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The Beauty Myth in American Literature and Culture

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Mein Dank gilt

... meiner Mutter die mich immer unterstützt und ermutigt hat

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Taught from infancy that beauty is woman's scepter,
the mind shapes itself to the body and roaming round its gilt cage,
only seeks to adorn its prison.

Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 1792

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1 Introduction: “Beauty has its price”: The Beauty Myth in American Literature and Culture

At first glance, the term “beauty” seems to be associated with positive things for the most part. Objects can be beautiful, as well as people and beautiful people are associated with positive character traits. They seem to have more friends, are more successful in their jobs, have a partner, and most importantly, they seem to be happier. There are, however, a few hitches: Beauty only seems to be a prerequisite for a happy life for women, and secondly the likelihood of fitting the standard is restricted to a very small number of women. The rest spend their days with a frustrating quest for this ideal, set by a male-dominated society, which is apparently almost impossible to reach. As a consequence, referring to Betty Friedan, Naomi Wolf coined the term the Beauty Myth for this new “problem that has no name”. According to her “the beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance” (14). She further criticizes that it is as mentioned above, double-edged, owing to the fact that only women have to obey it, while it does not have much to do with men (12). MacCannell and MacCannell cut right to the chase of the matter by saying that “Men are real. Women are ‘made-up’ (212).

On that account, I chose the title “Beauty has its price”. As a matter of fact, many women literally spend a lot of money on various forms of beautification. It starts with body care products such as shower gel, shampoo, deodorant, conditioner, moisturizer (separate for face and body), then we have the hair saloon, tanning, plastic nails, clothes, accessories, shoes, make up, tools for hairstraightening, razors, the list can be continued ad infinitum – and it goes without saying that I am only talking about products for every day. In the United States visits at beauty salons are common, where you can get your hair waxed, have facials, and get permanent make-up among many other things. Be that as it may, you can always take it one step further and have cosmetic surgery. This is, however, a line crossed, as cosmetic surgery involves actual pain. A price more and more women are willing to pay, ignoring the fact that they are at risk to pay with their lives for these medically unnecessary interventions. The title further stands for another representation of the Beauty Myth. Women unintentionally

choose to put their lives at risk, namely when they suffer from an eating disorder. Eating disorders are rather complicated illnesses, which can be the result of many different psychological factors. It has been suggested, however, that the standard set by society, this ideal that is so difficult to reach, has a bearing on the illness.

The subtitle of this paper reveals the fact that I will examine in more detail the representation of the various faces of the Beauty Myth, in popular culture with a special focus on American culture. America is a land of extremes. Everything is bigger in the United States, so literally are the people. In this country we are faced with a special consumer culture. You can buy immense amounts of fat food, which is cheap compared to healthy food, leading to the fact that a large number of Americans is morbidly obese. Considering that high calorie food is cheap, obesity also serves as a social marker. At the same time we find extremely thin women, members of what Hesse-Biber calls "The Cult of Thinness".

In the course of this paper, I attempt find traces for the Beauty Myth in American literature and culture. In chapter 1, I will try to define the term "beauty" and several concepts connected to it, the main being the Beauty Myth. As a conclusion the famous Barbie doll will be subject to investigation in terms of her role as the epitome of the Beauty Myth. It has been argued that her unrealistic body dimensions, if she were a human being, foster insecurities in children playing with her and influences the body image of girls. I will outline her biography and then comment on her being a role-model for children.

The second chapter will be fully dedicated to eating disorders. Eating disorders are psychological illnesses, the influence of the cultural standard is no longer denied. I will first outline the different eating disorders that exist, which will be completed by a section explaining why mostly women are affected by the "problem that has no name". Furthermore, a cultural analysis of the eating habits in the land of extremes, the United States is on the agenda. As a representation in American literature, I chose to examine closely the autobiographical narrative *Wasted* written by Marya Hornbacher. She describes in great detail her life with anorexia and bulimia over the

course of a few years and how she struggled with the illnesses. At second view, one might pose the question whether her book is a simple memoir, or whether it may also serve as an “how to guide” for girls (and boys) with a certain predisposition for eating disorders.

In the third chapter, the focus will be on cosmetic surgery and its meaning for American culture. More and more women use the opportunity of cosmetic surgery in order to become seemingly better versions of themselves. It has been argued that cosmetic surgery has not the sole purpose of beautification, but many women opt for it in order to look what they consider “normal”. This would suggest however that these women have a defect concerning their looks and this “ugliness” can be treated as if it was a disease (Wolf 223). As proof for the representation of this nuance of the Beauty Myth, an analysis of the TV show *The Swan* is on the agenda. This show is the product of a series of so-called Makeover Shows in American reality TV. Sixteen women participate and they are transformed via cosmetic surgery in order to be able to complete in the pageant to be crowned “The Swan” in the end. I will have a close look at the meaning for American culture of this “most unusual competition ever attempted” (*The Swan*).

In the last analytical chapter an analysis of advertisements taken from two American fashion magazines, *Cosmopolitan* and *Allure - The Beauty Expert* is on the agenda. Many American women read fashion magazines on a regular basis and it has been suggested that it actually makes them feel worse right afterwards (Eckhardt 106). A large part is contributed by the commercials, which take up an enormous share of pages. I would therefore like to argue that advertisements as well have a grand impact on women’s body image and are therefore another representation of the Beauty Myth in American culture. I will first explain what commercials generally constitute of, what meaning they have for women, and in the last part I will analyze a few samples with regard to the Beauty Myth.

But this is just a foretaste of what is to come in this thesis. In the next chapter I will go in medias res and explain how beauty might be defined by giving a general overview of the topic.

2 “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall ...”

Many women are obsessed with their bodies, with their weight, their whole appearance. It mostly leads to unhappiness due to the fact that most women cannot reach the ideals they are faced with today. In the following chapter, I would like to describe this phenomenon in more detail, taking into account several ways of perceiving and analyzing this female obsession with beauty. I would like to start with a general overview of the topic of ‘beauty’. This will be followed by Susan Bordo’s and Sandra Lee Bartky’s view, who analyzed the problematic side of female beauty according to Foucault’s theory of the body adapted to Feminist discourse. I will then proceed with slightly different views on the matter. I will present “The Beauty Myth” by Naomi Wolf and how she characterizes it, followed by “The Beauty System” by MacCannell and MacCannell, scholars who gave this beauty cult we experience a name.

2.1 Beauty – a General Introduction

Women in modern society often find themselves obsessed with their bodies in many different ways. One of the reasons could be that in our culture, women’s value is and has been defined by our bodies (Kesselman et al. 108). From very early on, girls learn that they will be evaluated by their looks, and, very often, looks count more than intelligence and skills (108). “Learning to care about looks is a lifelong process” according to Rhonda Under and Mary Crawford (quoted in Kesselman et al. 108). This is supported by society, which constantly tells most of the women to change their physical selves, so that they can finally be happy, loved, healthy, successful and accepted (Siebecker 123). Siebecker further argues that among women, there is an immense pressure to conform. This “war against our bodies” could be interpreted as personal issues for women; it is however a social one (124). The result is that “it helps keep women in an inferior place in our society and is harmful to us socially, psychologically, and physically” (124). It has to be mentioned here that we are speaking of a certain ideal our society creates, which is almost impossible to reach, at least for most women. The gap between the ideal that women try to achieve and

reality is immense. Yet it still highly influences women's lives, thus very often, the body is the main focus in their lives. And this applies to a high range of women, no matter how close they actually are to the ideal. Hardly any woman is completely satisfied with her body and would not want to change anything, if she had the possibility. What is so difficult to understand and realize is that we are not all meant to be the same size; however, women are told so by various sides (124). It has to be emphasized once again that the beauty cult is a social problem, not solely a personal one.

Nowadays many people are concerned with their appearance and their body in general, but one can see a tendency that women are under a far higher pressure than men. One can find a higher number of eating disorders among women, and they spend far more money on beautification measures than men. Tseelon therefore argues that beauty can be seen as a gender-related category (78), and Freedman calls it a gender-related trait (113). "Looks are important but inconsequential for the man, but they are a defining feature for the woman: both in terms of how others respond to her, and how she experiences her own self" (Tseelon 78). Freedman adds here that "good looks are prerequisite for femininity but incidental to masculinity" (112). Thus one could say that beauty is also strongly linked to femininity (113). Appearance is generally emphasized and more highly valued in females than in males. Women are more often critically judged for their attractiveness and at the same time more severely rejected if they seem to lack it. Moreover, there is a greater influence of the body-image on women's self-concept than on men. According to Freedman, "a woman is more likely than a man to equate herself with what she looks like, or what she thinks she looks like, or what she believes others think she looks like" (113). It is however important to say that beauty itself cannot be the enemy. Rather we all are, men and women, bound by a system that actually encourages obsessive preoccupation with the female body (112).

What exactly is "Beauty", this ideal women try to achieve? Can it be defined? Throughout history there have been several attempts to do so. In ancient Greece, for example, people thought that our sense for beauty was an instinct. We would recognize beauty whenever we see it (Liggett 166). Also later people argued that

beauty can be measured and clearly defined, something that can be calculated on the basis of the proportions of a person. Psychologists on the other hand choose a completely different, far more pragmatic approach. They claim that what is beautiful is what a high number of people in a representative study find beautiful. There is no need to further explain and define beauty as anyone is capable of recognizing it, which comes close to what the Greeks said. Nevertheless, psychologists take it one step further and create the prototype of an attractive face on the computer. They therefore take pictures of people who are seen as attractive and of course also unattractive by many people and out of them they “create” a new face of a person who obviously does not even exist (Gründl 9-14). In his article, Gründl further states what features people generally find attractive, and here I will focus on women only. He argues that women are more attractive if their faces follow the scheme of childlike characteristics. Those are among others: a large head and a large forehead, big, round eyes, a small nose, a small chin, and a round chin. Adult women hardly ever possess these characteristics, since they are normally found in little children, but the ones who do, are considered as very attractive (Gründl 9-14). Rita Freedman defines beauty from another point of view:

Beauty is many things – an external radiance, an inner tranquility, a sexual allure, a fact of social exchange. [...] On the one hand, beauty is dismissed as mere façade, a superficial trait of little consequence. On the other hand, it is infused with supernatural power; a spellbinding, dazzling, irresistible princess can capture hearts and control kingdoms. (112-13)

There is no such thing as a clear definition of what beauty is, as there is no universal beauty. It has many different sides and after all, beauty still lies in the eye of the beholder. Philosopher David Hume once said: “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind, which contemplates them” (quoted in Liggett 168).

Nevertheless, there will always be norms of what beauty should consist of in our society. Across the planet we can find many different ideals, since they depend on the respective culture. That means each culture has its own norm or even norms. Thus, one could argue that beauty actually is a cultural construct. The ideals and norms we can find are in constant flux, just like fashion is. The problematic side here is that it is

not as easy to change the body as to change what we wear. This can lead to immense problems such as eating disorders, but I will return to this in my second chapter.

As I argued that norms constantly change, I would like to shortly focus on ideals today and earlier. What can be said is that from early on women try to achieve a myth, the “Beauty Myth”¹ as Naomi Wolf calls it. This is emphasized by the fact that standards vary greatly and change throughout times. Women, however, try to follow them anyway. And centuries ago, the norms were as unreachable as today. Gründl states that in the 16th century, the ideal among women was to have a voluptuous, curvy body. This can be seen on pictures dating from that time showing curvy women. They have, however, small breasts and childlike faces. An ideal impossible to reach. Nowadays, the ideal is turned upside down. Women should be extremely slender with a big bust. A similar trend can be seen with the complexion. Today, a rather tanned complexion is perceived as beautiful; yet this has not always been the same. In former times, a rather pale complexion was the ideal. This dates from a time when poor women had to work in the fields, while the rich stayed in their castles during the day, never leaving it without an umbrella. Pale skin was equated with expensive clothes and jewelry, just like a status symbol, only available for the privileged. The tanned skin from working outside, however, often marked the poor. Today, the ideal is turned upside down once again. Considering that most people work indoors nowadays, having a tanned skin, can be seen as a status symbol. It can symbolize wealth, if the skin was tanned in the holidays, but also athleticism, health and youth. Therefore, beauty as such can be seen as a status symbol (cf. Gründl 21-25).

However, beauty has never been more useless than today. Still the beauty cult is as big as never before, while today traits like intelligence for instance are so much more important (Gründl 32). Why do women spend so much money, take up with all the pain and stress in this attempt to reach an ideal that is mostly unhealthy and impossible to reach anyways, ending up frustrated and highly dissatisfied? Of course, there is no single answer to this question. Naomi Wolf in her book names patriarchal

¹ I will elaborate on Wolf’s Beauty Myth in chapter 1.3.

society as a reason why women fall for the “Beauty Myth”. Others however claim that the media play a big role. I think that there is no doubt that almost anyone is influenced by the media and especially by commercials. It is hard to escape them even if one does not read glossy magazines or watches TV. The media in general very often suggests what we have to look like and what we need to buy in order to finally become happy.

Another reason why women care for beautification so much is that in our society beauty and beautiful things are generally associated with something positive. Tseëlon states in her book that according to empirical evidence, hypothetical attractive people (adults and children) are preferred as friends and make a more competent impression. And here it is important to note once again that appearance is emphasized and valued more highly in women than in men. Women are more critically judged than men, and on the other hand also more severely rejected when they lack attractiveness. This influences the professional and private life of many women to a large extent.

I have now presented a side of beauty which is not always set in a positive context. Yet beautification can of course also be something pleasurable. In her text about Female Beautification, Ann Cahill differentiates between two kinds of beautification: the one that takes place on a daily basis and the one which is only practiced for so-called “special occasions” such as weddings for instance (44). Everyday practices include diet, make-up, in short everything women feel the need to perform before appearing in public. This can be argued to take place because of the patriarchal structure we live in, but this will be returned to later. The dressing up for a “special occasion” however can be seen as something very pleasurable for women. In the case that women do it together as a group, it is called “communal feminine beautifying”, which can include putting on make-up, getting dressed or doing one’s hair (44). I think however that here being with other people is in the foreground, and in the end the process is much more important than the product as opposed to everyday beautification. The same applies to visits at spas and similar places. If visited together with friends, again the communication and being with others is more important, but also when women visit a spa alone, the main pleasure can be the pampering and the

relaxing effect, rather than the beautification effect. One could also argue that this can be said for sports and a healthy diet. If women focus on these things it does not always mean that they are solely obsessed with their bodies; it can also have a very positive side. Namely a healthy body and mind, in case one does not overdo it all.

Now that I have given a rather general overview of the topic of beauty I would like to turn my attention to different concepts of beauty scholars have dealt with. I will start with Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo's interpretations of the female body and the beauty cult in connection with Foucault's theories.

2.2 Foucault and the Female Body

In the center of this beauty craze we find the female body, which is the subject of beautification measures and often also frustration, when the wished for goals cannot be attained. Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo amongst others adapt Michel Foucault's theories about the body to the field of Feminist Theory, which I would like to focus on in this section. Taking into account that these texts were written at the end of the 1980's , I think that they are nevertheless still valid and applicable to today's society, since the obsession with the body has probably even increased ever since.

In his critique of modern society, Michel Foucault (1979) argues that while parliamentary institutions have become more important and influenced new conceptions of political liberty, a darker counter-movement has complemented a new and unprecedented discipline against the body (Bartky 25). More is now required from the body:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its [sic!] behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies. (Foucault quoted in Bartky 25)

Foucault's view of the body however leaves out the fact that men and women experience their bodies differently. According to him, the body male or female can be treated as one, both men and women sharing the same bodily experiences and bearing the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. According to Bartky, Foucault is "blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" (27). Femininity is an artifice, to which various practices in connection with the body are attached. Bartky focuses on three practices, namely on those aiming at a body of a certain size, the body with its specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements, and those directed to a body seen as an ornamented surface (27). The first practice Bartky is referring to, namely the 'tyranny of slenderness', is prevailing in present-day culture. The styles of the female figure do vary over time and in cultures, more than that they reflect the obsessions and preoccupations of a culture. In the present "tyranny of slenderness" the body can "become one's enemy, an alien" (28); anorexia nervosa has now assumed epidemic proportions. I do not want to go into further detail at this point, since I will return to this topic in my second chapter. The second practice Bartky is referring to is the space women are taking up. Very often women make themselves small and narrow, seeming to take up little space in contrast to many men, who often take up much more space. The third practice I would like to present in a little more detail. Apart from the slender ideal we are faced with today, the woman's body can also be seen as some sort of ornamented surface, whose production takes up a lot of discipline. We are speaking of the makeup many women put on everyday and their selection of clothes and accessories. Additionally, a woman must take good care of her skin: "A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless, and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought. Hair must be removed not only from the face but from large surfaces of the body as well, [...]" (Bartky 31).

Another argument Bordo makes is that the body represents some sort of surface, but she attaches a further meaning to it, namely that the body is seen as a medium of culture:

The body – what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body – is a medium of culture. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central

rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete [sic!] language of the body. The body may also operate as a metaphor for culture. (Bordo 13)

More than that, the body is not only a text of culture, but according to Foucault, it can be seen as a practical, direct locus of social control. In his works *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*, he brings up the argument that people do not only live according to 'ideology', but also through the organization and regulation of the time, space, and movements of our daily lives. Thus "our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity" (Bordo 14). His argument is ever so current taking into account that women spend more time with enhancing their bodies than they have in a long time. In Foucault's words they have become "docile bodies", bodies whose energy is largely used in order to be transformed, regulated, and improved. These enhancing practices used by women such as dieting, putting on make up, dressing take up a large part of the daily routine, in other words time and space in a woman's day. Women focus very much on self-modification. These activities, however, may lead to the impression of a lack, of being insufficient and the feeling that one can never be good or beautiful enough and even to death in the worst case.

Bordo argues in her text that these practices and disciplines of the normalization of the body might be the only gender oppression exercising itself, but to different degrees and in various forms according to age, race, class, and sexual orientation. It has however proved to be a rather durable and flexible strategy of social control. Bartky as well argues that the disciplines constructing a "feminine" body out of a female one are by no means race- or class-specific: all are aiming at the same result, choosing different ways to achieve the goal (34). Bordo further mentions that at present, living in a society which is preoccupied with appearance, women are much more affected than men, and therefore this phenomenon can be seen as a "backlash" phenomenon, which reasserts "existing gender configurations *against* any attempts to shift or transform power-relations" (Bordo 14). Women dedicate large parts of their lives to being obsessed with the pursuit of reaching an aesthetic ideal. For many, it has become the central torment of their lives (14). Bartky and Bordo both present the

female body as a reproducer of the docile body of femininity. Bordo adds in her essay two other types of “body” according to Foucault, which have been adapted to feminist discourse, namely the “useful body” and the “intelligible body”.

The intelligible body includes our scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body – our cultural *conceptions* of the body, norms of beauty, models of health, and so forth. But the same representations may also be seen as forming a set of *practical* rules and regulations through which the living body is “trained, shaped, obeys, responds,” becoming in short, a socially adapted and “useful body”. (quoted in Bordo 26)

Now that I have put forward the fact that many women struggle with their attempt to have a “perfect” body, one might pose the question whom we could hold responsible for all this? Is it the media or *the* men? Both Bartky and Bordo attempt to get close to an answer in their essays.

Bartky speaks of a constructed body of femininity (33), a “practiced and subjected” body on which an inferior status has been inscribed. Women’s bodies and faces must be made up and disguised but also made over if necessary. At least that is what advertisements often suggest to women. Their strategy is to make women believe that their bodies are in one way or the other deficient, but they finally leave them alone struggling to measure up to an ideal which can only lead to failure (33). But the media cannot be held responsible for this development alone: “The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity on the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular. However, taking into account that the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a “subjected and practiced” and therefore inferior body one has to see them as aspects of a far larger discipline, “an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers” (Bartky 37). Bordo agrees with Bartky’s point of view when she argues in her essay that according to Foucault, power is not possessed by one single group, but we have to think of a “network of practices, institutions and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination within a particular domain” (15). To draw conclusions, one might argue that there is not a single group to blame, however. The battle many women are fighting can be

seen in connection with the patriarchal structures we are faced with. In Bartky's words: A woman must make herself "object and prey" for the man. "In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. A woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (34). In addition, Bartky agrees when she says that women practice this discipline on and against their own bodies, letting the men getting off "scott-free" (42).

Facing the fact that many women are struggling with the attempt of reaching the perfect feminine body one might ask why they are doing all this? As mentioned above it consumes a large part of women's time, takes a lot of discipline as well, albeit the results are often not satisfactory leaving the women with a constant feeling of failure and bodily deficiency. According to Bartky

the transformation of oneself into a properly feminine body may be any or all of the following: a rite of passage into adulthood, the adoption and celebration of a particular aesthetic, a way of announcing one's economic level and social status, a way to triumph over other women in the competition for men or jobs, or an opportunity for massive narcissistic indulgence. The social construction of the feminine body is all these things, but at its base it is discipline, too, and discipline of the inegalitarian sort. (37)

To conclude this section I would like to emphasize once again that not all forms of body "management" such as dieting or exercise should be denied. The body is rather seen as a site of struggle, "where we must *work* to keep our daily practices in the service of resistance to gender domination, not in the service of "docility" and gender normalization" (Bordo 28). This requires a skeptical view of the way liberation and pleasure are offered to us by our culture and an "awareness of the often contradictory relations between image and practice, between rhetoric and reality." Images often try to convey that one could "have it all". However, women trying to pursue this ideal often find themselves distracted, depressed and physically ill in the end (28).

2.3 The Beauty Myth

In the chapter above I examined a first view of the obsession with the female body in our society. Now I would like to proceed one step further with Naomi Wolf's ideas on female beauty. She has chosen a term that characterizes the "problem that has no name", namely "The Beauty Myth" and sheds a slightly different light on the matter by focusing on educated, working women.

Much has changed for the better for the American woman after the 2nd wave of feminism. Women gained more legal and reproductive rights and entered male-dominated professions. But: Do women feel free one generation later? They do enjoy freedoms unavailable before. Many women, however, are not free when it comes to their bodies. They are ashamed to admit that they care a lot for trivial matters such as bodies, makeup, physical appearance, faces, hair, and clothes, but according to a scientific study thirty-three thousand American women would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal (Wolf 10). During the last decade, women managed to breach the power structure, but at the same time eating disorders have risen exponentially, and cosmetic surgery has become the fastest-growing medical speciality. Moreover, consumer spending has doubled and pornography has become the "main media category" (10). Women have more money and power nowadays, but when it comes to how they feel physically, they are probably worse off than their unliberated grandmothers. Most Western working women face self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of ageing, and dread of lost control in connection with their bodies. Wolf draws the following conclusion:

It is no accident that so many potentially powerful women feel this way. We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth. It is the modern version of a social reflex that has been in force since the Industrial Revolution. As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control. (10)

She argues that this backlash is very powerful, since the ideology of beauty is one of the last remaining ideologies from former times that still manage to control those women who have gained power and respect in other fields after the 2nd wave of

feminism and should therefore remain rather uncontrollable. The Beauty Myth has become stronger than the myths about motherhood, domesticity, and chastity, and it is undoing all the good things feminism did for women materially and overtly in the past (11). It is undeniable that the Beauty Myth has a large impact on our society: while in former times women found advertisements for household products in the media promoting the feminine mystique, they now encounter diet and skin care products.

It is important to note here that the Beauty Myth is somewhat double-edged. According to Wolf, "beauty" can be seen as a quality that objectively and universally exists. "Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men [...]" (12). But of course none of this is true. She rather proposes the view that "beauty" is a currency system like the gold standard for instance. It is, like any economy, determined by politics, and in Western society, it remains the "last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves" (12). "Beauty" cannot be seen as something universal or changeless or even as a function of evolution. Each culture has its own ideal, which is at the same time changing rapidly as is the Beauty Myth. But then, what is this Beauty Myth all about? Wolf provides the following answer to this question: "The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power" (13), and she further argues that "*The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance*" (14). With this quotation, Wolf refers to the fact that competition between women is part of the myth in order to separate them from each other. What women fear most is ageing, thus youth and what is linked to it can be seen as the main goal that is to be reached, since "ageing in women is unbeautiful" (14).

The Beauty Myth in its modern form is fairly new. However there has existed a beauty myth in some form ever since there has been patriarchy. Before the Industrial

Revolution women had few other images to compare themselves to one another. Furthermore, “beauty” was not an issue as important as today, since women had to convince with other skills. Nowadays, living in a visual society, mass production provides large amounts of images for us in magazines, on TV and other media.

When it comes to social class, Wolf focuses mainly on the middle class, and she comments in connection with the rise of mass production: “Since the Industrial Revolution, middle-class Western women have been controlled by ideals and stereotypes as much as by material constraints” (15). Nowadays, women have gained more power and they are materially stronger, but the Beauty Myth has grown stronger as well. Due to the fact that mass production has become easy, we can find millions of images of the current ideal, which Wolf calls “the modern arsenal of the myth” (16). The mass market is what Wolf sees as the scapegoat for the whole myth:

[...] the unconscious hallucination grows ever more influential and pervasive because of what is now conscious market manipulation: powerful industries – the \$33-billion-a-year diet industry, the \$20-billion cosmetics industry, the \$300-million cosmetic surgery industry, and the \$7-billion pornography industry – have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties, and are in turn able, through their influence on mass culture, to use, stimulate, and reinforce the hallucination in a rising economic spiral. (17)

She claims, however, that this should not evoke the idea of a conspiracy theory, but that the possibilities of women have become somewhat open-ended; “they threaten to destabilize the institutions on which a male-dominated culture has depended, and a collective panic reaction on the part of both sexes has forced a demand for counterimages” (17). For Wolf this is represented through what she calls “The Iron Maiden” (17). It originally was an instrument of torture, where the victim was enclosed inside a body-shaped casket that resembled a young woman. The locked-up person either died of starvation or of the metal spikes inside the casket. Wolf argues that we face a hallucination, in which the trap a woman finds herself, is “similarly rigid, cruel and euphemistically painted. Contemporary culture directs attention to imagery of the Iron Maiden, while censoring real women’s faces and bodies” (17), in other words their bodies can be seen “as prisons that their homes no longer were” (184). One can see the Beauty Myth that women have to face today as a beauty backlash that is destroying women physically, but at the same time also psychologically.

In her book Wolf focuses on the different representations of the Beauty Myth in our culture, which I cannot fully mention here, but I will return to them throughout my thesis in the respective chapters. Right now I would like to present her ideas going “beyond the Beauty Myth” and the attempts at finding a solution to the whole matter she provides in her book.

“What is a woman? Is she what is made of her? Do a woman’s life and experience have value? If so, should she be ashamed for them to show? What *is* so great about looking young?” (270). Are women the pliable sex that does not mind being shaped, cut, and “subjected to physical invasion?” (270). Are fashions in clothing different from fashions in women’s bodies? And, does this mean that women have to feel guilty when choosing to wear makeup? Wolf’s answer to these questions is that women have to move away from this myth and to dissolve it and “survive it with sex, love, attraction, and style not only intact, but flourishing more vibrantly than before. I am not attacking anything that makes women feel good; only what makes us feel bad in the first place. We all like to be desirable and feel beautiful” (271). She claims that women must no longer check the mirror for what they have done wrong, whenever somebody wants to use the beauty myth against them (275). But: “as long as the definition of beauty comes from outside women, we will continue to be manipulated by it” (277). Therefore she claims that a third feminist wave will be needed, since the environment we live in will not let women get away with that. Women have to become willing to really look at the alternatives and to support them as well. The questions are not only about women’s appearance, but much more about power relations. Women have to find out who profits from the beauty cult and work against that. Unfortunately the myth is promoted through the marketplace, which would be powerless if women did not enforce it against one another. Women have to collaborate to outgrow the myth, since the men or the media will not make the change. Women can work against the myth through their behavior towards each other and in the way they see other women (283).

How to begin? Let’s be shameless. Be greedy. Pursue pleasure. Avoid pain. Wear and touch and eat and drink what we feel like. Tolerate other women’s choices. Seek out the sex we want and fight fiercely against the sex we do not want. Choose our own causes. And once we break through and change the rules so our sense of our own beauty cannot be shaken, sing that beauty and

dress it up and flaunt it and revel in it: In a sensual politics, female is beautiful. (291)

To sum up, Wolf argues that women themselves have to stand up against the Beauty Myth that is used against women, and they have to begin by not discriminating against each other. Women have to join forces against the patriarchal system and the mass media, in other words those who profit from the Beauty Myth. At the same time, however, women must have the right to choose what they want to look like, be it dressed up or not, since the Beauty Myth is not so much about appearance as it is about power relations. Women must stop looking at themselves trying to find the fault whenever the Beauty Myth is used against them; they must become confident.

2.4 The Beauty System

In this section I would like to focus once more on a concept of beauty, namely on “The Beauty System”. Like Naomi Wolf, Dean MacCannell and Juliet MacCannell decided to describe and analyze the beauty cult in more detail in their way and giving it a name. Like the other concepts I presented, it dates from the late eighties of the previous century, but I included it in my thesis since I am convinced that most of its elements are still valid today.

According to MacCannell and MacCannell, there exists an uneasy arrangement between the sexes in society: “boys are like this, girls are like that” (207). Men in the Anglo-American society are supposed to be “cool” and “masculine”. The woman then has to be attracted to him because of his social achievement and simply because he is a man, but not because he makes himself especially attractive for her (207). MacCannell and MacCannell argue that “this male behavior is a component of an enormous complex of cultural practices that can be called the *feminine beauty system*” (208). That term should describe the degree to which a woman is committed to making herself attractive to men. “The feminine beauty system, including the masculine appraisal of it, and attraction, is the main feature of the cultural terrain between the categories “male” and “female” in our society” (208). Moreover they claim that in modern society, no other cultural complex influences people more than

the existing beauty standards including a very high amount of discipline so that we can even speak of some sort of *ideology*. In other words, a way of living a contradiction pretending it is not one. The existing “beauty standards apply to face paint color, body size and weight, breast shape, upper arm measurement, head and body hair texture, color and visibility, facial expression, garment and accessory selection and coordination” (208). And what is the reason for sticking to this discipline according to them? – To find and “keep” a man. On the other hand, however, they argue that these practices are meant to be executed in order to be attractive for men and therefore to bring the sexes together, the actual effect is that the sexes are kept apart from each other in an unequal relationship and that proves to be rather problematic. Men do not have to show or represent themselves in any way in order to be accepted as a *man*. This does not apply to women, however. MacCannell and MacCannell summarize this pointedly: “Men are real. Women are ‘made-up’ ” (212).

“Beauty is only Ugliness in Disguise”. This statement is a rather important feature that describes the Beauty System. Many women claim to be ugly when they do not wear make up or when they are not dressed up. Very often women also claim that their ugliness belongs to the past, meaning that they felt like the “ugly duckling” back in their childhood, but now they feel pretty (given that they can be “disguised”). This leads to the fact that other women can identify with these women, giving them the feeling that any woman can be pretty and then feel good again. MacCannell and MacCannell therefore claim that young girls have a choice: They either accept themselves the way they are or they enter the Beauty System, “motivated by a belief in [their] own deficiencies as the taken-for-granted baseline condition justifying the numerous and often bizarre operations deployed against [their] body. Once in the beauty system, [they] must live an absolute contradiction: beauty is proof of ugliness” (214), Tseëlon emphasizes this statement by saying that “[b]eauty, for the woman, is an identity claim, except that it is a conditionally spoiled identity. It is only through hard work that the woman can avoid being shown up as ugly” (78).

What kinds of women find themselves in the Beauty System, believing that underneath they are ugly? Most women do. Unlike actual wealth, prestige, and power,

the Beauty System is accessible for many women, no matter what class, skin color or age. MacCannell and MacCannel argue “that the beauty system reflects the class and ethnic standards of the entire society in its aesthetic formulas” (214). However what can be found then is a competition for rank between women, which sometimes even becomes more important than competition for a man. “Beautification contains elements of “identifying up”, desiring to be seen as among the rich and famous who are often represented in the popular entertainments as proponents of the beauty system” (219). It can help a woman to gain more pride and self-assurance, but she will fail if she tries too hard.

2.5 “Barbie Everythinggirl”

I have now provided an overview of what has been said on the large topic of ‘beauty’. In this last section of the chapter I would like to present the Barbie-doll and then relate her to the discourse about ‘beauty’. In my thesis I want to illustrate the beauty craze in relation to its representation in American literature and culture. Barbie will be the first example.

On her webpage² we can find that 18 million users are registered at “barbiegirls.com” worldwide, 1000 Youtube channels are dedicated to her, 74.5 million hits are made when searching for Barbie in Google, 70 known designers have outfitted Barbie, and 90% of American girls ages 3-10 own at least one Barbie doll. When she had her 50th anniversary in 2009 she was all over the media. I think one could make the claim that at least in Western society most people have heard of Barbie. Additionally, many people have an opinion on her, and very often a strong one either very positive or very negative. People love her for what she is or they condemn her for proposing an unrealistic ideal of a body that influences the girls playing with her during childhood. But first a few words on how Barbie’s *fantastic* history began in the first place.

² Cf. <http://www.BarbieMedia.com/?subcat=24>.

The Barbie-doll was created by Ruth Handler in 1958, owner of the Mattel company, in order to provide a representation of an adult to play with instead of baby dolls or paper dolls for her daughter Barbara, eponym of the famous doll. Together with her husband, Ruth searched for this kind of toy and finally found it in Germany, a doll named Lilli. Back in the United States, the Handlers remodeled the doll, but they kept the size and the features essentially intact. On March 9th 1959, the Handlers presented it to the visitors of the New York Toy Fair and the day remained Barbie's official birthday. What they however not mentioned to the customers was that Lilli was a somewhat pornographic image of a woman intended to be sold to men in tobacco stores and bars and was based on a cartoon for the infamous German newspaper *Bildzeitung* (cf. Birkle 253).

Today Barbie can be seen as a pop-culture icon. She can be bought in toy stores together with her "friends" and all the available accessories. She is also the star of TV series, several magazines are dedicated to her, children can be members of the official Barbie Fan Club, and the list goes on. Additionally, there is also a large number of art pieces; she is the topic of paintings or comics for instance. Consequently, Barbie *is* art. Barbie, however, is also fantasy; yet at the same time, she represents the "American" ideal (Lord 294). Therefore, one could argue that she can be seen as the epitome of the Beauty Myth. Her body measures are highly unrealistic if she was a "real" woman. She would not be able to menstruate in real life, she has no nipples or pubic hair (Lord 226), and additionally she would be clinically anorexic at the height of 5'4" (the average height of American women) (Urla and Swedlund 416). At the same time "Barbie is an emblem of 'femininity', a concept quite different from biological femaleness" (Lord 194). Thus, Barbie perfectly embodies the Beauty Myth; she literally *is* the personified ideal that is impossible to reach, an "American" ideal, nobody can ever achieve. The Barbie-doll "offere[d] the possibility of identification for girls and teenagers and represented a concept of femininity that eventually became its trademark" (Birkle 254). At the same time, the Barbie-doll, which embodies "femininity", suggests to many girls and boys that this is a prerequisite for a woman, but do women really have to have a "feminine" look in order to be taken seriously? Barbie says yes. She constantly wears make-up; she can only wear high heels, and

apparently she is on a strict diet in order to keep her weight. There even existed Barbie-dolls which came together with a scale permanently set at 110 lbs. and another had a book entitled "How to lose weight" (Lord 229). Additionally, Barbie comes with many different clothes and accessories. Together with Barbie, girls learn to enter the whole beauty system and for many, this means that the body is in the center of all attention. Looks equal value and the girls learn that this is much more important than other skills. I do not want to fully blame Barbie for the beauty cult that exists in our society today, but I think that she indeed influences some girls in one way or the other. There are even women who literally become real-life Barbie-dolls after a large number of surgeries and other beautification measures.

In order to emphasize the "good" sides of the doll, it must be mentioned that throughout her life, Barbie had several careers ranging from flight attendant to presidential candidate, in other words she changed her identity several times. As a role-model she shows girls that they can achieve any profession they like to have. One must not forget however that at the same time, her *"hyper-slender, big-chested body has remained unchanged over the years"* (Urla and Swedlund 407), providing an ideal, impossible to reach. The measurements of Barbie resemble those of Lilli, the sex doll, thus proposing an ideal of a very thin body, extremely long legs and a large bust, thus a beauty ideal deriving from male fantasies (Birkle 257). "These male fantasies gradually turned into a seemingly 'universal value'; girls and young women were constantly confronted with these ideals that became norms, and increasingly internalized them" (257). By proposing this ideal in connection with all the careers Barbie had, it is suggested to girls that "beautiful", thin women are more successful than plain women – in work-life and in private. Beauty and success go hand in hand (260). Again the focus is on the body: if only you have a nice body, you will be successful as well.

I do not think that Barbie is the only one to be blamed for the beauty cult. Nevertheless, her influence on young girls should not be underestimated. The solution might not be to stop buying Barbie, since she is part of our culture, too. I think however that it is important to make girls and boys aware that she is a doll, which embodies an ideal that nobody can ever reach and not necessarily the representation of a real woman.

3 “Am I thin enough yet?”

In the second chapter, I would like to examine the representation of the Beauty Myth in our culture in the form of eating disorders. I will give a brief overview of what they consist of, followed by the role of culture with a focus on the United States. At the end of the first sub-chapter I will analyze the autobiographical narrative *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher, dealing with the topic in order to show the representation of eating disorders in American literature and therefore in American culture.

3.1 Eating Disorders

According to psychology, eating disorders are dealt with as mental disorders and are therefore classified according to DSM-IV guidelines. Eating disorders include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Classified, which include the Binge Eating Disorder. Obesity is not a clinical eating disorder or classified as a mental disorder, yet it is dealt with in connection to eating disorders in the literature I consulted. This is why I will later talk about this phenomenon as well, especially about its occurrence in the United States and its meaning for their culture, but first I will explain eating disorders according to DSM-IV guidelines, making no claim of completeness, since eating disorders are complicated illnesses and mostly a mixture of several components. What almost all people suffering from one of the eating disorders mentioned above have in common, though, is a certain obsession with their bodies and body shape, food and weight, and it has been suggested that most eating disorders occur due to prior dieting. Additionally, of all eating disorders, about 9 out of 10 are women, except for obesity, making it a rather gendered problem, which I will refer to in more detail later.

3.1.1 Anorexia Nervosa

Cases of anorexia nervosa have been mentioned in the literature for more than a century, but it only became important in the 1960s and 1970s. Feighner et al. and Russel first stated the diagnostic criteria in the late 1970s, which have changed little

ever since and which basically include severe weight loss, morbid fear of fat and the evidence of an endocrine disorder (amenorrhea) (Herzog & Delinsky 31).

DSM-IV Criteria for Anorexia Nervosa:

A. Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height (e.g., weight loss leading to maintenance of body weight less than 85% of that expected; or failure to make expected weight gain during period of growth, leading to body weight less than 85% of that expected).

B. Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though underweight.

C. Disturbance in the way in which one's body weight or shape is experienced, undue influence of body weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of the current low body weight.

D. In postmenarchal females, amenorrhea, i.e., the absence of at least three consecutive menstrual cycles. (A woman is considered to have amenorrhea if her periods occur only following hormone, e.g., estrogen administration.)

Restricting Type: During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has not regularly engaged in binge eating or purging behavior (i.e., self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).

Binge Eating/Purging Type: During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has regularly engaged in binge eating or purging behavior (i.e., self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).

(from *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association* quoted in Herzog & Delinsky 33)

In the first phases of the illness, it is often difficult to detect it, due to Western society's focus on thinness, and frequently even family and friends do not recognize the seriousness of the weight loss, while at the same time anorexics often deny the illness themselves (Pomeroy 178). It must be noted however that it is the 'most life-threatening' of all psychiatric disorders with a fatality rate between 5% and 20%, leading to death either from starvation or from heart failure (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 25). Other medical problems include osteoporosis, which can lead to bone fractures and stunted growth, electrolyte imbalance, anemia, skin discoloration, hair

loss on scalp coupled with the growth of fine body hair called lanugo. Additionally, anorexics often report sleep disturbances, hyperactivity, constipation, low body temperature and cold intolerance, among other symptoms (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 25; Pomeroy 178-79). One might think that anorexics do lack the feeling of hunger, but this has been proven wrong. Quite the opposite is true: they are often hungry, but they suppress their hunger fearing to gain weight (Abraham and Llewellyn-Jones 15). Furthermore, anorexics tend to have a distorted body image, meaning that they perceive their body as larger, wider, and fatter than it actually is. Thus, many severely emaciated women deny their extreme thinness (18). As quoted above, patients suffering from anorexia tend to be hyperactive; they constantly need something to do and they are unable to relax. 'The hyperactivity may be the cause of insomnia, especially early morning walking, which is a feature in some patients with anorexia nervosa (Abraham and Llewellyn-Jones 77). Among the reasons why this eating disorder occurs it has been suggested that anorexic women may have a fear of 'growing up' and of becoming physically and sexually mature (34). The parents' influence can also play a role, which I will comment on later.

3.1.2 Bulimia Nervosa

At first, bulimia nervosa was thought to be an advanced phase of anorexia nervosa, but then it was Russell who identified it as a separate eating disorder in 1979 and who gave the illness its name as an analogue to anorexia nervosa (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 73-74). The main criterion to be diagnosed a bulimic is bingeing behavior, in other words bulimics eat large amounts of food within a rather short period of time, which is often followed by purging behavior. As opposed to anorexics, women suffering from bulimia nervosa very often only show few obvious physical signs and often appear healthy overall (Pomeroy 180).

DSM-IV Criteria for Bulimia Nervosa:

A. Recurrent episodes of binge eating. An episode of binge eating is characterized by both of the following:

(1) eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g., within a 2-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances.

(2) a sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (e.g., a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control how much one is eating).

B. Recurrent inappropriate compensatory behavior in order to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting; misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications; fasting; or excessive exercise.

C. The binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviors both occur, on average, at least twice a week for 3 months.

D. Self-evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.

E. The disturbance does not occur exclusively during episodes of anorexia nervosa.

Purging Type: During the current episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas.

Nonpurging Type: During the current episode of bulimia nervosa, the person has used other inappropriate compensatory behaviors, such as fasting or excessive exercise, but has not regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxative, diuretics, or enemas.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association quoted in Herzog & Delinsky 35)

Like anorexia nervosa, it occurs mostly with women, namely 1% to 3% of adolescent and young adult women, but it tends to start later, preceded by dieting behavior. A very common trigger for the illness is a young woman's first separation from home, such as leaving home for college or boarding school for instance. It has been reported that 40% of all college women at least occasionally show bulimic behavior.

When a so-called binge occurs, bulimics tend to eat big amounts of sweet, high-calorie junk food consuming over 10,000 calories, which is accompanied by large amounts of fluid, in order to ease the vomiting afterwards. Being afraid that the food will result in weight gain, it is reported that the vomit is often checked afterwards for the appearance of all the foods consumed before (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 64-

65). Again, bulimics tend to be of normal or above average weight, which often contributes to the fact that the disorder can remain undetected for years, since most patients are secretive about their bingeing behaviors. Bulimia nervosa, however, leaves its traces, since many suffer from fatigue, decreased energy, headaches, abdominal pain, heartburn, irregular menses and constipation due to laxative abuse among other symptoms. Physical signs include erosion of dental enamel as a result of recurrent vomiting and Russell's sign, an abrasion on the back of the hand (Pomeroy 180). Furthermore, recurrent vomiting destroys throat tissues and makes the salivary glands swell, which can lead to so-called "chipmunk faces" often found with bulimics (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 65).

Bulimics are often characterized to have borderline personalities, meaning that their successful outside hosts a demonic inside. Bulimics tend to be sexually active, and they are more socially outgoing, and impulsive than anorexics. Additionally, bulimics often describe their parents as neglectful, as opposed to anorexics who tend to have overprotective parents and therefore refuse to eat. Bulimics can be seen to eat because they have the feeling of not having been loved enough, and the consumption of large amounts of food can be interpreted as a way of mothering herself (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 66).

3.1.3 Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified

This category of eating disorders consists of individuals with disordered eating behaviors and attitudes, but they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. We can speak here of a wide variety of disordered behaviors in connection with weight, shape, appearance, and food, and in combination, they even may constitute a new syndrome. One example of this group, probably the largest one, are the so-called "chronic dieters", another are binge eaters.

DSM-IV Criteria for Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified

The eating disorder not otherwise specified category is for disorders of eating that do not meet the criteria for any specific eating disorder. Examples include:

1. For females, all of the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met except that the individual has regular menses.
2. All of the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met except that, despite significant weight loss, the individual's current weight is in the normal range.
3. All of the criteria for bulimia nervosa are met except that the binge eating and inappropriate compensatory mechanisms occur at a frequency of less than twice a week or for a duration of less than 3 months.
4. The regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviors by an individual of normal body weight after eating small amounts of food (e.g., self-induced vomiting after the consumption of two cookies)
5. Repeatedly chewing and spitting out, but not swallowing, large amounts of food.
6. Binge-eating disorder: recurrent episodes of binge eating in the absence of the regular use of inappropriate behaviors characteristic of bulimia nervosa.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association quoted in Herzog & Delinsky 37)

Very often, eating disorder NOS is described as an atypical eating disorder not affecting many people; however, the opposite is the case. 20-25% of eating disorder patients belong to this group, making it a rather common diagnosis. An estimated 4-6 % of the general population has an eating disorder NOS (Herzog and Delinsky 37). Again, women are much more affected, Olson even speaks of the fact that "most American women diet" (*Reading Eating Disorders* 86). It has been concluded that generally eating disorder NOS is less severe than bulimia nervosa or anorexia nervosa, but one must also not forget that dieting is also a precondition for these eating disorders. In other words, it is highly associated with the later development of either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. In addition, there is hardly any difference in body dissatisfaction compared with full criteria anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa (Herzog and Delinsky 37-38).

3.1.3.1 Binge Eating Disorder

Among the classified eating disorders, the binge eating disorder is the most recently described and therefore the least studied of all (Pomeroy 180). It was introduced in the DSM-IV as a provisional diagnosis requiring further research (Herzog and Delinsky 38). It is characterized by the fact that people suffering from it regularly engage in bingeing, which is however not followed by purging or any other compensation behavior, which distinguishes it from bulimia nervosa. Interestingly, this eating disorder is prevalent in both men and women as opposed to others, which mainly affect women (Herzog and Delinsky 38-39).

Research Criteria for Binge-Eating Disorder

A. Recurrent episodes of binge eating. An episode of binge eating is characterized by both of the following:

- (1) eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g., within any 2-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances
- (2) a sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (e.g., a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control how much one is eating).

B. The binge-eating episodes are associated with 3 (or more) of the following:

- (1) eating much more rapidly than normal
- (2) eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- (3) eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- (4) eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating
- (5) feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating

C. Marked distress regarding binge eating is present.

D. The binge eating occurs on average, at least 2 days a week for 6 months.

E. The binge eating is not associated with the regular use of inappropriate compensation behaviors (e.g., purging, fasting, excessive exercise) and does not occur exclusively during the course of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders by the American Psychiatric Association quoted in Herzog & Delinsky 39)

People suffering from binge eating disorder are generally overweight; yet they may be generally healthy. Thus, very often, obesity is the single physical sign of the illness. They do not seek medical help for disordered eating very often, but they frequently visit physicians seeking diet advice (Pomeroy 180). As opposed to other eating disorders, binge eating generally occurs prior to dieting, as the disorder is characterized by the fact that weight gain is not necessarily avoided. Compared to non-bingeing obese people, binge eaters tend to be more occupied and in distress with food and weight (Herzog and Delinsky 38-39). To sum up, binge eaters eat huge amounts of food in a short period of time, while feeling powerless over the binge and very often they are not physically hungry. Bingeing often takes place in private, since their overconsumption embarrasses them (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 77-78).

3.2 The Cult of Thinness

Today, being thin is everything a woman wants. If you are thin, you will find a husband, you will find a great job, and you will be happy. If you are fat, you will not. Thin is good, fat is bad. This is the cultural message that is conveyed, primarily targeting women - and the message can be found everywhere. We have the media, promoting super-slim models and actresses as role models, regardless of the fact that they are somewhat “constructed people”, who do not look like their picture in real life. We find advertisements for all sorts of products women *need* in order to enhance their bodies (diet pills etc.); women can enroll in certain programs in order to lose weight (e.g.: Weight Watchers, among others), leading to the fact that in America only, people are spending 50 billion dollars each year for diet related-products (cf. Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 15-17).

“American culture sends a powerful signal to women – that only the beautiful, and the thin are valued and loved, catalyzing an American ideal of female body image where thinness is a sign of success, health, and being in charge of your life” (Hesse-Biber, “Mass” 208). In today’s society, women’s worth is equated with her looks and further by her ability to attract men, leading to the fact that many women are caught in an obsessive pursuit of thinness. This yearning to be thin is what Hesse-Biber

compares to a religion by calling it the “The Cult of Thinness”, its members being women wishing to be among “the chosen few”:

The object of worship is the “perfect” body. The primary rituals are dieting and exercising with obsessive attention to monitoring progress – weighing the body at least once a day and constantly checking calories. The advertising industry and the media provide plenty of beautiful-body icons to worship. There are numerous ceremonies – pageants and contests – that affirm this ideal. (*Cult* 16)

Naomi Wolf as well makes the comparison by calling the diet problem a hunger cult (185). To return to Wolf’s Beauty Myth, when it comes to body shape and weight, society sets a standard that most women are not able to reach, but regardless of that, most women have accepted society’s standards of beauty, “even though these standards may undermine self-image, self-esteem, or physical well-being” (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 20).

Dieting has become normal and culturally accepted, even for normal-weight women; more than that, it has become a way of life. “Eating is no longer a natural process, but something to be regulated and scrutinized. [...] Like cult members, we allow corporations claiming to know what is good for us to tell us what, when, and how to eat. What we lose is not weight, but control over our lives” (71). Besides, women are constantly told that their bodies are insufficient. As a result, many women lose their instincts when it comes to eating, considering the fact that 40% of American women are on a diet on any given day (Lintott 66). A large number of these women can be classified as chronic dieters, also known as restrained eating, belonging to the group of EDNOS, which can also be called “disorderly eating”. These women do not meet the full criteria for a specific clinical eating disorder, but some or most of the indicators, such as an obsession with food, weight and body shape and a restricted food intake.

Hesse-Biber thus argues that eating disorders may still have psychological reasons. However, today, facing the unrealistic ideals promoted by the media for example, they may also be culturally induced (*Cult* 20). Herzog and Delinsky claim that “as body dissatisfaction and weight concerns become increasingly normative among women in Westernized countries, it becomes harder to differentiate pathological

concern from cultural norm" (40). Thus, psychological explanations define anorexia for instance as an individual pathology (Hesse-Biber, "Mass" 210), but today, many women suffer from eating disorders without meeting the psychological criteria for a full clinical disorder. Alarmingly, this behavior, as I mentioned earlier, very often starts in the early teens, after they become conscious of weight, and, more than that, they learn that a slim body is connotated with positive traits. Consequently, the teenagers learn that they can control their weight by dieting, exercise or by using other measures, which possibly leads to an eating disorder in their pursuit of thinness, since being slim is associated with being successful, pretty, healthy, and happy.

On the other hand, food and the process of eating is a very important factor in our society. The provision of food is often equated with the provision of love and caring, and sharing food at a meal is seen as one of the prime social contacts. Therefore, culture provides a very contradictory view: On the one hand, one must eat everything that is offered, but at the same time one has to stay slim and is complimented for losing weight and staying thin. This is also reflected in many glossy magazines: one can find diets that guarantee immediate success in almost every issue, followed by recipes for luscious food a few pages later (Abraham and Llewellyn-Jones 28-31). I would like to mention once again that women today are faced with an ideal that is not reachable for most, thus the majority is excluded from it. This might result in the fact that most diets are not successful, meaning that the dieters do not achieve the wished for goal, and medical studies have found that regardless of the technique used in order to lose weight, almost all dieters gain back the weight they lost (Cuntz and Hillert 122). This might be connected to Bordo's argument that in today's consumer culture, self-management becomes more and more elusive as it becomes more pressing at the same time. "The attainment of an acceptable body is extremely difficult for those who do not come by it 'naturally' (whether aided by genetics, metabolism, or high activity-level), and as the ideal becomes firmer and tauter it begins to exclude most people" ("Reading", 99). So what does it mean to have a slender body today? For many women, it can symbolize some sort of power and control over their bodies, which those, who do not reach the ideal, do not possess. This feeling of power has a special meaning for eating disordered women: Eating

disorders are an indirect way of gaining power, namely the complete power over their bodies and themselves, since nobody can really force an anorexic to eat or a bulimic to stop bingeing and purging (Killian 313; Bordo, "Reading", 105). On the one hand, having and maintaining a slender body might symbolize control and power in a society. Yet, on the other hand, by falling for these ideals promoted by our still male-dominated society and in their sometimes even obsessive pursuit for thinness, women give away their power, namely the power to say no - no to these impossible ideals and no to being reduced to body shape and appearance. This leads me to an important question in that matter: Why are so many more women faced with eating disorders or disorderly eating than men? I attempt to answer this question in the next section of my paper.

3.3 Being a Body – The Role of Gender

As I mentioned before, more than 90% of all eating disordered people are women. Besides, I argued that for many people suffering from an eating disorder or disorderly eating culture's influence might play a major role. But still, why is this a gendered problem? According to Hesse-Biber, an argument for that could be that in our culture, men are primarily judged in terms of how powerful, ambitious, and aggressive they are in the world of thought and action, whereas women are mostly judged for their appearance. "The split between mind and body is a central idea in Western culture" (*Cult* 32). In other words, she speaks of a body/mind dichotomy. This is further mirrored in society and culture and, Smolak & Murnen state: "Visible people in power, be it government, sports, or business, are more likely to be men. Often the most recognizable women are those known more for their looks (e.g., supermodels, actresses) than their skills or abilities" (100). Therefore, especially young girls get the impression that as a woman, attractiveness is their best path to success, and they opt for a slender, model-like body. In addition to that, it has been suggested that the dominant feminine role model for girl's and college women is that of the "superwoman". This image makes them believe that they should be able to have it all: a good career, a happy marriage, healthy children, an active social life, and good looks. Why this might fuel eating disorders may have several reasons. First of all, since

thinness is linked to mostly positive traits, it may be seen as *the* prerequisite for success. Thin women seem to be more likely to date, have good jobs, and to be happier. Yet one must not forget that most women spend most of the time trying to get closer to the ideal. This might lead to perfectionism for some, which has often been associated with eating disorders (Smolak & Murnen 95-96).

Taking this into account, it is interesting that eating disorders are especially common among college girls. As mentioned before, disordered eating tends to start in situations of a major change in life, such as puberty, but also leaving the parents for college or for a boarding school. The transition from high school to college is a time that is associated with weight gain. What frequently happens then, is that many people, especially women, use food as a means to cope with all the stress that the new situation evokes. This overeating triggered by stress may lead to weight gain in an environment that highly values thinness. The result is the effort to lose the extra pounds, which then might be followed by disorderly eating or clinical eating disorders (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 171). This is a phenomenon which is termed by Hesse-Biber “freshman 15”, which are the 15 pounds women generally gain in their first year of college, which “is a cultural prescription in league with the ‘pig out’ and the ‘frat barf’” (171). The reasons for all this might be associated with the fact that these women fail to organize their meals without their parents supervising them, finding themselves too busy to eat, or eating more than usual (171). Furthermore, it could be connected to the “superwoman” role they feel attracted to, simply lacking the strength to cope with all the stress they have to face in this period of life (Smolak & Murnen 96).

Once again I would now like to comment on the sociocultural forces fueling eating disorders and disordered eating. One of the important factors influencing women in terms of their body image are glossy magazines, providing a very dangerous source of body shape information. The pictures shown there are mostly of super-slim models, which have been retouched and at least one article gives information about how to quickly lose a lot of weight, and apparently many more articles of that sort are found in women’s magazines than in men’s magazines (Smolak & Murnen 97). I would like to quote here a few samples from such an article I found in the August 2009 issue

of *Allure – The Beauty Expert*, a glossy magazine, with the title “The Fashion Insider’s Diet”, describing how successful women in the beauty business stay slim:

Being tempted by choice is not the key to staying slim. The truth is that fashion insiders, for the most part, eat exactly the same thing for breakfast and lunch. Every. Single. Day. “When you take the decision making out of your meals, being healthy is so much easier,” explains Eleanor Ylvisaker, a public-relations and fashion consultant. (170)

While many diet-conscious women already know that ordering an appetizer as an entrée is a smart move, Ferebee Taube, a public-relations consultant, takes it one step further. She often asks her dining companions if they would like to share several small plates as the main meal, “which means we all taste a few amazing dishes without really splurging”. (170)

Lauren Clarke, public-relations manager at Dolce & Gabbana, ensures that liquid calories don’t add up by following a glass of wine (which she sips, slowly) with two glasses of mineral water. Pinto also swears by sparkling water “because the carbonation actually fills you up”. (170)

The article contains many similar tips how to lose weight, yet to me only these three quotes read like a “how to guide” for clinical eating disorders. In the first quote, one is told not to vary food, since it is easier to eat less then, which I would consider highly dangerous, since one does not have to be a nutritionist to know that variety is an important factor in healthy eating. I therefore think this advice is the exact opposite of a healthy diet. The second quote does not seem so dangerous in the first place, since sharing plates in a group of people must not directly be connected with eating disorders. Yet, taking into account that they probably order one appetizer per person, which they maybe do not even finish, again reminds me of good advice how to start at least disordered eating. What utterly shocked me, however, was the advice to drink sparkling water, because it “actually fills you up”. Not only is the author speaking of “liquid calories” suggesting that food has to be divided into different categories, but more than that this advice suggests to women that in case they are hungry, they only need to sip a glass of sparkling water to soothe their hunger, because this is exactly what anorexics do, according to my findings. I do not want to blame the media alone for triggering eating disorders in girls and women, since only a minority actually develop a clinical disorder (Smolak & Murnen 97), but as a matter of fact a large number of American women are chronic dieters, and I would not negate the influence

of articles like the one I cited on these women. Articles like that promote a semi-starvation-like diet not as a normal diet, but even as healthy. To me they seem like “how-to-guides” for eating disorders, supporting once again the claim of Hesse-Biber that eating disorders and disordered eating can be culturally induced.

Yet, there are also other important influences and triggers for young women, namely family and peers. For some girls, the cultural message or even the cultural imperative that girls dislike their bodies and should change them, is commonly reinforced by their parents. It has been suggested that even among elementary school children, body dissatisfaction can be related to parental remarks about their weight and body shape. This may be even truer for girls than for boys, and therefore the combination of messages from the media, the peers, the parents seem to be more common and therefore stronger for girls (Smolak & Murnen 97-98). For children, parents function as mediators of culture, and therefore they influence their identity. (Haworth-Hoepfner 213). Thus, the influence of the parents may play a major role in the production of eating disorders. The mother, for instance, highly influences the eating habits of the daughter, let alone that she mostly inhabits the role of the nurturer. According to Hesse-Biber “A mother who is obsessed with being thin and who diets regularly is considered one of the eating-disordered risk factors for an adolescent girl” (*Cult* 164). Fathers influencing the development of an eating disorder often have high standards of feminine beauty and they send this message to their daughters by comments, taking into account that the girl already grew up in an environment where her mother had to cope with that. Margo Maine comments on that in Hesse-Biber’s *The Cult of Thinness*:

A girl develops beliefs about feminine behavior by watching her father interact with women. She observes the traits he values, the behavior that evokes his support or his disdain, and the way he treats them. A father’s treatment of his wife especially influences the adolescent daughter in her struggle to determine the ways in which she should be similar to, or different from, her mother. (161)

Haworth-Hoepfner, in her article about family influence states that not culture alone influences eating disorders, but more than that how parents present and mediate culture to their children, being their main influence. She states that parental influence producing eating disorders is linked to four conditions. The first is called a *critical*

family environment, meaning that in these families, parental criticism about weight, appearance, or the person in general prevails, such as recurring questions of the type “Have you gained a little weight?” or comments like “That does not look good on you. Go back upstairs and change your outfit”. The second category, *coercive parental control* is characterized as “behavior of the parent in a contest of wills, which results in considerable external pressure on the child to behave according to the parents’ desires” (216). This type of control is reflected in behaviors such as yelling, hitting, the use of excessive rules and surveillance, while it is especially evident in the case of governing food. The affected children then often feel that how much, what and when they eat, is the only thing they can control on their own. The third category described an *unloving parent-child relationship*, which is characterized by the children feeling unaccepted, unacknowledged, and unloved. The final category is called *main discourse on weight*, which refers to conversations within the family with the topic of weight and appearance, being a central focus of the family. Three primary topics of discussions are parental dieting concerns, criticisms of the daughter’s weight or appearance, and prejudicial attitudes involving weight.

Young women can of course be influenced by all family members, such as remarks on the body by a sibling, and also the grandparents may play a role, often sticking to a “clean-your-plate” attitude. As I mentioned before, society asks for thin women, who on the other hand always eat the food they are offered, since food is often equated with caring. A college student in Hesse-Biber’s book said: “My grandmother is always telling me that I should eat and be strong and healthy, but when I do, she tells me to watch what I eat or I’ll never find a husband” (*Cult* 169).

Above, I have elaborated on the influences of eating disorders in connection with the pursuit of thinness. Since I have argued that this ideal is unlikely to be reached by most women, I would now like to comment on those who actually fail to do so. In the United States, a land in which many women are literally obsessed with their bodies in the cult of thinness, Americans are actually steadily growing heavier. In America, 59 million people, nearly one third of all adults are considered obese or overweight. Doctors repeatedly refer to it as “America’s overweight epidemic” (Thaler

3), but the problem is not unique there, since the World Health Organization has declared it a global epidemic in 2000 (Stroebe ix). Obesity is not classified as a mental illness, like the clinical eating disorders anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, but in literature they are mostly discussed together, since obesity deviates from “normal” eating behavior, which makes it an eating disorder in that sense. It has been suggested that obesity may be partly inherited, and this factor is just as important as the environmental factor of overeating, namely eating habits (Abraham 145). Once you stick to overeating habits, it is very difficult to lose this weight again. This is where the large group of chronic dieters is located. Furthermore, for people who actually lost a lot of weight regardless of the technique they used, studies suggest that after 4 years, they are very likely to weigh more than before, because apparently the body seeks to go back to the original weight (Stroebe ix; Cuntz and Hillert 122).

I do not want to go into further detail of what constitutes obesity, but I would rather like to comment on the “American paradox”, namely the fact that in the United States, we find an epidemic of eating disorders and obsession with thin bodies and an epidemic of obese/overweight people. I argued above that thinness is connoted with positive traits, fat however with negative ones; sometimes it can even be seen as a sign of moral failure, thus as individual failure rather than a universal problem of consumer culture, which is rather special in the U.S. (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 54).

First of all, one can say that Americans have a tendency to be obsessed with size either small or large. This is mirrored in culture by an extremely slender ideal, while providing very large portions when eating outside the home, which is very common compared to other countries. Additionally, these large portions are generally extremely cheap, giving the consumers the feeling that they “get the most for their money”. The concept that stands behind this is called “value-marketing”, which was invented due to an overproduction of food. Yet the consumers do not seem to realize that in the long run, this is only profitable for the companies selling the food. Value meals are generally sold in fast-food chain, containing a main course such as a hamburger together with a side order such as French fries and a soft drink, which are

cheaper when purchased separately. Mostly, there is also the possibility to order these meals *supersize*, which are even cheaper compared to buying each component separately. Therefore, people have the feeling to save a large amount of money, yet at the same time they order meals of a size they would not normally eat. Since this food is generally unhealthy, value meals can lead to overweight, because people tend to eat much more than they need, yet paradoxically, many people order diet drinks with these meals in order to save some calories. The price of these meals is cheap, but the nutritional costs are high. What is also rather special in America is the “doggie-bag culture”. Usually the portions in restaurants are so big people cannot eat everything and they take the rest back home, since one should get the most for one’s money (cf. Sallas 7-15). The food industry however also takes up other measures, such as a promotion of a snacking culture, telling the consumers that they should have more than three opportunities a day to eat; free water is replaced by purchased soft-drinks and desserts are presented as the ultimate award. Yet, at the same time there is a huge market for diet products. Hesse-Biber speaks here of a “cultural paradox”, since there is a demand for junk food and diet foods at the same time, in a culture where people become increasingly obese in a culture of thinness (“Mass” 213). This seems like a contradiction in the first place, but Hesse-Biber argues that these two phenomena are “not only congruent – they are inextricably linked” (*Cult* 23) as mirrored in the fast food eating culture I described above. People eat more and more processed food; besides they eat less and less meals at home and if they do so, they often rely on industrially prepared foods, which, in the long run lead to serious health implications such as the high number of obese and overweight people in America (*Cult* 24).

At the same time, we can find an enormous range of diet-related products in the U.S., suggesting that even when you are overweight, you can still lose weight any time. One can purchase numerous products, such as diet pills, processed food from weight-loss companies, diet and low-fat food of almost any kind and more, promising quick and lasting weight loss. In order to lose weight, you only have to buy pills, a food plan, or a membership in a self-help group. If only you consume something, you can lose the weight easily (Hesse-Biber, “Mass” 213). Thus, the promises are that if only

you want, you can become and stay slim whenever you want. Yet one has to take into account that these measurements that can be taken in order to lose weight generally cost a lot of money. So does healthy food in America.

Therefore, one could argue that what your body looks like can be connected to your financial situation. The pursuit of thinness, especially when someone does not naturally conform to the standard set by society, can cost a lot of money. Additionally, a healthy, well-balanced diet is much more expensive than fast food “value meals”. In the United States then, obesity can also function as a marker of lower classes, since it is highly prevalent among the poor. According to Greta Olson, “America is developing a two-body society that mirrors the economic divisions between the privileged and the under-privileged” (“Fat” 187), which leads to the fact that overweight, poor people in America not only suffer from social stigmatization, but also from health problems due to their weight problems. Yet there are no solutions in sight so far. Greta Olson in her article argues that

The American ethos of individual responsibility precludes the idea that it is the state’s responsibility to prohibit the sale of fast food in schools, to guarantee the poor access to exercise areas, or to monitor the public’s diet. A prevailing American myth suggests that any individual can attain whatever form of personal success s/he wants of s/he only desires this enough and is willing to work hard enough to achieve it. (194-95)

Thus, again overweight or obesity are seen as moral and, more than that, individual failure, proving that this individual simply did not work hard enough in order to stay slim, since according to the American Dream everybody can achieve *any* goal as long as s/he tries hard enough.

Following my theoretical overview of eating disorders in America, I would now like have a look at their cultural representations. As argued above, the body can be seen as a medium of culture; therefore eating disorders are just another example of female obsession with their bodies. The existence of eating disorders in American culture is mirrored in glossy fashion magazines, which tend to focus on emaciated models only far away from the average American women and so does the movie business. We can find numerous novels about experiences with eating disorders; the

internet is full of websites about and for eating disorders, and the list goes on. I chose to dedicate the next chapter to the analysis of the autobiographical narrative *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher with regards to its representation of eating disorders in connection with American culture.

3.4 *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher - An Analysis

The awakened and knowing say: body I am entirely, and nothing else;
and soul is only a word for something about the body.
Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (quoted in *W* 1)

I don't know where the body begins and the mind ends. (*W* 122)

Wasted is an autobiographical narrative of an eating disordered girl describing in great detail her sufferings throughout a period of years in a quite complex and utterly disturbing way. At the time she finished the novel she was twenty-three years old and had been struggling with different types of eating disorders for about fourteen years. At the tender age of nine, her obsession with her body started, leaving her with the impression of being too fat probably for the rest of her life, as in the end we do not find evidence of her full recovery. She gives the reader an in-depth view of her struggle with food, bulimia, and anorexia during several periods in her life, including life with her parents, boarding school and finally college. Apart from that, the reader learns about her relationships, her problems with drugs, and her experiences in various clinics in the eating disorder unit and an asylum. I will go into further detail when I talk about the themes of the book.

Wasted is chronologically structured, each chapter is dedicated to a certain period of time and connected to that her development of bulimia or anorexia. Between these chapters, one finds Interludes with comments about the present, meaning the time when she wrote the book. The text is furthermore interspersed with quotations from fictional texts or poetry, eating disorders handbooks and notes taken by various care takers, medical records, and diagnoses. The use of various text types makes it a hybrid text. Furthermore, she makes use of various stylistic variations such

as shifting between first-person singular, plural, and the second-person forms of address. This leads to the fact that the reader has to move between several perspectives. According to Olson, the text therefore creates the effect of instability, and she states that “the formal instability of the text matching the narrator’s sense is her own fragile and fragmented self” (cf. Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 226-27). One might also pose the question whether her memoirs are fully autobiographical. Olson argues that due to its hybrid nature and different stylistics, *Wasted* shows a high level of fictionality and literariness (230), and one has to take into account that Marya Hornbacher actually is a writer. Olson further claims that the narrative is a confessional one (*Reading Eating Disorders* 231).

Significantly, she starts her book with a dark quote by Nietzsche (quoted above), which mirrors her own perception of “her body as the defining principle for her entire identity” (Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 225). According to Hornbacher “The body is no more than a costume, and can be changed at will. That the changing of bodies, like costumes, would make me into a different character, a character who might, finally, be all right” (*W* 31). Evidently, the main theme of the text is Hornbacher’s struggle with her body. As early as at the age of six, her plan for life was “to get thin”, to change her body so that she can finally be happy, successful, etc. and she pursues it ever since. She, like many women, falls for the

female version of the American dream [...] I, as many young women do, honest-to-god believed that once I Just Lost a Few Pounds, somehow I would suddenly be a New You, I would have Ken-doll men chasing my thin legs down with bouquets of flowers on the street, I would become rich and famous and glamorous and lose my freckles and become blond and five foot ten. [...] As soon as I left my hometown and lost a few pounds. (*W* 91-92)

Her constant moving underpins this pursuit of thinness in order to change her life: “I would disappear, only to come home reinvented. I would be unrecognizable upon my fleeting returns” (*W* 90). This quote suggests that she does not only fall for the American Dream, but likewise for the Beauty Myth. If you are thin, you are happy and successful, and anybody can achieve that as long as one tries hard enough. It is obvious that Hornbacher is well aware of the influences of culture and society on dieting behavior and eating disorders, as she broaches the issue repeatedly. Nevertheless, she

does not seem to be capable of applying this knowledge to her own life, being trapped in the Beauty Myth probably for the rest of her life. She asserts that “there are precious few women who eat normally. You get out of the hospital, look around at what other people are eating, and realize the nice little meal plan you’re on – though you need it to stay healthy – is not the norm” (W 217). She is conscious of the fact that she needs a certain amount of food in order to stay healthy or even alive, but living in a society where 40 % of all women are dieting at any given day and where dieting has become culturally accepted, establishing a “normal” eating pattern is very difficult, not to forget that she has a history of clinical eating disorders. Later she highlights once again that numerous women are obsessed with their weight and generally with their bodies and she criticizes that women award each other for being thin: “Oh, you’ve lost so much weight! You look fabulous!” (W 282). Moreover she comments that “women use their obsession with weight and food as a point of connection with one another, a commonality even between strangers. Instead of talking about *why* we use food and weight control as a means of handling emotional stress, we talk ad nauseam about the fact that we don’t like our bodies” (W 283). She analyzes pointedly what this obsession with bodies really is about, but at the same time she does not provide any advice or solutions; it almost seems like an excuse why she herself is caught in this craze about the body. “We grew up in a world in which the surface of the thing is infinitely more important than the substance [...]” (W 136).

Nevertheless, Hornbacher also falls for the American Dream, as throughout the autobiographical narrative, she portrays herself as extremely successful and hard-working. At school, she receives numerous awards and scholarships even though she never actually finishes high school. She describes herself as a workaholic with its peak at college in Washington, where she is working several journalist jobs at the same time, while studying full time. Connected to the American Dream she comments:

Success, I firmly believed, was the key to my salvation. It would absolve me of the sins of the flesh and the soul, lift me out of the life I hated. “Success” meant a perfect career, perfect relationships, perfect control over my life and myself – all of which depended on a perfect me, which depended in turn on me living inside a perfect body. (W 232)

Once again I would like to state that even at the end of the book, the reader does not gain the impression that she has fully recovered, and one is left with the feeling that she will have to struggle with eating disorders for the rest of her life. I commented above on her moving a lot, in order to come home reinvented, but there is one thing she might have realized, namely that “everywhere you go, there you are” (W 231).

Literature often suggests that the parents of eating disordered girls play a role, and I would like to further analyze whether this is true for Hornbacher as well, since she claims: “I am not here to spill my guts and tell you about how awful it’s been, that my daddy was mean and my mother was mean and some kid called me Fatso in the third grade, because none of the above is true” (W 4). Later again, she holds her ground that it is not her parents’ fault that she is eating disordered; nevertheless some evidence of their influence can be found throughout the narrative, as in the following quotes: “I was born in Walnut Creek, California, to a pair of exceptionally intelligent, funny, wonderful people, who were perhaps less than ideal candidates for parenthood” (W 17). “It was not an unhappy childhood. It was uneasy” (W 18). These examples suggest that her parents might have affected her becoming eating disordered after all.

Her parents were both actors in a theater. She therefore grew up in the theater and her life was highly influenced by it. According to Hornbacher, one adopts a certain “The show must go on”-attitude, which perfectly suits the American Dream. If you fail, it is your fault, you have to work hard enough in order to achieve your goals. She also claims that working in the theater fosters narcissism like nowhere else, but likewise one can feel tremendously empty as an actor. A further characteristic of this profession is that one continuously has to change roles and characters in order to keep the audience enthused (W 29). As quoted above, for her the body is nothing but a costume that can be changed at will, and she concludes that she has several women in her closet, roles she can act, but nobody can look at what is underneath. Apparently she adopts this way of seeing a woman, a body at a very young age. In their inability to cope with a child, Hornbacher’s parents used another metaphor deriving from the theater: “Quit *acting* like a child” (W 25). Sadly enough, however, they used it when

Hornbacher still was a child, exemplifying one more time their possible impact on her eating problems.

However, this is not the only way her parents influence her. Apparently the whole family has varying issues with food, in Hornbacher's words: "My parents are weird about food" (W 10). Although her parents try to ensure that they have dinner together on a regular basis, her mother shows signs of being eating disordered herself, while they use food as a means of communication or comfort, especially at times when the parents have difficulties with each other. On that account, food is equated with love, especially for her father who often takes her out for special treats. Furthermore, they have nicknames for each other, her father is called "Pig" and Hornbacher is "Piglet", which are supposed to allude to the way they eat. We further learn that her stepgrandmother has, apart from her alcohol problem, a problem with food as well. She does not only warn Hornbacher frequently that she will become fat; she also does not offer much food on visits. Referring to a trip to her grandmother Hornbacher even states that the three women, she, her mother, and her grandmother were competing for who could eat the least (W 98). In her mother's family eating is seen as an annoyance and fat people are lesser people according to them, people who can obviously not control themselves. I would therefore suggest that her mother's family and her mother had a high impact on Hornbacher developing an eating disorder. After her first hospitalization, when she weighs 103 pounds Hornbacher declares: "I am pretty thin. And my mother will respond: I wouldn't call you thin" (W 100). It must also be added however that her parents helped her when they realized that she had a clinical eating disorder; they arranged for her to go to a clinic, but it took a long time until they admitted to themselves that she needed help.

One could argue that her parents are utterly overwhelmed by the whole situation of raising a child. This argument is supported by the fact that each family member has problems with Marya's puberty and the changing of her body. Her father does not want to accept that his little daughter grows up; he denies that she needs a bra for instance, and her mother is incapable of helping her when she needs her. Therefore, Marya herself feels rather uncomfortable having to deal with all this on her

own. She writes letters to her mother about the things she is concerned with, but she never responds, so for instance she has to buy tampons on her own when she gets her first period (W 48-49). At that time, she is right in the middle of her struggle with eating disorders, to be more precise she is in a bulimic phase. Matching my findings I elaborated on above, Marya starts to become sexually active at the age of thirteen already. That means she sleeps with many different men, one time she has even sex on a bus with a complete stranger. One might argue that she needs to sleep with many men in order to feel her body, and she enjoys it when men are attracted to her. At the same time she gets involved with drugs and alcohol. This is significant for bulimia, which is frequently associated with a substance abuse history.

This also accounts for her leaving for boarding school, an art school for gifted teenagers at Interlochen, Michigan. She wants to attend this school since she is an ambitious, young writer, but another motif is her coming back home reinvented afterwards. As described before, eating disorders are rather common in colleges and boarding schools. Critics suggest that one reason could be the inability to cope with the first separation from home, even a term for the weight gain has been coined – the freshman 15. This is the amount many girls gain when they leave home, and Hornbacher asserts that this is “a rite of passage beyond our control [...]” (W 104). Hornbacher however claims that for her leaving home came as a great relief and a sense of freedom (W 101). On the other hand, her eating disorder becomes worse and worse during her stay and it changes from bulimia to anorexia. Thus, at this school as well, many girls have an eating disorder: “There were an incredible number of painfully thin girls at Interlochen, dancers mostly. The obsession with weight seemed nearly universal” (W 102). During her stay, she finds out about many new techniques of losing weight, and there are plenty of other girls who live the same way she does, and she eventually becomes anorexic. They only eat foods with a laxative effect, and they are obsessed with food. Food is put into categories made up by these girls, for instance there are safe foods like sugar, because it is fat-free. It is their number one topic. One could call this cultist behavior, them being members of what Hesse-Biber calls the Cult of Thinness. In that respect she comments: “It’s interesting how we think of calories as the Antichrist rather than as a source of energy” (W 109). Instead of seeing food as

something that is life-giving, she interprets it as a destructive force, while the opposite is true.

In Interlochen she starts to exercise excessively, she runs in the morning and in the evenings, but she also speedwalks everywhere she goes. According to her this mania develops due to her malnutrition; she makes up certain rules and forces herself to obey them. For example, she has to run a round, then touch the door (she runs indoors), and when she does not touch it, the round does not count and has to be repeated (110). Later, when she lives in Washington, she takes her set of rules one step further and limits herself to one bagel and one yoghurt per day, which has to be eaten in a certain manner. This can be seen as an extreme example of what Foucault calls the 'docile body'. Further evidence for her anorexia is the fact that she grows a lanugo due to her starving, and she asserts that she likes it, she feels like a little bear. As proposed in studies on eating disorders, her sex life decreases as well, and she generally becomes more and more isolated. In addition, she works extremely hard for school and she earns a lot of prizes. Excessive working is also often associated with anorexia.

I have now given a few examples from the book that match my general findings about eating disorders. In Hornbacher's text, we also find many detailed descriptions about her illness. I would therefore like to pose the question whether the narrative is a cultural critique or a how-to-guide for girls reading the book and will elaborate on that.

Wasted is at first sight a cultural critique. Hornbacher is well aware of the pressure on women about their bodies, and she brings this argument up throughout her book. At the same time she also distances herself from popular theories about the source of eating disorders calling them too general. She denies that it is her parents' fault or her not wanting to become a woman. Instead she speaks of a combination of factors, namely her emotional intensity, her sense of insecurity, her family history combined with America's thinness-obsessed culture (cf. Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 251-52). The greatest share of the blame takes the cult of thinness, however:

I do believe that the cultural environment is an equal if no greater, culprit in the sheer *popularity* of eating disorders. There were numerous methods of self-destruction available to me, countless outlets that could have channeled my drive, perfectionism, ambition, and an excess of general intensity, millions of ways in which I could have responded to a culture that I found highly problematic. I did not choose those ways. I chose an eating disorder. I cannot help but think that, had I lived in a culture where “thinness” was not regarded as a strange state of grace, perhaps one that would not have so seriously damaged my body, and so radically distorted my sense of who I am. (W 6-7)

I already commented in more detail on culture’s influence on Hornbacher’s illness above. I would therefore like to argue why *Wasted* can also be seen as a how-to-guide for bulimia and anorexia. The main argument is that she describes the different stages of her illness and the related routines in such detail that after the reading of the book the reader is well informed about eating disorders. I would like to start with her general presentation of the eating disorders, as for her being an anorexic or being a bulimic are two different things. Throughout the book she stresses that she wants to be and to be seen as anorexic. She says: “I distinctly did not want to be seen as bulimic. I wanted to be an anorectic” (W 107). For Hornbacher, anorexia stands for full control over her body and mind, whereas bulimia with its characteristic binges embodies the exact opposite. Apart from the seeming loss of control of, bulimics also tend to be normal weight, but being thin is the aim, which she eventually attains. She further asserts that in the clinics she stayed, bulimia was always seen as a much less dangerous illness than anorexia; she almost presents it like a ‘second-rate’ eating disorder. Nevertheless, throughout her book she lives through different phases of both illnesses. In the beginning she suffers from bulimia; it already started when she was nine years old. At the time she starts to binge on a regular basis, she reads in a book: “[...] you could die from an eating disorder. That didn’t bother me. What it did *not* say was that if it did not kill you right away, it would live with you the rest of your life, and *then* kill you. I wish I would’ve known that. I decided that if I did nothing else with my life, I would be an anorectic [sic!] when I grew up. Bulimia seemed a good place to start” (W 43). In connection to her first experiences with bingeing and purging she describes a situation with her baby sitter, when she insists that she can eat a whole loaf of bread, which she eventually does:

Determined, I'd start popping bread in the toaster, heart pumping. I remember the toast, the butter I spread on it, the crunch of toast against teeth and the caress of butter on tongue. I remember devouring piece after piece, my raging, insatiable hunger, the absolute absence of fullness. I remember cheerfully heading off for my bath. Night, I said. Locking the bathroom door, turning the water on, leaning over the toilet, throwing up in a heave of delight. (W 43)

Although she later prefers being an anorexic, this episode casts a highly positive light on bulimia; it can almost be compared to the description of a sexual experience, at least it comes across as a rather pleasurable one. She describes further experiences with bingeing and purging, one time even the pipes in her parents' house break during a relapse.

Hornbacher seems to glamorize her eating disorders at one point or another as shown in the quote above, and she gives the reader more tips what eating disordered humans do. At several points she elaborates on the use of laxatives and a medication called Ipecac, which induces vomiting instantly. When she writes about her experience with Ipecac, she interestingly uses the "you-perspective" just like it is actually addressed to a reader of a how-to-guide. She explains that she bought it under the false pretense of being a young mother who wants to store it at home in case of an emergency with her kid. She eventually manages to convince the man behind the counter and buys a bottle of which one should take one spoonful together with 8 ounces of milk or water when needed. "*Do not administer the entire bottle*. In case of an overdose, call your poison control center IMMEDIATELY" (W 170) is what the label on the bottle reads. Yet this is exactly what she does, which evidently leads to an immediate collapse: "You vomit in insane, ripping heaves, blood squattering in the seat" (W 171). She also experiences the use of laxatives, again in the "you-perspective". She comments on the fact that when one suffers from an eating disorder, one is not capable of "taking a dump" anymore. "It will become an obsession" (W 147). Hornbacher asserts that during a stay in a clinic she begs for laxatives due to her problems; she is not addicted to them yet, and she claims that "the whole idea of using them for weight loss will seem utterly stupid to you, because it 's not *real* weight you lose by shitting all day long. [...] Of course you do not know then that in less than six months, you and your disdainful ass will move into the

bathroom for days at a time because, yes, you too! will be eating whole boxes of chocolate Ex-Lax three times a day” (W 147-48). Furthermore, we learn that while purging one should turn on the water, in order to make some noise, but then bulimics seem to learn to vomit silently: “no hack, no gag, just bend over and mentally will the food back up” (W 97). As mentioned above, Hornbacher underpins the claim that bulimics tend to use “markers” when bingeing and purging. That means they consume artificially colored food first such as “Doritos” so they can make sure after vomiting that all the food they ate has left the body again and a lot of fluid is drunk while bingeing (cf. Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 262-63).

Hornbacher suffers from bulimia for a long time; she becomes anorexic and has several relapses. Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that she prefers being anorexic: “The minute you stick your fingers down your throat, you know damn well that something’s wrong. You know you’re out of control” (W 224). She further says: “I distinctly did not want to be seen as bulimic. I wanted to be an anorectic. I was on a mission to be another sort of person, a person whose passions were ascetic rather than hedonistic, who would Make It, whose drive and ambition were focused and pure, whose body came second, always, to her mind and her ‘art’”(W 107). In her eyes, this control she seeks can be attained with anorexia. She first becomes anorexic when she enters boarding school in Interlochen, Michigan. There she meets many other girls who are concerned with their food, and she starts to develop a rather strange behavior when it comes to food, but she does not realize it at first, since many other girls do the same. For instance, as commented on above, they only buy and eat foods with a laxative effect, and she starts running excessively and makes up certain rules she forces herself to obey. In the beginning she eats together with her colleagues, but later she avoids going to the cafeteria. At the same time, she stashes food in her room, a habit typical of anorexics according to her and she binges on Sundays together with some other eating disordered girls. She stops having a sex life. So she makes her first experiences with anorexia in boarding school. A few years later, however, in college in Washington she develops an even more extreme way of the illness. Again, she has a ‘system’ of eating, where food is divided into several units:

A unit consisted of eighty calories, the equivalent of your average slice of bread. Of course I made this system up in my head, and do not, to this day, understand why this particular system held such significance for me. This is how we work, we all have our systems. A friend of mine used to divide food arbitrarily into liquids and solids – solids including soup, bread, pasta, rice; liquids including chocolate, vegetables, and chicken – and would've argued with any rational being, who tried to explain to her the alternative nature of "liquid" or "solid". (W 246)

After the stay at Lowe House, an asylum, she eats 31.25 units per day, but within about a year she is down to four units daily. She eats 320 calories a day at that time, which is according to her not only a starvation diet,³ but it is suicide. This time describes one of her most severe phases of anorexia, and even though she is gradually becoming more and more ill, her description of that time is extremely glamorized. She portrays herself as very successful, while her weight is gradually dropping, which she describes almost like a countdown (cf. Olson, *Reading Eating Disorders* 258-59):

Seventy.

I took off my belt and shoes.

Sixty-seven. (W 267)

In Washington she becomes a true workaholic, which perfectly suits the American ideal of course, and this sort of hyperactivity has also been mentioned in connection with anorexics. Hornbacher is in constant movement; she runs most of the time, and when she is not busy, she is worried something could be wrong. She calls herself manic and comments: "I do not have an off switch" (W 248). Needless to say, she is still obsessed with food. She sticks to eating carrots with mustard and much coffee and when she "was feeling particularly brave, frozen yogurt in a coffee cup" (W 249). Hornbacher cannot eat a whole bowl at a time; this simply seems too much for her and she regularly checks with the restaurant manager whether it really is non-fat or if there is a wrong sign. She also describes the way she eats it; she calls it an "erotic encounter with a plastic spoon" (W 254), and one could argue that this comes quite close to an how-to-guide for eating disorders:

³ "The term 'starvation diet' refers to 900 calories a day" (W 247).

Try this at home, kids, it's great fun. You take the edge of your spoon and run it over the top of the yogurt, being careful to get only the melted part. Then let the yogurt drip off until there's only a sheen of it on the spoon. Lick it – wait, be careful, you have to only lick a teeny bit at a time, the sheen should last at least four or five licks, and you have to lick the back of the spoon first, then turn the spoon over and lick the front, with the tip of the tongue. Then set the yogurt aside again. Read a full page, but don't look at the yogurt to check the melt progression. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Do not take a mouthful, do not eat any of the yogurt unless it's melted. Do not fantasize about toppings, crumbled Oreos, or chocolate sauce. Do not fantasize about a sandwich. A sandwich would be so *complicated*. (W 255)

The most obvious sign of the reference to the how-to-guide is of course the introduction “try this at home” and her orders to repeat the procedure. Additionally, she describes in close detail how she eats a frozen yogurt, an act not worthwhile talking about for people who are not eating-disordered.

Her obsessions are however not only restricted to food, but she is also extremely obsessed with her body and its shape, which she observes and controls regularly in a mirror. Mirrors play an important role for her, especially for these body checks:

I became very concerned with gaps, spaces between bones, absent places where I was certain there had once been flesh but I couldn't quite remember when. When the small voice in my head would not stop hissing, I'd throw down my pen, stand up, go to the mirror, drop my pants, and look at the gaps. Pressing my legs together as hard as I could, I'd look at the gaps between my calves and thighs. I began to measure things in absence instead of presence. Where once I'd stared at my rear end, to see if it had grown or shrunk. I looked at the space around it, to see if the space had grown or shrunk. I looked at the way the side of my ass sank in toward the hipbone. I'd scrutinize the hipbone, cup the bone in my hand, knock on it, listen to the hollow sound. I'd look at the space between my thighs, my lower body like a wishbone, my pubic hair obscene on a prepubescent frame, legs bowed apart from each other, the bones of my knees touching and then pure space, blank space. I could see the heater behind me through my legs, a little oval of space from knee to crotch. I stared at the place where my torso had been, the space between bones. I took my rib cage in my hands, curved my whole hands around the twin curves of bone, fingers inside the cage, palms on the outside, two fists. When I was satisfied that space had not shrunk, that my body had stayed within its spatial confines and had not encroached, I pulled up my pants, sat down at my desk, swallowed my coffee, and worked. All night. (W 252-53)

Again, she gives a very detailed description of how one could examine their body closely. The length alone shows the importance of that routine for her, but also tells others how they can do it and that it is normal to have an extremely close look at one's body. This routine helps her to establish what she seeks, namely control, control over her body, which means control over her whole life. Thus, her life is marked by a lot of work and her obsession with food and her body, which includes several routines such as the mirror check I cited above and eating. These rituals, which mean control for her, become a sign of lost control when Hornbacher gets a new roommate. She comments on that: "Having a normal person around me made it poignantly clear to me that I was out of control. No, that had not in fact occurred to me before this point" (W 265). She further asserts that because of the presence of her new roommate, she is reminded of why she is anorexic in the first place: "I was anorectic [sic!] because I was afraid of being human" (W 266).

I elaborated on a few examples which make *Wasted* seem like a how-to-guide for eating disorders. One can find several more examples, for instance on how she tricks the staff in clinics at weigh-ins and others. To conclude this section I would like to have a look at the theme of death, which can be found throughout the book, but first I would like to analyze the title of the book. The word "wasted" can be used in several ways. It pointedly describes the state her body is in at the end of the book. She is still alive, but she is emaciated and weak. She does everything that is bad for her body, that means she literally wastes it. Furthermore, she abuses alcohol and drugs throughout years; thus she often actually *is* wasted in another sense of the word.

As I said, she is still alive at the end of the book; she often comments on the fact that she wants to die or simply vanish, which can also be seen as a way of dying. I think it also stands for her losing weight in order to reach what for her is perfection, because she further tells the reader how she likes to watch the pounds disappear. She writes about vanishing:

And I remember being utterly, utterly pleased with myself.

Why?

Because I was disappearing. A disappearing act, the act of becoming invisible, is, in fact, a visible act, and rarely goes unnoticed. (W 129)

Being thin is her ultimate goal in this society where slenderness is associated with positive traits and where being fat is seen as moral failure. She is well aware of the fact that she will eventually die, but in the end, anorexia seems much more important to her. When she lives in Washington she writes: "No one even noticed me. I was invisible. It was perfect. I have since wondered if some part of my brain had decided it would be a good place to disappear completely. Take my exit, leaving nothing in my wake" (W 236). Even though she casts herself, her success with men and her professional success in a rather positive light throughout the book, she gives the impression that she enjoys the fact that in a city, where everybody is concerned with themselves, nobody notices that she has a problem, but at the same time they complement her on her achievements. It seems that for an anorexic the fear of fat is overpowering and more important or relevant than the fear of death. About *the* anorexic girl she says: "Does she care she's dying? Hell, no!" (W 81). She seems to think about death, which she calls "a fascinating thing" (W 125) often and comes to the following conclusion:

Nothing will ever be so close to you again. You will never find a lover so careful, so attentive, so unconditionally present and concerned only with you. Some of us use the body to convey the things for which we cannot find words. Some of us decide to take a shortcut, decide the world is too much or too little, death is so easy, so smiling, so simple; and death is dramatic, a final fuck-you to the world. (W 125)

Furthermore she writes about death: "I wanted to die right then. I had this idea in my head that dying would be lovely, a loosening of the ankle shackles that held me to the ground. I would lift off into the sky, float over the iced white streets, yes, that was death, and I was a princess trapped in a cage, dying of a broken heart. That was death" (W 181). Later when she lives in Washington she writes after she collapses in the street:

I think I'm dead.

Finally. (W 271)

Although she somewhat glamorizes her eating disorders and success she has even though she is sick, there is this constant feeling of the need to die. She can obviously not cope all that well with her illness. Thus, what I find very interesting is the fact that she portrays the act of dying as something beautiful and pleasurable. She compares it to a loving and caring partner, and also her flying to heaven paints a beautiful picture of death. She does not seem to be afraid of death at any rate, since being alive is so difficult for her. In the last chapter in which she writes about her present state called "Wreck" she tells the reader that she actually attempted to kill herself, but then she learned that there is also another way to cope with life: "I learned, gradually, to just fucking *deal*" (W 275-76).

In this chapter I tried to give an overview of the field of eating disorders, a part of the beauty myth women are faced with everyday. Even though only a small number of women actually suffer from a clinical eating disorder, many are obsessed with their bodies and food, are dieting chronically in this pursuit of thinness, which seems to promise happiness, success, and a loving partner. As a representation of eating disorders in American culture I chose *Wasted* as one out of many other narratives. It is an interesting book to analyze, because Hornbacher is a professional writer, and throughout the book the reader learns that she is well aware of the cultural pressure that is put on women. However, there is no way out. Women are easily trapped in the Beauty Myth and the American Dream. Marya Hornbacher is only *one* example.

4 “The First Cut Is the Deepest”

The machine is at the door. Is she the future? (Wolf 269)

This chapter will be dedicated to the practice of cosmetic surgery, which has become more and more popular in the United States over the past few years. Most celebrities have undergone surgery, and so-called ‘nose-jobs’ or breast enlargement, for instance, are common graduation presents, albeit aesthetic surgery is mostly restricted to the upper middle class due to the fact that these operations are very expensive. In order to make them accessible for the lower classes, too, Nely Galàn invented the reality show *The Swan*, in which underprivileged “ugly ducklings” have the opportunity to change their bodies and therefore their lives for the better with the help of a team of “experts”. In this chapter I will first give an overview of cosmetic surgery in the United States today, and as its cultural representation I will analyze *The Swan*.

4.1 Cosmetic Surgery

First of all I would like to emphasize the fact that there is a difference between cosmetic surgery and plastic surgery, but the procedures are the same. Cosmetic surgery has the sole purpose of beautification, which has no medical purpose whatsoever, whereas plastic surgery is carried out when it is necessary in order to stay healthy, such as rhinoplasty when somebody has trouble breathing or after an accident for example. Nevertheless, it is the fastest growing and at the same time most risky medical specialty at the moment (Davis, *Reshaping* 11). In 2006 nearly 11.5 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures were performed in the United States. Since 1997, the numbers have increased 446 percent and have been growing roughly 11.2 percent yearly with a market size of \$ 2 billion. It must be highlighted here that a large amount of procedures are carried out on adolescents (Wegenstein 1). Examples of the different procedures are rhinoplasty, breast augmentation and reduction, Botox injections, liposuction, tummy tucks, brow lifts, facelifts, cheek implants, arm-lifts, chin augmentation, and the list goes on.

Again the purpose of these beautification measures is to make people happier in the long run by changing and improving their “wrong bodies”, which fits the argument mentioned above that many people associate beauty with happiness and a better life (cf. Gilman, “Skin Deep” 8).

Taking into account that so many surgeries are carried out per year, one might ask who the target group is. We find patients in all social strata, but generally it is restricted to the upper classes – like many beautification measures. The body and the quest for beauty are connected with social class by Bourdieu, who calls it the “sign-carrying, sign-wearing body” (quoted in Albright 109), and it must be added that the higher the social class, the more the importance of beauty augments (Albright 110). This, nevertheless, leads us back to the notion of the American Dream, which is inextricably linked with the Beauty Myth. With cosmetic surgery you have one more possibility to make the most of yourself. Wolf in her Beauty Myth argues in that respect that “[the] Surgical Age is an unqualified good. It is the American dream come true: One can re-create oneself ‘better’ in a brave new world” (Wolf 252). She further criticizes that it is seen as feminist liberation, this “beauty that is almost fair because you can earn it with pain and buy it with money” (252), but it is only a further way into the trap of the Beauty Myth. I would therefore like to pose the question why women decide to get surgery, with all its risks and side effects, when it is not medically necessary? For Wolf, the main advantage of cosmetic surgery is the monetary benefit for the surgeons. In line with that she asserts: “The surgeon’s market is imaginary, since there is nothing wrong with women’s faces or bodies that social change won’t cure; so the surgeons depend for their income on warping female self-perception and multiplying female self-hatred” (232).

For Kathy Davis quite the opposite is important. In chapter 7 of her book “Reshaping the Female Body” she stands up for the women who choose to have cosmetic surgery, because in numerous interviews with former patients she finds out that these women opt for surgery in an attempt to become “normal” just like all the other women. “It was not about beauty but about wanting to become ordinary, normal, or like everyone else” (Davis, *Reshaping* 161). She explains that not all women she talked to are fully satisfied with the outcome of the operation, still most of them

would do it again. Nevertheless, most of the interviewed women feel the need to explain why they underwent surgery, albeit they all claim that they did it for themselves and not because anyone else wanted them to. Davis further argues that against the belief among feminists that cosmetic surgery turns women into objects, “[paradoxically], cosmetic surgery enabled these women to become embodied subjects rather than objectified bodies” (161). Davis emphasizes the need of listening to the reasons why women choose to have surgery, but this wish of becoming “normal” is probably just another representation of Wolf’s Beauty Myth. As quoted above, a social change would help these women more than supporting their wish for an operation.

Furthermore, Wolf argues that cosmetic surgery implies the notion of a defect of the female body. “Ugliness” is treated as a disease, like menstruation, pregnancy, masturbation and menopause were seen in former times. Modern women are made believe that parts of their healthy bodies are diseased and have to be medically changed (Wolf 223). Blum as well puts forward the notion of defect in women’s bodies in her article “Becoming the Other Woman”, and she criticizes the fact that aesthetic surgery is becoming a normative, cultural practice (107), instead of a change in culture that would make it redundant. Kathryn Morgan likewise argues in her article “Women and the Knife” that cosmetic surgery is becoming the norm, while women who refuse to have surgery, or cannot afford it, are stigmatized and seen as deviant (165). Nevertheless, the woman today “is always evaluating her appearance (intimately bound up with her identity) in relation to some standard that must be *Other* in order to function as a standard” (Blum 104). Thus, for Blum the main reason why women choose to have their bodies surgically changed is because they want to become this Other woman. Women are frequently told that their bodies are deficient, but that they have the possibility to change them via several beautification measures, the most radical one being cosmetic surgery. “Cosmetic surgery, in other words, holds out a technological and economic solution (if you have the money, the technology is there) to the very dilemma posed by the way capitalism manages femininity by simultaneously commodifying it, idealizing it, and insisting on its native defects” (Blum 110). But who is this Other woman we want to become? According to Blum we

typically think of this woman as a liaison, a not-wife, the woman who could take away your man. "You are never the Other Woman, but always the one who could be left for her" (110). So, how can a woman manage to become this Other woman, but stay herself at the same time? With cosmetic surgery one ventures to provide one solution.

That means in other words that women seek to become someone else and surgery provides the possibility, in case you have the money. In line with that a major problem arises. In the case that women actually decide to have surgery and pay for it, they expect the best results, and consequently patients have very high expectations of the outcome. I would like to add here that there are many famous cosmetic surgeons who describe, for instance, the noses they create in terms of their own surnames, thus one could have a "Goldman nose" for example (Morgan 167). These doctors obviously satisfy many patients, which attracts further patients. This goes hand in hand with Gilman's suggestion that the surgeon can be seen as a sculptor, who improves and beautifies a woman, in other words we can speak of the notion of the surgeon as an artist. As a result, body parts today can be seen as status symbols. The women want to get the most for their money, but it is difficult to satisfy the patients: "When you buy a body part for aesthetic reasons, you automatically compare yours to others who have better or worse. Even if you are pleased with a surgical result, you will see the rest of the world as so many possibilities" (Blum 105). Cosmetic surgery, therefore, is a promise that cannot be kept. Unhappy with the outcome time and again, this can lead to the fact that women become addicted to cosmetic surgery in their pursuit of the "perfect" body. They are labeled polysurgical addicts, or more informally as "scalpel slaves" (Blum 106). A famous representation is Cindy Jackson, a woman who became the living image of the Barbie doll.

The notion of the surgeon as a sculptor, might also have a negative connotation and critics might argue that a cosmetic surgeon is no more than a modern Frankenstein. Zykinska in her article on bioethics in relation with the show *The Swan* goes to such lengths as to call the women having surgery "twenty-first-century neocyborgs, bearing the marks of technology on their bodies" (140). In that matter I would like to return to Foucault's docile bodies once again. He argues that the

outcome of disciplinary power is the docile body, a body “that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault quoted in Morgan 171).

What is important about this notion in relation to cosmetic surgery is the extent to which it makes it possible to speak about the diffusion of power throughout Western industrialized cultures that are increasingly committed to a technological beauty imperative. It also makes it possible to refer to a set of experts – cosmetic surgeons – whose explicit power mandate is to explore, break down, and rearrange women’s bodies. (Morgan 172)

In connection with that Morgan speaks of the “Three Paradoxes of Choice”. Paradox One is “The Choice of Conformity”. She criticizes the fact that cosmetic surgery could be used to “create and celebrate the idiosyncrasy, eccentricity, and uniqueness” (Morgan 172), but this is not the case. She further argues that what at first appears to be their own choice, are instances of conformity, and she illustrates this with the example of women who undergo surgery in order to have better chances to compete in a beauty pageant. But women are not only faced with judges in beauty pageants, in which they voluntarily choose to participate, but the judges can be anywhere. Actual men – brothers, fathers, lovers, male beauty “experts” – “and hypothetical men live in the aesthetic imaginations of women” (Morgan 172), although these judges can also be women. Thus, she argues that women might have the feeling that they decide for themselves, but “what looks like an optimal situation of reflection, deliberation, and self-creating choice often signals conformity at a deeper level” (173). Paradox Two is what she calls “Liberation into Colonization”, which means that women choose to have surgery in order to liberate themselves and protest against “the constraints of the ‘given’ in their embodied lives” (173). Yet again, the power is exercised by men, who suggest that women should “take care of themselves” and that these deformities can be gotten rid of easily. In this attempt to gain freedom and “to make the most of themselves”, however, women make themselves more dependent on men and the “beauty experts”, who create this “Other” that is “almost always affected by the dominant culture, which is male-supremacist, racist, ageist, heterosexist, anti-Semitic, ableist and class-biased” (Morgan 173). Paradox Three is called Coerced Voluntariness and the Technical Imperative. Morgan asserts that women who opt for surgery clearly make a choice, which seems rational, not to forget that these interventions are very costly. Again, women are told to be deformed and that they have “problem zones”;

therefore, Morgan argues that “the technological beauty imperative and the pathological inversion of the normal are coercing more and more women to ‘choose’ cosmetic surgery” (175); but do modern American women have a choice, anyway?

Apart from the question whether women choose by themselves, or whether they are forced by society’s expectation to have cosmetic surgery, I would like to touch upon the physical problems and side effects women can be faced with after surgery. It has been suggested that the terms for cosmetic surgery are trivialized and infantilized by calling the various interventions names like “tummy tuck” or “nip” (Wolf 257; Morgan 167). These “cute” terms camouflage the actual procedures and entirely leave out the fact that as a matter of fact, they are operations that have to be performed in a hospital, with the need for anesthesia and possible post-operative complications (Morgan 167). Alongside, what is easily forgotten is the fact that one is in severe pain for weeks after surgery. But what I consider most disturbing, are the possible side effects women put up with. As doctors have warned, after breast augmentations, women might experience a numbness of their breasts; a risk of eyelid surgery is blindness, after rhinoplasty, one risks to lose the sense of smell and numbness is related to face-lifts (Wolf 249). However, “beauty’s pain is trivial since it is assumed that women freely choose it” (Wolf 257). I would like to conclude this section with yet another quote by Naomi Wolf when she says: “Cosmetic surgery is not ‘cosmetic’ and human flesh is not ‘plastic’ ” (257).

4.2 *The Swan* – Transformation from the Inside out

“Only some will make it – all will be changed forever” (*The Swan*)

Cosmetic surgery has become a popular topic in recent American television. There is the series *Nip/Tuck* about the cosmetic surgery business, which is fictional, but to take it one step further, it has also entered reality TV. The initial show was ABC's *Extreme Makeover*, followed by MTV's *I Want a Famous Face*, where people can become look-alikes of their favorite celebrity, E! Entertainments Television's *Doctor 90210* and Fox's *The Swan*, which I will analyze in the following section. All these shows have in common that human beings opt to change their bodies through cosmetic surgery in the quest for a physical makeover, but in the long run also for a makeover of their lives. As a means of introduction, I would like to give a synopsis of the show *The Swan*. I will explain how it is structured, who the “protagonists” are, and what procedures they undergo. Later I will analyze the show with respect to its connection to the Beauty Myth.

In the *The Swan*, women undergo cosmetic surgery in a competition in order to change “from the inside out” (*The Swan*). In the beginning there are 16 participants who were chosen after an application among thousands of women. From these 16 women, two are part of one episode, and each time only one can “win”. The winner of each show then becomes a contestant in the pageant, which takes place at the end, where ‘the Swan’ will be crowned. From the beginning of the show until the pageant, each woman lives in an apartment in Los Angeles, where she is fully transformed. The participants stay there for three months, and during that period of time, they are not allowed to see their friends and families, but they can stay in contact via telephone. The most interesting part here is, however, that they are not allowed to see themselves in a mirror. In the apartment all mirrors and reflective surfaces are treated by the so-called “mirror police”, as well as in the gym, where all mirrors are hidden behind curtains. All women are filmed on their reaction when they first realize that there are no mirrors. While some are shocked that there are none, others are seemingly relieved: “I avoid them anyway” or “This is kind of a nice break” (*The Swan*). Moreover, the no-mirror policy is suggested to ease recovery, but in *The Swan* it has a

further function. At home you see your old self for the last time and the next time you stand in front of a mirror, your new self will be revealed.

I will now focus on how what three months look like for each woman. It all starts with the “team of experts”. It obviously consists of two cosmetic surgeons, while one is usually treating one patient per show, with the exception of one woman, where they work as a team. We further have a dentist, who inspects the condition of the teeth first in terms of health, but then she provides all of them, but one with veneers, which only have an aesthetic purpose, of course. There is also a fitness coach, who is in charge of “getting the women in shape” (*The Swan*). In addition, as I mentioned above that *The Swan* program is a change from the inside out, there is also a therapist and a so-called life coach, Nely Galàn, who is at the same time the producer of the show. It must be added here that in the various episodes other experts can be seen at the end of the show, who obviously contributed to the transformation in one way or another, but what I described above is the core team that also decides on the change the women actually undergo.

What the viewer sees first in each episode is a short sequence where the participants are introduced. They talk about what troubles them in connection with their appearance and how this influences their lives. Then the team of experts decides on what “needs to be done” in order to transform them into ‘Swans’ or into “pageant material”, a further term for the contestants. In these short extracts one sees extremely unhappy women, whose only wish it is to finally be pretty and therefore be happy. To realize this wish, they need to eliminate all their “flaws” in order to become beauty queens, not to forget that the change will be from the inside out. After this assessment, we find out what procedures each women will face. Almost all of them are put on a 1200 calorie diet, they have to exercise for two hours a day together with their fitness coach, and they undergo weekly therapy. The life coach comes in when the women have problems sticking to the program as a means of motivation. Moreover, all women but one get veneers for their teeth, a procedure, where healthy teeth are abraded and then covered with the veneer in order to create a more even look. Apparently the procedure is not dangerous, it has, however, an aesthetic purpose

only. It goes without saying that the most dramatic change owes to the cosmetic surgeons. They opt for the following procedures, with slight differences between the participants: almost all had a brow lift, liposuction in several areas (body, but also on the chin and in the face, if necessary), cheek implants, rhinoplasty, Botox injections, breast augmentation, and reduction in one case, face lifts, and in single cases laser treatment, once for facial hair and once for acne scars, among other things. All the participants wearing glasses undergo laser eye surgery in order to be able to dispose of their glasses. The viewer can trace the change made over a few weeks in one show and at the end the result is presented. The fully transformed and new woman sees herself in a mirror for the first time in three months under the watch of the experts and millions of TV viewers. The procedure is as follows: the women enter a large hall, awaited by the host of the show and the team of experts, who welcome her clapping. For “the revelation” she is then guided in front of the mirror, which will be uncovered whenever she is ready. Will the ‘Ugly Duckling’ be a ‘Swan’ now? At the beginning of the show we see the “old selves” of the participants in grey clothing and quite a few looking very unhappy, but in front of the mirror stands a transformed woman. She now wears large amounts of make up, her hair is done by a professional, and, needless to say, they wear fancy evening gowns and high heels. Unsurprisingly, Rachel Love Fraser, who wins the pageant in the end comments in front of the mirror “I don’t look anything like that girl” (*The Swan*). The viewer sees both participants revealing their new selves, but in each episode only one woman wins, after being judged on “beauty, poise and overall transformation”. This woman then becomes a contestant for the pageant, where ‘the Swan’ will be crowned. The Pageant, just like a real beauty contest, consists of several rounds: they present themselves in an evening gown, a bathing suit, they are asked questions by the judges and finally they are seen in lingerie. The contestants are judged again on beauty, poise, and overall transformation in each of the rounds and obviously at the end ‘the Swan’ is crowned and wins \$50 000 and “prizes worth hundreds of thousands of Dollars” (*The Swan*), such as a Jaguar, a scholarship for a university, a model contract, clothes, a stay in Hawai’i, and many other things.

What now follows is a cultural analysis of the TV show *The Swan*, which is, as the host Amanda Byram puts it, “the most unique competition ever devised” (*The Swan*). In the following section I would like to have a closer look at what this type of show says about America’s beauty culture, and I will also examine the motivations and expectations of the participants, and further which role men play here.

I will first analyze the role of men in connection to the series *The Swan*. Needless to say, the “team of experts” consists of men, namely the fitness coach and the two surgeons. The rest of the core team are women, namely the dentist and two women who are in charge of the mental health of the participants, namely the therapist and the life-coach. Thus, half of the team are men, the other half are women. What is striking here, however, is the fact that when it comes to change the outward appearance of the participants, the men are the leading forces, whereas the women are more concerned with the inner transformation, except for the dentist. She is certainly also responsible for cosmetic change in the women’s teeth by putting on veneers in order to create a nice smile; however, she also takes care of decayed and damaged teeth, which is not only non-cosmetic, but also necessary in some cases. In that way she helps the women, since, coming from a low social stratum, they could not afford that. For that reason, I would like to argue that the participants of *The Swan* are dramatically changed by the men in the team, in other words the women are evaluated and then transformed under the male gaze. This is reflected in the fact that almost all participants have to lose weight and undergo liposuction in many different areas, such as the chin, to mention a rather special case, but at the same time, their breasts become enormously big. Moreover, the surgeons highlight on several occasions that the women need to be feminized, by adding more symmetry to their faces; uneven breasts are surgically adjusted, they perform liposuction in the knee area to feminize the legs, lips are made fuller, and the list can be taken ad infinitum. This is closely connected to a standard wished for by our patriarchal society, which is physically impossible, however. It has to be added here that the women make the final decision of what surgery is done, eventually, but the surgeons propose several interventions to them. In the end, there is only one contestant in the first season who refuses to follow the surgeon’s plan, even though he comments that “she does not

have the best genetics" (*The Swan*). Interestingly, she is the oldest woman taking part in the program.

The role of men does not only affect the transformation into the new selves, they also contribute to the low self-esteem many women have before the program. All of the participants have in common very low self-confidence, often connected with how they were treated by men. Many women in the program had abusive relationships and husbands who cheated on them. Furthermore, many had problems with their fathers, growing up together with them or not. Rachel's father tells her teacher in the 3rd grade: "Don't expect too much from Rachel", and at the same time her husband says about her that "she is a little average" (*The Swan*). Furthermore, almost all women report that they were picked at in school due to their looks. The participants of the show are very insecure and unhappy, and all directly relate this to their appearance. In *The Swan* program, they are promised that afterwards they will be changed and finally happy as a result of their change from the inside out. This is a very powerful message that is sent here, as it suggests that all "beautiful" women are happy with their lives. Although they insist that the transformation also takes place on the inside, good looks seem to be a prerequisite for happiness.

The title of the show alludes to the famous fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling", and also what is promised to the participants reads like a fairy tale. The fairy tale metaphors of the "ugly duckling" who becomes a "swan" in the end advocate that a dream will come true. Orosan-Weine in her article argues that like in the fairy tale all suffer from trauma and loss (19). But they link their psychological problems to their looks, although the majority of women share these seemingly physical problems. The participants say about themselves: "I feel average", "I want to be a better Cristina", "I wanted to hide from the outside world", "I'm just ok" (*The Swan*). These problems are not what Orosan-Weine calls "body" problems; *The Swan*, however, only provides "body" answers (20). She further adds that most of these women focused their lives on family or work. "Perhaps, as in the fairy tale, they felt no sense of agency and little ability to garner their resources and take action. This show, and its recognition, provides for them the sense of being seen, being recognized and being responded to"

(Orosan-Weine 21). As argued above, Wolf claims that cosmetic surgery is a promise that cannot be kept. The participants of the show share one thing with regular patients having cosmetic surgery, namely that they have very high expectations of the outcome. In the case of the women in *The Swan*, however, the focus is not on the actual outcome of the surgery in terms of the perfect nose or belly. They expect that their lives will change forever, which will happen in any case, but we do not know if for better or worse. Even though they all have weekly therapy, many of them have severe issues, which will probably not be solved within this time span. In addition, after the program, they have to put up with their new bodies, which have changed dramatically; the question is, however, whether their everyday lives have changed as well. It is very likely that the promise *The Swan* makes is not easily kept. In that respect Eggington argues that *The Swan* is nothing but illusion:

The Swan plays out a fantasy before our eyes, a fantasy born of the miscegenation of consumerism with the modern obsession with self-realization. This fantasy, which we could call the desire for limitless change, promises that the drive to self-realization can be fulfilled through consumerism, through choosing and applying various products, solutions, or changes and expressing them directly to the body. (Eggington 188)

This quote leads me straight to the next point, namely the American Dream. *The Swan* is not only an exemplary representation of the Beauty Myth, but linked with that we can also see it as an image of the American Dream as one would expect. The American Dream indicates that as long as you try hard enough, you will reach your aims and goals in the end. For the women participating in *The Swan*, this program symbolizes a second chance in order to reach this dream.

All of the women are from a rather low social stratum, some are unemployed, thus most of the beautification measures available are too costly, not to mention cosmetic surgery. It starts with very basic things such as dental care. A few participants have severe problems with their teeth, which are solved during the show. Furthermore, the women wearing glasses undergo laser eye treatment in order to be able to see without them afterwards. These non-cosmetic interventions would not be affordable for these women in their regular lives, so the program is definitely providing real help in that case. Most of the other procedures, however, are solely for aesthetic

purpose and probably not necessary, but they are told by the team of experts that they have several (in fact many, when we look at how many procedures are done per woman) flaws, which they have to get rid of in order to be able to lead the life of their dreams. Needless to say that none of these operations would be affordable for any of these women. Although, it might be argued whether a single operation would have been necessary in the first place in order to change their lives. I do not doubt that they benefit from therapeutical help, on the contrary, this is probably the only help they need considering the fact that to the layperson, none of the women look “ugly” in any way. Nonetheless, they are told that this is a once in a lifetime chance to finally change and become a better version of themselves.

Moreover one must not forget that winning the show also means winning \$50,000 in cash and prizes “worth hundreds of thousands of Dollars” in addition to a whole new life. This means for the American Dream that first of all, you have to do something in order to improve your life, but in the end you will be rewarded for your effort. There is, however, a hitch to this whole fairy tale – only one will be crowned to be ‘the Swan’ in the final episode. Hence, I would argue that in *The Swan*, the theme of winners and losers is very prominent, which is evidently linked to the American Dream as well. As the host of the show Amanda Byram repeatedly states: “Only some will make it – all will be changed forever” (*The Swan*). This suggests that all participants have the chance to transform their bodies and change their inside, but in the end, only one woman will be changed enough in order to earn the title ‘the Swan’ in the “most unique” beauty pageant. Nevertheless, during the show it is always highlighted that they are all winners, which is actually true considering the amount of money all the different procedures and surgeries cost, but in the end the ones who fail to win the pageant are by definition ‘losers’.

One might therefore pose the question why the women have to compete in a beauty contest at all, especially concerning the fact that most of them insist on doing this only for themselves. Some might say that a competition triggers the motivation needed in order to make the best out of yourself. This, however, contradicts the fact

that they put up with all the side effects the treatments bear, only for themselves. But did they really only do it for themselves?

In order to examine the pageant more closely, I would like to put forward more information on what it looks like in the show. Like in a “real” pageant, the women are presented with their names and the state they come from. Just like during the regular episodes, they are evaluated by judges, while here the team consists of four women and one man only. In four rounds, namely in an evening gown, in a bathing suit, in a question round, and wearing lingerie, they are judged on “beauty, poise and overall transformation”. This pageant is so unique, because all of the contestants had cosmetic surgery, hence, like in no other beauty contest, they are also judged on overall transformation. In order to make this more transparent for the viewer, short extracts of previous episodes show “their unique story” (*The Swan*) once again. To highlight the difference, an image of the old self, wearing the grey clothes as mentioned above, is seen on the runway next to the ‘new self’ during the walk. Furthermore, we see the effort they have to engage in the month between the final show and the pageant. During this time, the contestants are again not allowed to see their family and friends and needless to say still have to stick to the program. This does not involve further surgery or any other procedure, but they have to exercise for three hours a day in the gym “on their journey from flab to fab” (*The Swan*), and they have to practice the routines for the pageant in a dance studio five times per week together with a choreographer. Then in the four rounds they “show off their new selves” (*The Swan*), and the viewer can immediately see the amount of points the judges award to their performance.

Needless to say, the women try to look their best, again wearing large amounts of make-up, big hair, probably with artificial extensions and pretty clothes according to the topic of the round. For all that I would like to know, in what way it should represent that they felt the need to change their bodies in order to feel better, when they walk around in a bathing suit with high-heels on a stage on TV. It might show that they have gained more self-esteem in terms of their bodies, but at the same time, they do it in order to be evaluated by people according to their looks once again. There is

one winner in the end who will become 'the Swan', but all the other contestants will remain ugly ducklings and therefore 'losers'. It could be argued that this pageant might trigger a major backlash for some on account of their self-esteem. They try their best in order to improve and become better versions of themselves. Eight of the women can even be transformed into "pageant material" (*The Swan*), but for seven this is still not enough.

Thus, I would like to return to the question why the women were so eager to change their bodies and then participate in a beauty pageant. One might argue that their participation in the program and later in the pageant is nothing else than a quest in order to become the Other woman. Most of the women have psychological problems, often in connection with their looks, in other words they all had very low self-esteem. Many report that they were bullied during school and, as already mentioned above, many have problems with the men in their lives. Therefore, it could be argued that they have the feeling they undergo this major change for themselves, but in the long run this was triggered by many different factors. They were always unhappy with their looks; for instance one of the participants states: "I feel like the ultimate Plain Jane" (*The Swan*). Another says before entering the competition: "I wanna be a *better* Cristina" (*The Swan*; emphasize added). These statements go hand in hand with what Blum calls the notion of wanting to become the Other woman. Throughout their lives they had the feeling that a large part of their unhappiness is due to their looks. I would like to quote Blum here once again: The modern woman "is always evaluating her appearance (intimately bound up with her identity) in relation to some standard that must be *Other* in order to function as a standard" (Blum 104). The participation in the program seems to provide a solution by transforming their bodies, and in the end all become this Other woman, like the winner states in front of the mirror: "I don't look anything like that girl" (*The Swan*). According to themselves they all become better versions of themselves in the end, not only on the outside, but also in the inside. And like in a fairy tale, they all live happily ever after. Unfortunately, however, we do not find out how their lives continue after the show, since it might be argued that while they have changed radically, their everyday life has remained the same. I therefore think that returning home and taking up "real life" again must have

been extremely difficult for most of the participants. In the show, they focus on themselves for three or four months depending on becoming a contestant or not. Thus, I would like to argue that a life finally *being* the Other woman could shape up as being highly irritating and difficult, especially for the losers of the show.

To return once more to the question why *The Swan* has to end in a beauty contest, I would like to argue that the show is not only a perfect representation of the Beauty Myth, but as claimed above it also serves well for the American Dream. Taking part in a beauty pageant is symptomatic for it; it is the ultimate American Dream for an American woman. In this pageant only, they even compete for best overall transformation, where they can show who has managed to work the hardest in order to make the best out of herself. In the end they are awarded with fame and glory and needless to say money and prizes. But are they more than neo-cyborgs in the end?

To conclude this section, I would like to focus on the impact this and other makeover shows have on the viewers in terms in cosmetic surgery. After broadcasting these shows, there actually has been an increase of cosmetic surgery. It has been hypothesized that they influence women in their choices to have surgery, with their attitude towards cosmetic procedures, and with the perceived safety of them, which has been proven correct in the end (Sperry et al. 7-10). One positive side of *The Swan* is in my view that the participants are shown after surgery, in a lot of pain. It is also sometimes highlighted in connection with some procedures that the women better not have too high expectations, one of the major problems related to cosmetic surgery. This has, however, hardly any impact on many viewers as proved in the study quoted above.

5 “Cover like a pro. Look like a natural.”

The fourth and last chapter of my paper will be dedicated to an analysis of the print media, more precisely advertisements in fashion magazines with respect to the representation of the Beauty Myth. Advertisements exert a dominating influence on women in relation to their body image and needless to say on their buying behavior. And the dilemma is that advertisements are omnipresent. Advertisers might tell you that a commercial is to be treated as mere information about a product, but I argue that there is much more to it. I think that advertisements play a decisive role in order to keep the Beauty Myth alive and I attempt to track down evidence for that argument.

5.1 Advertisements and the Beauty Myth

“Students at a leading university felt worse after reading a magazine” (Eckhardt 106). One cause might be the articles in the glossy magazines, but I think that the advertisements have a much more powerful impact, considering the fact that there are numerous pages filled with them only. We come across many different products, mainly concerning body care; I would like to name a few: we see commercials for shampoos, lotions for different body parts, hair dye, different means to get rid of body hair, mascara, blush, powder, foundation, perfumes, vibrating skin cleansers, and the list goes ad infinitum. Women are told that they need all of these products in order to become beautiful and healthy. Yet another dilemma are the models that are displayed. “The media is depicting unreasonably ‘perfect’ bodies as attainable and continues with the confusing profusion of beauty, diet and ‘health’ advice from profit making companies” (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 63). Capitalism uses the media in order to spread the picture of the culturally desirable body and at the same time they offer help on how to gain it. The message is that if you buy a certain product, you have the chance to become like this woman depicted in the ad, yet at the same time, the media is promoting an almost impossible standard (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 63). In the previous chapter I introduced the notion of the Other women, and in the media we find one representation of her, the woman we want to become as well. We see her daily, in

many facets, and she tells us to change our lives in order to become as happy as she is. Women only have to lose some weight, or buy some moisturizer. Advertisements lead to the belief that we only have to consume in order to get the perfect body and with that the perfect life. In spite of that, the selling companies are the only ones who profit (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 66).

Nevertheless, beauty has a high potential for commercials, even though it is not real. The models wear large amounts of make-up; they wear hair-pieces; they are presented literally in the “best light”, but after that the real conceit begins: digital retouching. On the computer, fat is removed, the skin color is changed, body parts are modified, and this goes so far as to use the picture of breasts of one woman on another. The media wants the consumer to believe that there exists something like physical perfection and there must be many women and certainly men as well who believe that these perfect bodies and faces really exist (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 65). However, women should be made aware of the fact that what we see are “constructed bodies” (65). According to Bleicher, the body as it is represented in the media, becomes a mere surface, an image, and a product (121), and we are made believe that one only has to buy this product.

I would now like to have a quick look at what the average commercial consists of. We usually find an image component and a text component (Eckhardt 105). In order to scrutinize an advertisement, we have to look at each component in turn, then we examine their juxtaposition (105). Conventionally we find a model together with the product in combination, which function as a frame. The purpose is to get the consumer to buy the product, but it goes without saying that the model can also play a more indirect role. Perceiving her picture suggests that you too can be beautiful, sexy, successful like her (105). In line with that Schmidt and Zurstiege argue that advertisements have to be positively connoted at any rate (228). Any factors that could negatively influence this perfect picture are left out (228) in order to leave the consumer with a good feeling towards the commercial. Schmidt and Zurstiege further assert that pictures in advertisements have an imperative function: they do not

communicate the status quo, but how things should be (228). On that account we frequently find pictures of young, beautiful women – Other women.

5.2 Analysis of Advertisements

In the following section I will analyze several advertisements with respect to their representation of the Beauty Myth. I chose different types of commercials taken from *Allure* and *Cosmopolitan*, both popular fashion magazines in the United States. First I will give a short description of the advertisement, which will be followed by a cultural reading and analysis.

5.2.1 Advertisement 1: “Neutrogena Concealer” (figure 1)

The first advertisement I analyze is for Neutrogena, namely a two-step concealer for the face. There is no model representing the product, we only see the concealer twice together with a short paragraph of information. The main slogan for the commercial is: “Cover like a pro, look like a natural”. This reference to the term “natural” could also account for the composition of the advertisement; it is reduced to the product and the message, which are shown on white background, and no colors are used except for the beige cream. This might suggest that if you only buy this product, it might be the only one you need in order to look good or in other words, like a natural. However, on the following pages one will find many other products with the same message.

I would like to start with the more general parts of the advertisement such as the brand name and its presentation. Neutrogena stands for many different types of body care products. Their main slogan, which is included in the company logo, is as follows: “#1 Dermatologist Recommended”. Needless to say that this creates a feeling of trust. Doctors are professionals who tell us whether our body and mind are healthy or not. Therefore, the buyer could assume that this Neutrogena product is good and maybe even healthy for us, since even doctors supposedly agree on that. However, there is no proof or reference to any clinical study that verifies the truth of this statement. In addition, one might pose the question if dermatologists actually

recommend for instance make-up to their patients. Furthermore, two terms accompany the brand name which create a highly positive influence on the consumer: beautiful and beneficial. As mentioned several times above, the word beautiful is mostly associated with positive things. The term beneficial is equally positive. The two terms in combination therefore mean that using Neutrogena products makes you prettier, more beautiful, but this is not the main reason, because they help you to feel better, too. Together with the recommendation of the dermatologist one is almost convinced that using make-up can even be healthy.

I will turn my attention to the actual product that is advertised by having a close look at the short paragraph of information. In beige letters it says: “*NEW* mineral sheers concealer kit SPF 20”, which is a description of the product. By highlighting that the product is new, one could argue that this functions as a way of saying that it is better than the old one. Mineral sheers® is a term coined by Neutrogena, which refers to a whole series of products, in our case a concealer for the face. By using the words minerals and sheer, again a positive effect is created. The term sheer suggests that the product is light and comfortable to wear, it is almost invisible. In addition, minerals are necessary for human beings in order to stay healthy. Therefore, the advertisement suggests that this concealer is not only plain make-up, but it is also healthy and good for your body.

After the short description of the product, which tells us that it is healthy, we learn what other function the concealer has: “Cover your flaws in 2 steps, just like the professionals”. The use of the term “flaw” directly refers to what I mentioned above several times, namely that women seem to have a natural defect in terms of their bodies, flaws that need to be hidden. This is highlighted here through the fact that no special target group can be identified; it seems to address women in general. Furthermore, the sentence “just like the professionals” proposes that beauty is a matter for experts, just like in *The Swan*, which I have dealt with above with their “team of experts”. A professional can usually attain a better result than the layperson, no matter in what field. The advertisement suggests, however, that with this product you can work professionally at home by yourself. At the same time, one can save a

large amount of money compared to a professional treatment in a beauty salon, for instance. One could argue that with this single sentence, the feeling that the user can look like a famous person might be evoked. When it comes to beautification measures, actresses and models are usually treated by professionals only. This leads to the fact that they generally display an ideal that is impossible to reach by the average woman, because she cannot have several stylists for each part of her body. Thus, even though no models are displayed in here, promoting an impossible standard, the advertisement still communicates that you can look like celebrities treated by professionals, but at home and cheaper, with just one product.

This is again followed by a description of the product: “The silky cream hides flaws”. The term “silky” evokes a positive attitude towards the cream; it seems to be nice and comfortable to wear and at the same time hides what needs to be hidden. There is one hitch to this, however, namely that the cream needs to be hidden, too: “Then the mineral-rich powder hides the cream”. In order to perfectly camouflage flaws, the cream must be disguised, too, with the healthy powder. This is concluded with the sentence: “So you have nothing to hide”, and I would like to add “anymore” here, because as a matter of fact we have already hidden everything possible. In addition, it is highlighted once more that Neutrogena products are “Recommended most by dermatologists”.

As a conclusion I argue that this advertisement is a good example of the notion of “beauty is only ugliness in disguise” argued above by Tseëlon, MacCannel and MacCannel. Women are told that they need to wear make-up in order to cover and hide their flaws, but this is no more than a masque. Beneath it, there will always be this woman the way she is. That is why I would like to claim that in the advertisement beauty is equated with naturalness. Even to achieve a “natural” look, makes many daily beautification measures necessary, let alone that looking “natural” does not include any “flaws”. Needless to say that most women wearing no make-up would display one flaw or another, such as an uneven skin color, redness, puffy eyes and many more. Therefore, as long as women see their own “natural” look as defective, the Beauty Myth will prevail, and they will be stuck in this quest for better looks in

order to be happier. What is needed is a change of society, leading to the fact that women do not have to undergo several procedures before leaving the house in order to create a “natural” look, hiding their “flaws”. In addition, it is of course problematic that in order to become more beautiful, the woman has to buy something. Advertisers, however, present the possibility of buying beautification products as a second chance. As long as you buy the products, you can always become prettier, thinner, hide your flaws and the list goes on. At the same time you show that you try your best in order to improve yourself. The question whether this improvement is by any means necessary or not remains, however.

5.2.2 Advertisement 2 “Schick Intuition Razor” (figure 2)

The next advertisement will be dedicated to a beautification measure I have not touched upon yet, namely hair removal, which has become a standard practice in the United States. Before analyzing the advertisement, I will have a look at general information about body hair removal norms and practices. According to Hildebrandt in her article, between 80 and 90 % of American women and girls regularly practice body hair removal (59). However, more and more men join in and remove large parts of their body hair. Nevertheless, body hair removal practices were initially performed by women, starting around 1915. According to a study provided by Hope, which is quoted in Hildebrandt, a veritable “assault on underarm hair” can be seen in advertisements from 1915 to 1919 (Hildebrandt 60). Therefore, a connection between body hair removal and advertisements can be established. This is emphasized by the fact that these commercial are of a highly instructional nature, telling the women that “new styles of dress featuring sleeveless or very sheer-sleeved evening gowns made the removal of hair from the underarms an important consideration” (Hope qtd. in Hildebrandt 60). The removal of body hair is linked here with body parts previously hidden by clothes. This also accounts for the removal of hair on the legs when nylons were introduced up to now, where the removal of the hair from the bikini line has become normative, let alone “Brazilian waxing”, where most of the pubic hair is removed (61-62). Therefore, Hildebrandt argues that “the only flesh suitable for public view is *cultivated* flesh” (62). In other words the “public” part of the body needs to be

hairless, while body hair signifies the “private” body (62). I would like to add here that at some point this also accounts for men, who increasingly remove body hair as well.

In connection with that, Hildebrandt mentions Foucault’s concept of the “docile body” on which I elaborated above and I agree with her when she says: “Body hair removal can be understood as one of these everyday bodily practices that achieve the docile body” (65). And even though women are much more engaged in beautification measures of any kind, Hildebrandt argues that: “Body hair norms for both genders thus exemplify Foucault’s concept of the operation of modern power through self-discipline and the management of the self (67).

In the following section I will have a close look at an advertisement for a razor, which is targeted at women for body hair removal. Just like in the commercial above, there is no model together with the product; instead we see the razor with a picture and a short paragraph of text underneath. The razor is called “Intuition”, and its special feature is that it has an integrated solid moisturizer, which lathers and moisturizes the skin; the blades are attached to it. The name of the product evokes that it is the most natural thing to use, a thing every woman should have. At the same time it alludes to the saying that every woman has this “female intuition”. Therefore, it is evident that women should use this razor – their intuition tells them. Needless to say that again the name communicates positive feelings.

As far as the picture is concerned, more than half of the space is dedicated to a large, thick wood, with a current in the middle of it. The razor begins where the stream ends in order to symbolize that it shaved through the forest. Right next to the product one can read: “Your skin will drink it in”. Again it evokes positive emotions towards the product, since human beings need water in order to stay alive, so why not drink it through the skin. At the same time it means that your skin is moisturized already and you will not need any further lotions. Usually razors dry out the skin because of their sharp blades and you need extra care and moisture afterwards. This product, however, suggests quite the opposite, namely that after using it your skin will be extra soft and moisturized.

Concerning the picture, I think the choice of the wood is rather interesting. In connection with a razor it is obvious that it should symbolize female body hair. It is, however, a rather exaggerated simile considering that women usually do not have much body hair compared to men, for instance. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the forest represents the unruliness of body hair, which can be ended with the new razor, and at the same time the skin is moisturized. Thus, there are only advantages for the buyer of this product. One is left to wonder, however, whether cutting down a forest really communicates positive feelings towards the advertisement.

On the bottom of the picture we find the short paragraph of information, as follows: "Replenish with the new Schick® Intuition Plus® razor: Now with a redesigned moisture rich conditioner with shea butter and a fourth blade to give you an even closer shave. It's the effortless way to lather, shave and moisturize for noticeably softer skin. FREE YOUR SKIN™". The term "replenish" might have several meanings in connection with this advertisement. First of all it imparts that when using it one can replenish energy. This is achieved, since you save time, as this razor combines three steps. Without it lathering is needed, then a razor and in the end a moisturizer. With the Intuition razor you have only one product that can do it all. But you do not only replenish energy, but also moisture your skin, which is emphasized by the slogan "Your skin will drink it in". Considering its basic meaning, one could also argue that it relates to the fact that one can replenish the razor with new blade-moisturizer combinations, which only need to be attached. You do not have to buy a new razor each time, only a new set of blades, which supposedly saves money, too.

Furthermore it is highlighted that the product is new or has new features; therefore it is better than its precedent and worth buying. We learn that it has a redesigned conditioner, apparently an enhanced version of the old model. In addition, the new razor has four blades "for an even closer shave". That would suggest that the old razor did not keep the promise of fully removing body hair, but this is highly unlikely. One might pose the question, why women would need four blades in order to get rid of body hair. In this advertisement, body hair is symbolized as something unruly and wild, which can only be tamed with this product. I think that four blades could be

useful for razors for men, which are used in the facial area, since male hair seems to be thicker. For women, however, four blades seem highly unnecessary. In addition, one is left to wonder how many more blades will be attached to new razors, in order to enhance it and get an even closer shave than before.

Nevertheless, the razor is advertized as an all-in-one “machine”. As opposed to other products, using the Intuition is the “effortless way”, since you lather, shave and moisturize at the same time. This saves the user time, but not only that, because your skin gets also “noticeably softer”. The most flamboyant message of the advertisement, however, can be found at the bottom written in capital letters to make the message more visible and is has the nature of an order at the same time: “Free your skin!” Moreover, it has close resemblance to slogans of activist groups of any kind, which leaves the impression that to free your skin is a serious matter. In my view, this is another rather extreme representation of the Beauty Myth that influences women to a large extent. The message to free your skin communicates that body hair of all kinds is a defect; they do not argue that it is unnecessary, but they actually ask you to remove it so that the skin can breathe again. This imparts that having body hair is actually bad for your body and that the skin has to be treated with lotions, for example, in order to become softer and smooth. In other words, the female body is defect in the first place, but when a woman buys and uses several products, she can enhance her body in order to create a better self.

After a closer look, I think that this advertisement uses rather drastic pictures and words to convey its message. The picture is highly exaggerated, but also the slogan at the end goes overboard in my opinion. Body hair is seen as wrong and ugly, which has to be removed for a better look. Taking into account that one actually needs to lather the skin, then shave it, which irritates skin very often and then moisturize it, one has to undergo many steps for a smooth skin. Nevertheless, body hair removal has become a normative practice, while leaving the hair is often perceived as repugnant and unkempt.

5.2.3 Advertisement 3: “Nivea Good-Bye Cellulite” (figures 3, 4 & 5)

The advertisement I am about to analyze deals with Anti-Cellulite Cream by Nivea. The commercial consists of three pages, while the first page is dedicated to the actual advertisement for the product and the two other pages feature an invitation for the “Good-bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge”. I will first talk about page number one and then I will comment on the challenge, which follows.

As opposed to the advertisements above, the product is not in the center of attention, but we see three Caucasian women between twenty and thirty wearing summer clothing. They are apparently in a very good mood, they seem to have fun, since all of them are laughing. When it comes to their looks, they all wear rather short skirts or dresses, which provide a good view of their seemingly “perfect” thighs. Obviously they do not have cellulite problems, but their skin looks firm, smooth, and slightly tanned. On the bottom of the corner on the right side, the advertized product is placed. We see a tube of Anti-Cellulite Cream called “Good-bye Cellulite”, a blister of pills, and the case in which it is sold. The picture of the product itself is rather small, together with the text written on the left it takes up about a quarter of the whole page. The picture of the women dominates the commercial. The slogan of the advertisement is: “The difference between worrying about cellulite and not having to”. Below that we see a short, informative text: “NIVEA® Good-bye Cellulite 30-Day Body Beauty Program. Its smoothing gel with L-Carnitine helps reduce the appearance of cellulite in four weeks. And the dietary supplement helps support lean muscle mass”. Therefore, we learn that the product is part of a whole program that contributes to reducing cellulite in four weeks, and there is a link to a Nivea homepage where women can take part in a Bikini Challenge. I will return to that when I analyze pages two and three of the advertisement. On the bottom of the page we see the logo of Nivea, which includes the phrase: “Touch and Be Touched”.

In my view, the slogan of the advertisement is directly linked to the picture of the women, while the short text and the picture of the product go together. The slogan suggests to the woman seeing the commercial that the women on the picture do not have to worry about cellulite anymore and that if one purchases this product,

the same can come true for anyone. As argued above, the three women do not depict life the way it is, but how it should be. Cellulite is presented as something that needs to be reduced, and at the same time it is conveyed that it is something women worry about. This is another example of the female body as a defective body, because many if not most women have cellulite. Moreover, it communicates that once your cellulite is gone, you can be happy and have fun with your friends again. To take the argument one step further, one could claim that the advertisement suggests that if you use this product you can finally become the Other woman. The three women on the picture function as models for this Other woman.

When it comes to the descriptive text, we learn that the gel is smoothing, thus very comfortable to wear. In addition it contains L-Carnitine, which is part of the skin according to the information on the tube, which helps to reduce the cellulite. What I find rather appalling, however, is that the cream comes with a blister of pills, which are not referred to in much detail. We only learn that they are a dietary supplement that helps support lean muscle mass. Selling a cream together with pills highlights the notion of defect in women, since cellulite is treated like a disease that can be cured with pills. In my opinion it is rather drastic to take pills in order to reduce cellulite, let alone the fact that the only information we get can be found on the case: "Dietary Supplement Capsules *can* help support lean muscle mass" (my emphasis). The term "support" alone does not promise much, but in combination with "can" one gets the impression that these capsules are useless.

On the very bottom of the page we can find the Nivea logo together with the slogan "Touch and Be Touched". This can be interpreted in different ways. First of all one could argue that it is used in the sense of being emotionally touched when seeing the result, which in other words means that after its use you will be happy. "Be touched" at the same time, however, could also mean that you will finally find a man who literally touches you. In any case, this advertisement communicates in many ways that it can make you happy.

As mentioned above, we find a link to Nivea's "Good-Bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge" below the informative text. This competition is also the topic of the two pages that follow the advertisement. Again we see a rather big picture, but there is more text included than before. About half of the page displays a model called Kristin Cavallari, a "famous beach babe". On the top of the right side we find the slogan once more: "Join the Nivea Good-Bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge Today!", below that the model shares her four "favorite bikini secrets" with the *Cosmopolitan* reader. The model is blonde; she wears a bikini, and she is portrayed in a rather uncomfortable looking pose. It reveals, however, her "flawless" thighs; not a single trace of cellulite can be found. Her picture suggests to the reader that this is what one can look like after the challenge. Again the picture does not symbolize the status quo, but rather what the result can look like in the end.

When it comes to her tips, she first speaks about confidence: "When wearing a bikini, attitude is what conveys confidence. If you feel good about yourself, it will shine through". This is generally a rather helpful tip, but it leaves out the fact that the problem of women is precisely that they do not feel good about themselves in terms of their bodies. In addition, most women who are not happy with their looks probably lack the ability of feeling confident in a bikini, since no piece of clothing reveals more skin. Her next tip relates to eating habits: "I only eat what's fresh, natural and easy to digest. This keeps me from feeling bloated or bogged down, physically and mentally". This, too, is basically good advice, but there is also a hitch to it. Many women struggle in order to eat healthily. In addition, fresh and natural food is rather expensive, which means that in the United States, it is difficult for many people to maintain a healthy diet. The third advice deals with personal style: "Dress for your body type and choose what makes you feel comfortable. Just because a trend looks good on a friend doesn't mean it will look good on me". Here the problem is again that many women do not feel comfortable with their bodies and find it therefore difficult to dress in a manner they feel comfortable in. In addition, she is a professional model and seeing her picture does not help many women to feel good about their bodies. Nevertheless, it is of course good advice to dress in ways you feel comfortable with. Her last advice concerns the upcoming summer: "My skincare routine for summer always includes

drinking lots of water for hydration and never leaving the house without SPF 30 on my face”, which is a helpful general tip in my view. The text part of this page concludes with an online link to the bikini line the model designs.

On the next page we find more detailed information on the actual challenge and we can read the slogan: “Ready for the Challenge?” in large letters. Below that is a short text: “Take the NEW 2009 NIVEA GOOD-BYE CELLULITE, HELLO BIKINI CHALLENGE. Last year the NIVEA Challenge helped over 100,000 women reduce the appearance of cellulite, get fit and feel confident – all in time for summer. Now it’s your turn to try the NIVEA Good-bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge. It’s a 4-week plan designed around the four key areas of Fitness, Nutrition, Skin Care & Style to help you get bikini-ready.” Then we see three pictures of the model and one of the product, which accompany each of the four areas. When taking part in the program one gets a workout plan, as well as a week-by-week plan for a healthy diet, which at the same time helps you to “shed pounds for the feel-good bikini body you’ve always wanted”. For the skin care area one must use the Anti-cellulite cream, and the last area is dedicated to the choice of a bikini that suits your body shape. Taking into account that the advertisement is for Anti-cellulite cream in the first place, it only takes up a minor role in the challenge. Here, also fitness and a healthy diet are promoted, which is basically good advice. At a second view, however, I doubt that the women participating in this program achieve the goal to shape their bodies and reduce their cellulite in only four weeks. This can only account for already slender women with little cellulite, but they are probably the exception. In the long run, this can only lead to frustrated women, who are still unhappy with their bodies. The advertisement communicates that in the end you can look like the model, leaving out the fact that her profession mostly includes being evaluated on the basis of her looks. Therefore, she is one of few women who have a slender, athletic body, which she did not get in four weeks. I think that the commercial triggers very high expectations in the women who decide to take part in the program, which cannot be reached for most of them. In addition, the challenge is supposedly undertaken every year. By mentioning that in the previous year 100,000 women were helped, high expectations are inevitable.

We also find a box on the bottom on the left with all the information once again. You find the webpage where you can “start your countdown to bikini season”, and you are further promised help by “trusted experts”; you get a personalized tracker tool which measures your progress, and in the end you can win bikinis and “a complete beauty & bikini makeover”. The term “bikini season” seems to be rather common in fashion magazines, and it is mostly related to a certain type of diet which helps you to “get ready”. In my view, however, “bikini season” almost sounds like a threat, especially in combination with “countdown” as in the NIVEA advertisement: “When summer comes, you must be slim and beautiful in order to fit your bikini!”. Therefore, when summer finally arrives, many women are left frustrated, feeling uncomfortable about their bodies in a bikini, due to the high expectations they imposed on themselves. I furthermore doubt whether the promise of a “personalized plan” made by “experts” can be kept, taking into account that more than 100,000 women participate in the program only by logging onto the NIVEA webpage. I doubt that a single woman gets in personal contact with the “experts”; nevertheless mentioning them might evoke trust in some participants. These experts, however, also set the beauty standard, since one must not forget that it is a competition. I find it rather problematic to let women take part in a competition where the goal is to reduce cellulite and get a “bikini body”. Although the most disturbing factor is the fact that the winner of this competition, the women who reduced most of her cellulite and got into shape in four weeks, wins a “complete beauty & bikini makeover”. This is quite paradox and suggests already in the beginning that even though you will have changed, this will not be enough, but you will be helped by getting a *complete* makeover.

In my view, this is again a rather extreme example of the Beauty Myth and at the same time of the American dream. First of all, women are told that their bodies are defective and cellulite is seen as a disease. Cellulite might not conform to the beauty ideal of many people, but it is not dangerous and it does not affect health. Furthermore, they suggest that women should get a “bikini body” and feel good about their bodies. Nevertheless, they choose a slender and athletic model as its representation and communicate the message that you can look like that in four

weeks too. The goal should be that women can feel good about the bodies they have and should not have to be “afraid” of the summer, when they wear bikinis or light clothing, which reveals thighs for example. Nevertheless, NIVEA invites women to take part in a competition, with the goal of reducing cellulite and weight and here the American Dream comes in. American culture is full of all sorts of contests and competitions; many of them are found in the “beauty area”. You only have to try hard, and in the end you will look good; then you will find a husband, and you will live happily ever after. That is the simple message that is conveyed, which is also reflected in the Nivea logo: “Touch and be touched”. Nevertheless, when it comes to competitions concerning beauty, one tries to achieve a certain ideal, which may have nothing to do with your actual body. Bodies are different and there should not be a single, slender ideal, because this excludes many women and leaves them frustrated. Therefore, the aim should not be that women take part in competitions in order to change, but to give them the confidence to be happy with the bodies they have.

5.2.4 Advertisement 4: “L’Oréal Hair Shampoo” (figure 6)

The last advertisement I will analyze is for hair shampoo for dyed hair called “EverPure” by L’Oréal. It consists of a rather large picture component and a few short text components. The image depicts a model, namely the actress Eva Longoria. We can see her face and shoulders, and she does not wear any clothes. Her hair is tied around her neck in a rather uncommon way, and she only wears light make-up that means no flashy colors, but her lashes look unnaturally full and long. Next to the picture we find information on the product, as well as an image of two tubes of the shampoo and a conditioner. On the bottom of the page we find further information on the product, as well as a comment on hair coloring by a “beauty expert”.

Unlike other products, this hair shampoo focuses on which ingredients it does not contain. This goes in line with the name of the shampoo: “EverPure”. According to the tube that is displayed, there is no sulfate and further there are not “harsh salts” contained. Furthermore it is full of “natural botanics”, and it is suggested that it is “100% vegan”. It could be argued that this advertisement is supposed to address women who consider it important to use products that are natural, which is also

connected to the trend for organic food and products. In the last years, more and more people have decided to buy organic food and also body care products. Therefore, L'Oréal probably attempts to get its share by promoting "pure" products. Nevertheless, apart from all the ingredients that are not in the shampoo, the main function is to moisturize colored hair, and at the same time the advertisement promises to help "keep the color pure even after 32 washes" with its own "Anti-Fade System".

As mentioned above we find two quotes, namely by Christophe Robin, a colorist, and Eva Longoria, an actress. It can be argued that both are "beauty experts", the first because he is a stylist and Longoria, being an actress is constantly in touch with beautification measures, they are part of her profession. She comments on the shampoo: "Even after 32 washes, my color looks pure and luminous. It's almost like I just colored my hair". Robin says: "As a colorist, I recommend EverPure. Its rich lather respects your hair fiber and its Anti-Fade System protects your color." I already talked about beauty experts, especially in the previous chapter on cosmetic surgery, and here, too, they play a rather important role. One is a rather famous person, so if she recommends this shampoo, many women will think, if she uses this shampoo why shouldn't I? She therefore evokes trust, because people know her, or at least they have the feeling they do. The most important impact, however, is provided through the fact that women might think that by using the product she advertizes here, they can look like her one day. That the product must be good is supported by the colorist, a person who helps to improve the looks of women. Therefore, by showing the two people who give the advice to use the shampoo, many women might confound this with advice by actual friends, who actually use the products they recommend. Therefore, fake trust is evoked; many women buy the product, and L'Oréal reached its goal.

What strikes me most looking at this commercial, however, is the fact that the shampoo should be used in order to "free" the hair from harsh sulfates and salts the color contains. Thus, hair colors contain a lot of harsh ingredients, which might not be good for your body. According to the advertisement, one only has to use this shampoo

and all the bad ingredients are literally “washed out” again. On the one hand, the shampoo claims to be reduced to the basic needs, namely moisturizing the hair with natural ingredients, but on the other hand it is said to “free your color from harsh sulfates and salts”. This is clearly a contradiction. Furthermore, the term “pure” does not go in line with hair color. If a woman wanted to be “pure” in terms of her hair, she would probably not dye it, but leave her hair color the way it is. The message of this commercial is once more that in order to become pure, beautification measures are needed in the first place. Natural beauty can only be attained through a change of the body, while the real body is equated with “ugliness”. This is another perfect example of Tseëlon, and MacCannel and MacCannel’s argument that beauty is only ugliness in disguise. Nevertheless, the commercial is also symptomatic of consumerism in the USA. You have to dye your hair in order to enhance your beauty, but for the perfect result you need more products. All the commercials suggest that in order to become prettier, you need to buy. Hesse-Biber pointedly calls this behavior “buy, try, comply” (*Cult* 63). The pictures we find in the media seem to offer “help”, but at the same time they present an impossible standard (Hesse-Biber, *Cult* 63), which is reflected in this example by displaying the actress Eva Longoria. It is very likely that the picture is retouched; her lashes are extremely long and full. Also her hair seems to be very long considering the fact that it is tied around her neck, but it could easily be added by computer. The problem is that men and women today hardly ever see “real” people in commercials anymore. They are rather constructed people, who leave the impression that they are real. Therefore, an ideal that cannot be reached is easily established, since even the models and actresses do not fit it. Moreover, it is suggested in most advertisements that even “natural beauty” can only be attained by using products that enhance one’s look.

6 Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to identify evidence of the Beauty Myth in American literature and culture. For that matter, I introduced in the first chapter the theories necessary for the following analysis. To name the most important ones, I explained the notion of Wolf's Beauty Myth, but also MacCannel and MacCannel's Beauty System, as well as the concept of the 'docile body' coined by Michel Foucault and adapted for feminist discourse by Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo. Furthermore, Hesse-Biber's Cult of Thinness played a decisive role in my paper.

Wolf argues that "the Beauty Myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance" (14). Furthermore, she suggests that the Beauty Myth has higher significance for women than for men, which have exemplified throughout my thesis. Apparently, beauty is associated with positive traits, beautiful people are said to have more friends and more professional success. Furthermore, they always seem to have the partner of their dreams. However, only a very small part of the women belong among 'the chosen' ones. The rest spend their days engaging in beautification measures of all different kinds, spending large amounts of money, but are also frustrated, eventually. American society sets an ideal, for outward appearance, which cannot be reached by most. One should be thin, look young, be fit and in the end this is equated with happiness. I presented these arguments in the beginning of my thesis and in the end they have proven right. In my quest for the Beauty Myth in American culture and literature, I came across numerous examples. I have not found any evidence that the Beauty Myth has become less important, suggesting a change in society and that women are asked to accept their bodies the way they are, but, on the contrary, more and more men get involved in the Beauty Myth, too. This is reflected in the numbers of cosmetic surgeries performed on men; more and more men fall victim to eating disorders, and shaving practices concerning body hair become more and more popular among men, too.

The first analysis was dedicated to the Barbie doll, a pop-culture icon. Barbie probably does not bear all the blame for girls and women obsessed with thin bodies,

but I think that her influence on the body image cannot be denied, while obviously more girls are affected than boys. As a matter of fact, Barbie would not be able to live in case her body proportions were those of an adult woman; her breasts are enormous, while her waist is extremely thin, her legs are very long and she can wear high heels only. Still, some girls see her as a role model in terms of her body.

A more realistic example has been put on display with Hornbacher's autobiographical narrative *Wasted*. Preceding the analysis of the book, I provided information on the several types of eating disorders acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association, and I introduced the argument that they are not only triggered by psychological problems, but more and more by the unrealistic ideals prevailing in American society. This has been proven right according to Hornbacher's book, which was a rather special account of a life with different eating disorders, because the writer is well aware of culture's influence on eating disorders and she frequently comments on it. For the reader she opens doors to a world unknown to those who have never been in contact with eating disorders. Her book is a good example for the Beauty Myth, and her behavior further highlights the notion of the 'docile body'. Her descriptions of certain instances of her illness are generally so detailed that I go in line with Olson who argues that *Wasted* can also be seen as a how-to-guide of eating disorders. So on the one hand she provides interesting insight in the life of an eating-disordered girl, but on the other hand we find out that in the end she will never be fully cured. Therefore, girls who are at risk for eating disorders can easily mistake her book for advice.

The most bizarre and disturbing illustration of the Beauty Myth in my paper is the American TV series *The Swan*, which shows 16 female participants competing for the title 'The Swan' after a series of cosmetic surgeries as well as a 'complete makeover'. During the last few years, a certain mania referred to makeovers can be detected in American TV. Cars are made over, as well as houses and in the end also human beings. Cosmetic surgery is seen as the perfect way to change the body, since radical results can be attained. The most serious problem in that matter, however, derives from the fact that most patients have very high expectations that cannot be fulfilled in most

cases, and they often underestimate post-surgery pain. For the contestants of *The Swan* all dreams seemed to come true. They changed their bodies and at the same time their lives. The viewer, however, does not find out if for the better or worse in the end, since the participants did not have “body problems”, while *The Swan* only provides “body answers” as Orosan-Weine puts it (20). Furthermore, the show has proven that men largely set the standard of what women should look like. Even though the “team of experts” consisted of three men and three women, the men were responsible for dramatic changes of the body, while the women were accountable for the inner changes, except for the dentist. Interestingly, in every case the cosmetic surgeons opted for breast enlargement and at the same time, all of the women had to undergo liposuction in several areas. This contradicts the natural shape of women, who generally do not have large breasts, while having a slender body. Therefore, they have been changed under the male gaze.

The last part of my paper was dedicated to the analysis of a selection of advertisements taken from the fashion magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Allure*. Due to the fact that one cannot *not* consume advertisements, they arguably play a decisive role in relation to the Beauty Myth, and they influence women to a large extent in connection to what their bodies have to look like. After having had a closer look at only a few commercials, I am convinced that the messages that are conveyed have a great impact on women in terms of their body image. Needless to say, most advertisements can be seen as perfect representations of the Beauty Myth. Evidently, consumerism is inextricably linked to the Beauty Myth in that respect. All of the commercials promise beauty enhancement, usually in no time and cheap, too. When reading between the lines, however, we can see that the only purpose of many products is to make a few people rich by telling women that they have defective bodies. The notion of defect in the female body is very prominent in the examples I provided. One should try to avoid commercials like these as much as possible and when seeing them, one should have a critical look at them.

To finally conclude my paper, I think I have demonstrated and proven that the Beauty Myth is still valid and no improvement or positive change in society can be

seen. The only movement that I could trace is that men equally start to engage in beautification measures of all kinds. Ideally, society should change in a manner that women can feel comfortable with the body they have. Nevertheless, one should not forget that we are all part of this system that sets an unrealistic standard, so everyone has the chance to change it, even if only a little bit. Women themselves have to learn what shape and size of body is realistic for them, and further they must learn to feel comfortable with the body they have. Men, with unrealistic ideals in their minds, must get rid of them. Today, we are faced with a body ideal mostly created by the media, where hardly any “real” people are depicted anymore. Most of the pictures of models we see are retouched and enhanced. Furthermore, parents must teach their children that their body does not equal their value, because it has been proven that they highly influence their children in terms of their body image. Evidently, this is a bold venture, since in order to be a good role model, one has to embody the values first, which is often not the case. To sum up, we all must create a new, more realistic picture of a woman’s body in our minds. Women do not have to stop practicing sports or engaging in a healthy diet, but we have to detect the forces that provide unrealistic bodies and see them more critically. “Thin” should not equal good, while “fat” should not stand for moral failure and personal fault. Women should stop seeing their bodies as defective and in need to be treated. They should stop having the feeling that as long as they buy all the products that promise bodily enhancement, they will become prettier and therefore better people. One has to learn again that beauty cannot be equated with happiness and that a change of the body does not necessarily mean that life can be changed for the better.

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9 Appendix

Figure 1



Figure 2



A surreal landscape where a river flows from the distance, winding through dark, forested hills, and finally merging into the head of a pink and white Schick Intuition Plus razor. The razor is positioned vertically, with its head at the top, and the river flows directly into it. The background is a deep blue, suggesting a night sky or a deep forest. The overall mood is one of natural beauty and hydration.

YOUR SKIN WILL DRINK IT IN.

Intuition

Schick

Intuition Plus

Replenish with the new Schick® Intuition Plus® razor. Now with a redesigned moisture-rich conditioner with shea butter and a fourth blade to give you an even closer shave. It's the effortless way to lather, shave and moisturize for noticeably softer skin. FREE YOUR SKIN.™

4 BLADES

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Figure 3

© 2009 NIVEA
Beliersdorf AG

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
WORRYING ABOUT CELLULITE
AND NOT HAVING TO.

NIVEA® Good-bye Cellulite 30-Day Body Beauty Program.
Its smoothing gel with L-Carnitine helps reduce the appearance of cellulite in four weeks. And the dietary supplement helps support lean muscle mass.

Take the **2009 NIVEA Good-bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge** at
www.NIVEAusa.com/goodbye.

NIVEA TOUCH AND BE TOUCHED.

The image shows three women laughing and posing outdoors. In the bottom right corner, there is a product shot of the NIVEA Good-bye Cellulite 30-Day Body Beauty Program. It includes a tube of Smoothing Gel with L-Carnitine, a blister pack of dietary supplement tablets, and a box of the same products. The box features an illustration of a woman in a bikini.

Figure 4

PROMOTION

A full-body photograph of Kristin Cavallari, a blonde woman with a bright smile, wearing a blue one-piece swimsuit with a halter-style top and high-cut bottoms. She is standing against a light blue background.

Join the **NIVEA** GOOD-BYE CELLULITE, HELLO BIKINI CHALLENGE Today!

AS PART OF THE NEW 2009 NIVEA
GOOD-BYE CELLULITE, HELLO BIKINI
CHALLENGE, WE ASKED FAMOUS BEACH
BABE **KRISTIN CAVALLARI** TO SHARE
SOME OF HER FAVORITE BIKINI SECRETS

CLEARLY CONFIDENT
When wearing a bikini, attitude is what
conveys confidence. If you feel good
about yourself, it will shine through.

THE TASTES OF SUMMER
I only eat what's fresh, natural and
easy to digest. This keeps me from
feeling bloated or bogged down,
physically and mentally.

PERSONAL STYLE
Dress for your body type and choose
what makes you feel comfortable. Just
because a trend looks good on a friend
doesn't mean it will look good on me.

FACE SUMMER
My skincare routine for summer
always includes drinking lots of water
for hydration and never leaving the
house without SPF 30 on my face.

A circular logo for Shay Todd Swimwear, featuring a silhouette of a person swimming and the text "SHAY TODD" below it.

Kristin's bikinis by
SHAY TODD SWIMWEAR
www.shaytodd.com/nivea

Figure 5

PROMOTION

Ready for the Challenge?

Take the **NEW 2009 NIVEA GOOD-BYE CELLULITE, HELLO BIKINI CHALLENGE**. Last year the NIVEA Challenge helped over 100,000 women reduce the appearance of cellulite, get fit and feel confident—all in time for summer. Now it's your turn to try the NIVEA Good-bye Cellulite, Hello Bikini Challenge. It's a 4-week plan designed around the four key areas of Fitness, Nutrition, Skin Care & Style to help you get bikini-ready.

1 fitness



Kick-start your summer body with a workout plan specially designed with you—and your bikini—in mind.

2 nutrition



Discover our nutrition expert's week-by-week plan to help you eat healthy and shed pounds for the feel-good bikini body you've always wanted.

3 skincare



NIVEA Good-bye Cellulite, formulated with skin's own L-Carnitine, helps reduce the appearance of cellulite. Apply to your trouble spots for visibly smoother skin in just 4 weeks.

4 style



Kristin knows that confidence comes from finding the bikini that flatters your unique shape. Find yours with the help of swimsuit-designer-to-the-stars Shay Todd.

Log on to NIVEAUSA.com/bikini and start your countdown to bikini season. You'll be able to access a customized 4-week plan with step-by-step advice from trusted experts designed to get you looking bikini-ready this summer. There's even a personalized tracker tool to help you measure your weekly progress. PLUS, enter for a chance to win the **ULTIMATE SUMMER SWEEPSTAKES**. Prizes: A complete beauty & bikini makeover, limited-edition NIVEA bikinis from celebrity designer **SHAY TODD** and more!



Figure 6



L' O R É A L PARIS

**FREE YOUR COLOR
FROM HARSH SULFATES
AND SALTS***

EVERPURE
SULFATE-FREE
COLOR CARE SYSTEM™

L'ORÉAL'S FIRST COLOR CARE
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L'Oréal Paris Color Expert

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10 Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Repräsentation des Mythos Schönheit in amerikanischer Literatur und Kultur. In einem einleitenden Kapitel versuche ich den Begriff Schönheit zu definieren. Schönheit wird meist mit positiven Dingen assoziiert, schöne Menschen haben mehr Freunde, haben mehr Erfolg und sind glücklicher, so die landläufige Meinung. Schönheit und Dünnsein ist daher positiv, während Hässlichkeit und Dicksein als negativ gesehen werden. Weiters stelle ich im ersten Kapitel die für meine Analyse relevanten Theorien vor. Die wichtigste stellt der Mythos Schönheit von Naomi Wolf dar, der besagt, dass eben dieser Mythos immer ein Verhalten, aber niemals Aussehen selber beschreibt. Weitere wichtige Vertreter zum Thema sind MacCannel und MacCannel, die dem Schönheitswahn den Titel „The Beauty System“ geben, sowie Sandra Lee Bartky und Susan Bordo die Michel Foucaults Ideen zum „gefügigen Körper“ an den feministischen Diskurs angleichen und Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber mit ihrem „Cult of Thinness“. Sie sind sich alle einig, dass viele Frauen von dem Aussehen ihrer Körper besessen sind aufgrund des unrealistischen Standards den die Gesellschaft vorschreibt und der die Mehrheit der Frauen ausschließt. Mehr Frauen denn je haben Essstörungen, kosmetische Eingriffe werden jährlich mehr und die Körper mit denen Frauen im täglichen Leben konfrontiert werden, zum Beispiel in Form von Werbung, sind immer seltener die von „echten“ Frauen. Der Einfluss der Kultur spielt hier zunehmend eine Rolle. Meine Arbeit beschäftigt sich damit, Beweise für diese Aussagen in amerikanischer Literatur und Kultur zu finden.

Im ersten Kapitel analysiere ich die Bedeutung von der Barbiepuppe und illustriere kurz ihre Entstehungsgeschichte. Das zweite Kapitel ist Essstörungen gewidmet. Nach einer Einführung über die derzeit anerkannten Essstörungen, analysiere ich eine autobiographische Erzählung mit dem Titel *Wasted* von Marya Hornbacher in Bezug auf den Mythos Schönheit. Das dritte Kapitel handelt von Schönheitsoperationen. Ich gebe einen Überblick über die Lage in Amerika, anschließend widme ich mich der Fernsehserie *The Swan*, in der sich 16 Teilnehmerinnen operieren lassen, um anschließend in einem Schönheitswettbewerb

gegeneinander anzutreten. Das vierte und letzte Kapitel behandelt den Einfluss von Werbungen. Für die Analyse habe ich hier vier Werbungen aus den Magazinen *Cosmopolitan* und *Allure* ausgewählt.

Zusammenfassend kann man sagen, dass in allen Beispielen, die ich analysiere, der Mythos Schönheit sehr prominent ist. Das Schönheitsideal wird weitgehend von den Medien und der amerikanischen Kultur geprägt, in der immer unrealistischere Körper dargestellt werden. Ich kann keine Verbesserung der Lage ausmachen; vielmehr habe ich den Eindruck, dass sich nun auch immer mehr Männer dem Schönheitswahn unterwerfen. Die Zahl der Schönheitsoperationen steigt und auch Körperhaarrasur wird immer beliebter unter Männern. Daher wäre eine Veränderung in der Gesellschaft dringend notwendig. Frauen sollen sich in den Körpern, die sie haben, wohlfühlen können und unrealistische Körperideale sollen aus den Köpfen der Menschen verbannt sein. Da wir alle die Ideale dieser Gesellschaft prägen, liegt es auch an jedem Einzelnen dies zu verändern.

11 Abstract in English

The paper deals with the representation of the Beauty Myth in American literature and culture. In the introduction, I seek to define the term beauty. Beauty is often associated with positive things, so one might get the impression that beautiful people have more friends, are more successful, and have the partner of their dreams. Beauty and thinness are seen as something positive, while ugliness and being fat are seen as negative. In the first chapter I further introduce the relevant theoretical background for the following analysis. Naomi Wolf with her Beauty Myth, which always describes behavior and never appearance, provides the most important theory. Other contributors to the topic are MacCannel and MacCannel with their Beauty System as well as Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo who adapt Foucault's concept of the 'docile body' to feminist discourse, and Sharlene Hesse-Biber's Cult of Thinness. All agree that many women are obsessed with their bodies due to an unrealistic standard prescribed by society, which excludes the majority of women. More and more women suffer from eating disorders; the cosmetic surgery industry rises steadily, and the bodies women are faced with in the media, are hardly "real people" anymore.

The influence of culture and society increasingly play a role in that matter. In my paper, I attempt to find traces for these arguments in American literature and culture. In the first chapter I analyze the meaning of the Barbie doll. The second chapter is dedicated to eating disorders. I first give an overview, then I have a close look on the autobiographical narrative *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher. In the third chapter, I deal with cosmetic surgery and its situation in the United States, and I analyze the TV series *The Swan* in connection to the Beauty Myth. The topic of the last chapter is the influence of advertisements in fashion magazines. For that matter, I examined four commercials taken from *Cosmopolitan* and *Allure*.

To sum up, the Beauty Myth prevails in all of the examples I analyzed. In the United States, the body ideal is highly influenced by the media and culture, which portrays more and more unrealistic bodies. I could not trace any improvement of the situation so far; I found out, however, that more and more men subdue to the Beauty

Myth, too. Cosmetic surgery on men is rising, and bodily hair removal becomes more and more popular. As a result, a change of society would be necessary. Women should be able to feel good about their bodies, and unrealistic ideals should be cleared out. We all influence this ideal, so it is also our duty to change it.

12 Lebenslauf

ZUR PERSON

Katharina Schett, geboren am 4.3.1983 in Lienz

SCHULE

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Jänner 2002-Juni 2002 Sprachaufenthalt in New Jersey, USA

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