how my commitment to myself began” (p. 64). This statement vividly illustrates how public and private are conflated, for Guthmiller identifies her husband’s insistence on her living up to a public, patriarchal ideal as the motive for her own personal commitment.

Note that the husband’s public threat, the withholding of love and approval, is what spurs Guthmiller on to begin her “new life.” The consequences of sin are graphically illustrated; men punish us when we weigh too much. The panoptic gaze is installed when an important man in our lives tells us that his love is contingent on how successfully our weight and body shape conform to a public ideal. Following the formula established by other “Success Stories,” Guthmiller tells us how she turned her life around by reading about nutrition, joining a figure salon, starting aerobics. Her zeal for her “new life” is apparent in the words she chooses: “The few hours I spend exercising each week multiply in terms of renewed energy, which allows me to be more efficient at everything I do. . . . Losing weight didn’t make all my problems disappear. Losing more than 100 pounds, however, gave me the confidence that I can do anything I want if I’m willing to work for it” (p. 64). Here the confession ends with personal initiative rhetoric described earlier: by really committing oneself to a body-shaping plan, one can accomplish anything, including losing 100 pounds.

Later on in the narrative we learn that Guthmiller made some major changes in her new, healthier life, including divorcing her first husband and marrying another man, “someone wonderful who loves me just for me” (p. 64). This ending implicitly connects the new health and exercise regime to success in love.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has been devoted to understanding how textual mechanisms, which I have labeled “panoptic,” further the ends of patriarchy, disempowering women through the ideological conflation of public and private. The metaphor of the panopticon offers a useful model for understanding how women become obsessively self-monitoring.
In the two issues of Shape examined here, all the “Success Stories” follow a formula that varies only in the particulars. Each woman has some kind of individual body deficiency, some physical shortcoming that causes her private grief. Her physical problems are symbolically linked to interpersonal problems (a troubled marriage or a relationship difficulty caused by blocking one’s feelings). The woman confesses her mistakes to the disembodied authority residing on the pages of Shape—or is it to the reading public who is encouraged to become that judgmental authority?—makes a commitment to a new, healthier body, exercises, and diets and feels and, more important, looks wonderful. At the same time, the personal problems that plagued her before are solved or are no longer in evidence (her reward for public conformity?). As each of these women makes an effort to more closely resemble the feminine ideal, her life improves. The magazine, of course, does not claim that the consequence of losing weight or toning one’s muscles is a better life. But the form that these stories take makes this connection for the reader (Williamson, 1978). The news of the improved body is always juxtaposed with the fact of the improved life. This is a good example of the duplicity that operates when the female body is at issue.

This formula achieves the conflation of private and public very skillfully. Each of these women is featured as an individual, yet their stories contain public moral imperatives to conform to the feminine ideal. Each of these women mouths the same kind of “can do” fervor, makes a statement of personal conviction and commitment after confessing her sins, and ends on a triumphant note that invites the reader to share in her success (no doubt by reading and following the dictates of Shape magazine). The story thus is a public one in the sense that it has recurring themes. And it is public in the sense that it invokes a social standard, complete with moral overtones that imply this tale should be a lesson to us all (the reading public).

In two of these stories, the women experience eating, dieting, and exercise disorders, yet the magazine continues to feature particular eating regimens and exercise plans as the remedy for what it frames as private, individual problems. Instead of questioning the public, social motive that mandates an almost-impossible-to-achieve body ideal—from which eating and exercising obsessions frequently result—Shape seems to argue that the eating and exercise regimes the women followed earlier were the wrong ones and that the women themselves were at fault for their lack of personal commitment to this rigid body ideal (as demonstrated in their confessions, their admissions that they sinned, their shame over their shortcomings). All that is needed to fix the problem is a little personal initiative, a concern for health, and the right diet and exercise plan (which appears on the pages of Shape), and then one is beautifully transformed, a real-life Cinderella.
If indeed the panopticon provides us with a useful understanding of how unrealistic body standards are inculcated, a significant question arises: Are the effects of the panopticon potentially more disempowering for women than for men?

The body is a particularly useful instrument for concealing public motives as private ones because the body seems irreducibly private and individuated—my body is experienced as separate from other bodies (even if this experience is in some senses illusory). The sense of my body as separate from others is accentuated by normal female socialization, where women are encouraged to compete against (and hence separate themselves from) other women for men, and the female body itself is the locus of that competition.

The body as site of this ideological conflation is especially disempowering for women because the public bodily ideal that is being promoted is virtually unattainable. Efforts to achieve this ideal are doomed to failure from the very outset.

The ideal of toned slenderness and a total absence of cellulite, flab, and fat runs directly counter to women's biological predispositions. Female reproductive functions require sufficient adipose tissue for childbearing, and the sites of fat are genetically programmed so that fat is deposited in the breasts, hips, thighs, and belly. Yet the female beauty ideal demands that these very areas—with the recent exception of the breasts—be devoid of fat. Only the most strenuous discipline and self-denial can maintain the low levels of fat and the rippled physique typified by Madonna and fashion models like Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell, and Kate Moss. It is telling that magazine editors employ computer imaging to alter photographs so that if a model's contours are not as free of flesh as the ideal (even models don't quite measure up, it seems), fat may be magically sheared off, creating the illusion of bodily perfection (Wolf, 1992). As women bear children and as they age, their percentage of body fat typically increases and the ideal becomes ever more difficult to obtain.

Yet women's magazines imply that these biological tendencies should not stand in the way of a perfect figure; that they should, in fact, spur us on to greater feats of body control. A special fitness section in the September 1992 issue of Self magazine, which is aimed at a similarly body-conscious audience, illustrates precisely this point in its texts and photos. These shots, all appearing in the same feature, show just how inexorably the body beautiful is pushed, despite (or perhaps because of) the difficulties of achieving such a shape. One photo shows a woman holding a baby (presumably hers) tenderly (p. 174). The subtext is that she has had this child—who appears to be about 3 months old—recently, yet she is slender, toned, and completely free of fat. The way in which the photo is framed, with nature as its backdrop, suggests that it is natural for women to look this trim after having had a baby and that women should achieve this “natural”
look. Another photo shows a woman from the back, naked except for a transparent scarf she is trailing behind her. From this perspective, we see a lean, cellulite-free bottom, slender thighs, and skinny upper arms. The caption reads "This is what 50 looks like if you're fit," reflecting an even greater denial of the difficulties in attaining the body beautiful (p. 179). Apparently not even being 50 exempts women from the panoptic gaze. The insistence that childbearing and age present no obstacles to achieving the body ideal epitomizes the way popular representations set women up for failure. How many of us will look like this at 50, regardless of how fit we actually are? For most women, this kind of physique at 50 requires lifelong dieting and denial, punishing exercise regimens, and probably liposuction.

Further jeopardizing the attainment of the body ideal are the ways our culture encourages a preoccupation with food—shopping, cooking, dining out—and suggests that the rapid gratification of all bodily desires is our due. Moreover, it is women who are most often responsible for food buying and food preparation, so they frequently cannot escape their involvement with food, even if they so desire. Taken together these conditions seem to ensure women's ultimate failure to measure up to the body beautiful standard. The inevitability of failure is what creates disempowerment. When women do fall short, their failures prey on their self-esteem, setting up debilitating cycles of self-hatred.

So even when texts such as Muscle and Fitness, largely directed at male body builders, employ panoptic mechanisms, men are relatively less disempowered than women, for the ideal of hypermesomorphism—hypermuscularity—is at least more consistent with male biology and involves exploiting what is already a given for many men—a higher muscle/lower fat body. This does not deny that for some men an Arnold Schwartznegger physique presents as unattainable a goal as a Cindy Crawford physique presents for women. But in our culture, men's worth is not as closely bound up in their appearance as is women's worth (Berger, 1972). Therefore, the consequences of women's failure to measure up to the body ideal are far more damaging than the consequences of men's failure to measure up.

Nonetheless, magazines like Shape promote the Cindy Crawford body with an urgency that seems directly proportional to the difficulty in achieving it. As we have seen, women are continually and duplicitously assured that a fashionable body is within their reach. In the September and October issues of Shape this theme resounds in a way that invites women to the very exercise and diet excesses the magazine deplores. These issues exemplify how the panoptic gaze may be installed with particular efficacy. They do so through "systematically duplicitous practices," two of which I have sketched, that ideologically conflate the public and private, social and individual. Given the preferred readings invited by the text, is it any wonder that many women find it difficult to experience their bodies as subject and to regard sport and fitness as meaningful
for the intrinsic pleasures they provide: the pure enjoyment of movement, the thrill of mastering skills, the challenge of pitting oneself against a worthy opponent?

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**NOTE**

1. Shape has been in existence for more than 12 years, and the most recent statistics compiled (for July 30, 1993) show a healthy circulation: 298,278 subscriptions and 543,192 newsstand copies sold (V. Giramberk, Shape executive offices, personal communication, November 1993).

**REFERENCES**
