ISSN: 1817-6798 (Print)
Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities
available online at: www.jtuh.org/

Binge-eating, Emotional Eating, and Fat Stigma in Erin Jade Lange's *Butter*

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***Keywords*:**
docile body,
binge eating,
emotional eating,
young adult novels,
middle school fiction

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:
Received 1 Sept 2024
Received in revised form 25 Nov 2024
Accepted 2 Dec 2024
Final Proofreading 2 Mar 2025
Available online 3 Mar 2025
E-mail t-jtuh@tu.edu.iq

A B S T R A C T

This paper examines Erin Jade Lange's *Butter* through the lens of the "docile body" concept by Michel Foucault. It highlights the complex interaction between body politics, societal norms, and psychological turmoil. Lange's novel focuses on this issue through the presentation of Butter, an obese teenager who plans to eat himself on a live broadcast, to reflect the pervasive impact of fat shaming, binge eating, and emotional neglecting as well as isolation. Relying heavily on Foucault's concept, the analysis shows how Butter's body becomes a site for both resistance and submission. It reveals the unjust reality of societal norms of beauty and health that are used to discipline teenagers' bodies. Lange's novel critiques societal beauty standards, body shaming, and fat stigma, revealing how bodies become objects of scrutiny and control. Lange's portrayal underscores the devastating consequences of unchallenged societal norms while suggesting the complexities of resistance within the constraints of body politics. Ultimately, the study calls for a reevaluation of cultural attitudes towards fatness and individuality, advocating for empathy and inclusivity.

DOI: http://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.32.3.2.2025.17

الأكل الشره, الأكل العاطفي, وعار السمنة في رواية ايرين جايد لانج "زبدة"

فاطمة ظافر مدحي/ وزارة التربية/ المديرية العامة لتربية صلاح الدين

الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا البحث رواية ايرين جايد لانج زبدة وذلك من خلال مفهوم الجسد الطيع لميشيل فوكو كأساس نظري. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على التداخل المعقد ما بين التصورات الاجتماعية، المعاناة النفسية، وسياسات الجسد. تركز هذه الرواية على هذه المشكلة من خلال تقديم الشخصيّة الرئيسة "زبدة" وهو مراهق يعاني من السمنة والذي يقرر أنه سينهي حياته في بث مباشر على الأنترنت وذلك لأجل تسليط الضوء على التأثير الواسع للسمنة، الأكل الشره، بالإضافة إلى الإهمال والانعزال العاطفي. استنادًا على مفهوم

الجسد الطيع، يظهر تحليل هذه الرواية كيف أن جسد زبدة تحول إلى موقع للمقاومة والخضوع في آن واحد لأجل فضح الممارسات غير العادلة لسياسات المجتمع فيما يخص الجمال والصحة والتي يتم استعمالها لضبط أجساد المراهقين. تنتقد هذه الرواية معايير الجمال، التنمر على الجسد لأجل إظهار أن هذه الأجساد تصبح محطا للتحكم والتحقير. إن تصوير لانج لهذه الظاهرة يعكس العواقب المدمرة لهذه المعايير غير الخاضعة للتعديل وبالتالي تدعو لتغيير معايير الجمال والصحة فيما يخص هذه الفئة من المجتمع .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجسد الطيع، الاكل الشره، الاكل العاطفي، ادب المدارس المتوسطة، ادب الشباب، عار السمنة

1. Introduction: Obesity in Relation to Michel Foucault's Docile Body

Obesity has emerged as one of the most pressing public health challenges of the 21st century. In an era where convenience and sedentary lifestyles have become the norm, the prevalence of obesity has reached alarming proportions, affecting individuals of all ages and demographic groups. This epidemic does not only pose significant health risks but also it exerts a substantial economic burden on healthcare systems worldwide. As researchers and healthcare professionals grapple with the multifaceted nature of obesity, it is imperative to delve into the causes, consequences, and potential solutions for this complex issue.

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher and social theorist, best known for his work on the relationship between power, knowledge, and social institutions. In his influential book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault explores how society's systems of punishment have evolved, particularly in terms of controlling and disciplining bodies. Foucault introduces the concept of the "docile body"—a body that is manipulated, trained, and shaped by social norms and institutions into compliance and productivity. He highlights the shift from physical punishment to more subtle mechanisms of power, focusing on surveillance and control as ways to instill discipline. Foucault’s broader work examines how power operates not just through laws or force, but by shaping individuals' actions and perceptions, making them complicit in their own regulation.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault presents the concept of the docile body, emphasizing that the body is molded by enforced, systematized practices. According to Foucault, the docile body is an object that is "manipulated, shaped, and trained" to meet

the demands of a system (Foucault, 1977). It is through this control that the body becomes a site of power relations, in which social systems dominate individuals. Docility sets in when constant surveillance removes the capacity to resist, turning individuals into submissive forms. The fear of punishment leads others to conform to the norms to avoid harsh consequences.

Body theory, as a sociological framework, addresses how the human body is shaped by cultural and societal forces. In the *Disability Theory* (2011), Tobin Siebers argues that biopower, a key concept for Foucault, determines how individuals experience their bodies. Siebers contends that the body does not exist independently but is created by social and ideological forces. This resonates with Foucault's analysis of power and its effect on individuals. The body is not merely a physical entity but a vessel that can be controlled, shaped, and disciplined by external forces. Foucault traces the shift in punishment from ritualistic physical pain to more administrative methods of control. The modern system of punishment emphasizes discipline, which is enforced through surveillance and control rather than brute force. In this sense, the body becomes a "docile body," subject to disciplinary measures that regulate its actions and movements. For Foucault, discipline is not just about control but about creating bodies that comply with societal expectations through subtle mechanisms of power. As he notes, society shifted from a "dream of a perfect society" to one where individuals are subjected to "permanent coercions" and automatic docility.

The example of the soldier's body exemplifies Foucault's ideas on docility. The soldier's body is marked not only by physical attributes such as strength but also by its adherence to discipline. Soldiers are trained to perform certain movements automatically, embodying the power that is imposed on them. These automatic habits reflect how power is exercised over the body at the level of its physical actions, shaping it to fit specific roles within society. Foucault emphasizes that such discipline is not limited to the military but pervades other institutions, including schools and hospitals.

Discipline, in Foucault's view, operates as a form of power that is exerted directly on the body. It works by distributing and locating individuals within a system, determining how they are classified and treated. The body's movements, duration, and posture are all regulated by surveillance and power relations. Foucault provides the example of students, whose bodies are positioned according to strict rules dictated by the teacher. This "instrumental coding of the body" exemplifies how power operates at the most detailed level, manipulating the body's actions and gestures to create disciplined individuals. Foucault's analysis of discipline culminates in his discussion of Jeremy

Bentham's Panopticon, a prison design in which guards could observe prisoners from a central tower. The Panopticon illustrates how visibility can be used to control individuals. Prisoners, not knowing whether they are being watched, adjust their behavior accordingly. This constant surveillance ensures the automatic functioning of power, turning individuals into self-regulating subjects. The Panopticon, for Foucault, represents a model of power that operates not just in prisons but in various other institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and factories.

Disciplinary power, unlike sovereign power, does not rely on overt domination but operates through the subtle interactions between individuals. It is not a top-down exercise of power but a set of relations that permeates the social body. In schools, hospitals, and prisons, disciplinary power regulates individuals by creating specific systems of knowledge, education, and punishment. This type of power is more insidious because it does not manifest as brute force but operates through routine practices that individuals come to accept as normal.

Foucault breaks down disciplinary power into four components: distribution, control of activity, organization of geneses, and composition of forces. The art of distribution ensures that space is efficiently organized to maximize productivity. Control of activity refers to the regulation of movements and timing, ensuring that individuals adhere to a strict schedule. The organization of geneses ensures that individuals progress through training or education in a systematic way. Finally, the composition of forces refers to the coordination of individuals within a system to achieve maximum efficiency.

1.2 Erine Jade Lange and Young Adult Fiction

One of the significant aspects of obesity novels is the way they highlight battles against depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. This battle is exacerbated by obese characters' strained relationship with food and the way society views them through the lens of their bodies. Young Adults' novel tackles this issue, offering a platform to discuss young adults' journey towards self-acceptance and thus foster possible empathy and understanding. *Butter* by Erin Jade Lange follows the story of a morbidly obese teenager, Butter, who plans to eat himself to death live on the Internet. Through Butter's character, Lange addresses the profound impact of bullying, social stigma, and the psychological struggles associated with obesity. As such, the novel encourages readers to look beyond superficial judgments and understand the complex emotions and experiences of such teenagers who live with obesity. About writing for adults, Erin Jade Lange illustrates:

> I feel like I write *about* young people more than *for* young people. I believe YA [young adult] books are not just for teens but also for anyone who remembers what it was like to be a teen. It's such a short but critical time in our lives that shapes who we are forever. To me, there is no more interesting age to write about. (https://www.crackingthecover.com)

Lange's career as a journalist is a source of inspiration; it motivates her to write about adults and their big issues, specifically when the consequences of these issues are not confined to them but rather affect the entire society. This is confirmed by Dana K. Cassell David H. Gleaves' *The Encyclopedia of Obesity and Eating Disorder (2006)*, which considers obesity among the common problems that have affected one-third of the American population since the 1980s (vii). Regarding the issue of obesity in *Butter* (2012), Lange explains "[it] came from what I see in the newsroom – almost daily stories of childhood obesity, teen suicide and internet bullying. Those stories collected in the back of my mind until one day, they poured out in a flash of an idea about this boy, Butter. His story grew from there". (https://www.crackingthecover.com)

Butter, a nickname given to an obese teenager, is the protagonist of the novel. In the opening, Butter is introduced to the reader as alone and depressed due to the constant use of his nickname by others. He provokes others and openly declares his intention to commit an online self-immolation.

Before sharing his proposal on the Internet, he anticipates that others will either feel sympathy, mock him, or disregard him. Nevertheless, the news of the genuine praise for his performance astonishes him. As his scheme nears completion, he gains greater recognition and experiences more happiness. However, his emotions as the deadline approaches are significant. The extensive endorsement of his live online suicide threat has instilled him with excitement, although he conceals anxiety about the potential consequences if he chooses not to move on with his plan.

In Lange's *Butter* (2012), the characters surrounding the protagonist, Marshall "Butter" Gowan, each play a crucial role in shaping his journey and influencing his decisions. Butter, as mentioned earlier, an obese teenager struggling with self-worth and emotional turmoil, interacts with a variety of characters who either contribute to his sense of isolation or help him find a path toward self-acceptance. From his peers at school to his family members, each character in the novel reflects different aspects of the social and emotional challenges "Butter" faces, ultimately driving the narrative forward and highlighting the complex dynamics of teenage life. Butter's relationships, particularly with

Anna McGinn—who unknowingly forms a bond with him online—showcase the complexities of identity and self-worth. His friend Tuck initially supports Butter's plan for notoriety but later realizes its seriousness. Characters like Jeremy, who passively contribute to Butter's isolation, and his parents, who struggle to address his emotional needs, highlight the challenges of navigating friendships and family dynamics. Figures like Dr. Bean, who underscores Butter's health risks, and Professor Dunn, who recognizes his musical talent, play crucial roles in his journey toward self-discovery. Through these interactions, the novel explores themes of identity, societal expectations, and self-acceptance.

Butter (2012) is a middle school fiction. Defining this fictional form requires a differentiation between young adult fiction and middle school fiction. In young adult fiction, there is an existential question related to identity and belongingness, that is according to Pam B. Cole (2008), "Who am I and what am I going to do about it?" At the climax, the protagonist reaches a realization that shapes his adult identity, which is tied to the resolution of the external struggle. Middle school fiction, on the other hand, addresses a more compassionate, less self-centered viewpoint on the same issue by presenting a young person's pragmatic quest to understand the world. In middle school fiction, the protagonist often aspires to fit in or find an inviting space in the little world of family and school. In young adult fiction, on the other hand, this venue is often rejected or fought against in favor of the terrifying outside world.

Unlike middle school novels, which focus on the outside world, young adult novels mostly take place within the stormy mind of the protagonist. (Campell, 2010, p. 70-1) As such, analyzing *Butter* in terms of fat studies and middle school fiction is guided by certain questions: How does Lange construct Butter's fatness? What poetics does Lange utilize to communicate Butter's fatness to readers, and what do these poetics reveal about the normalization or Othering of fatness?

1.3 The Representation of Fat Stigma and Binge Eating Disorders in *Butter*

The global dissemination of fat stigma is profoundly connected with the social model of disability. The moral ramifications of prevalent attitudes on the physical appearance of overweight individuals indicate that the stigmatization of fat and the establishment of body image norms have extended beyond the context of obesity and have grown increasingly widespread on a worldwide scale. This phenomenon might potentially result in a rise in prejudice and suffering. In comparison to fat bodies, thin ones are of higher quality. Indeed, for those who are overweight and want to break into society, fostering their

spiritual qualities might help them remove the societal gaze from their Other stigmatized bodies. The portrayal of Butter makes this point very apparent. The first chapter of the novel, as a case in point, introduces the readers to Butter; it implies direct and indirect characterization—a matter that enables one to get an initial impression about Butter as an obese teenager: " I'm that guy with the specially built oversize desk…[who] settled into the extra-large armchair…[for whom] nothing better to do than sit at home alone playing music" (Lange, 2012, p.9). This quote implies a Cartesian duality (mind-body problem). Rene Decartes illustrates (1998):

> Now my first observation here is that there is a great difference between a mind and a body in that a body, by its very nature, is always divisible. On the other hand, the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, that is, myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish any parts within me; rather, I understand myself to be manifestly one complete thing. Although the entire mind seems to be united to the entire body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm or any other bodily part to be amputated, I know that nothing has been taken away from the mind on that account. (Decartes, 1998, p. 85-6)

The fundamental principle of Cartesian dualism is the idea that there are two primary types of matter: res extensa, the body, and res cogitans, the mind. Descartes posits that reasoning, consciousness, and self-awareness are qualities of the mind, which are immaterial and non-extended entities. In contrast, the body is a physical, extended entity that is both space-bound and governed by physical rules. In Butter's case, the body and mind\soul seem to be at odds with one another. While his soul and mind can be described by means of words such as sublime and creativity, his body is an anti-docile body whose special feelings for food are expressed in a sensational language that reflects on the way his physical senses respond to food's flavor:

> A single Dorito was balanced precariously on the edge of the bag. I rescued it before it fell out and transferred it to my mouth. The flavors exploded over my tongue—salty, sweet, spicy—everything I liked all rolled into one. God, I love Doritos. As an added bonus, the crunch filled my ears, drowning out the sound of the hated story. (Lange, 2012, p. 8)

The "hated story" he refers to is one of his obese body—the story he constantly avoids remembering because of its synonymous relationship with fat stigma. The stigma associated with being overweight seems to have grown even as the obesity epidemic has

progressed. Butter's body is stigmatized because of its anti-docility. This is materialized in different ways. On the social level, it is manifested in Butter's resentment reference to the humiliation implicitly embedded in the extra charge paid by obese people for airplane seats:

> This chick with one of the airlines was in the story, saying the double billing would start January 1 and trying to play it off like it was for the benefit of the big people, like they'd be more comfortable with two seats and it was only fair to charge them. Well, I call bullshit on that, lady. I knew there was nothing—including cramming my ass into one of those itty-bitty lame excuses for an airline seat—nothing worse than being the guy taking up two seats so everyone on the plane sees you and thinks, "Oh! So that's how big you have to be to pay double." No thanks. (Lange, 2013, p. 8)

Imposing a two-seat with extra charge for customers with obese bodies sparked discrimination claims from advocacy organizations that highlight the way the community has moved beyond seeing obesity as a choice in lifestyle; they called for eliminating the humiliation and neglect of obese passengers' feelings. Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) [1] published on its website an essay about the policy of Canadian airplanes entitled: "To Buy or Not to Buy an Extra Seat:

> To some people, these airline policies are clearly discriminatory. If customers with excess weight must pay for another seat, why aren't tall people required to buy a second seat so their legs don't push into the seat in front of them? A customer with a baby who cries for the entire flight also makes passengers very uncomfortable, as does a customer wearing too much perfume. Yet, they fly for the price of one seat. Whether or not the policy discriminates depends on the meaning of purchasing a ticket. Does the ticket buy transportation to a destination or merely a designated space on the plane? The Canadian courts have ruled the former and forced airlines to accommodate passengers with excess weight by offering a second seat at no additional charge. (https://www.obesityaction.org)

[1] The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Its core focuses are elevating the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improving access to obesity care, providing science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fighting to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.

This essay is trying to give justice to obese individuals and liberate them from the "Other" label by questioning why similar policies are not applied to other passengers. These passengers, such as those with limited legroom, parents with crying babies, and those who wear strong scents, might also cause discomfort for other passengers. As a result of the conservative, docile body society, obese people are subjected to a multitude of structural, institutional, and legal abuses. They face a greater risk in terms of their well-being and livelihood as a result of the pervasive prejudice against their weight. Butter reflects on his mother's prejudiced perspective on the issue of the airplane policy against fat passengers. His mother believes that such a policy is fair in a sense that "docile body" passengers are not obliged to share the seats they pay for with "people who can't lay off the snacks before dinner" (Lange, 2013, p. 9). Her comment rings the bell jar of his fat shame feelings:

> I froze with a meatball sub halfway to my mouth. Damn! Can’t a guy enjoy a little sandwich in his own living room without feeling like he’s being judged? But it was too late to be defensive. Suddenly that sub didn’t look good at all, and the smell of it made me sick. In fact, everything in front of me instantly looked revolting. I hated every brightly colored candy, every salt-coated chip. (Lange, 2013, p. 9)

Being overweight is a badge of shame. Therefore, the remarks of Butter's mother confronted him, within the familial domain, with the horrible fact of his anti-docile body. His mother's remarks about fat bodies signify their innate incapacity to handle the hardships and rewards of contemporary living, including the duties and rights that come with citizenship. What makes Butter "froze" is simply treating obese people like him for the horror of a stigmatized identity, one that has little to do with what he really thinks of himself. His projection of the turmoil inside him is seen in the way he drops the snacks in the trash without a word to his mother. Then he heads to his room, where he wraps his lips around the only thing that tasted good and healthy during one of such episodes—his saxophone.

Stigma is fundamentally a social phenomenon that pertains to the interconnected methods by which certain individuals are perceived as inferior, resulting in a variety of disadvantages. Consequently, fat stigma is a fundamental concept that pertains to the manner in which society perceives and condemns fatness. This is indirectly expressed by Alexandra A. Brewis, Amber Wutich, Ashlan Falletta-Cowden, and Isa Rodriguez Soto in their "Body Norms and Fat Stigma in Global Perspective" (2011):

> It is not well understood whether and how fat negativism might be transforming and homogenizing across groups in the same manner as the adoption of slim idealism. Slim idealism in itself need not inevitably lead to fat negativism, raising the possibility that the processes of any spread in these ideas may be connected, or not. (169)

The above quotation raises questions about whether the promotion of slimness inevitably results in negative opinions on fatness and whether fat negativism is spreading across communities in the same way as thin idealism has. It implies that the distribution of these concepts may be related or may happen on its own, but the exact nature of this relationship is still unknown. Appreciating slim idealism openly by Butter's mother is a repressed desire in a sense that she "stopped talking to [Butter] about food or exercise or anything to do with [his] weight. And the bigger [he] grew, the more she pretended not to see it" (Lange, 2013, p. 10). Butter mistakenly relates this to her feelings of fat sham, which rest on the social truth that is central to the rhetoric of the docile body: the fat body is uncivilized. However, mothers are often believed to be responsible for children's weight. This is confirmed by Butter, who eventually realizes that she feels guilty for being a bad mother who lets her child "get so big" (Lange, 2013, p. 10). She tries to accomplish penance by sneaking sugar out of his diet. Butter explains that "when it came to feeding me, Mom bounced between whole grain and whole fat, vegetables and cupcakes, hope and resignation, the way I bounced between binging and purging" (Lange, 2013, p. 15). A current perspective exists regarding the manner in which individuals would prefer to have their food presented on their plates. In general, food should be delicious; however, there are instances in which this objective is rendered secondary due to health reasons. This is recognized in Butter's breakfast that his mother prepares, "Breakfast the next morning was the usual fare: egg-white omelets and turkey sausage for Mom and Dad; pecan waffles, Canadian bacon, and poached eggs for me. No syrup for the waffles this morning, though. I didn't ask why because I could guess the answer" (Lange, 2013, p. 15). Butter's breakfast is an attempt by his mother to rub out her failure concerning her duty as a mother responsible for her child's healthy, docile body. This meets the claim suggested by May Friedman in her "Mother Blame, Fat Shame, and Moral Panic: "Obesity" and Child Welfare" (2015). Instead of blaming fat children for their presumably miserable fates, the literature invokes the humiliation that fat children face as evidence of parental failure, signs of neglectful and uncaring caregivers unconcerned with their children's health and welfare.

It is intended that children should be provided with positive role models. This implies that they should reside in family structures that provide ample time for relaxation and

companionship and the ability to regulate a secure environment. This is exactly what Butter could not find in his relationship with his father, who othered him because of his anti-docile body. The notion that obesity is self-inflicted, in which an obese son fails to manage their weight through a healthy diet and exercise effectively, can lead to parental stigmatization of fat sons. This conviction simplifies weight management by disregarding the biological and psychosocial factors contributing to weight gain, many of which are beyond the individual's control.

Criticizing sons for their weight does not prevent obesity; rather, it can have detrimental effects on weight management by promoting unhealthy coping strategies, such as the avoidance of physical activity and unhealthy eating behaviors (e.g., binge eating"). In his relationship with his father, Butter practices a kind of stigmatization and fat-stereotypic views inflicted upon him by his father, who neglects and stops talking to him. Despite his persistent endeavors to engage his father's attention via the use of probing inquiries aimed at fostering a dialogue between them, his efforts always prove unproductive. "I still tried to talk to him at breakfast sometimes, though, just to see if I could trip him up and get him to say something directly to me" (Lange, 2013, p. 12). Some parents stigmatize their own children with higher weight, particularly daughters (e.g., Crandall, 1991; Kenrick et al., 2013)—perhaps leading, in some cases, to children’s heightened depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Eisenberg et al., 2003). The distance between Butter's dad and him makes the latter hungry for something and filled with emotions of being an outsider. The mechanism he follows to cope with and work through his depression is playing a particular song in his sax: "I picked up my sax and played a few notes in response. It was a song I played often when I was down" (Lange, 2013, p. 45).

Obese children may face weight-related bullying, taunting, and negative consequences such as low self-esteem, mental disorders, decreased academic performance, and limited social engagement. This is implicitly embodied in *Butter* in two particular incidents: Butter's looking for his big-size seat, "bench" in the school restaurant, and his decision to hide his real identity from Anne in cyberspace. Obese individuals may have challenges while eating out, both in terms of social interactions and physical well-being. Chairs equipped with armrests or seats that are very tiny might cause visible scars and bruises. Meals are endured with discomfort or plagued by anxiety that a fragile chair could break away. In Butter's case, deciding where to sit in the school restaurant is a challenge:

> My bench was missing. My table sat empty at the back of the cafeteria, as always, but there was no bench tucked underneath. I panicked. What

> was I going to sit on? I could borrow one of those rickety plastic chairs from another table, but chances were I'd break it. I looked around desperately for the sturdiest unoccupied chair I could find, and that's when I noticed that every table within a twenty-foot radius was packed with kids just staring at me—and not with the usual curious, what's-he gonna-eat-today glances, but openly gawking. Oh my God. (Lange, 2013, p. 111)

The missing bench incident represents a horrifying accident for Butter. It symbolizes Butter's growing invisibility and other's disregard for him. The bench, where he sits alone, was removed without notice or care, symbolizing how he feels because peers and society forget him as a whole.

Understanding obese people's restaurant dining experience is of significant importance. On the moral level, it is important to learn about obese people's perceptions when it comes to their feelings concerning the restaurant experience that are affected by their weight and social perception of their body image. For obese people, this experience is intensified by their physical self-image (i.e., big/small, ugly/beautiful, flabby/muscular), the way they think others perceive them, and the actual attributes of the restaurant services cape.*, and the service style. Yaniv Poria, in his " Does size matter? An Exploratory Study of the Public Dining Experience of obese people" (2019), explains:

> When they were unable to sit on a standard chair or in a booth , participants described a sense of shame and humiliation: "I tried to get into a booth one time, and couldn't … I wanted to disappear. It was so embarrassing" (Danny, obese man). It should be noted that the gender factor was found to be critical. When referring to the distance between the chair and the table, obese men and women differed in describing the difficulties: Men often referred to their belly, whereas women referred to their breasts ("If I sit in a booth, my boobs are all over the table. The waiters have a problem trying to find room for the plates. The findings reveal that women put forth greater effort to hide themselves from other people's gaze, indicating they are more concerned with others' attitudes than men, being more ashamed and concerned of their body size and appearance. (52)

* Servicescape is defined as the physical environment "in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact ,combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service"

On a more specific level, *Butter* sheds light on the role of the stigma attached to a non-normative body and the impact this has on people's dining experience. The novel addresses the issue of being able to participate in the full spectrum of activities in one's society—a matter that has long been recognized as a basic human right, which society must act to ensure, whether through legislation or by changing social norms. Moreover, in the context of restaurant dining, obesity is represented as a social disability that can be defined as a disadvantage that stems from a lack of fit between a body and its social environment. This social disability generates a desire to hide oneself from others.

Aiming at invisiblizing his obese body, Butter determines to hide his real identity when he starts his relationship with Anna via an online chat platform. Unlike the confinements of the physical space, cyberspace provides him with the confidence to write and reflect on his denied mental personality. William Odysseus Tunningley, in his dissertation entitled "(Dis)embodying Fat Bodies: Erasure and Resistance in Cyberspace and the Classroom" (2012), assumes that:

> Fat bodies have, for far too long, been denied the physical space in the academy necessary to write themselves through full participation. In addition to other forms of discrimination, the physical spaces themselves create a hostile environment for fat bodies. Through what Foucault described as a "learning machine" (147), fat bodies are disciplined, told they do not fit and that not fitting is their own fault. When fat bodies are denied the space to write themselves in classrooms, it is not only fat bodies that suffer but also the learning community as a whole. (2)

Accordingly, in spaces of the web, where bodies are hidden on the other side of the screen, some fat bodies that are hyper-invisible insist not to exist so as not to be met with disgust. Butter says: "I'd certainly never sent her a picture, and I refused to send her a fake photo" (Lange, 2013, p. 12). Within these spaces, Butter's refusal emphasizes his desire to claim space, to write, and to recompose his Othered personality that has been decomposed, marginalized, negated, and oppressed by intensified fat-phobic narratives and anti-fat sociocultural discourse. This discourse is symbolically represented by Charlotte Cooper (2007), who puts it using 'Headless Fatties'*:

> As Headless Fatties, the body becomes symbolic: we are there but we have no voice, not even a mouth in a head, no brain, no thoughts or

*" Headless Fatty" is a term coined by Dr. Charlotte Cooper in **a piece entitled *Headless Fatties*** .In that piece, she comments on what is communicated to society by the media's depiction of fat people (especially women) without heads.

> opinions. Instead, we are reduced and dehumanized as symbols of cultural fear: the body, the belly, the arse, food. There's a symbolism, too, in the way that the people in these photographs have been beheaded. It's as though we have been punished for existing, our right to speak has been removed by a prurient gaze, our headless images accompany articles that assume a world without people like us would be a better world altogether. https://charlottecooper.net/fat/headlessfatties/

In this sense, physical space, according to Butter, is an anti-heterotopic because it is not a space in which being fat is normalized and can be enjoyed playfully and socially. Virtual space, by contrast, is heterotopic, a utopian "placeless place." Heterotopias is a term presented by Micheal Foucault in his "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias"* (1984):

> There are real places in every culture that act as counter-sites, reflecting and inverting societal norms. Unlike utopias, which are ideal and imaginary, these heterotopias exist in reality. For example, a mirror is both a utopia, as it represents an unreal space, and a heterotopia, as it exists in reality and alters our self-perception by showing us a reflection of ourselves in a different space. (3)

Foucault introduces the concept of *heterotopias*, real places that serve as counter-sites reflecting, contesting, or inverting societal norms. Unlike utopias, which are ideal and imaginary, heterotopias exist in reality and challenge our perception of everyday life. He uses the mirror as an example, illustrating how it functions as both a utopia (a placeless ideal) and a heterotopia (a real object that alters our self-perception by showing us a reflection that distances us from our actual presence). Butter's decision to create a website on which he announces his whole self (body and mind) comes as a reaction to the traumatic situation he finds himself in after his attempt to protect Anna against Jeremmy in the school restaurant. On this website, he declares:

> You think I eat a lot now? That's nothing. Tune in December 31st, when I will stream a live webcast of my last meal. Death row inmates get one. Why shouldn't I? I can't take another year in this fat suit, but I can end

* This text, entitled "Des Espace Autres," and published by the French journal Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité in October 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault's death and translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec.

> this year with a bang. If you can stomach it, you're invited to watch … as I eat myself to death. (Lange, 2013, p. 7)

On this website, Butter gives his whole self a space on which it has the chance to write itself, frame by its pen the narrative around itself, and control the messaging, even if that messaging is not always received and delivered in the intended way. The virtual space he creates enables him to say he is fat, and he longs to be the fat body which, though overwritten countless times, is still visible, fighting through layers of effacement and tangled strings of letters for the opportunity to embody the writing of himself. In doing so, he helps make space for other fat bodies, some with stories more poignant and profound than his own.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2005), an eating disorder can be defined as a psychological and physical illness in which patients experience extreme shifts in thoughts and feelings regarding food and, most significantly, eating practices. These people can develop an obsession towards food as well as body weight and appearance. In *Butter*, Butter experiences two types of eating disorders, namely, emotional eating and binge eating. In his "Emotional Eating and Binge Eating Disorder" (2021), Manouchehr Saljoughian discusses the aspects of both emotional eating and binge eating. He defines emotional eating as the tendency in which one responds to stressful and uncomfortable feelings by eating, regardless of whether he or she is physically hungry. Emotional eating, also known as emotional hunger, frequently manifests as a desire for high-calorie or high-carbohydrate foods with minimal nutritional value. Junk food that includes chocolate, ice cream, cookies, chips, pizza, and French fries is often called comfort food. Normally, people who do not have clinical depression may exhibit this behavior as a result of temporary negative feelings or long-term stress.

As a case in point, emotional eating plays a central role in Lange's *Butter* to highlight the protagonist's struggle with low self-worth, isolation, and identity crisis. He uses food as a coping mechanism to endure the emotional pain that he gets as a result of bullying, loneliness, and low self-esteem. He was bullied once for standing up for Anna, the girl whom he loves: "New boyfriend, Anna? I didn't know you liked them so big. But that's cool, babe. I dig chicks with fetishes. Just be careful he doesn't crush you, huh? Wouldn't want you to suffocate" (Lange, 2013. P. 41). This quotation is said by Jeremy who is used to bully Butter at any possible occasion. This incident causes Butter to rush out of the cafeteria because of his feeling of shame and anger; he describes the scene: "I let them all crash over me until I reached the doors and escaped into the blissfully silent hallway beyond, my sandwich still clutched in my fist" (Lange, 2013. P. 41). As he fails to meet

the strict societal norms, he looks up for alternatives to fill in the emotional hole within his soul. Butter's connection to food is intricately linked to his emotions. He uses food to minimize the emotions of rejection and inadequacy he encounters at school.

> I ate my chicken wraps on the way to the teriyaki takeout place, but I saved my stir-fry until I found an empty lot to park in. When the last grain of rice was gone, I tossed the bowl on top of the pile of hollow cups, tacos wrappers, and burger boxes. I wasn't hungry anymore, but I was far from full. I somehow felt emptier with every bite. (Lange, 2013. p. 43)

Food serves as a solace for him, compensating for the absence of significant connections and the ongoing need to conform to conventional norms of physical attractiveness. Furthermore, he feels alienated from his own family because of his largeness. In the novel, Butter's sense of isolation from his parents greatly influences his tendency to engage in emotional eating. His troubled relationships and emotions of being misunderstood lead to his need for food as a source of comfort. Butter's father is emotionally distant and mostly gone from his life. The absence of a strong father bond intensifies Butter's emotions of loneliness and insufficiency. In the lack of a good role model or emotional support from within the family, Butter goes to using food as a means of dealing with the emotional emptiness caused by his father's absence.

On the other hand, Butter has a sense of detachment, even from his mother. She excessively focuses on his weight but ignores to address the deeper emotional challenges he goes through. Butter's feeling of being alone is intensified by her obsessive emphasis on his dietary and physical appearance rather than his mental well. He interprets her worry as judgmental rather than encouraging, which drives him to rely more on food for comfort. He reflects on this when he says:

> I could see how Dad's distance from me made me hungry for something and now mom's solution was to fill up that empty space with food. I could see how assholes like Jeremy made me want to reach for food instead of reach out and make friends. But none of that was my fault, so how the hell I'm supposed to fix it? (Lange, 2013. p. 98)

The absence of understanding and communication causes Butter a sense of loss of belonging. He craves to be embraced and appreciated for who he is, not for what he looks like. Although his family is physically present yet, they are emotionally unavailable, which

leads him eventually to search for a source of comfort that food presents. In essence, Butter's alienation within his family is intricately connected to his emotional eating. The lack of emotional support, understanding, and meaningful connections within his family drives him to find comfort in food, which becomes a substitute for the emotional nourishment he craves but does not receive. This theme in the novel highlights how familial relationships, or the lack thereof, can significantly impact a person's mental and emotional health, particularly in how they cope with their emotions.

Food in this novel serves as the string wheel that drives and motivates the sequence of events. Butter struggles with being a binge eater. Accordingly, binge eating disorder (BED) is defined as the tendency towards consuming a huge amount of food in a very short period of time. Frequently, the patient eats so quickly that they are unaware of what they are eating or how does it taste (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Binge eating causes a person to feel out of control and unable to stop eating, even if he or she wants to. People with BED eat even when they are not hungry, and they often feel uncomfortably full or ill. According to the American Psychiatric Association (1994), BED was first introduced in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a research category in 1994. Those who binge are usually uncomfortable with their behavior in a sense that they feel disgusted or guilty towards themselves and their body, in addition to the scar of shame for losing control over food. Most episodes happen alone in a private space, such as a bedroom, workplace, or vehicle (Mayo Clinic, 2021). Nicoli and Junior (2011) have found that The cause of the disorder has not been well examined, although it has been connected to a variety of social and psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and obesity.

In the novel, one can say that the term binge eating disorder is used interchangeably with emotional eating disorder. Butter's behavior of binge eating is not merely depicted as a physical act but rather a serious manifestation of psychological suffering. Food for Butter is not only a coping mechanism but also a cry for help that allows the readers to delve into the dark sides of obesity and the stigmatization that accompanies it. Butter eats to numb his feelings of pain and to escape from the societal rejection he faces. Butter turns to food to fill the void whenever he feels overwhelmed, either by the bullying he encounters at school or by the psychological alienation he lives with at home. He describes his binge episodes vividly in a way that is frequently portrayed with a sense of detachment to highlight how eating is used as a source of relief for a short period. Food is what made him in contact with his own body in a way that "I knew, it was food. And food was exactly what had just made contact with my face" (Lange, 2013. P. 39). Food also what made him

somehow feels his masculinity when he admits that: "I was a binge eater, not a bulimic. That shit is for girls." (Lange, 2013. P. 29)

Nevertheless, his relationship with food affected the way he perceived his body and diminished his relations with people around him. Butter's sense of self-worth is deeply connected to his opinion of his physical shape, and the ongoing bullying he endures from his classmates only serves to deepen his self-doubt. He is aware of the negative impact of food upon him, yet he feels powerless to stop it because he is afraid of confronting his emotional pain by means other than food. The novel reflects on this point when he meets his friend Tuck, who loses a considerable amount of pounds and advises him to do the same– believing that the fat suit he wears does not match his soul:" I know if I did, I'd at least try to fit in, to make friends. Man, you just assume everything sucks before you try it. You don't give anything a chance because you're afraid of being disappointed. And that is why you eat. Because it never lets you down" (Lange, 2013. P. 99). This quotation underscores the ongoing struggle of those who go through the cycle of binging and self-hatred and reflecting on the real experiences of many binge eating disorder patients.

In *Butter*, the concept of docile body can be seen in the protagonist's relationship with his own body, the societal pressures he faces, and the ways in which he internalizes these pressures, ultimately leading to his desperate and self-destructive behavior. According to Foucault (1977), the "docile body is a pliable object, in that, when disciplinary force is enforced through control and dependency, the subject becomes bound to the structure of such disciplinary practices." Foucault's idea of the docile body is tied to the ways in which power exerts control over individuals, disciplining their bodies to conform to specific norms through various institutions, practices, and discourses.

Foucault introduces the concept of the docile body in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), where he discusses how power is exercised through the regulation and discipline of bodies; according to Foucault, institutions such as schools, prisons, and the military shape individuals into docile bodies—bodies that can be easily controlled, manipulated, and trained to fit into societal norms and expectations. This process of discipline is not merely about physical control but also involves the internalization of societal norms, leading individuals to regulate their behavior according to these norms.

The docile body, then, is a body that has been subjected to, used, transformed, and improved through discipline, making it efficient and compliant with societal expectations. This concept is particularly relevant in discussions of how societal pressures related to

body image and health can lead individuals to engage in self-surveillance and self-discipline, often to the detriment of their well-being. In *Butter*, the protagonist Butter can be seen as a docile body in the way that societal expectations around body image and health shape his identity and behavior. Butter's body is constantly subjected to scrutiny—by his peers, his family, and even himself. This scrutiny reflects the societal norms that dictate that thinness is desirable and that obesity is a sign of failure, lack of discipline, and moral weakness. These norms are enforced through various means, including bullying, parental pressure, and medical advice, all of which contribute to Butter's internalization of these expectations.

From a young age, Butter has been disciplined to see his body as a problem that needs to be fixed. His mother's constant monitoring of his diet, the frequent visits to doctors who warn him about the health risks of his weight, and the relentless bullying he faces at school all serve to reinforce the idea that his body is unacceptable as it is. This external pressure leads Butter to internalize these norms, viewing his body not as his own but as something that must be controlled, disciplined, and punished for its failure to conform to societal standards. Butter's self-discipline is evident in the way he engages in binge eating as a form of self-punishment. Although binge eating might initially seem like an act of defiance against societal norms, it is, in fact, a manifestation of the internalization of these norms. Butter's binges are driven by feelings of shame, guilt, and self-loathing—all emotions tied to the belief that his body is unacceptable. In this way, Butter's body becomes a site of both resistance and submission; he resists societal norms by indulging in food, yet he also submits to these norms by punishing himself for his perceived failure to control his body.

Foucault's concept of the panopticon—a prison design where inmates are constantly visible to a central watchtower—can be applied metaphorically to Butter's experience of surveillance and self-surveillance. In the novel, Butter is constantly aware of the gaze of others, whether it be the judgmental eyes of his peers at school, the concerned looks of his mother, or the clinical gaze of his doctors. This constant surveillance shapes his behavior, leading him to engage in self-surveillance, where he monitors and judges his own body according to the standards imposed by society. The most poignant example of this self-surveillance is Butter's decision to live-stream his plan to eat himself to death. In this act, Butter turns the panoptic gaze on himself, making his body the focal point of public scrutiny. By putting his body on display for the world to see, Butter internalizes the societal gaze to such an extent that he uses it as a means of self-discipline and self-destruction. The live-stream becomes a final act of submission to the societal norms that have disciplined his body throughout his life. This act also reflects the ultimate consequence of the docile body: the internalization of societal norms to the point of self-

harm. Butter's decision to eat himself to death is not just an act of despair but also a demonstration of how deeply he has internalized the belief that his body is unacceptable. His willingness to destroy his body in front of an audience shows how the disciplinary power of societal norms has led him to see his body as something that must be eradicated rather than accepted.

Throughout the novel, various institutions play a role in shaping Butter's body into a docile one. The school, for example, is a site of both overt and covert discipline. The bullying Butter faces from his peers is a form of social control, reinforcing the idea that his body is deviant and must be corrected. The school's implicit acceptance of this bullying, by failing to intervene effectively, further reinforces these norms, making it clear that Butter's body is an object of derision and discipline. Medical institutions also play a significant role in disciplining Butter's body. Doctors repeatedly warn Butter about the health risks of his weight, framing his body as a medical problem that must be solved. While these warnings are well-intentioned, they also contribute to the idea that Butter's body is a failure that must be corrected. The medical gaze, as Foucault would describe it, turns Butter's body into an object of clinical scrutiny, stripping it of its individuality and reducing it to a set of symptoms and risks. Even Butter's family functions as an institution of discipline. His mother's constant monitoring of his eating habits and her obsession with his weight are forms of familial control that discipline Butter's body according to societal norms. Although his mother genuinely cares about his health, her actions also reinforce the idea that Butter's body is a problem that needs to be fixed. This familial discipline further internalizes the societal norms that dictate that thinness is desirable and obesity is a failure.

While Butter's body is shaped by the disciplinary power of societal norms, the novel also explores the potential for resistance. Butter's live-streamed plan to eat himself to death, while ultimately an act of self-destruction, can also be seen as a form of resistance. By turning the societal gaze on himself and making his body the center of attention, Butter challenges the norms that have disciplined him throughout his life. His plan is a way of asserting control over his body, even if that control is exercised in a self-destructive manner.

However, this resistance is limited by the extent to which Butter has internalized societal norms. His plan to eat himself to death is still rooted in the belief that his body is unacceptable, and his act of resistance ultimately leads to his submission to these norms. The novel suggests that true resistance to the disciplinary power of societal norms requires more than just defiance; it requires a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between the self and the body and a rejection of the norms that have been internalized.

To sum up the above, In *Butter*, the concept of the docile body is powerfully illustrated through the protagonist's relationship with his body and the societal pressures he faces. Butter's body is disciplined by various institutions—his school, the medical establishment, and his family—and he internalizes these disciplinary forces, leading to self-surveillance and self-discipline. The novel shows how the internalization of societal norms can lead to self-destructive behavior, as Butter's desperate plan to eat himself to death demonstrates. At the same time, the novel also explores the potential for resistance, even as it highlights the limits of such resistance within the framework of the docile body. Through Butter's story, Lange offers a poignant commentary on the power of societal norms to shape our bodies and identities and the devastating consequences when those norms go unchallenged.

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