

Feederism: an exploratory study into the stigma of erotic weight gain

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents qualitative exploratory research findings on the phenomenon of feederism. Feederism, also referred to as “erotic weight gain,” involves people who are sexually aroused by gaining weight (called “feedees” or “gainers”) or encouraging others to gain weight (called “feeders” or “encouragers”). Sometimes feederism is practiced within relationships and sometimes it is practiced alone. Respondents emphasize the importance that fantasy plays within feederism. The experiences and understandings of 30 respondents are considered in an attempt to examine how those who are interested in feederism might be stigmatized and how they may cope with having this stigma.

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## **Dedication**

For my Mom in appreciation of her ongoing support and love.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

What is feederism *really* about? This is the question that came to mind when I first came in contact with the phenomenon almost two years ago. At the time I was writing a paper on ‘fat sexuality’ and feederism was explained by one author in a way that immediately struck me. Having researched obesity, fatness, and dieting since my undergraduate degree several years prior I was immediately taken aback by how this author described feederism. Murray’s (2004) description of feederism left me wondering if it was **really** about *dominant men* force feeding *submissive fat women* to the point of *immobility* and then *abandoning* them once they become *incapacitated* only to find a new *victim* and start the cycle again.

When I looked further afield I was unable to find any empirical research to support or refute Murray’s assumptions about feederism. When I looked online, by doing a Google search entering the word “feederism,” I found that it was a real practice, or so it seemed, because I was able to find entire websites devoted to it. I wanted to learn more so I frequented the websites and read many discussion forums where members were discussing the topic. The information I gathered just from reading discussion forums led me to believe that Murray’s (2004) assumptions about feederism might be exaggerated. I tried to find more academic references but came up with very few and none that were based on empirical research. It was at this time that I decided this was a topic that was begging to be researched.

To the best of my knowledge, this research represents the first systematic attempt to conduct an empirical investigation of this phenomenon. My broad research questions were: What is feederism? How is it defined and practiced by those who are interested in it? In conducting this research I completed 30 qualitative interviews with respondents I located through the online feederism websites and through referrals. I chose, for reasons of manageability and time, to focus only on feederism within the heterosexual context.

Feederism is a phenomenon that involves people who are sexually aroused by thoughts and actions having to do with weight gain. People interested in feederism often identify themselves as “feeders” or “feedees.” “Feeders” are part of a larger classification of “encouragers.” Because these individuals are aroused by thoughts and actions surrounding weight gain they often encourage their partners to gain weight. This can be done in the form of verbal encouragement to eat more or certain foods or it can be accomplished through physical encouragement in terms of cooking food, buying food, or literally feeding their partner food. Sometimes, “encouragers” or “feeders,” some of whom lack partners, do not actually participate in encouraging weight gain but fantasize about it instead. “Feedees” and “gainers” are aroused by thoughts and actions surrounding their own weight gain. The amount of weight they wish to gain varies from very little to extreme amounts. “Gainers” or “feedees” may or may not have a partner encouraging or helping them to gain weight. Some “gainers” and “feedees,” for various reasons, choose not to participate in actual weight gain but still fantasize about it. These definitions and terms are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Symbolic interactionism is the most appropriate theoretical framework to investigate the phenomenon of feederism because it allows me to look at the social construction of the meanings that feederism has for its practitioners. Symbolic interactionism allows me to look not only at the roles respondents play but also the meanings they attach to those roles. It provides a framework to understand how respondents make sense of their actions.

Most people have never heard of feederism. Being sexually aroused by weight gain and additional fat is contradictory to what most people consider desirable, erotic, sensual, and sexy behaviour. However, it is this “differentness” that makes it sociologically interesting. Various studies have been done on activities that have been socially constructed as “odd.” For example, Lowery & Wetli (1982) studied “sexual asphyxia” where participants were aroused by asphyxiation. DeYoung (1989) studied the North American Man/Boy Love Association, a group of individuals that advocates and promotes adult sexual behavior with male children. Forsyth & Benoit (1989) studied dirt eating. Forsyth & Gauthier (1999) studied bug chasers, people (specifically gay men) who are seeking to infect themselves with the HIV virus through unsafe sexual practices. Aguilera (2000) studied devotee communities for people who are sexually aroused by amputees or disability in general. Huntley (2000) studied pregnant pornography and pregnant sex. Gailey & Prohaska (2006) studied hogging where men seek women who are overweight or unattractive to satisfy their competitive or sexual desires. Adler & Adler (2008) studied the online communities of self-injurers. These studies are all about a topic that may be considered ‘odd’ or ‘rare’ to many people. A study into feederism

can be placed within this same general category.

Feederism may seem on the surface to be like the other types of phenomena mentioned, such as bug chasing or sexual asphyxia, but it will be a phenomenon examined through Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma. Stigma is a sociological concept introduced and developed by Erving Goffman (1963). Just within the past year it has been applied to such topics as: slavery (Price *et al.*, 2008), obsessive compulsive disorder (Fennell and Liberato, 2007), strippers (Bradley, 2007), youth homelessness (Kidd, 2007), customers of adult novelty stores (Hefley, 2007), sex workers (Scambler, 2007), mental health (Mak, 2007; Wright *et al.*, 2007), and incarceration (Schnittker and John, 2007).

Goffman's work on stigma continues to be a useful way to analyze various phenomena sociologically.

Goffman (1963:3) writes, "the term stigma . . . will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting." He identifies three types of stigma. The first is "abominations of the body" which include physical deformities that are visible (Goffman, 1963:4). The second type of stigma are blemishes of individual character which he describes as: "weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior" (Goffman, 1963:4). The third type of stigma are "tribal stigmas" such as "race" that are passed on from generation to generation and affect all members of a family (Goffman, 1963:4).

Fat bodies are stigmatized both as a type of “abomination of the body” and a “blemish of individual character” as will be discussed in Chapter 2. However, the type of stigma investigated here is “a blemish of individual character.” This type of stigma is shared by both counterparts of this phenomenon: “feeders” and/or “encouragers” as well as “feedees” and/or “gainers.” Both are aroused by weight gain, be it in fantasy or reality. “Feeders” and/or “encouragers” desire someone else to gain the weight while “feedees” and/or “gainers” desire their own weight gain. Therefore, both carry the stigma in that they desire something outside the norm. While most North Americans are attempting to and supporting and encouraging others to *lose* weight, those interested in feederism are doing the opposite by either gaining weight on purpose or encouraging someone else to gain weight. This “unnatural passion” (Goffman 1963) becomes a blemish on their individual character because it violates the dominant cultural norms and values surrounding beauty and sexuality. This creates a stigma for those who desire something deemed taboo.

In Goffman’s (1963:42) terms, this stigma is “discreditable.” The differentness is not immediately obvious nor is it known before an interaction occurs. Being sexually aroused by weight gain (either for one’s self or in others) is not something that is visually apparent and therefore, until someone finds out, this sexual preference is hidden. Therefore, “the issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his [*sic*] failing” (Goffman, 1963:42). Rather than having a visual mark of their stigma, those interested in erotic weight gain carry a stigma of individual character, which is invisible. Thus the individual attempts to hide

this information, to hide their stigma, during social interaction. The individual also has to cope with (or manage) their stigma in various ways.

My findings suggest that feederism is understood by respondents to be a sexual practice, a fetish, a sexual identity, a lifestyle, a fantasy, a subculture, and it has an online community. Because feederism is a complex phenomenon, analyzing it through the symbolic interactionist concept of stigma allows me to discuss it in the different ways my respondents spoke about feederism in their lives. This concept of stigma has been applied to enough other topics that it shows its versatility and will allow each different understanding of feederism to be highlighted. To my knowledge, feederism has never been analyzed through the concept of stigma. Doing so allows this research to add to and extend the existent sociological literature on stigma and stigma management as well as providing introductory empirical findings about feederism

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### ***Goffman's Symbolic Interactionism***

*Erving Goffman is the quintessential sociologist of everyday life. The self, social interaction, social order, deviance, social inequality, calculation, morality -all are matters taken up in Goffman's writings. (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvi)*

Goffman's main theoretical contribution to symbolic interactionism includes the idea that the self is a social product (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvi). The self is constructed during performances that are given publicly and then validated by an audience (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvi). Goffman's second main idea is that the extent to which an individual can sustain a respectable self-image depends on one possessing characteristics that are considered acceptable and desirable within the dominant culture (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvi). Goffman's ideas are pertinent to my research because the respondents in my study are attempting to sustain respectable self-images despite possessing a stigmatizing characteristic.

For Goffman, the nature of social life is one where we manage ourselves in accordance to societal morality and ritual order through maintaining face (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvi). During social interaction we attempt to act in particular ways that would not be detrimental to our own sense of self or others' personas. He applies the metaphors of drama, ritual and the game to develop these concepts. The final major contribution to symbolic interactionist theories within sociology is Goffman's concept of "frames." Framing is the way in which we come to understand the meanings attached to a given activity (Lemert and Branaman, 1997:xlvii). "The key relevance of this idea in

Goffman's social theory is that events, actions, performances, and selves do not always speak for themselves but rather depend on framing for their meaning." These frames are constrained by both social structure and social organization so that actors are not free to frame experiences in any way they please. The ideas that Goffman contributes to symbolic interactionism pertaining to the self as a social product where one has to be manage their self image is the focus of this thesis. This research adds to the existent literature on stigma management by stigmatized individuals.

### **The Stigma Associated with Feederism**

While Goffman did not apply his stigma concept to deviance, much of the deviance literature has taken on the concept of stigma to explain what happens when one is perceived to be deviant. Deviance is a perception of difference that is often negative. Stigma is the adverse response to this perception(Heatheron, *et al.*, 2000:5). Therefore, because in North American society thin bodies are part of the beauty norm while fat bodies are loathed purposeful weight gain is perceived as "different." It goes against the dieting discourse that inundates much of popular culture. In response to this perceived difference, this "deviant desire," "feedees" and/or "gainers" are stigmatized for wanting to gain weight for sexual enjoyment or pleasure while "feeders" and/or "encouragers" are stigmatized for encouraging and enabling others to gain weight. However, for the person who is gaining weight in real life their stigma may be exacerbated if they are fat enough to be visually overweight or obese. "Gainer" and/or "feedees" may carry the visual stigma of excess fat which is immediately "discredited" (Goffman, 1963:41) because it is visual. While their *desire* to gain weight remains hidden and is therefore "discreditable," the obvious stigma of their fat body may immediately offend during some social



interactions. The link between obesity/fatness and stigma has been made in previous research as is suggested below. adverse

### **The Stigma of Obesity**

In 1968, five years after Goffman introduced the term “stigma,” Werner Cahnman applied the concept to obesity. He makes a compelling argument for why sociologists should study the link between fatness and stigma:

Obesity is a complex phenomenon having a variety of causes and consequences, and accordingly, it is very insufficiently understood. In the vast medical and nutritional literature on the topic, obesity is usually treated as a clinical problem residing in the physical make-up and the behavior pattern of the individual, and it has only been recently that social causation and their consequences, amounting to stigmatization, have received increased attention. However, obesity is hardly ever mentioned in the writings of sociologists, and not at all in the literature on social deviance. This omission is amazing because it ought not to escape any one scanning the articles and advertisements in popular journals or listening to the radio and television commercials that obesity is a social phenomenon. Clearly, in our kind of society, with its stress on affluence and upward mobility, being overweight is considered to be detrimental to health, a blemish to appearance, and a social disgrace. What is much less obvious is that it is held to be morally reprehensible. (Cahnman, 1968:283)

Cahnman argues that because obesity is a social phenomenon in a society that views it negatively, it should be a topic of interest to sociologists.

An important contribution that Cahnman’s makes is his emphasis on the value-laden terms “obese,” “fat,” and “overweight.”

Speaking of obesity, I am going to disregard the inherent difference between overweight and obesity in a narrower sense. It is possible to

think of overweight as minimal obesity and of obesity as maximal overweight. . . . but the difference is blurred in interactional situations. In a sociological view, therefore, the terms obesity and overweight may be considered as synonymous and used interchangeably. (Cahnman, 1968:283-4)

This is an important contribution in that it highlights how subjective the terms “obese”, “overweight,” and “fat” are and how the lines between these categories are blurred during social interaction. In other words describing someone as “overweight” has no inherent or universal meaning because this word could suggest someone who is ten pounds over their “ideal weight” based on their height or it could mean someone who is two-hundred pounds “overweight.” The terms “obese”, “overweight,” and “fat” are social constructs that Cahnman indicates become unclear during social interaction.

Cahnman makes an important observation when he shows that the obese are held personally responsible for their stigma because weight is seen as something that can be changed or managed through personal dedication to exercise and regimented dieting.

It has been doubted whether the stigma of obesity is as grave as the others . . . not only because, on physical grounds, the disability connected with obesity does not seem overly serious, but also because, contrary to those that are blind, one-legged, paraplegic or dark-pigmented, the obese are presumed to hold their fate in their own hands; if they were only a little less greedy or lazy or yielding to impulse or oblivious of advice, they would restrict their excessive food intake, resort to strenuous exercise, and as a consequence of such deliberate action, they would reduce. Actually, the moral factor which is thus introduced aggravates the cause. While blindness is considered a misfortune, obesity is branded as defect. (Cahnman, 1968:294)

DeJong (1980:77) conducted an experiment in 1980 to look at how adolescent girls’ opinions of an obese peer might differ if they knew the cause of her obesity. In this study

of 64 adolescent girls, half of the girls were shown a photograph of an obese peer and the other half a photograph of a normal-weight peer. There was an introductory message which accompanied the photographs. Half of the girls received an introductory message that informed them that the girl depicted had a thyroid condition. After looking at the photograph and reading the introduction, the girls were then asked to complete a questionnaire rating the peer on a number of personality dimensions such as warmth, self-discipline and happiness. They were also asked to indicate how much they liked the peer in the photograph. In the end, ‘the high school girls’ negative evaluation of the obese target resulted from their naive assumption that her obesity was caused by lack of self-control. The obese girl was seen to be less self-disciplined than the normal weight girl’ (DeJong, 1980:80). The obese girl with the thyroid condition was rated in more positive terms than the obese target without the thyroid condition (DeJong, 1980:80). DeJong, in the second experiment of his two-part study, went on to test if having an obese peer who stated she was dieting and had recently lost 25 pounds would be seen more favorably than an obese peer who did not mention that she was dieting or attempting to lose weight.

Unless the obese can provide an ‘excuse’ for their weight, such as a thyroid condition, or can offer evidence of successful weight loss, their character will be impugned. . . . It can be concluded, then, that the perception of responsibility does play a large role in reactions to the physical stigma of obesity. It is not the mere fact that obese people are physically deviant which causes them to be derogated, but that they are assumed to be responsible for their deviant status. In this respect, the obese have much more in common with those who possess a characterological stigma than those who are physically handicapped or disfigured. (DeJong, 1980:85)

DeJong adds to the body of literature available on fatness and stigma by noting that he finds the stigma of obesity to be most similar to other blemishes of individual character. He also makes a link between deviance and stigma by noting that obese individuals are stigmatized because they are held responsible for their deviant status.

Gina Cordell and Carol Rambo Ronai published an article in 1999 on women's narrative resistance to the stigma of obesity. Using a life history method they interviewed ten women found through snowball sampling who ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-three. They suggest that their respondents participate in narrative resistance to discursive constraint: "through discursive constraint, society controls a person or groups of people, such as overweight women, by establishing and perpetuating negative stereotypes that affect their behavior and how they think of themselves" (Cordell and Rambo Ronai, 1999:31). In order to resist the labels provided through the societal discourse on weight their respondents attempt to recognize the categories available to construct alternative conceptions of self (Cordell and Rambo Ronai, 1999:31). Participants used narratives which reject the deviant labels cast upon them. For example, the idea that "fat is unattractive" is resisted by those believe that, "I Am Not Unattractive." Other resistive statements included: "I Am Not Sexually Undesirable," "I Am Not Taken Advantage Of," "I am not Desperate to Lose Weight," "I do Not Hate My Body," and "I am Not Jolly" (31-35). Further still, their participants distanced themselves from others perceived with similar stigmas. Their narratives here said, "At Least I'm Not as Fat as She Is," "At Least I'm Not a Lazy Slob," "At Least I'm Healthy" (37-9). Loopholes or excuses were used to exempt themselves from the ascribed deviance using narratives

which suggest: "... But I have Different Genetics" "... But I was Poorly Socialized..." (41-2). This grouping of narratives sound like Sykes and Matza's (1957) "techniques of neutralization" where participants attempt to reduce their stigma by giving alternative accounts or reasons for their deviance. This reduces the amount of personal responsibility or shame they feel. Cordell and Rambo Ronai (1999) identify ways in which their small group of participants resist the dominant discourse on weight and their possible stigmatization.

Leanne Joannis and Anthony Synnott (1999) also examined the stigma of obesity by conducting twenty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews with eleven women and twelve men. They not only wanted to examine the extent to which obesity is stigmatizing but also how obese individuals cope with and manage their stigma (51). Their "findings indicate that the stigma of obesity infiltrates every area of a person's life: family relationships, social skills, employment opportunities, marriageability, access to health care, and peace in their daily lives. Fat people are abused by their parents, teachers, doctors, employers, colleagues, strangers and also by their peers, friends, and spouses" (Joannis and Synnott, 1999:59). Internalization happened for "those who agree with the norms of the majority culture and constantly engage in weight loss attempts. . . Internalizers are adamant in their belief that their weight is the source of most of their troubles" (Joannis and Synnott, 1999: 60-1). Many dealt with their stigma through anger with society's conventional standards of attractiveness (61). Others dealt with their stigma through verbal and/or physical assertion/aggression (62). Those who recognized that they were happier being large people used flamboyance as a type of "in-your-face"

self assertion (64). These authors found that some participants also used self acceptance, fat power, and activism (64-6) to help cope with the stigma attached to obesity. This article is useful in that it suggests different ways that fat people may be resisting the stigma attached to their “deviant bodies.”

It is surprising, given the large amount of literature on the topic, that an article would be published as late as 2005 questioning: “Is Obesity Stigmatizing?” (Carr and Friedman). In fact, what the authors question is not if the obese are seen as having a personal attribute that is “deeply discrediting” but rather if “obese persons experience a critical component of the stigma process: discrimination. Although prejudicial attitudes toward obese individuals are well documented, these attitudes may not necessarily be translated into discriminatory behavior” (Carr and Friedman, 2005:244-5). This study used the results from a multistage probability sample of English-speaking adults aged 25 to 74 employing telephone interviews and self-administered mail questionnaires. Their analysis is limited to 3,437 of the 4,242 cases collected (248). Focusing only on the question of whether the stigma of obesity is translated into discrimination, they found that persons who fit within the obese I and obese II/III<sup>1</sup> categories are 40 to 50 percent more likely to report experiencing major discrimination compared to people of normal weight (Carr and Friedman, 2005:252). “Our article provides compelling evidence that obese persons are stigmatized and that this stigmatization transcends negative evaluations by others . . . We find that obese individuals perceive that they are the target of multiple forms of discrimination and that this discrimination has implications for their

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<sup>1</sup> Persons classified as obese I have a BMI (Body Mass Index) between 30-34.9. Those with obese II/III have a BMI above 35. Normal weight body mass index is between 18.5-24.9. (Carr and Friedman, 2005:252)

psychological well-being” (Carr and Friedman, 2005:253). Another interesting finding is for those who are severely obese. Obesity may become a “master status” at high levels of obesity (i.e., BMI greater than 35) as, “a characteristic that overrides all other features of a person’s identity” (Carr and Friedman, 2005:253). Because feederism may involve prolonged weight gain, which could reach these higher levels of obesity, this is an important contribution in regards to the gravity of a weight gainer’s stigma.

Very recently, Erich Goode and D. Angus Vail (2008) published a book titled *Extreme Deviance* with sections on: extreme tattooing, believing one has been kidnapped by extraterrestrials, believing in white supremacy, having and endorsing adult-child sexual conduct, saving the environment, engaging in S&M practices, and being hugely obese. The authors classify these forms of deviance as “secondary deviance” where individuals acquire “the *identity* of a deviant when they are scorned, isolated, and stigmatized” (Goode and Vail, 2008:x). Stigma is the result of actions that are constructed “deviant,” non-normative behaviours that elicit negative reactions (Goode and Vail, 2008:xix). Goffman’s work on stigma is applied throughout the book demonstrating how stigma becomes as adverse response to perceived deviance.

Obesity is an attribute that makes people different from the norm . . . Men and women of average weight tend to feel superior to the obese, reward them less, punish them more, make fun of them; the obese may become targets of derision and harassment. What is more, thin people will feel that this treatment is just, that the obese deserve it, indeed, that such treatment is something of a humanitarian gesture because such humiliation will supposedly inspire them to lose weight. (Goode and Vail, 2008:68)

The authors agree with past research in this area that obesity is seen as a blemish of individual character.

Although strictly speaking, obesity falls into the type of stigma Goffman (1963) referred to as ‘abominations of the body,’ one of the ‘various deformities’, in fact, it is regarded by the average-sized majority as a moral failing as much as a physical defect. Being fat indicates a blemish of individual character, more specifically, possessing a ‘weak will’ and an ‘unnatural passion.’ (Goode and Vail, 2008:69)

Manzo (2004:405) found that the words “being overweight/eating disorders/body image” were used in six titles when he looked at how many topics were addressed as examples of stigma in scholarly journals, professional presentations and dissertations from 1995–2001 making it the fourth most popular example of stigma.<sup>2</sup>

Being overweight has been viewed as a blemish of individual character and previous literature shows that fat people are seen as responsible for their “flaw.” This applies to the phenomenon of feederism because those who are gaining weight in real life may be going from a “normal” identity (Goffman, 1963:7) to that of a stigmatized identity by gaining weight and becoming fatter, which is perceived as deviant. While it is certainly the case that obesity itself can be stigmatizing, my respondents did not focus on this aspect of stigma. For example, during my interviews, “feedees” (and/or “gainers”) did not recount experiences of discrimination for being fat nor did they provide narratives about feeling stigmatized due to their fatness. Likewise, “feeders” (and/or “encouragers”), especially those with fat partners, did not speak about the stigma attached

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<sup>2</sup> AIDS or HIV infection was the first most popular. This was followed by: homosexuality and bisexuality and then mental illness. The topic ‘being overweight/eating disorders/body image’ was tied for fourth with prostitution and tuberculosis. (Manzo, 2004:405)



to having a fat partner. While Goffman's (1963:31) concept of a "courtesy stigma" (a stigma that is extended to those who are involved with the stigmatized individual) could be applied to those who have fat or very fat partners, this did not surface in interviews. Respondents did not report that they feel a stigma is extended to them just because they have a fat partner. If anything, several "feeders" (and/or "encouragers") actually felt proud to be out in public with their fat partners.<sup>3</sup> So while being fat is stigmatizing this is not the type of stigma that respondents reported feeling. The type of stigma felt by many of my respondents is that their sexual identity is devalued and stigmatized because they have a desire that is often seen as socially unacceptable: purposeful weight gain.

The type of stigma that is shared by all of those interested in feederism is "discreditable" (Goffman, 1963:42) in that it is not a visual characteristic or a known stigma. Upon seeing someone interested in feederism you would not know that they are sexually aroused by weight gain. Research into discreditable stigmas is vast. For example topics vary from voluntary childlessness (Park, 2002) to genital herpes (Inhorn, 1986), to mental illness (Schumacher *et al.*, 2003). Similar perhaps to feederism, "the childfree identity was not a dominant one for participants most of the time. Often it was a 'background' identity" (Park, 2004:31). The same could be true for those aroused by weight gain. It may not be a primary aspect of their identity and therefore less stigmatizing than other types of stigma such as physical disability. In terms of the discreditable stigma attached to genital herpes, "the 'invisible' nature of genital herpes is, in some senses, its most perplexing attribute-creating emotional, practical, and ethical dilemmas in the private,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Dewayne says, "it's actually a thrill to go out with a much larger woman in public. It's an attraction to have everyone staring and looking."

‘discreditable’ domain of information management” (Inhorn, 1986:62). Those with this stigma must manage information, to tell or not to tell, especially sexual partners, about their stigma, a circumstance that may be common to those with the stigma of being aroused by weight gain. Marcia C. Inhorn(1986) in her ethnography of a self-help organization found that those with the stigma of genital herpes deal with their hidden stigma in three ways. First, they divide their social interactions into two groups. A small group of trusted “insiders” know of the stigma. While the “outsiders,” “would be too distraught (e.g., parents), too rejecting, or too garrulous to be trusted with the secret” (Inhorn, 1986:62). Another way to deal with the issue is to limit the number of sexual partners. This avoids passing the virus on and allows the individual to avoid having to disclose the stigma to potential partners. Finally, emotional and clinical support is found by joining self-help groups (Inhorn, 1986:62). This is similar to my respondents who found emotional support online as a way of coping with the stigma associated with feederism to be discussed further in chapter 4. Those with discreditable stigmas, be it voluntary childlessness to genital herpes have to deal with concealing information in an attempt to hide their stigma during social interactions.

### **Stigmatized Sexual Identities**

Goffman’s original discussion of stigma included the concepts of “the own” and “the wise.” Having a spoiled social identity often means an individual is “cut off” from society (Goffman, 1963:19). Goffman (1963:19-20) writes that the individual with the spoiled social identity will find sympathetic others who are willing to accept him as “essentially” “normal.” The first group of sympathetic others is those who share the same stigma, referred by Goffman as “the own.” The second group, “the wise,” are those

individuals who are sympathetic to the plight of the stigmatized. My research is most concerned with “the own.” These individuals know from their own experience what it is like to be sexually aroused by ideas or actions pertaining to weight gain. By aligning with such individuals, the stigmatized individual can “withdraw for moral support and for the comfort of feeling at home, at ease, accepted as a person who really is like any other normal person” (Goffman, 1963:20). For those who carry the stigma of being sexually aroused by weight gain, the internet is an effective way to find sympathetic others. Using the internet, those with this stigmatizing sexual identity can cope with and manage their stigma. The internet serves as an important social structure for those who are sexually aroused by weight gain to come together to discuss their situations and manage their stigma. Quinn and Forsyth (2005:197) suggest that, “the internet provide[s] a mechanism for linking individuals with like-minded partners for sexual experimentation, conversation, and social learning.”

Feederism is not the only devalued sexual identity or “sexual stigma” (Plummer, 1975) which uses the internet to manage its stigma. “Bestiality is surely one of the most extreme forms of sexual deviance. However, the internet has presented a unique avenue for bestiality enthusiasts to share their fantasies and interests via websites, chat rooms, and discussion groups” (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:598). Even in 1995, prior to the huge growth in internet usage, Durkin and Bryant wrote, “there is every reason to believe that the bestiality subculture will grow and that the number of persons involved will proliferate; the computer bulletin board supports such expansion” (Durkin and Bryant, 1995:193).

Another potentially stigmatized group who use the internet to find like-minded individuals is the “crush fetish.” “This online forum is dedicated to those who find scenes of women crushing small animals (mostly insects and snails) sexually appealing” (Rosenmann and Safir, 2006:75). Katharine Gates (2000:133) refers to this group as “crush freaks.” She interviewed someone with this desire who explains that “he gets sexually aroused fantasizing that he a tiny one-inch-long bug squished underneath the bare feet of a beautiful woman” (133). Rosenmann and Safir (2006:77) conclude that online forums for this group offer a sense of not being alone. “Finding others who share similarly constructed sexual realities dispels the often repeated fear of being singular and completely alone. The individual now learns that he or she is a part of a group, from which validation can be drawn, and sexual scripts exchanged.” The internet provides one who is stigmatized access to the group which Goffman calls “the own” (Goffman, 1963:20).

One of the most well-documented internet groups are pedophiles. This group uses the internet to not only exchange child pornography, but also to locate victims (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:598-9). Pedophiles carry the stigma of an unnatural passion (Goffman, 1963:4) for children. NAMBLA (the North American Man/Boy Love Association) is “a political, civil rights and educational organization that advocates and promotes adult sexual behavior with male children” (DeYoung, 1989:111). Durkin *et al.* explain that NAMBLA has a prominent presence on the internet. Online there is a wide variety of

literature available providing affirmation and validation to pedophiles who seek it (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:599).

Another example of sexually stigmatized individuals finding their way online concerns apotemnophilia which refers to sexual arousal by amputation (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:599). ‘Amputee World’ is one website that includes photos, videos, and a method for interested parties to make contact (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:599). Raymond Aguilera (2000) in his study of the devotee community (those who are sexually aroused by amputation or more generally by disability) found that the internet provides ample erotic material. “Aside from being a source of erotic material, the internet was also used by the devotee community as a means for making contacts with the objects of their desire” (257).

The internet provides a social support system to people with stigmatized sexual preferences. “The internet is an unprecedented source or support for those with the most devalued sexual identities - a place where they can readily receive affirmation and reinforcement” (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:598).

The internet offers a seemingly bottomless inventory of deviant practices because it lacks evident constraints and transcends spatio-temporal restrictions on association. The internet can spawn and support communities around extreme forms of deviation. These processes of creating and supporting behaviors that are beyond the margins of most norm systems require empirical investigation as well as social commentary. (Durkin, *et al.*, 2006:600)

Because such groups are using the internet to form communities of support sociologists need to find their way online in order to study the groups and provide insight into how they construct and manage their identities and sexual preferences.

### ***How is Feederism Contextualized Academically?***

There is almost no scholarship on feederism. It is mentioned in two journal articles (Monaghan, 2005; Murray, 2004) and two book chapters (Kulick, 2005; Giovanelli and Peluso, 2006). To my knowledge no empirical research has been done on this topic. There is no research which investigates feederism as a sociological phenomenon. In terms of scholarship on feederism, I will focus on the articles and books written by Kulick (2005), Murray (2004), Monaghan (2005), and Giovanelli and Peluso (2006).

### **“Fat” by Kulick (2005)**

Don Kulick (2005), an anthropologist at New York University, devotes one full page (page number 82) to the topic of feederism within his fifteen page chapter on the topic of fat pornography. He defines fat pornography in the following quote.

This kind of pornography specializes in women who weigh well over three hundred pounds. Some of the biggest stars tip the scales at more than five hundred pounds. Aside from the sheer size of these models, the single most striking thing about this genre of pornography is that the women who are pictured do not engage in sex. Instead, they pose, dressed in lingerie in their bedrooms, clad in bikinis or everyday clothes on their living room sofas, standing naked in their kitchens. While they do sometimes display their breasts and their behinds, most of the camera work is focused on their stomachs. Genitals are generally not exposed, perhaps because once a woman passes the four-hundred-pound mark, it's frankly impossible to actually see her genitals without the aid of special equipment. Instead of having sex, these women have food. They eat. . . The pornographic act is not the display of a penis or some other object entering a woman's vagina.

Instead, the pornographic act is the display of fat food entering a fat woman's mouth. (Kulick, 2005:79-80).

The problem I find with his characterization is that while he is discussing a genre of pornography which I have also found to exist in my own research in this area, he is discussing a very specific type which should be more appropriately termed. There is pornography that exists where fat women *are* depicted having sex, displaying and using their genitals and *not* depicted eating. This type of pornography should also fit within one's definition of "fat pornography." The pornography to which Kulick refers would be more appropriately termed something like "fat eating pornography" or "feeder porn" to distinguish it from the larger genre of "fat pornography" that exists and that Kulick does not discuss.

Because traditionally pornography has either ignored women's pleasure or "portray[ed] a woman's invisible pleasure by showing close-ups of a man's visible ejaculation," Kulick (2005:89) argues that "fat pornography may have hit on one powerful way of providing another representation of female pleasure." This specific genre "displaces erotic pleasure from the genitals and disperses it to other parts of the body, thereby reconfiguring what can count as a pleasurable body" (91). The focus on fat bodies as pleasurable bodies and eating as a pleasurable act removes the emphasis on the phallus and man's pleasurable and very visible ejaculation. "Despite the fact that most of it seems designed for male consumption, there is a decidedly non-phallic component to fat pornography's representation of female pleasure" (Kulick, 2005:91).

The reason he introduces feederism is to make the point that the type of fat pornography he is describing has an audience: “others who clearly find such [fat pornographic] pictures erotic are individuals who identify as ‘feeders’ and ‘feedees’” (Kulick, 2005:82). He goes on to explain what these two classifications mean: “a feeder is a person who gets pleasure out of encouraging and helping another person gain weight. A feedee is someone who enjoys gaining weight, especially when assisted by a feeder, in the context of a sensual or a sexual relationship” (Kulick, 2005:82). Kulick (2005:82) refers to the relationship involved: “the ultimate sign of commitment in a feeder-feedee relationship is when the feedee allows herself to be ‘taken to immobility’ by her feeder- that is, when she is made to gain so much weight that she is unable to walk.” Kulick does not indicate where he obtained his information or how he arrived at his definitions of the terms “feeder” and “feedee.” He cites Betsy, “who is one of the best-known feedees,” who suggests that, “few male feeders are in fact willing to take their female feedees to immobility” (Kulick, 2005:82). For this, he cites an interview that Katharine Gates (2000:198-207) conducted with Betsy so perhaps this interview is the source of his entire understanding about “feeders” and “feedees.” While Kulick’s definitions of “feeders” and “feedees” may be appropriate, they need to be verified by the participants who engage in this activity.

#### **“Locating Aesthetics: Sexing the Fat Woman” by Murray (2004)**

While Kulick introduces the phenomenon of feederism in broad terms, Samantha Murray, a women’s studies professor at Macquarie University in Australia, describes the practice in specific and narrow terms, using negative value judgments: “feederism is an underground fat sexual practice that involves women who allow themselves to be



submissively force-fed [through] a funnel by a dominant male master, who derives sexual excitement from watching his submissive servant grow fatter and fatter as he forces her to eat more and more” (Murray, 2004:244). It was this quote that introduced me to the topic of feederism. She identifies all “feeders” as men and all “feedees” as women, a problematic assertion without empirical proof.

Murray contradicts Kulick on the issue of immobility.

Disturbingly, men who engage in this sexual fetish (known as ‘feeders’) often force-feed the feedee to the point where she is completely immobilized, so fat she can no longer move, clean herself or leave the house. Once the dominant male feeder has achieved his goal of incapacitating his feedee, he will leave the woman and go and find another who is interested in what is termed ‘erotic weight gain’ (Murray, 2004:244).

She credits Camryn Manheim (1999), an actress who wrote a book about being fat, for the term “erotic weight gain.” While Kulick states that there are *few* “feeders” who want to immobilize their partners, Murray claims this is *often* the case although she does not offer any empirical evidence for her conclusion.

She also writes, “for me, one of those most troubling aspects of the relationship between the dominant male feeder and the submissive female feedee is that it suggests a kind of creationist fantasy for the male, in which he derives sexual pleasure from bringing a monstrous creature into being” (Murray, 2004:245). Suggesting that women who become obese are “monstrous creatures” is simply offensive. Furthermore, to say that these relationships are categorically dominant and submissive without allowing for

variations along a continuum can be misleading. That is, Murray focuses on one extreme version of a feeding relationship.

Murray compares feederism with the practice of “rodeo.” A “rodeo” involves a young man (a cadet in her example) who picks up the fattest woman at a bar, takes her back to his hotel room where, unknown to her, his male comrades are hiding. The man “would then ask her to kneel [blindfolded] on the bed on all fours . . . thinking this was a kinky start to sex” (Murray, 2004:238). The man then calls out to his friends who emerge from their hiding places. “One by one, they would jump on the fat girl’s back, kicking at the soft flesh of her hips and belly, riding her like she was some sort of animal” (Murray, 2004:238). Comparing the two practices of “rodeo” and “feederism” is problematic since rodeo is assaultive and non-consensual while feederism may involve consenting adults.

Kulick (2005) introduces the topic of feederism in his chapter to suggest that “fat pornography” has an audience in “feeders.” Murray (2004) introduces feederism in her article to illustrate that, “the female feedee, like the spectre of the other in Foucault’s beautiful lie, experiences her pleasure almost by proxy. What I mean by this is that her pleasure (if it exists at all) is always already an effect of the aesthetic practices and ideals of the male subject. The fat feedee, like the other, can never actively participate in her own self-cultivation” (Murray 2004:265-6). Both Murray’s (2004) and Kulick’s (2005) references to feederism seem to be little more than attention-getting devices, designed to support arguments not directly related to this topic. Their understandings of feederism do not critically address the varying degrees of feeding relationships that may exist.

**“Big Handsome Men, Bears , and Others: Virtual Constructions of ‘Fat Male Embodiment’” by Monaghan (2005)**

Lee Monaghan is a senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

Monaghan has studied fat male embodiment online. He defines “fat male embodiment” as, “the social meanings and practices constituting male bodies clinically categorized as overweight or obese” (Monaghan, 2005:83). Instead of examining fat bodies as “bad” or “ugly” or examining the “obesity epidemic” or stigma surrounding obesity, Monaghan (2005:82) used qualitative data he gathered from English-speaking cyberspace. He explores positive typifications of fat male embodiment. He found three “generic types of male bodies” with subtypes. Big Handsome Men (BHM), rather than simply measuring their large bodies, engage in processes of accepting and promoting their bodies in heterosexual space. He notes that there is often a romantic or sexual focus with their online involvements (82). Bears, who are distinguishable by full facial hair, and a masculine body usually associated with an aging male body engage in similar processes in homosexual online spaces (82). The third type, “other big/fat males,” are those who are attempting to gain weight, by sharing recipes or participating in eating competitions (87). There is a possible sexual focus where male “feedees” may seek female “feeders” in heterosexual relationships and gay male “gainers” may seek gay male “encouragers.” The purpose of these relationships is to help “derive greater (eroticized) pleasures from eating calorific food and/or accruing body fat. For them, increasing offline body measurements may be cited and framed as indicators of progress” (87).

Feederism fits within the third type of big/fat males because this group is attempting to become larger. Monaghan does not go into details about feederism but he does write:

Whether reference is made to gay or heterosexual oriented cyberspace, emphasis may shift from weight-gain fantasies to the pleasures of eating. Often there is overlap. Either way, dyadic relationships may be sought with supportive cybersociates . . . Gainers form eroticized feeding relationships with Encouragers. Similar relationships are forged in heterosexual space, though participants *may* typify as Feedees and Feeders and call their practice Feederism. (95, emphasis added)

His use of the word “*may*” is commendable in that he leaves room for further research and exploration. Monaghan’s lengthy journal article is informative in terms of examining current online typifications of fat men but he only *mentions* feederism, thus shedding little light on the phenomenon itself.

**“Feederism: A New Sexual Pleasure and Subculture” by Giovanelli and Peluso (2006)**

The most comprehensive academic treatment of the topic of feederism comes from Giovanelli and Peluso (2006), who wrote a chapter on it in the “Handbook of the New Sexualities Studies” edited by Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, and Chet Meeks. They attempt to “address sexual fetishism and sexual subculture by way of a critical dialogue on the topic of feederism” (Giovanelli and Peluso, 2006:309). Their article is theoretical in nature and not based on empirical research. They do not explain how they obtained their information or how they gained their understanding of feederism.

They refer to feederism as “a phenomenon which incorporates the eroticization of body fat and the *act* of feeding, along with disciplined weight gain for participants’ sexual gratification. Individuals engage in feederism in a multiplicity of ways – through the internet, while fantasizing, with their partners” (309).

Individuals exhibit varying levels of commitment to feederism. Some are active participants in what we might consider a 'lifestyle,' while others are interested solely in fantasizing about feederism. Some may never incorporate feederism into their 'in the flesh' sexual practices and behaviors. Whether individuals choose to incorporate feederism into their romantic relationships or strictly their fantasies, it can be understood as a sexual phenomenon that runs the gamut of erotic possibilities. (310)

While Kulick and Murray provide a very narrow definition of feederism these authors identify it as multi-faceted. Overall, they wish to examine if feederism is a sexual fetish, a sexual subculture or both.

Giovanelli and Peluso (2006) use Gamman and Makinen's (1994) discussion of fetishism, a discussion that is strongly influenced by the writings of Sigmund Freud. Freud's use of the term "pathological fetishism" was defined as "occurring when an inanimate object or part of the body becomes the focus of arousal in preference to the person" (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:37). When examining the use of "fetish" beyond Giovanelli and Peluso's (2006) basic treatment, "fetish" is used as a clinical term defined in the psychology, psychotherapy and counseling literature. Within psychology and its various branches, fetishism is identified as a psychological problem which requires diagnosis and treatment. For example, Epstein (1975:303) notes that, "fetishism is a psychopathological state in which an object becomes the primary source of sexual gratification." In a more recent article, Wiederman (2003:316) defines it in the following terms: "fetishism in general refers to the fixation on a nonliving object (such as a particular type of garment) . . . typically the fetish object is necessary or preferred for sexual functioning." Finally, according to the *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, "fetishism involves sexual arousal associated with nonliving objects that occurs primarily among

males” (Hall, 2000:364). These definitions are found within articles whose main purpose is diagnosis of a problem, discuss reasons for it, and provide possible remedies or treatments. Not all fetishes are harmful or illegal: “many of us may have a fixation about an object or a special part of someone’s body at some time in our life but most of us see this as ‘healthy’ not pathological” (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:52). While the term “fetish” has been pathologized, in contemporary usage, “fetish” “has virtually become a blanket term to characterize all erotic fixations or obsessions seen as ‘perverse’” (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:52).

Gamman and Makinen (1994) favour the model suggested by Paul Gedhard who “attempts to refine Freud’s perception about ‘degrees’ of fetishism. He suggests that sexual fetishism can be conceptualized along ‘a continuum of intensities’” (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:38).

Level 1: A slight preference exists for certain kinds of sex partners, sexual stimuli or sexual activity. The term ‘fetish’ should not be used at this level.

Level 2: A strong preference exists for certain kinds of sex partners, sexual stimuli or sexual activity. (Lowest level of fetishism)

Level 3: Specific stimuli are necessary for sexual arousal and sexual performance. (Moderate intensity of fetishism)

Level 4: Specific stimuli takes the place of sex partners. (High level of fetishism). (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:38)

Original or “orthodox” (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:38) definitions of sexual fetish, stemming from Freud, and closest to Level 4 above, focused on a fetishized object such as a shoe or piece of leather. This definition left out the plethora of sexual interests held by many people in their study. “We felt we needed to be able to conceptualize different

stages (and intensities) of sexual fetishism because not all female sexual fetishists we found got all their sexual stimulation from objects” (Gamman and Makinen, 1994:2). This is an appropriate distinction because for feederism to be considered a sexual fetish it must not be defined as the predilection for only an object. Feederism seems to be about more than just fat and food. Because it appears that feederism is about the process of gaining weight it may not fit within the Level 4 definition of sexual fetishism but may fit closer to a Level 2 or Level 3 using this schema. The term “fetish” is a difficult concept to define sociologically partially due to the fact that it has been used within psychology as a diagnosis. While Giovanelli and Peluso (2006:312) assert that “feederism presents itself as more than a mere fetish,” the absence of a clear definition makes it hard to construct feederism as a fetish.

In terms of a sexual subculture, Giovanelli and Peluso (2006:310) have applied Plummer’s (1975) six criteria for determining if feederism is a sexual subculture. Plummer (1975:85) wrote, “individuals facing common ‘sexual’ problems come to evolve shared solutions (through mutual interaction with each other). Norms are generated which structure sexuality and which give support to its participants.” Furthermore the number of participants in the subculture must be great enough that they will or can come in contact with one another (Plummer, 1975:86). This is the first factor affecting the emergence of a subculture. Second, it is not necessary that members are in direct contact with one another: “there are many kinds of sexual experience which do not really require contact with ‘like-minded individuals’ . . . pornophiles do not need contact with other pornophiles” (Plummer, 1975:86). However, groups may meet for other

reasons such as, “the exchange of views and the neutralization of guilt” (Plummer, 1975:86). Third, actors must be able to communicate effectively with one another (Plummer, 1975:86). Fourth, the supply of those interested is enough to sustain the group; that is, “there are enough individuals interested and involved in the behavior to sustain it over time” (Giovanelli and Peluso, 2006:311). In fifth place, the deviance associated with the group must be prolonged rather than short-lived or a one-time occurrence (Plummer, 1975:86). Finally, the sixth factor: “a subculture is unlikely to emerge if the deviation can be readily incorporated into the orthodox pattern of sexuality” (Plummer, 1975:87). This means that the deviation must be seen as different enough from cultural norms to remain a deviation rather than being “incorporated into the dominant sexual institutions” (Plummer, 1975:87).

Giovanelli and Peluso (2006) argue that feederism meets several of Plummer’s criteria for a sexual subculture. It fits because it is widespread enough for individuals to encounter others also interested in the practice. “We know that it is widespread enough for actors to cross state lines *and* continents to engage in feederism through internet websites and chat rooms, and perhaps to meet in person” (Giovanelli and Peluso, 2006:311). While they do not state *how* they *know* this to be true, they *believe* it to be the case. They do not believe that feederism always requires some type of collective action because “an individual may be interested in merely fantasizing about the activity, and many individuals participate in acts of self-induced feederism. In physical space, however, due to the power play involved in feederism between the feeder and the feedee, the behavior often necessitates at least minimal actor contact – be it electronically or in



the flesh” (311). The authors suggest that “many aficionados of feederism” (311) interact online using message boards as well as various websites and print magazines. The continual growth of the internet will allow people to attain group membership and interact electronically (311). However, just because the internet exists does not mean that there are enough people interested in feederism to sustain it as a subculture. Furthermore, as Durkin *et al.* (2006:597) suggest, the internet may actually *create* an interest in something that was not already there: “emergent internet technology thus appears to have the potential to help shape the tastes of many users.” This suggests that more people may become interested in feederism with increased internet usage.

According to Giovanelli and Peluso (2006:311), feederism meets the conditions of the fifth factor because the goal for participants is to increase their own or their partner’s weight over an extended period of time. Finally, in regards to feederism becoming more accepted within the dominant sexual culture: “the presence of body fat is still equated with sexual undesirability, and the act of feeding with the specific intent to increase a partner’s [or one’s own] body size is largely unheard of in dominant sexual practice” (311). Feederism meets Plummer’s final criterion as a deviation that is unlikely to be incorporated into dominant patterns of sexuality because purposeful weight gain is not a common or “normal” sexual practice.

Overall, Giovanelli and Peluso (2006) question whether feederism may be considered a sexual fetish or a sexual subculture. While limited by their lack of empirical research and without stating where they obtained their information about feederism, the authors do

attempt to begin a worthwhile discussion of broader theoretical links. The authors' attempt to discuss feederism as a fetish is useful because it highlights that this is a sexual phenomenon making note that purposeful weight gain is unlikely to soon be incorporated into dominant patterns of sexuality within our society. This demonstrates how those who *do* desire weight gain in themselves or in others are aroused by something outside the norm. By desiring something outside the norm individuals are stigmatized for their difference. Therefore, feederism is better analyzed through the concept of stigma. The authors' discussion of feederism as a sexual subculture illustrates that this is a phenomenon involving people who share a similar characteristic that sets them apart from the social majority and who are attempting to cope with their difference through group involvement.

Overall, the four academic writings discussing feederism barely scratch the surface in terms of understanding the phenomenon. They can all be faulted as discussing a phenomenon with no empirical evidence. While the concepts of fetish and subcultures have been applied to feederism, seeing as how it has been conceptualized as a sexual phenomenon occurring outside the norm of *what most people are doing*, a more appropriate analysis would be to understand how those interested in feederism are stigmatized and how they cope with the stigma.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

While I set out to conduct this study using grounded theory, after further consideration, I did not. My study does not fit within grounded theory for two reasons. While I did begin my research without placing judgments on my respondents in terms of their desires for weight gain as being either “good” / “bad,” “proper” / “improper,” “consensual” / “nonconsensual,” or “healthy” / “pathological,” I did not begin with the “blank page” that grounded theory requires. Grounded theory asks us to avoid any preconceived ideas or assumptions about our topic (Dey, 1999:3). However, as mentioned previously, I began with the impression that Murray’s (2004) assumptions about feederism were incorrect, or at the very least, vastly exaggerated. I began with the inkling that feederism was not (or not entirely) about *dominant men* force feeding *submissive fat women* to the point of *immobility* and then *abandoning* them once they become *incapacitated* only to find a new *victim* and start the cycle again. I wanted to disregard Murray’s (2004) understanding and find out what feederism was *really* about. The second reason that my study does not fit within grounded theory is because within grounded theory a “substantive” theory or theories are to emerge from the data (Dey, 1999:1-2). However, due to the complexity of the phenomenon being studied and the variance found among my respondents’ experiences, a substantive theory did not develop. In fact, what happened was the application of various concepts to the topic *post hoc* such as “fetish,” “identity formation,” and “community” (much of which did not fit within this final draft). So while several participants spoke about feederism as a sexual identity and others spoke about it as a sexual fetish these concepts did not fit nicely together to form a “substantive theory.” There was also variance among the definitions of the terms used with feederism

such as “feedee” and “gainer” and “encourager” and “feeder.” Furthermore, the blurred line between fantasy and reality within this phenomenon made it challenging to develop a “substantive theory” from my data. For these reasons, even though I intended it to be, grounded theory was not the primary methodology employed.

This research is both exploratory and qualitative in nature. There is no past research on feederism from which to spring-board new inquiries. To my knowledge this was the first empirical study into the phenomenon, providing me with the task of gathering preliminary findings. “Exploratory research seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. The goal is to learn ‘What is going on here?’ and to investigate social phenomena without explicit expectations” (Schutt, 2006:14). This is also the goal of symbolic interactionist methodology: attempting to find out what is happening in a given social setting and what meanings the actors associate with their involvements (Jary and Jary, 1991:509). I wanted to find out “what is feederism *really* about?” Being qualitative in nature it explored the smaller details of life “in depth with the goal of gaining insight that may subsequently form the basis for broader generalizations” (Hale, 1995:46).

In line with symbolic interactionism’s preference for intensive interviews<sup>4</sup> with the goal of finding out how participants themselves attach meanings to their actions (Jary and Jary, 1991:509), I conducted 30<sup>5</sup> qualitative interviews over the course of five months

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<sup>4</sup> Intensive interviews are actually preferred second to participant observation within symbolic interactionism’s methodological preferences (Jary and Jary, 1991:509).

<sup>5</sup> I actually conducted thirty-two (32) interviews but two were removed prior to coding and analysis. See below for further discussion.

(September-January 2008). The interviews were semi-structured. I began with a set of interview questions that got molded and tweaked during my interviews. Extra questions were added and questions were also discarded<sup>6</sup> (Berg, 2004:86) making the schedule of questions flexible as the research progressed. During interviews, I added additional probing questions and frequently asked for clarification. After completing approximately five interviews, I had my core questions<sup>7</sup> (see appendix A). This can be best summarized as what Berg calls a “semistandardized interview.”

[It] involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress, that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions. (Berg, 2004:81)

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<sup>6</sup> Demographic questions such as age, children, and country of residence were moved to the end of the interview because it seemed more appropriate to end with those questions than to begin with them. A question about occupation and ethnicity was added to the interviews. The order of the questions about being *active* in feederism was changed because often one question led into another question more appropriately. The question about whether participants placed emphasis on the feeding and food or the weight gain aspect in their definitions of feederism was added because it became a recurring topic of discussion. The question 'Do you consider yourself an active feeder/feedee?' was removed because that question was answered by a previous question. The questions 'To what extent are you "out" about your enjoyment of FAT women/men?' (and interest in feederism) were added because the topic of being “out” was raised early in the data gathering and proved to be an important topic for discussion. Further probing questions were added surrounding the discussion of the term "fetish" as the interviews progressed because it provided more complete responses. The question 'How does this lifestyle differ from other lifestyles?' was replaced with 'What conditions need to be present for “feederism” to be considered a lifestyle?' because it provided more complete and thoughtful responses. The questions about the feeding activities such as hand-feeding, force feeding and belly sex grew from respondents telling me what activities they associated with their involvement in feederism and what they did and did not enjoy. For a small number of interviews I asked the questions 'How would your partner feel if you decided to stop gaining weight? How would this change your relationship?' and 'How do you reply to people who think this is abusive? What are your thoughts on that claim?' when it was appropriate to the discussion or circumstances of the interview.

<sup>7</sup> Three of the first five interviews were conducted over the telephone so I was able to add in any additional questions to the document for the respondent to answer when they were verifying the notes. This ensured consistency in having the new questions answered by those respondents first interviewed before the interview questions became more fixed as interviews progressed.

As my data collection progressed the interview schedule was adapted to more appropriately address the topic being examined making the interviews semistandardized.

### ***The Online Feederism Community***

*Virtual communities focus on any conceivable interest, avocation, or identity. As such, the Internet would seem to provide an unprecedented source of social support for individuals with extremely stigmatized sexual identities. (Durkin, 2004:141)*

The rise of the internet has made a large impact on feederism allowing those interested in it to come together more easily to form a community that may not have been possible before because there may have been too few people in any given geographic location interested in it. The internet provides a means for fellow stigma sufferers (Goffman, 1963:112) to come together. The position of having a stigmatizing characteristic (that is, being sexually aroused by weight gain) is removed within these communities because those present here either share the stigma (“the own”) or are sympathetic to it (“the wise”) (Goffman, 1963:19 and 28). The internet reduces the physical boundaries of membership and anyone with electricity, a computer, and an internet connection can log on and find the community. There are no shortage of quotes that suggest that respondents consider there to be a “feederism community.”

Everyone in *the community* is concerned with health issues. . . It’s really a nurturing, caring relationship; *a community* of respect, love, and nurturing. (Damon, emphasis added)

Most users use Fantasy Feeder or “dime” as porn sites as well as connection with *the community*. (Damon, emphasis added)

We started dating and he would slowly introduce me to famous BBWs online and *the “Dimensions” community*. (Jackie, emphasis added)

For myself, it's all about the weight gain. But I don't see myself as being representative for *the feeder/feedee community*. (Grant, emphasis added)

I'm so used to running in communities with INTELLIGENT people who talk about sex, that it's really kinda frustrating to be in *the feeder community*, where most people (unfortunately) seem to be morons. (Donna, emphasis added)

I might try finding someone through *a gaining community online*. However, I've chatted with people in those *communities* occasionally, and I don't really talk with many people there that I have much in common with, other than the feeding... (Katrina, emphasis added)

I'd say "dms" is more of a size acceptance/all encompassing community and feederism is just a small part of it, but from *the community* I gain a lot of support. (Cathy, emphasis added)

[It's] a safe haven for being a feeder feedee --and [I enjoy] knowing that I'm helping to create *a community* that is safe for others as well. (Henry, emphasis added)

Immobility is an oft-banded-about phrase in *the feederism community*, but really there are all sorts of interesting goalposts and milestones, and it is very much an individual thing. (Rosie, emphasis added)

I do admit yearning for a more intelligent tenor of conversation, wherever I go, and, sadly, *the feederism community* seems rarely able to provide it. (Rosie, emphasis added)

Fat is fun and it's cool to know *there is a community* where you aren't kudded [*sic*] as a weirdo for having the preferences you have. (Adam, emphasis added)

[I am] only [out] to *the online community* who has similar interests. (Perry, emphasis added)

An oversight on my part was not asking respondents how they define the "feederism community" and to describe its parameters. Therefore, I am unsure the extent to which respondents' use of the term "community" reflects the same or similar ideas. It is likely they are all using the term to mean something different. For my purposes the online

feederism community can be described as several websites<sup>8</sup> that are devoted either entirely or partially to feederism. These websites are found by internet users by typing words like: “feederism,” “feedees,” “feeders,” or “erotic weight gain,” into search engines such as google. For example, typing “erotic weight gain” into google<sup>9</sup> displays within the first three entries, the two most well known<sup>10</sup> feederism websites: “Dimensions Online” and “Fantasy Feeder.” When the terms “feederism community” or “online feederism community” are used within this thesis it is referring to “the community” *at large*. This does not suggest that it has a static presence or can be narrowly defined. It should be noted that the online feederism community for the purposes of this thesis refers loosely to a group of websites allowing people to come together to discuss aspects of feederism. “The community” therefore is “the web-space” frequented by a fluid and changing group of people who visit it. A more specific discussion of these websites follows. The online feederism community is an important aspect to this research because I gained my sample using the two main websites available to this community. It is also important in terms of my findings which suggest that the online feederism community aids individuals in coping with their stigma by connecting like-minded individuals (“the own”).

### ***Sampling Method***

In order to try and ascertain the flux, ambiguity and emergent nature of a qualitative exploratory study, this research used multiple methods of sampling. When my initial

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<sup>8</sup> There are many sites provided when one conducts various searches for feederism using a search engine. However, some sites are better than others and this research focuses on two sites: “Dimensions Online” and “Fantasy Feeder”; which will be discussed in further detail.

<sup>9</sup> As of August 13, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> The majority of interview respondents made note that these were the two most well-known websites for the feederism community.



interest in this topic began, I joined the two websites that became the focus of my sampling energies. These sites were chosen because they focus on feederism within heterosexual relationships.<sup>11</sup> I chose to focus my research by considering feederism within heterosexual spaces and relationships due to time constraints and manageability. I recognize that feederism within non-heterosexual contexts may differ greatly. While not exclusively so, the majority of relationships described on the two target websites appear to be heterosexual.<sup>12</sup> I spent much time lurking on these sites to become familiar with these online communities: “ethnographers in cyberspace can, of course, lurk in a way that face-to-face ethnographers cannot readily achieve . . . [they] can simply merge invisibly with all the other lurkers in an online setting” (Hine, 2000:48). I loitered on these sites for months before taking any action. My lurking consisted of: reading current and past posts;<sup>13</sup> examining who posted frequently and had on-topic and insightful comments to make; reading all or several pages of other posts made by the most frequently active members; examining the various types of topics discussed and coming to learn what was acceptable and unacceptable conduct on these boards; becoming familiar with the type of language and lingo used in posts; determining who I wanted to speak with further about my topic and who I wanted to interview. I made a file with specific quotes from the members’ posts and saved it with their username so I could find them to request an interview. Besides the discussion areas of the sites I also examined other areas containing articles and fantasy stories, personal ads, and member-submitted pictures. The two websites (Dimensions Online and Fantasy Feeder) were chosen because every other

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the websites “Belly Builders” and “Bigger City,” were excluded because they focus on homosexual relationships between men.

<sup>12</sup> For example, people would often refer to heterosexual constructs such as portraying themselves as a woman and referring to their partner as their “boyfriend” or “husband.”

<sup>13</sup> I would estimate that I read over three-hundred forum posts and replies during my research.

website that mentioned feederism always noted these two as being devoted entirely (in the case of Fantasy Feeder) or partially (Dimensions Online) to those interested in feederism.<sup>14</sup> In order to understand my sampling method it is important for me to provide an overview of both websites.

### **Dimensions Online: “dms”**

Once full university ethics clearance was granted on August 21, 2007, I began to seek potential participants. During the first week of September I made my first contacts and started interviewing the second week in September. During this time I focused my attention on Dimensions Online, originally the website of a now defunct American magazine catering to the plus size community. It contains stories,<sup>15</sup> articles,<sup>16</sup> personal ads, and photos to its fat friendly, size acceptance, and fat loving<sup>17</sup> community subscribers.<sup>18</sup> The original hard-copy magazine published 88 issues between 1984 and the final issue printed in April 2002. The magazine stopped production due to cost

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<sup>14</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup> 2008, Fantasy Feeder had 13,629 registered members. However, this number is misleading because it does not indicate how many of those members are active. Because accounts are not deleted due to inactivity this means that people could have created accounts but never use the site. Also, it does not take into account how many users are visiting the site, reading content but not participating and therefore, are not registered members. On May 22, 2008 the website owner of the “Dimensions” website replied to my email asking for user statistics. He wrote: “There are just under 20,000 officially registered users. How many are active at any given time is hard to say. At the bottom of the main page, there are usually between 600 and 1000 users on at any given time. As for overall traffic, we’re in the top 100 of 2,100 large boards listed at big-boards.com. We also generate so much traffic that Dimensions alone requires an entire high-powered dedicated server all to itself.”

<sup>15</sup> For example, fat-friendly stories entitled, “Food Games: A Story of Food, Fantasies, and Sex” (Dimensions, 1995:46), “Fast Majinkle Without Limits” (Dimensions, 2000:42)

<sup>16</sup> For example, titles of fat-friendly articles include: “Exercise and the Fat Person” (Dimensions, 2000:17), “Outlook: Fat & Aging” (Dimensions, 2000:12), “Too Fat for Sex?” (Dimensions, 1995:13), “Romance with Dimensions!” (Dimensions, 1995:45), “The Thin Goddess: Madison Avenue Greed” (Dimensions, 1995:15).

<sup>17</sup> The terms “fat friendly,” “size acceptance,” and “fat loving” refer to people who accept fat people, admire fat people, adore fat people, and appreciate largersized bodies. In these spaces fat people are made to feel welcome, appreciated, adored, accepted, and even sexy.

<sup>18</sup> The magazine’s byline is: “Where Big is Beautiful.” The later issues have the following at the top of the front cover: the magazine for plus-size women and their admirers. Below the publishing information it says, “Dimensions is published for the support and educational benefit of people with a preference for large figure, as a source of news and information, and as a forum for ideas, experiences, and opinions.”

constraints. In 1995, the magazine began an online website. While the website and forums have changed servers and appearance several times over the years, it is still functioning and very active today. Apart from the active and current discussion forum where I spent my time and the updated news-ticker on the opening page, the “dms” (Dimensions Online) website houses archives of fat-friendly articles,<sup>19</sup> stories,<sup>20</sup> pictures, and material<sup>21</sup> as a type of static library for the fat and fat admiring community. I began my search for participants on the “dms” forums rather than at Fantasy Feeder because it appeared to me that there were more members on this site who appeared to be discussing more relevant topics more thoroughly.

I started in the Dimensions online forums. The “dms” forums are organized by forum categories. For example, there are forums called: The Lounge, which discusses “fun, games, and off-topic stuff,”<sup>22</sup> the Health Forum, “for the discussion and pursuit of optimal health at any size;”<sup>23</sup> the Weight Loss Surgery Controversy forum states that, “we’re against WLS. If you must talk about it, do it here.”<sup>24</sup> There are also forums for geographic locations such as: West, East, Canada, Europe, Other Areas. The third type

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<sup>19</sup> Website articles include: ‘Filling the Void: A Guide to the Fattening Process,’ ‘Compulsive and Binge Eating,’ ‘In the Name of Fat,’ ‘Why I Prefer Big Men,’ ‘FAs get no respect’ (Many of these articles appeared in the original hard copy magazine at some point. (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008)

<sup>20</sup> There are over 1,500 stories on the Dimensions website. Some titles include: ‘Goddess,’ ‘Fashionably Fat,’ ‘Kelly’s Belly,’ ‘A Sizeable Marriage [sic],’ ‘Tania Looks in the Mirror.’ (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008)

<sup>21</sup> Examples of other material includes: notes from the editor, many picture galleries of famous fat people and morphs for example, a listing of fat friendly songs including their lyrics, “success stories from couples who met thanks to Dimensions, and a place to buy back issues of the print magazine. (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Example topics include: ‘Midwest road trip: I need your help!,’ ‘Daily PET PEEVE,’ ‘The Movie Quote Game,’ ‘The Official Joke Thread,’ ‘Best Birthday Yet.’ (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008)

<sup>23</sup> Example topics include: ‘Eat More, Weigh Less,’ ‘What are your favorite workouts?,’ ‘7 Reasons Women Lose Their Hair’, ‘Bicycle recommendations needed.’ (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008)

<sup>24</sup> Example topics include: ‘WLS Topic on Daytime Soap,’ ‘Weight Loss & Chronic Pain,’ ‘Any reliable studies on WLS failure rate?,’ ‘Another WLS death,’ ‘My WLS Journey.’ (Dimensions Online, April 16, 2008)

of forums are archives from older forum versions which people can still read and to which they can reply. The active “Weight Board” has recently been subdivided into two separate sub-forums: “Fat sexuality” which is for “discussion[s] of sexuality issues pertaining to fat people and their admirers” and “Erotic Weight Gain” which is for “the discussion[s] of weight gain issues and fantasies.” The “Weight Board” was divided into two separate sub-forums so that topics surrounding fat sexuality were not confused with discussions of weight gain issues and fantasies. Fat sexuality is not to be seen as synonymous with weight gain. That is, there are many people interested in fat sexuality who are not interested in erotic weight gain. The “Weight Board” was divided to make this distinction clear.

I used the “Erotic Weight Gain” forum as the means to find potential participants. I read threads with titles that included: “Weight Gain Shake Recipes,” “Weight Gain in Real Life,” “How do you do a feeding?,” “I’m new! and I’m gaining!,” “Ideas for weight-gain goals, non-practicing feeders,” “Feeding: Hands on or hands off?,” and “Force-feeding post.” From reading the posts in the threads (posts are replies within the thread topic by various members and/or the original poster) I was able to choose who I wanted to send an email to. At first, because many different people with varying degrees of interest and experience with feederism visit the forums, I chose members who openly stated that they were “feeders” or “feedees” or simply that they were attempting to gain weight. This way I was not sending messages to people who had not explicitly said they were interested in or involved in feederism. I used the internal messaging system at “dms” to send my introductory emails (see Appendix B). The internal messaging system works

like email but members visit the “dms” site to read their messages. Members are notified in their regular email accounts that they have a private message waiting for them at the “dms” forums. It also sends a copy of that message to them. I kept track of each person to whom I sent an introductory message to ensure that I did not send them more than one. As Burgess *et al.* (2001:10) suggest for online recruiting, “the preferred method is to send an introduction to the research and an invitation to participate, instead of sending an unsolicited questionnaire.”

Within “dms” it is easy to view all posts by each member. If I wanted to read more about what a particular member thought or wrote I could easily pull and read all the posts from that member. I read at least one post per member but in most cases I read at least ten posts made by each member before contacting them. In some cases, I read fifty or more posts made by the same member. This was very helpful in gathering an idea of which members I wanted to contact. It allowed me to target specific people who stated an interest in feederism rather than having to send messages more randomly to non-interested parties and risk annoying people with my messages. It also allowed me to see if the member was consistent in how they portrayed themselves within multiple posts. This purposive sampling approach (Berg, 2004:36) afforded me 11 participants of the 32 members I contacted in this manner at “dms.” Most often if members were not interested they would simply not reply to my introductory message. Only once did I receive a “no thank you” response. To date,<sup>25</sup> my member account indicates that six of those initial emails I sent have yet to be read through the “dms” site. After participants replied to my initial email, I sent them the link to my information consent letter (See

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<sup>25</sup> May 21, 2008

Appendix C). The majority of times once participants received the consent link they agreed to participate. In total, there were only five potential participants who received the consent link who did not agree to participate (all sampling methods considered). After participating in my research I sent each respondent a follow-up thank you letter email (see Appendix D) which included a link to some crisis hotline phone numbers in case they were needed (see Appendix E). Using the “dms” website worked well for me in that I did not run into any problems with people questioning my authenticity or sincerity.

### **Fantasy Feeder**

The same type of sampling technique was used on the Fantasy Feeder site. The forums are organized in a similar fashion, but with considerably fewer forums. Apart from the forums, the Fantasy Feeder website houses member profiles (including pictures and videos), positive articles on fat and weight gain, member contributed fictional stories, a personal/dating section and live chat. The main difference between “dms” and Fantasy Feeder is that while the former is fat-friendly and caters to all fat people and their admirers, Fantasy Feeder is specifically geared to feederism. While “dms” members who are not interested in feederism can still wander into the “erotic weight gain” forum and can even post messages there, this is unlikely to happen at Fantasy Feeder. In other words, “dms” has members that are both “the own” and “the wise” (Goffman, 1963:19 and 28). Those “sympathetic others” who are not interested in feederism but still choose to post comments in the “erotic weight gain” forum do so as “the wise” in that they are

accepting of the practice and the people who are involved or interested in it.<sup>26</sup> The same is also true at Fantasy Feeder, although it is more likely that you would not find someone who is not interested in some aspect of feederism on the Fantasy Feeder site. The member messaging system at Fantasy Feeder works in a similar fashion to that of “dims.” However, at Fantasy Feeder members do not receive notification in their regular email accounts of messages waiting for them on the site. This means that members could have private messages waiting for them at Fantasy Feeder that unless they return to the site they would never read. The technique described above only provided me two participants out of eight initial messages sent. I sent fewer messages on this website because the site is less active in terms of participation on the discussion forum. For example, sometimes a forum post on a given topic only had one or two replies on this site whereas at “dims” the same type of post may receive ten or more replies. At Fantasy Feeder it was harder to do any background research on the user before contacting them. It was harder to find participants who had discussed numerous topics within the forums by looking at all their posts. I felt that I was not able to get as good an indication of one’s identity at Fantasy Feeder as I was with the more active participants on the Dimensions forums.

Another method used from Fantasy Feeder was adding people to my IM (Instant Messaging) program, in this case, Yahoo. Each member on Fantasy Feeder has a profile (this is also the case on “dims” but it is not emphasized in the same way). Members’ profiles often have their IM names or addresses published. This being public

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<sup>26</sup> Forum posts are monitored by “moderators” to ensure they are respectful. This means that if someone came into the “erotic weight gain” forum and posted judgmental and unaccepting comments about feederism, their post could be deleted and their account could be suspended.

information, I was able to add people who interested me to my Yahoo IM. The reverse was also true. Members who ran across my profile were also able to add me to their IM. This method afforded me one participant.

At neither site did I ask permission of website owners to contact “their” members. I did not want to draw attention to my presence because I was not planning on sending numerous messages. During my lurking time on these forums I quickly came to learn that “total outsiders” that come into these discussions forums requesting participation in various ways are generally shunned. A “total outsider” would be someone who has not participated or contributed in the forums (a tracking system notes and counts each person’s posts)<sup>27</sup> for a considerable amount of time. A “total outsider” is a complete unknown, someone who may have been lurking for a long time but has never contributed to the forum discussions. So when someone of this nature enters the forums and asks for participation it is looked down upon very strongly. In the recent past, the media have attempted on more than one occasion to make participation requests within these forums for various talk shows and television programs. Since members of these forums have participated in such media portrayals and felt they were misrepresented, requests for participation are not well received within these forums. These “total outsiders” are seen as greedy self-serving individuals who are simply using this “sexual kink for a juicy story.”

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<sup>27</sup> As of August 2008 I was able to record 12 of my respondent’s total post count. Total Posts: (1) 595; (2) 4,021; (3)1,926; (4)3,128; (5)1,807; (6)208; (7)13; (8)2,667; (9)2,080; (10)785 (11) 926 (12) 1,059. This is an average of 1,601 total posts per user. This number is misleading because (a) this figure only considers 12 respondents; (b) members sometimes change user names/account and may have done so recently which would effect their total post count or they may have changed user names/accounts and be posting under a new name that I am unaware of; and (c) total post counts take into consideration all posts made to the forums which may or may not be added to a conversations on feederism related topics.



You might have heard by now about the distrust 'Dimensions' has for people who want to study [th]em . . . I feel bad for you but you have to realize, people have been burned in the past, especially by two documentaries in England . . . I was pretty distrusting (as you know at first) but I know you're genuine . . . What you're doing is very different, it's just the approach people don't like . . . that we're guinea pigs and all . . . I'm all yuck at the possibility of being played up for shock value. (Derek)

Because researchers and, more often, media representatives have misrepresented people on these forums, "total outsiders" are viewed very skeptically. Even my "university credentials" as a "researcher" did not assure me that my presence would be welcome. For these reasons I chose not to publicize my presence as a researcher or my research pursuits through mass emails. Nor did I ever post a public forum thread or message to recruit potential participants on these sites. I simply used the targeted messaging technique described above. This was not an issue on "dims." However, an interesting incident occurred on Fantasy Feeder. Even though I only sent eight initial messages, and this speaks to why I did not send more, two of those members took to discussing my legitimacy and the authenticity of my research in the public forum (see Appendix F). Burgess *et al.* (2001:21) suggest that, "users tend to be suspicious of unsolicited mailings" and this was true in this case. After a couple of calm replies from me and a moderator the topic was put to rest. However, of the members who read this thread, three participants contacted me and an additional participant was referred to me. In the end, the public discovery of my research worked to my benefit. Perhaps I could have established my credentials, assured the forums of the legitimacy of the project, and hoped I would have been positively received and gained further research participants from publicizing my presence. Rather, I took the quiet targeted approach in fear of being

completely cast aside as yet another “total outsider” using these forums to create a “juicy story.” In the end, Fantasy Feeder, provided me with six participants.

### **Other Approaches**

I was able to obtain five direct referrals from participants using snowball sampling (Berg, 2004:36). Sometimes a participant was able to refer me to their partner and sometimes I was referred to friends or other acquaintance. I also used some purposive sampling which “ensure[d] that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes [were] included in the study” (Berg, 2004:36). An example of this was the topic of immobility. Even Murray (2004) notes immobility as occurring within feederism. However, up until a certain point I thought the “immobility issue ” might be more of an urban legend. However, it was important to me once I discovered a woman who claimed to be immobile that I try to find other participants to corroborate this aspect of feederism. For this reason, I purposefully sought out, towards the end of my research, another individual who was interested in this extreme version of feederism. I thoroughly searched the forum posts at Fantasy Feeder and “dms” on the topic of immobility to see if anyone was claiming to be immobile in their posts. I also asked a couple of respondents whom I had previously interviewed if they knew of anyone they could refer me to who was immobile or nearly immobile. I was able, after much waiting, to interview the participant’s partner. Referrals to partners was a sampling technique that allowed me to better understand the dynamics of feeding relationships from having interviewed both partners. In addition to the sources mentioned above, seven additional participants were recruited from various personal blogs, personal websites, and Myspace.

Myspace proved to be an interesting tool. Myspace is a social networking tool. It revolves around making connections with people and staying in touch with them. There is a thriving “community” for not only fat admiration on Myspace but also for weight gain pursuits. I was able to join Myspace, establish my profile, and within minutes establish a connection with several people who were attempting to gain weight. I joined a few groups such as: “feederism 101” and “feeder/feedee paradise.” From there, I could view member lists and, depending on the user’s level of security, read several profiles. I went through these groups and added people to my “friends” list that either had names such as “feeder” or “feedee” or “fatty” or whose profile suggested an interest in weight gain. Adding friends means that you make a request and then the user decides whether to accept or deny your request. I made my tag line on this site read: “I wanna talk to feeders and feedees!” Within a day, I had my first Myspace “friends.” Having a Myspace “friend” means that you can view their profile, pictures, videos, blogs, and comments from other friends (if they have such things on their account). It also means that you can view their friends’ list and acquire more friends. This is social networking at its best! Myspace also has an internal messaging system that notifies you at your regular email account when you have messages or friend requests waiting for you. At the time of completing my data collection and interviews I had obtained 86 new “friends.”<sup>28</sup>

MySpace is one place where I did post a “bulletin,” towards the end of my research:

From: ‘feederism’  
Date: 26 Nov 2007 9:21  
Subject: any feeders and feedees?

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<sup>28</sup> These people were never contacted for interviews because I was finishing collecting my data by this point and was specifically seeking participants who desired real life levels of immobility as a goal.

I'm looking for feedees and feeders to talk to about their experiences with weight gain or encouraging of weight gain. I am specifically interested in talking with ppl. who desire real life levels of immobility as a goal. Let me know if you know of anyone. Thanks and have a great day!

Bulletins are displayed on your friend's home page (the first page they see when they log in). So this means that potentially my 86 "friends" read this message. From this, I received one participant. I also used the initial message strategy as described above on a couple of occasions to very specific people whose profiles talked about feederism. I obtained one participant using this method.

Overall, the strategies I used to obtain my 30 participants worked very well. Given that people interested in feederism do not hold annual conventions, subscribe to a certain type of magazine, nor are they formally members of any one particular organization, finding participants could have been extremely challenging. Not only are participants in this community not socially organized for real life meetings and conventions, they are also few and far between. They span the globe but are few in numbers. Given these restrictions, acquiring a sample for such research could have been problematic. However, the approach that I used allowed me to elicit the participation of a good range of participants in this community. Below there is a discussion of my actual participants in terms of their identifying categories and demographics.

### ***Process***

Once participants had agreed to the online information and consent letter by filling out the form at the bottom, I received an email notifying me of their willingness to participate. In most cases, I then communicated with them via email to arrange an

appropriate time for the interview given our varying schedules and time zones. If the interview arrangements were not made via email then they were made via IM conversations. Participants had the option of either conducting a telephone interview or an IM interview. Seven interviews were conducted over the telephone and the remaining 23 interviews were conducted over IM. Stieger and Goritz (2006:553) note, “an inconvenience for researchers is the existence of different families of IM programs that cannot be used to talk to each other. To avoid a bias towards a certain IM program, researchers should use several IM programs when conducting interviews.” Therefore, I downloaded and used all three of the most popular IM programs. Three interviews were conducted using AIM. One interview was conducted using MSN. The remaining 19 IM interviews were conducted using Yahoo!<sup>29</sup>

### **IM Interviews**

Twenty-three interviews were conducted over IM. IM interviews ranged from one hour to six hours in length. The average interview took just over two hours to complete. IM interviews were fairly structured. I copied my questions into the chat window from my document and the participant typed their responses. I would often ask follow-up questions to their responses to ensure my understanding or to clarify what they wrote. These probes allowed me to better understand participants’ experiences and gain richer descriptions. I began each interview by reminding participants that they would remain anonymous in my study and that they could skip questions if they so wished. In no case did a participant skip a question. At the beginning of the interview I established a time frame with them to ensure that if they had an appointment or other commitment our

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<sup>29</sup> AIM is AOL’s instant messaging system. MSN is Microsoft’s instant messaging system. Yahoo! is Yahoo!’s instant messaging system.

interview would not interfere. In most cases, the interviews were completed in one session (all at once). On four occasions, it took multiple sessions to complete the interview. This was usually due to family or work commitments. All interviews were done in less than three sessions and did not span more than two weeks between communication intervals.

The main benefit with the IM interviews was that I had a ready-made transcript of the interview. These were saved and then later imported into NVivo 7 for organization, coding, and analysis. Many respondents chose this method over the telephone because it was comfortable for them in terms of remaining anonymous or simply in terms of being able to type their answers rather than having to verbalize them. Many, if not all, participants “do” IMing (chat over the internet) to friends, family, or even strangers on a regular basis so it was a method familiar to everyone with whom I spoke.

### **Internet Research**

Past studies that have been conducted on sexuality using the internet provide insight and support the methodology adopted here. Burgess, *et al.* (2001:6) examined what they see to be key methodological concerns involved in web-based studies of sexuality. They applied their methodological concerns to the issue of involuntary celibacy. They describe the benefits of internet research:

The World Wide Web offers a unique and heretofore largely untapped opportunity for sexuality researchers. Internet research has the potential to reach a wide array of respondents, can be conducted quickly and inexpensively, and eliminates many of the problems of in-person mail or phone interviews. (Burgess, *et al.*, 2001:5)

In addition to these advantages the authors indicate that the internet is ideal for sexuality research when the population of inquiry is difficult-to-reach, hidden, or stigmatized (Burgess, et al., 2001:6). The internet provides researchers with the opportunity to reach certain groups otherwise unavailable to researchers, such as those involved or interested in feederism. Furthermore, “internet research is especially suited to exploratory or descriptive research: projects that do not require representative samples” (Burgess, et al., 2001:25).

Lamb (1998:124) conducted online research into cybersex: “one of the advantages of communication in cyberspace is that one can adopt any identity one wishes.” Furthermore, “because text-based CMC filters out cues such as voice and physical appearance online communicators are theoretically free to perform any identity, gendered or otherwise, that they can imagine” (Herring and Martinson, 2004:426). This is actually a disadvantage to my study because it suggests that people may not be their authentic and truthful self online. In his research, Lamb created multiple identities for himself and chatted with users of a sexually oriented gay youth chatroom. He classified those he spoke with into three different categories: the browsers, the cruisers, and the pornographers (126). Lamb’s study illustrates that people can make up personas and act out fictitious identities online. This creates a problem for my research because I have no way of knowing if the people I interviewed, online, or over the telephone even, are being honest with me. Because people can create personas online I may have interviewed one’s “feeder” or “feedee” persona rather than another persona. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that because fantasyplays such an important part in feederism, it

is hard to know for certain if I received accounts of a respondent's actual experiences, desires, and thoughts or simply their fantasies.

In terms of conducting research over the internet, there appears to be more written about interviewing through email or internet surveys (see Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002; James, and Busher, 2006; Fricker and Schonlau, 2002) than research conducted by interviewing over instant messaging such I have done in this research. However, Stieger and Goritz (2006) did conduct research on IM interviewing. They used a web-based survey and then verified that against IM interviews with the same respondents one year later. Their web-based survey found that 28.9% (n = 210) of respondents have pretended to be somebody else in an IM conversation. They also found that 17.6% (n = 128) of respondents indicated having lent their account to another person (554). This suggests the possibility that while interviewing over IM, respondents may be falsifying their identities. However, the authors suggest that given these relatively low numbers, "the likelihood that the researcher hits upon one of those instances by chance is much smaller. Moreover, in the context of scientific interviews, respondents probably have fewer reasons to disguise their identity than with personal usage of IM" (Stieger and Goritz, 2006: 555). Overall, when comparing internet researching techniques these authors found that "when the choice is between a WWW survey and IM interviews, the use of IM is recommended if one or more of the following criteria apply: (1) the study is short, (2) complex and qualitative questions need to be asked, (3) a high response rate is required, and (4) a Web server and programming skills are not available" (Stieger and Goritz, 2006:558). Online IM



interviews serve a useful purpose in some studies the deal with sensitive topics such as feederism.

### **Telephone Interviews**

Telephone interviews were conducted with seven participants. Telephone interviews lasted between one and four hours. Participants gave me a home, work, or cell phone number where I could reach them at an agreed upon time. I used a telephony program called Skype<sup>30</sup> to make these calls inexpensively using my computer and a headset. During telephone conversations I asked the same questions as during the IM interviews and took notes of participants' answers using a pen and paper. After each telephone interview I typed the questions and answers into a document. I then sent this document back to the participant via email for their verification. This allowed the participant to check my notes, to answer additional questions added since their interview, and to add any additional information they felt was missing. If I had additional questions that came to me during the typing of the notes or questions that had been missed during the interview, I highlighted these so that the participant was able to answer them directly within the document. Six of the seven participants<sup>31</sup> verified the interview notes and returned them to me; in most cases, within one week. This approach worked very well because I received a hard copy of the interview that had been verified for accuracy by the participants themselves. I then imported these interviews into NVivo for organization, coding, and analysis.

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<sup>30</sup> Skype allows users to make telephone calls from their computer to other Skype users free of charge, or to landlines and cell phones for a fee. I had an annual flat rate subscription to SkypeOut to make calls within North America and bought additional credits on my account to make phone calls overseas.

<sup>31</sup> The one participant who did not return the document to me was still included in all aspects of the data collection, analysis and findings as per the notes I made.

Participants who chose a telephone interview over the IM method did so for various reasons. Some chose this method because they did not want to type their responses. Others chose this method in order to save time, thinking that an IM interview would take longer than a telephone interview. One interview participant, Damon, explained that the reason he chose the telephone interview was that he wanted his authenticity to be established and felt this was easier done through voice communication.

### **Coding**

After I had completed the majority of my interviews, I began to consider how to code my interview data.

[The] identification of properties or coding refers to the identification of an idea, event, theme, or common property that identified the content of a bit. As researchers code data, they are methodically labeling events and behaviours, structures, and experiences, for further analysis . . . The researcher is the essential element of the coding activity; this alone reaffirms the interpretative nature of research. (Kirby, *et al.*, 2006:226)

After speaking with several professors and graduate student colleagues I decided that I would obtain a student license for NVivo 7<sup>32</sup> to help me organize and code my data<sup>33</sup>.

In NVivo7, I set up tree nodes using my interview questions as a guideline. The questions which were asked became the categories while the various answers that were given became the properties of the category. For example, one tree node (a category)

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<sup>32</sup> QSR NVivo Version 7.0.281.0 SP4 at <http://www.qsrinternational.com/>

<sup>33</sup> I began by downloading the one month trial version from the internet and then purchased a twelve-month student license. I taught myself how to use the software (the parts I decided I needed to know) in about five (5) hours of watching the basic video tutorials and reading the help documentation and manuals.

was “initial involvement.” The nodes that fall under this tree are the properties: early childhood, magazines, internet, or through a partner. As I coded the interviews in mostly sequential order I developed my tree nodes by adding additional categories and properties as themes arose in an inductive manner (Kirby, *et al.*, 2006:226). I was also able to add in satellite categories (Kirby, *et al.*, 2006:225) which were data that were unrelated to other data. An example of a satellite category was: ‘body shape’ where I placed bits of data where participants made comments about body shape preferences which were not related to other categories. At the end of coding I had approximately 90 nodes (see appendix G for the summary of my nodes).

In order to analyze my data I wanted to separate various themes in terms of how different feeding identities spoke about a topic. Kirby *et al.* (2006:233), refer to this as cross-referencing to look for patterns. For example, I wanted to know if those who call themselves “feeders” define feederism differently from those who identity as “feedees.” In order to do this I ran matrix queries which then pulled all the coding for “defining feederism” and separated it by identity. I ran multiple matrix queries to examine how respondents felt on a given topic according to their feeding identity. This allowed me to see various links as far as commonalities and differences were concerned. Apart from matrix queries, I also used simple queries to search all interviews for various key phrases or wording. Overall, NVivo proved to be a very useful tool in terms of organizing large amounts of data in a simplified way and then allowing me to manipulate the data.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

As Berg (2004:59-60) writes, “one of the interesting ethical elements of Web-based research is that it is potentially far more anonymous than many other types of invasive data collecting strategies. Thus, a greater sense of security and anonymity may be permitted for some research subjects.” My participants, for the most part, remained completely anonymous to me. Consent forms were submitted electronically online and participants only had to provide an email address and a name (be it their real name or an alias) to complete the form. In many cases, I did not learn the real first name of participants unless they chose to disclose it to me. In addition, I assigned a study alias for each participant during the coding and analysis of data so that they would remain anonymous.

### **Being a Female BBW Researcher in Cyberspace**

I was often asked by my respondents to disclose my involvement or interest in the topic either prior to an interview, during, or even after the interview. Participants were curious about my personal interest in feederism, if I identified as a “feedee” or “feeder,” and why I chose the topic. I was honest that my interest in feederism was research-based rather than personal in nature. I explained that as a fat woman myself I cared about the topic and how it is understood. Within these forums and during my interviews, I personally identified as a BBW (Big Beautiful Woman). However, given the sexual nature of the topic being discussed during interviews, it is likely that my gender *and* my identity as a fat woman played a role in how my participants responded to me. David Waskul’s (2002) study into Televideo Cybersex suggests similar issues to the ones I confronted.

At one level, continuing an interview with a participant who is merely ‘getting off’ from being watched during the process of data collection raises ethical questions. In these circumstances, I am no longer just a researcher; I am a participant in an erotic episode regardless of my actual intent, action, and awareness. . . . In doing this kind of research, one must be prepared for situations like these. Playfulness, flirtation, and promiscuous online sex is exactly what this study focuses on, and therefore I could not expect to remove those elements from the data collection process and still claim to be studying the same thing. I can only imagine how much more difficult this research might have been if I were a female. (Waskul, 2002:209)

Because participants were discussing sexual situations, relationships, or even sexual fantasies, it is possible that participants were using our interaction as interviewer and interviewee as a method of sexual stimulus for themselves. While I did not feel that participants were literally “getting off” during our interviews as Waskul did during his study, (e.g. there were no long unexplained pauses during interviews, nor did participants type so slow as to be suspect of using one hand for typing and one hand for genital stimulation), it is possible that some of the topics discussed were sexually arousing to participants.

As a final comment, scholars cannot conduct honest firsthand research on sexual behavior and not confront their own sexuality. Admittedly, I was naive to this fact during data collection. In retrospect, it is obvious that I used my role as ‘sociologist,’ and to a lesser degree ‘husband,’ to bracket my sexuality and suspend it from the context of my investigations in televideo cybersex. I am left to wonder if my research would not have been better if I were a participant, knowing it would have been much different. But even so, it would be doubly naive to suggest that my sexuality did not influence the people who chose to participate in this study, the questions I asked them, the responses they gave me, the data I have chosen to include in this article, and how I have framed my discussions of it. (Waskul, 2002:210)

I believe that being aware of these issues is of pivotal importance. Not only my gender but also my sexuality as a woman and as a fat woman may have affected the interview process. These three examples, from the data, highlight just how aware my participants were of my fat female sexual identity:

*As a BBW, even if you never experiment with feederism, you owe it to a loving partner sometime to let them fuck your belly. (Derek)*

*I mean to say that just because I fantasize about installing a supercharger in my 93 'stang doesn't make me a mechanic. Just because I fantasize about stroking your turgid abdomen while teasing your lips with another delectable morsel doesn't make me your feeder. (Byron)*

*I may convert you yet! It would give me a thrill ... Believing that I was convincing you to become a feedee...that would thrill me. (Perry)*

My gender and my identity as a BBW, as Waskul (2002) notes, may have influenced who responded to my emails, the questions I chose to ask, how participants chose to answer, and how I have framed my entire thesis.

### ***Participants***

The population from which my sample was drawn included individuals who not only had internet access but who also frequented two specific websites (Dimensions and Fantasy Feeder). While internet usage in Canada remains quite accessible, “income, education, age and the presence of children in the household [still] all influence internet use” (Statistics Canada, 2005).<sup>34</sup> Those with higher incomes, higher education levels and

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<sup>34</sup> “Canada's digital divide (the gap in the rate of Internet use among certain groups of people) still exists, according to CIUS [Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2005] data. About 88% of adults with household incomes of \$86,000 or more used the Internet last year, well above the proportion of 61% among adults living in households with incomes below \$86,000. Similarly, 80% of adults with at least some post-secondary education used the Internet, compared with just under one half (49%) of adults with less education. Canadians between the ages of 18 and 44 (85%) were over one and a half times more likely to

children in their households access the internet more often than those with lower incomes, from lower educational backgrounds and those without children living with them. Burgess *et al.* (2001:8) suggest that 85%-90% of internet users are under the age of 55 and between 30%-40% are college graduates. The general demographic of internet usage impacts my research because the internet was the only means through which I found my participants.

My purposive sampling approach (Berg, 2004:36) allowed me to “pick and choose” whom I wanted to contact for potential participation. Due to this my sample is actually quite varied in terms of whether one was interested in the gaining or encouraging side of feederism. I did not want to have an over-representation of any one feeding identity (e.g. “feeders”) nor one gender. Seventeen men participated and 13 women. All of them were English speaking. Two participants identified as bisexual and the rest as heterosexual.<sup>35</sup> Most participants were employed full time except for two who were unemployed at the time of the interview. There were also five full time students (see appendix H for further demographic profiles). Eleven participants were single and 19 of the participants were married or in relationships at the time of the interview. Four participants (two women and two men) had either obtained a PhD (two) or were working towards its completion (two). This number could be higher as I did not directly ask participants their highest level of education. This seems like an atypically high number of PhD candidates or

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use the Internet than those 45 years of age and older (50%). The presence of children under 18 years in the household is also associated with a higher rate of Internet use among adults. About 81% of persons in households with children used the Internet, compared to only 61% of persons in households without children” (Source: Stats Canada, August 15, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> It was a methodological decision to include only people who identified as having relationships with people of the opposite sex (therefore, excluding homosexuals). This was done because I needed to narrow my focus and comparing ‘feederism’ within heterosexual relationships to ‘feederism’ occurring within homosexual relationships was beyond the scope and purpose of this study.

recipients for such a small sample. All participants identified as Caucasian except for two who identified as Black. Four of the eight female “gainers”/“feedees” run member-pay websites.<sup>36</sup> Table 1 displays respondent’s main feeding identities (definitions for these terms can be found within the findings section). The following tables display other key demographic information about respondents.

**Table 1: Primary Feeding Identity of Participants**

<b>Primary Feeding Identity</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
Gainers (including: feedees & fantasy feedees) <i>Sonya, Cathy, Hailey, Brianna, Donna, Odette, Rosie, Grant, Patricia, Jackie, Harold, Stewart</i>	12 (40%)
Encouragers (including: feeders & fantasy feeders) <i>Susan, Jane, Katrina, William, Derek Adam, Perry, Brandon, Damon, Dewayne, Jeffrey Calvin, Lenny, Randy, Henry, Shawn, Byron, Brittany</i>	18 (60%)

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<sup>36</sup> Member-pay websites referred to here cater to fat admirers and more specifically to “feeders” and/or “encouragers.” They are sexually explicit websites which focus on meagerly clothed or naked women showing their bodies off to the camera. They often do not show vaginas and rarely, if ever, show the presence of a sexual partner. The women simply pose for the camera in numerous positions accentuating various body parts such as: bellies, breasts, thighs, legs, hips, and buttocks. The women on these sites have themed sets where the location and dress changes each time. For example, a Valentine’s set may be situated in a kitchen, the model baking heart-shaped cookies wearing a silk negligée with pink hearts all over it. The various pictures may be of her mixing the batter, making the cookies, taking them out of the oven, and then eating the cookies, usually becoming less and less clothed as the set develops. There is often an accompanying video which may or may not follow the same theme as the set. Often the sets do not include any form of overt sexuality, such as masturbation. Those interested join the websites of the various models who suit their desires and pay a fee to view the monthly (or bi-weekly) site updates which include new sets and often stories or blog posts. Membership to such websites may cost anywhere from \$10 to \$25 a month. Not all of these sites cater to those interested in feederism. In general, these sites appeal to more of a general fat admirer audience. However, certain models do cater to those interested in weight gain. Four of my female “feedee”/“gainer” respondents run and/or model for these types of websites.



**Table 2: Primary Weight Identity of Participants**

<b>Primary Weight Identity</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
FA (Fat Admirer) <sup>37</sup>	15 (50%)
BBW (Big Beautiful Woman) <sup>38</sup>	6 (20%)
SSBW (Super-Sized BBW) <sup>39</sup>	4 (13%)
FFA (Female Fat Admirer) <sup>40</sup>	3 (10%)
BHM (Big Handsome Man) <sup>41</sup>	2 (7%)

**Table 3: Age Range of Participants**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
25 and under	9 (30%)
26 – 35	11 (37%)
36 - 45	6 (20%)
46 - 55	4 (13%)

**Table 4: Country of Residence of Participants**

<b>Country of Residence</b>	<b>Total Count n=30</b>
United States	23 (77%)
Canada	4 (13%)
England	2 (7%)
Australia	1 (3%)

I cannot say with any confidence that the information provided about my sample does or does not reflect the general population of people interested in feederism. Based on the methods I used my sample is a small purposive non-random sample making it difficult to make generalizations about the larger population that may be interested in feederism.

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<sup>37</sup> Someone, male or female, who likes fat and is usually sexually attracted to people with varying amounts of fat. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding)

<sup>38</sup> An overweight woman either based on her BMI (Body Mass Index) or she has chosen this label herself. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding)

<sup>39</sup> An overweight woman either based on her BMI (Body Mass Index) or she has chosen this label herself. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding). As of April 16,2008 there is a thread on the 'dims' forum from December 2005 where the consensus is that women over 300-350 lbs. (depending on their height) could fall into the SSBW category.

<sup>40</sup> Someone, who is female, who likes fat and is usually sexually attracted to people with varying amounts of fat. FFA is a specific type of FA. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding)

<sup>41</sup> An overweight man either based on his BMI (Body Mass Index) or he has chosen this label himself. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding). There is a SSBHM category but it is not often used.

### **Height/Weight/BMI**

I did not ask participants their height, their weight, nor their BMI. This may seem like a curious omission given that weight is a central issue. However, the reason for this decision was that this is personal information that is sensitive in the community; it has sexual meanings and overtones; and it is not important to the purpose of my study. Quite simply asking height, weight and/or BMI would have created unnecessary barriers between me and the respondents.

### **Verification Checks**

Sometimes there is a general level of distrust within the online “feederism community” regarding “fakers.”<sup>42</sup> Sometimes people lie about their identity, either in regards to gender or their feeding identity. According to my participants this most often comes in the form of gay men pretending to be female “feedees.” In terms of sampling it was something I needed to take into consideration. I had to question the believability of participants and, in particular their gender and their feeding identity. In most cases, I had no way of verifying what participants were telling me in regards to their demographic information nor their practices and thoughts about feederism. Also due to the fact that fantasy is an accepted part of feederism and its practice online, it could be expected to spill over into my interviews when people who often participate on these sites are asked, online, to describe their experiences. I could be receiving stories of fantasy and/or real life experiences. Even though my focus became how people construct themselves as “gainers” and “encouragers” online, I still chose to include only those thirty who

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<sup>42</sup> When participants were asked what the downside was to their involvement in online feederism communities seven said that “fakers” was the primary problem online. “The worst thing is all of the fakes. Fakes being gay men posing as women or kids posing as a woman” (Adam).

presented themselves as the most reliable source of information; or perhaps the best thirty “story tellers.” Three participants were excluded from the study.

### **Excluded Participants**

Overall, I had to take what participants were telling me as their version of the truth. If I assumed that everyone was lying or fabricating stories then my entire research pursuit would be fraught with problems. Therefore, I began each interview with the premise that the respondent was being truthful until I was led to believe otherwise. I completed 32 interviews. However, two interviews were removed immediately upon completion of the interview and a third was also excluded. I disqualified the first interview because his answers were very simple and he was not forthcoming with details. I felt he was not interested in the interview and asking probing questions did not work. He often did not understand what I was asking. Because my being understood was never a problem during the other interviews, I decided there was something amiss here. Not only did I feel the interview itself was a failure in terms of technique but also the answers he provided appeared to be somewhat prescribed and anticipated and yet not very detailed. I felt like he was giving me answers I wanted to hear rather than being genuine (or being a good ‘story teller’). For these reasons, I excluded his interview from my coding, analysis, and findings.

I excluded the second interview because the participant had a very difficult time articulating what he meant and he contradicted himself on several occasions. I do not think that he was lying or misrepresenting himself, but I do think that he was confused and rather unsure (and perhaps uncaring) about various topics and how he felt about

them. I felt that I had to ask so many clarifying questions during the interview to understand what he meant that his actual answers were difficult for me to decipher. I felt my own voice interfered too much. For these reasons I decided to exclude his interview from coding, analysis, and findings.

The third and final interview was completed and coded with the other twenty-nine interviews and when reading through it I thought it was fine. It was not until I started to analyze my data and write my findings that I became apprehensive about some of his replies. He identified as a male feeder and some of his key answers did not match other feeders' replies. In another case, his reply seemed quite outlandish (in regards to the amount of food his partner feedee could consume). It is arguably the case that I just did not see him as a compelling "story-teller." For these reasons I thought it best to keep his contributions to the findings section to an absolute minimum. I have still included him as one of the thirty participants in the study but I have not included his interview in the analysis and findings. I feel my findings are more legitimate without his contradictory contributions because I am skeptical about the veracity of his answers.

Overall, I was content with the technique of interviewing used and the quality of answers received from participants. I felt that I was able to make them comfortable during our conversations and built a high level of rapport and mutual respect. I think that my ability to do this rewarded me with several referrals. Participants, for the most part, were positive about their interviews with me stating things such as: "this is worthwhile

research,” “I sincerely wish you well with it,” “I can’t wait to read what you find,” “This has been an enjoyable interview.”

### **Sex & Location**

I interviewed 17 men and 13 women. Since my interviews were conducted entirely over IM and the telephone it is impossible to know with absolute certainty that the stated sex of participants was in fact their actual sex. The seven telephone interviews were conducted with four men and three women. Telephone interviews allowed me to more easily discern gender as participants’ voices were either masculine or feminine. I recognize that this is also not fool-proof but voice allows a person to confirm gender to a certain extent. The IM interviews allowed for less certainty. I interviewed 10 women over IM and 13 men over IM. In a few cases I was able to see pictures the user had posted on various personal websites, blogs, or within the “dms” discussion forum. These pictures often helped confirmed the gender (whether they looked masculine or feminine), and even approximate age of a few participants.<sup>43</sup> This visual verification was not possible for every participant.

The email form which participants submitted when they agreed to participate in the research collected the I.P. address when they submitted the form to me. The email I received with the agreement to participate displayed their I.P. address. I was able to use the I.P. address to verify their location. An I.P. (Internet Protocol) address is a series of

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<sup>43</sup> While some members post cartoons or stock images as their avatars on these sites (images that are displayed with all of their forum posts beside their username), there are forum threads where members do post pictures of themselves as well as in personal photo albums on blogs. While it is possible they are posting someone’s picture, the number of consistent pictures that some members post may lead one to believe that they are real pictures of the member.

numbers and dots (e.g. 125.45.87.204) which each computer connected to the internet receives from their internet service provider. By putting this into an I.P. search engine (found by typing “IP search” into Google), it will display the approximate location of the computer using that address. I did this for each participant and verified it against the state or city the participant told me they were in or near during our interview (as demographic information). In most cases the results were as specific as the very city the participant said they were in. In some cases, it was in the same general location or state/province of the country. In every case the country was accurately stated and verified by the participant’s I.P. address. In a few cases, the I.P. address did not match by state. However, this can be explained by the fact that many large internet service providers (AOL for example) have servers in California while the user may reside in Texas. However, in the majority of cases the I.P. address search did verify the participant’s physical geographic location against their stated location.

Overall, except in the three cases noted above, I felt that participants were very open, honest, and sincere. They appeared to trust me and were very open in sharing information.

### ***Limitations and Summary***

It should be noted that perhaps my sample is over represented by those individuals who are comfortable talking about their fantasies rather than those who are more “in the closet” about their desires. This also suggests that perhaps my sample is over representative of those individuals who feel that feederism is more part of their lives and their identity than others who simply enjoy it. That is to say, only those individuals with

a certain level of commitment to the practice, a level of interest high enough for them to seek support and like-mindedness online, had the opportunity to be recruited into my study. Those who are interested in feederism or have a partner interested in feederism but who do not visit these online communities had little chance of being part of my study.<sup>44</sup> Because all of my respondents either came from the online feederism community or through a referral by someone who participates in the online community, this means that my research may be mired in the rhetoric, nuances, scripts, and discourse of the community. My research may in fact be seen as an extension of the community itself. However, given the private nature of these relationships and sexual desire in general, and the rare interest in feederism, the anonymous nature of the internet proved to be the best means to conduct sampling for this study.

Methodologically, I believe my research to be sound. Not only did it overcome several ethical constraints, it also overcame the issue of having a small population size from which to draw my sample. The fact that I am dealing with a sensitive topic such as sexuality makes the potential for having few participants understandable. However, I was able to find ample participants for my study. While I recognize that 30 is still a small sample size, for a qualitative exploratory study into this phenomenon at the master's thesis level this sample size was most manageable. However, because a larger random sample was not possible, the small sample size impacts my ability to generalize about feederism and its participants. The findings that this research put forward are based on the very specific methodology described here.

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<sup>44</sup> Participants who do not participate in these online communities could have still participated in the study if they had been referred to me by someone who does participate in the "feederism community."

## **Chapter 4: Defining & Framing “Feederism”**

The ideas provided by my respondents allow me to propose a definition of feederism as a sexual practice where participants are aroused by thoughts and actions pertaining to weight gain either in themselves or in another person “I define feederism as the erotic enjoyment of fattening. Implicit is that the enjoyment could come from any of the associated factors (actual weight gain, deliberate over eating, breaking of taboos, etc.)” (Henry). For Sonya feederism includes, “a person or couple who are actively trying to make one partner or both fatter for the purpose of sexual pleasure.” All respondents agree that feederism is sexual in nature, causing arousal and sexual excitement in its participants. It should be noted that there are varying degrees in regards to which aspects arouse the person, the degree to which those aspects arouse the person, and the extent to which other things related or unrelated may or may not arouse the individual. Feederism, among my respondents, within a relationship between two people, usually creates a dynamic where the partner who encourages weight gain becomes or identifies as a “feeder” and the other, who is gaining weight, becomes or identifies as a “feedee.” These terms are discussed further below.

During my interviews feederism was constructed as a fetish, an orientation, a sexual identity, a lifestyle, a preference, a fantasy, a behaviour, and as a type of relationship. From fetish to lifestyle to sexual identity, feederism is framed by respondents in many different ways. To begin, many believe that feederism is a fetish. Katrina, a female feeder, states, “I have a fetish for feeding my partner and encouraging him to eat.” But Derek states, “I’m loathe to define our relationship by a fetish, though I used to be



ashamed of it and now I'm proud of it enough to participate in your research." When asked to define feederism Randy replies, "it's a fetish or fascination where two people receive pleasure when one partner is gaining weight intentionally. The satisfaction and gratification is an enhancement to their love life." These respondents speak about feederism in terms of it being a fetish. They use the term in rather neutralized and desexualized ways which makes me unsure if they understand what they mean by employing the word "fetish" in their definitions of feederism.

When respondents were specifically asked why they thought feederism was a fetish they provided explanations as follows:

What makes it a fetish, at least in my book, is that it's out of the ordinary and the person gets off on it... I believe that one can have a fetish, but still be able to get off [in] other ways. (Donna)

If we define 'sexual fetish' as something other people think is a weird kink... if this is the definition of 'fetish,' then yes, 'feederism' is a sexual fetish. (Patricia)

Fetish is a preference in something sexual to me. Fetish is also something out of the mainstream in my definition of fetish... a short person fetish wouldn't be a fetish if we were all short. (Adam)

Feederism itself is not a fetish. [However,] the actions and behaviors involved with feederism are fetishes. Loving specific body parts or whatnot (e.g., fat ankles or loving big bellies or big boobs) – THAT's the fetish. Feederism is a way of life and a psychosexual orientation (Damon)

I have thought about that myself, many times over the years. My opinion has wavered as I have grown wiser and become more informed. I would say that for me, feederism is definitely, without question, a fetish (Because I can't get off without thinking about fatness or gaining, and, of course, that's the very definition of 'fetish.')

But I am not comfortable generalizing that to all feeders and feedees. (Rosie)

These participants define 'fetish' in various ways. Donna, Patricia, and Adam understand "fetish" as linked to sexual practices that fall outside of what people consider to be the sexual norm. This highlights that participants acknowledge that an interest in feederism sets oneself up to be stigmatized because some may see it is a sexual practice that falls outside the norm of what most people "do" or desire sexually. Damon believes that the associated actions or behaviours are fetishes but that feederism itself is not. Meanwhile, Rosie forwards the notion of necessary stimulus in her definition of "fetish." As suggested in the literature review, Gamman and Makinen (1994) propose a continuum of fetish intensities which suggests that the third highest level occurs when, "specific stimuli are necessary for sexual arousal and sexual performance" (38). According to Wiederman (2003:316), the sexual stimulus must be, "necessary or preferred for sexual functioning." I asked most participants if this was the case for them and received mixed answers. While some felt that fat and/or weight gain stimuli are necessary for arousal, others stated that while not necessary, fat and/or weight gain stimuli are preferred.

No, from what I think of fetishes is that in order for a sexual experience to be satisfying the fetish object must be involved. I can have satisfying sexual experiences that do not involve feeding. However, when it is involved, it is something I enjoy a little more. So fetish, not exactly, enhancement would be more accurate. (Jane)

Yes, it's one of the only ways I can have any sexual arousal. I'm not really turned on by much else. The woman has to be larger... not necessarily gaining but larger for initial attraction. Rarely will I become aroused by anything outside the realm of feederism or fat in general. (Damon)

I am inclined to say that it is a necessity for many to become aroused – It is definitely a necessity for me. (Patricia)

You want the shortest distance between me and arousal? You want the shortest distance between me and getting off? Use feederism. And THAT'S the essence of why I feel my feederism is a fetish, but isn't completely necessary for sexual desire. But it is, hands down, without a doubt, my strongest fetish (Donna)

I do know that I can't become aroused from looking at thin women unless I imagine them much fatter. A thin woman would have to work hard to get me off. Even if it was a simple blow job I'd have to think of her fatter or that she will become fatter. I don't get aroused unless there is some thought of fat, feeding, etc. (Adam)

No way! It's an orientation! I don't need feederism to get aroused and because it isn't necessary for arousal it's not a fetish (in my definition). If one needs it to become aroused, then yes maybe it's fetish for them but I want to maintain that it is an orientation before anything else. (Jeffrey)

These quotes highlight a range of responses in terms of how respondents feel about feederism being called a fetish. It could be suggested that those who feel feederism is a fetish and who define or understand the word "fetish" as a sexual act that falls outside the norm recognize that they are or could be stigmatized by having this fetish. Jeffrey's insistence that feederism be considered a "sexual orientation" could suggest that he wants to avoid this attribution of deviancy or define his interest in feederism in a way that is less stigmatizing. His comment may indicate that he feels defining feederism as a "sexual orientation" is less stigmatizing than defining it as a fetish.

As Brianna's comment below suggests, for some feederism is more than just a sexual preference. While Brandon identifies feederism as a sexual preference he also suggests

that it can become more than that with higher levels of involvement. For Dewayne feederism is “a way of life, [and] a sexual preference.” Several respondents defined feederism as a way of life or lifestyle. Many participants feel that this is dependent on the level of involvement but that feederism has the potential to be a lifestyle if people are very involved in it. Rosie, Cathy and Brianna provide three insightful quotes.

I think it is a general consensus that ‘we’ as feeders/feedees hate the term fetish- it has been discussed at length on many forums I have visited. ‘We’ like to think of it more as a way of life. . . The reason I believe it is a lifestyle is because it is not just a sexual preference. . . it seems to be a part of our everyday life - ultimately the result of feederism affects every aspect of our lives considering I can’t put my fat away in a box under the bed when we’re done playing with it. (Brianna)

I think for people who decide to engage in it long term, over a life time, that it’s definitely a lifestyle. I think for most feedees it’s a lifestyle more than feeders, mostly because the feedee is generally the one doing the changing and may decide he/she doesn’t like the effects of the lifestyle, whereas the feeder is less likely to change his/her ways and would still receive gratification from the act. (Cathy)

Being a feedee definitely provides a context for my lifestyle, which has only become more pronounced as I have grown immobile. Again --I’m not confident enough to generalize this to the feederism community at large. . I think of a ‘lifestyle’ as an everyday expression of one’s character. When we take our identity and weave it into our daily life, that’s a lifestyle. So, to the extent that I express myself outwardly as a gainer, feederism is a lifestyle for me. (Rosie)

The comments made by the these three “gainers” and/or “feedees” illustrate the heightened level of permanence their interest in feederism dictates for them because as they gain weight and their bodies change it becomes a lifestyle for them. Their increased or increasing fat affects more (or perhaps all) aspects of their lives. These three

respondents recognize that there is a difference in terms of their involvement in feederism as “gainers” and/or “feedees” versus the level of involvement required by “encouragers” or “feeders.” While not explicit on the point, these quotes may suggest that some “gainers” and/or “feedees” recognize that they are doubly stigmatized: for being overweight or fat (a stigma that may not be shared with “encouragers” or “feeders” of average or “normal” weight) *and* for their desire to gain weight.

Sonya, Damon, and Jeffrey speak about feederism as a sexual orientation and part of their identity. “Being a feedee is a huge, huge part of my sexual identity regardless of [*sic*] if I am actually gaining at the time or not, I need someone who understands my fetish/interests in that department” (Sonya). She calls it a fetish because her identity as a “feedee” is very much tied to her overall sexual identity. Jeffrey is a “feeder” who feeds his wife Odette as an expression of his love for her: “feederism is an orientation. It is the act of feeding another person as an expression of love.” Jeffrey expects his wife to gain weight as a sign of her love for him. When asked how he would feel if his wife were to decide to stop gaining weight he replies, “I would feel horrible. It would be like rejection. It’s rejecting my love... but it would be her choice.” Jeffrey equates weight gain with love.

While not all respondents speak about their interest in feederism as part of their identity, many of them are explicit in claiming that feederism is part of their sexual identity.

Feederism is an orientation. (Jeffrey)

I can't imagine myself without it. Gaining is part of my identity. Weight gain became part of my sexuality since the beginning. (Patricia)

For most, it is part of their sexual identity. (Damon)

I've tended to be even more free in the identity when I dream about these things. (Henry)

I don't think I could see myself with someone who wouldn't share it [with me] because it is a very big part of my sexuality. (Hailey)

Feederism is a way of life and a psychosexual orientation. At 21 or 22 I fully embraced my sexual orientation (as I began more publicly encouraging and feeding); since then I have openly engaged in a variety of feeder/feedee relationships. I've never met someone who it went away for. It is part of their sexual identity. It would be shocking to see someone 'cure' themselves of this fetish, in my opinion (Damon).

For me, feederism is very tied to my sexuality . . . feeding is very closely tied to my sexuality and I don't think I could be 'cured' of it. (Katrina)

[Weight gain] became a cornerstone of my sexuality once I did hit puberty. (Rosie)

It's the only sexuality I have. It's the only version of eroticism I experience. (Damon)

The claim that feederism is part of one's sexual orientation or one's sexual identity may be a strategic way that respondents attempt to manage their stigma. By claiming their desire for their own weight gain or weight gain in others is part of their sexual orientation or identity may remove the insinuation that they are *choosing* this desire. When the desire is "*part of who I am; there is nothing I can do about it*" respondents may feel less

stigmatized. From fetish to lifestyle to sexual identity, feederism is framed by respondents in many different ways.

### ***Defining the “Feeding Identities”***

Besides the point that feederism is a fetish to some people and a lifestyle to others, a further complicating feature of this phenomenon is the fact that the vocabulary that is used is problematic. The terms used to describe participants’ identities in feederism, elsewhere referred to in this thesis as one’s “feeding identity,” are complicated. The “feeding identities” such as “feeder” and “feedee,” have different meanings for many respondents. It is not that those within the feederism community argue or disagree on the terms used. It is that they appear not to have taken the time to define the terms to ensure that everyone is talking about the same thing.

For example, Patricia suggests that, “the language ‘feeder’ and ‘feedee’ has been happily taken on by the community and I find this is disturbing.” Likewise, Donna says, “we need more research. And I’m not just saying that to make you happy. Rarely does the community sit back and look at their fetish as a whole from a non-sexual, academic point of view.” At another point during our interview she notes, “you do realize that most of these ideas are theories and hypothesis I’ve come up with, right? Because, once again, the community doesn’t talk about it together and there hasn’t been a study done. (Donna). These quotes highlight that within the feederism community the terms used are not necessarily agreed upon or clearly defined by the community itself even though they are widely used and accepted.

What seems to be consistent is that there are two “sides-of-the-fence” or complementary identities. One can either be interested in gaining themselves and/or in encouraging others to gain weight. Further complicating matters are people who enjoy both sides: the gaining and the encouraging. Sometimes, these people may seek mutual gaining relationships where both partners are attempting to gain weight and encourage each other. However, it seems people who enjoy both aspects are less common than people who have a preference for only one side. Those who enjoy their own weight gain are referred to as “gainers” or “feedees” while those who enjoy seeing weight gain in others are called “encouragers” or “feeders.” Often these roles are seen as gendered where women are “gainers”/ “feedees” and men are seen to be “encouragers”/ “feeders” (Murray, 2004:244; Gates, 2000:193). However, I found men who considered themselves “gainers”/ “feedees” and women who called themselves “encouragers”/ “feeders.” It is common for the terms “gainer” and “encourager” to be used to describe homosexual feeding relationships (Gates, 2000:193) but my findings suggest that even within heterosexual relationships, some people choose to take on the terms available, such as “gainer” and “encourager,” to describe their feeding identity. One participant suggests that this is done because the term “feeder,” for example, is very stigmatized while choosing other terms are less stigmatizing.

I was his first active gainer/feedee girlfriend. He would not call himself a feeder because there is to some a bad *stigma with the name “feeder.”* He likes the term “Gaining Enthusiast.” He thinks “feeder” sounds like you force the girl to eat. I don’t care what he calls himself either. [The fact is] he gets turned on by watching me eat and me talking about food and by giving me food; it literally makes him hard to watch me to eat. (Jackie, emphasis added)



Jackie highlights how the term one uses to apply to himself/herself may be chosen to reduce the amount of stigma associated to that “feeding identity.”

### **“Gainers” & “Feedees”**

Despite the distinction made by some respondents and within the community, I argue, based on how my respondents defined their own feeding identities, that “gainers” and “feedees” are virtually the same. Both “gainers” and “feedees” enjoy gaining weight, usually for sexual enjoyment, either in real life or in fantasy, and both identities have the option of having a partner aid in the process (or not).

A feedee is a person who enjoys being fed, usually but not always enough to significantly gain weight. (Cathy, female feedee)

A feedee is someone who gets off on the idea of being fed and the consequent weight gain that goes with it. (Donna, female feedee)

Someone who wants to gain weight for sexual pleasure. It is essential that there is an interest in weight gain *play*. However weight gain doesn't have to actually happen for a person to be a feedee. (Sonya, female feedee)

I've done so much of my own 'self-feeding' or gaining that doing it with a partner has become an added perk for me. While I definitely prefer it that way, I do not need a partner to receive sexual gratification from the act of feeding. (Cathy, female feedee)

A feedee is a person that is turned on or aroused by either being fed or gaining weight as a result of being fed. (Grant, male feedee)

A feedee within the definition means someone who eats or is fed for the purpose of weight gain and I believe that the process may or may not be sexually stimulating....and it can be with or without a partner. (Brianna, female feedee)

Most “encouragers” or “feeders” (the definitions follow) define “feedee” and “gainers” similarly.

[Feedees are] those who want to be fed or fattened by oneself or a feeder and who derive pleasure from the activity of gaining weight or eating to do so; or at least the idea of it. (Derek)

One who gains pleasure (sexual and otherwise) from being fed and/or feeding themselves - act of eating AND gaining weight. It's passive in some cases and/or active (when the feedee feeds her/himself with or without a partner). (Damon)

A feedee doesn't need a feeder (self feeding still makes a person a feedee) just like a gay person doesn't need a partner to be gay. Feedee is a sexual orientation, even if you don't actively participate in it, the orientation is the same. (Jeffrey)

My findings show that “gainers” and “feedees” can be considered the same in that there is no distinguishing characteristic between the two. However, *how* one chooses to play the role of either a “gainer” or “feedee” does vary greatly by individual. Overall, those who enjoy the weight gaining aspect of feederism, usually enjoy it for sexual purposes, where the weight gain either occurs in real life or in fantasy, either with the aid of an “encourager” or “feeder” or on one's own.

### **“Encouragers” & “Feeders”**

Whereas the feeding identities of “gainers” and “feedees” appear to be described as the same by participants, “encouragers” and “feeders” seem to be defined along a continuum. The “feeder” identity can be understood as a way in which respondents participate in the “encourager” role. The “encourager” is the participant who encourages weight gain in another person or in other people. “An encourager encourages someone to gain weight by either verbal or physical means. I'd say that traditionally, an encourager's role is mostly verbal” (Brandon). Perry provides further details. “An encourager is someone

with intent similar to a feeder, but who does not physically participate in the feedings. One who does not prepare nor serve the food. One who talks about gaining and the resulting pleasures, enticing the feedee to feed herself.” Furthermore, Shawn who considers himself an “encourager” and “fantasy feeder” says that:

My modus operandi is almost always to encourage, through a variety of persuasive means, females to eat foods/quantities they would otherwise not for whatever reasons they don't want to (the most common being perceived threats to their physique). This occurs mostly in the midst of normal, everyday conversations where the subject of food/eating is brought up by a female I'm talking by providing not-so-subtle hints that they should eat more, mostly, or that they don't need to worry. I like my women soft and curvy, so sue me!

Lenny, another “encourager,” explains that he encourages his wife to eat and to gain weight and that he is pleased when she gets fatter. Sometimes he is his wife's errand boy as she sends him to McDonald's frequently to buy her food. “I always ask her if she needs more to eat.... and sometimes, though not often, I'll say ‘please eat it all baby’ with a smile.” While providing her with food via various fast food runs, he claims to have never physically fed his wife but he feels his encouragement aids her weight gain.

“Feeder” is a way in which many “encouragers” play the role. While still encouraging weight gain, it is suggested that a “feeder” may *do* more than someone who identifies as an “encourager.” Those who identify as “feeders” within this research define “feeder” in very similar ways with little variation. Most agree that a “feeder” is “a person that is turned on/aroused by feeding another person or the subsequent weight gain that another person experiences” (Grant). Most concur that the “feeder” can do the actual feeding or

simply provide food and/or encourage it to be eaten. “A feeder is the person that is doing the feeding. The feeder gets horny knowing that his partner is eating and gaining. It can be gaining to get that super-stuffed belly feeling or to gain weight. Helping someone eat massive amounts of fattening food is about as good as it gets for a feeder” (Adam).

While all “feeders” agreed that it is a sexual practice, some also found other enjoyments.

A male or female who gains pleasure from encouraging or literally feeding someone in real life or online. The pleasure does not have to be entirely sexual but it would be hard to extract the sexual pleasure from the experience. Feeding almost always involves a sexual component in my experience, as well as (and not unimportantly) other general pleasures such as the joy and pleasure in nurturing, providing for, and taking care of a growing feedee. (Damon)

In his definition he notes that those who encourage “feedees” online are also “feeders.”

Most participants, but not all, recognize that sometimes the “doing” of the feeding is occurring online (therefore, not “real”) or just in fantasy.

Many feeders define the “feeder” identity using a language of help and encouragement.

William, Dewayne, Harold, Perry, Henry, Damon, Grant, Adam, Derek, Cathy, Calvin,

Jeffrey all explicitly used the word “encourage” when talking about this role. Derek,

Brandon, Jane, Cathy, and Grant on the other hand used the word “help” in talking about

it. The use of these words by both “feeders” and “encouragers” shows how both have a helping role, although to varying extents and in varying ways.

“Gainers”/ “feedees” agree on their definitions of the term “feeder.” There is little

variation in the way they speak about this identity. Generally participants agree that a

“feeder” is “someone who feeds who gets pleasure from feeding and usually gets turned on by the thought of fat/weight gain” (Odette). It is a sexual enjoyment, “a feeder wants their partner to gain weight for sexual pleasure” (Sonya). “A feeder is someone who is turned on by seeing someone gain... and they wouldn’t mind helping the process along. The weight gain, the overeating are things that are turn ons for a feeder” (Hailey). Rosie goes further in her definition explaining the various duties a “feeder” may perform. “In feederism, the feeder is the one who aids and abets her or his partner in their pursuit of weight gain. This may or may not include the various domestic tasks of shopping, cooking, cleaning, and actual feeding, but I think what’s important is that the feeder is not trying to gain weight themselves, but rather is trying to help their partner gain weight.” Although she says the focus for the “feeder” is aiding the “feedee” in their weight gain, she also recognizes that it is not always one-sided. “However, I’ve run into folks who are in mutual gaining relationships, so I would have to say that ‘feeder’ and ‘feedee’ are not mutually exclusive roles. But in short, the feeder is all about fattening up their partner” (Rosie). “Feedees” agree that the “feeder’s” goal and sexual stimulus comes from the weight gain. “I don’t know one feeder who doesn’t want someone to gain with the food they eat; most feeders who I talk to like the idea of the gain most” (Jackie).

Brianna further defines the “feeder’s” role: “a feeder can be defined as someone who achieves pleasure from weight gain through the act of feeding. On the other hand, not all feeders actively feed, but prefer to provide verbal encouragement. For a feeder, their sexual pleasure is derived from seeing a woman gain, watching them eat and slowly grow out of their clothing.” Brianna then reinforces the idea that there are differing desires and

levels of commitment among “encouragers.” “There are also the types of feeders which give feederism a bad name because they will fatten their women to immobility which in my opinion is abuse. I believe that the act of feeding makes them feel responsible for the outcome - which to them is a positive thing. They enjoy the fact that they played some sort of role in the weight gain.” Brianna highlights the important fact that “encouragers”/ “feeders” often have differing levels of commitment and desires in regards to how they practice feederism. This is a common theme that reoccurs in interviews.

Immobilizers are those feeders who won't stop [feeding] until their feedee is unable or nearly unable to move. The subject is bed-ridden or contraption-ridden (something on which they reside so that they can actually get wheeled around). We're not talking super-sized<sup>45</sup> here-we're talking enormous.<sup>46</sup> (Randy)

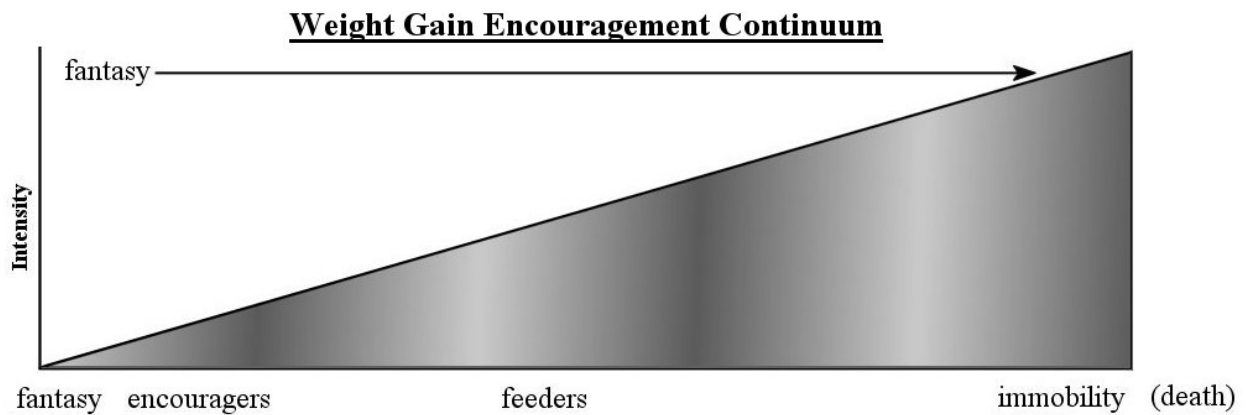
Remember, there are different classifications of these identities. There are feeders who are controlling and abusive (just like in any sexual relationship), there are feeders who are not. There are feedees who desire immobility and of course, there are feedees who do not. There are different classifications just like with bondage. It is important to recognize these different classifications within feederism. (Jeffery)

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<sup>45</sup> An overweight woman either based on her BMI (Body Mass Index) or she has chosen this label herself. (These are my personal definitions based on my own understanding). As of April 16,2008 there is a thread on the 'dms' forum from December 2005 where the consensus is that women over 300-350 lbs. (depending on their height) could fall into the SSBBW category.

<sup>46</sup> Enormous here would mean larger than super-sized. Someone who perhaps weighs much more than 350lbs.

**Table 1**



As Table One depicts there are different extremes and levels of involvement within the “encourager” and “feeder” identity. While some respondents only fantasize about others’ weight gain, some actually encourage it by doing such things as providing food, cooking, or even feeding their partner to encourage their weight gain. There are also those who desire extreme amounts of weight gain to the point of immobility and potential death. Those who are aroused by others’ weight gain fall somewhere on this continuum in regards to their level of intensity, their desires, and their level of action. Within all the various intensities, fantasy is prevalent (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). In terms of stigma, it could be hypothesized that those who fall within the furthest right shaded section of the continuum are the most stigmatized. Those who desire their partners to gain extreme amounts of weight or to become immobile may be seen as abusive (according to Jeffrey and Brianna) making these “extreme desires” most stigmatizing, going against the most norms. While, simply fantasizing about such things as weight gain (indicated at the far left of the continuum) would be seen as the tamest desires and therefore, the least stigmatizing. Overall, respondents agree that “feeders”/

“encouragers” are: (a) predominantly aroused by feeding, encouraging eating, and weight gain for sexual pleasure in another person be it real or in fantasy and that (b) their duties and their levels of involvement differ from providing actual food to the lips of another person, to cooking meals, to verbal or online encouragement. While “feedees” and “gainers” can be seen as the same with two different titles, “encouragers” and “feeders” can be understood to be identities along a continuum where the “feeder” may be more actively encouraging weight gain in a partner. All of these “feeding identities,” at least to some extent, are stigmatized by their desire for weight gain.



## Chapter 5: Stigma and Stigma Management

### *Discreditable Stigma*

One's arousal by weight gain and one's involvement in feederism can be understood as a stigmatizing identity. Interest in feederism creates a devalued social identity because participants possess an attribute that is not socially acceptable. The attribute of desiring weight gain in one's self or in another person is something that is seen as taboo in our society and goes against the dieting discourse that tells everyone, especially those who are overweight, that they should be dieting. Therefore, by desiring the opposite, purposeful weight gain, those interested in feederism possesses a discreditable stigma (Goffman, 1963:42). "The issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his [*sic*] failing. To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (Goffman, 1963:42). For those who are sexually aroused by weight gain, their stigma is discreditable in that other people are unaware of it unless or until this information is disclosed. One's interest in feederism can be concealed during social interaction making it a discreditable stigma. Those who desire weight gain in their partner or in other people more generally ("encouragers" and/or "feeders") are able to conceal this information. Unless this information is shared, or is let slip during social interaction, other people would not know that this individual is sexually aroused by weight gain.

Even for the person who is gaining weight ("gainers" and/or "feedees") that is visually noticeable, the *desire* to gain that weight *on purpose* is unknown. The gaining individual,

as mentioned previously, is dually stigmatized; first, for being obese (assuming they are) and second, for *desiring* to be (more) obese. The first stigma, obesity, is already a discredited identity because it may be visually obvious that the person is obese. However, the second stigma is discreditable because during social interaction others do not know the gaining individual actually *desires* to be obese or to become more obese and that this desire is tied to their sexual enjoyment. In terms of their discreditable stigma, the gaining individual can “pass” (Goffman, 1963:79) as someone gaining weight, for example, because of a medical condition or can avoid the issue by claiming they wish to lose weight. While a 400 pound “feedee” who maintains, “I’m on a diet,” cannot be exempt from the stigma of obesity because he or she may not be able to “pass” as anything other than obese, he or she can “pass” as simply “an obese person” rather than a person who also possesses the stigma attached to feederism, the *desire* to be obese or to become more obese. In other words, one can be obese, and be stigmatized for that alone but by being interested in feederism, the gaining individual possesses another stigmatizing attribute: desiring weight gain, a characteristic that is discreditable during interaction because it is unknown. The stigma being discussed within this thesis, sexual enjoyment that is gained from purposeful weight gain, is discreditable because people are able to conceal this fact during interaction. Both “gainers” and/or “feedees” and “encouragers” and/or “feeders” suffer from discreditable (Goffman, 1963:42) stigmas by having the desire for or sexual attraction to weight gain.

### ***Learning Experiences***

“People who have a particular stigma tend to have similar learning experiences regarding their plight, and similar changes in conceptions of self – a similar ‘moral career’ that is

both cause and effect of commitment to a similar sequence of personal adjustments” (Goffman, 1963:32). It is true for my respondents that many had similar learning experiences in regards to their interest in feederism. Many respondents recall first being attracted to fat bodies as children. The vast majority of “gainers”/ “feedees” speak to this fact. Adam, who considers himself both a “feeder” and “feedee” says, “at age 11 or 12 I was at my aunt’s helping to paint a rental property she owned and I saw a fat lady next door wearing brown corduroy pants and I got a boner when looking at her from behind....Her fat hips and ass were just bulging out magnificently.” Grant, a male “gainer” says, “as a kid I knew I liked larger sized people, and I knew I wanted to be fat ever since I can pretty much remember. I remember enjoying the idea of ‘padding’ (the act of putting clothes or pillows under your clothing to appear fat) as a kid.”

It was with me ever since I was a little kid, even before puberty. I would have fat fantasies as a kid, and play them out in my mind’s eye. I remember one silly little attempt in sixth-grade to gain weight. I saved my money and bought all kinds of chips and candies and stuff, and then pigged out during a television marathon one fine weekend. But all I got for my troubles was a tummy ache. (Rosie)

Some “gainers”/ “feedees” noted that their child’s play often included stuffing balls or clothes inside shirts to make their tummies look fat (Donna, Henry, Grant and Stewart) or taking imaginary “magic growing pills” or pretend “growing potions” (Stewart and Patricia). Seeing fat neighbours (Henry, Adam), teachers (Sonya) or relatives (Adam) also appealed to young “gainers”/ “feedees.” A couple mentioned seeing various cartoons (Cathy and Grant) where fat characters were depicted. Odette specifically remembers the graceful dancing of the hippos in Disney’s *Fantasia* as an early appealing

fat image. For most respondent “gainers” and “feedees” their first sensitizing interactions towards a predilection for fat bodies occurred in childhood.

“Encouragers” and “feeders,” have similar memories. Derek, who identifies as a “feeder” currently has no desire to gain weight himself. However, as a child he remembers playing with the idea of becoming fat. “My first best friend and I in preschool stuffed our clothes and played ‘fat.’ We drifted as friends well before puberty. Way later, when I hit puberty I resumed stuffing my clothes for a little bit and...I don't think I actually masturbated to it yet with my hand but I definitely ‘rubbed’ against the bed or something with my clothes stuffed” (Derek). While Derek, a “feeder” now, recalls role playing with himself as fatter, Katrina and Perry’s early childhood thoughts began about making others fatter. Katrina is a female “feeder” who says, “I have been fascinated with people eating and getting fat for about as long as I can remember! But I began exploring it sexually when I was about 14... 8 years ago. I fantasized about sensually feeding someone and seeing him gain weight. I did not actually act on those feelings until a while later, because I felt like it was a ‘weird’ thing.” Perry is a male “encourager” who calls himself a “feeder.” “There was a fat girl in my kindergarten class. I wondered what that belly was made of! I fantasized about keeping her in my playhouse in the backyard and feeding her while she got fatter and fatter. I also tried to ‘accidentally’ touch the bellies of my fat mother and neighbor. But I was embarrassed about my feelings so I didn’t do it often.” From an early age, Perry felt some stigma attached to his attraction to fat women.

Like Perry, Damon and Dewayne both recall being attracted to fat bodies since childhood and both specifically remember a fat neighbour. “I’ve been into this for as long as I can remember... before it was classified and had a name... as a child, I had a very fat neighbor who was fascinating” (Dewayne). Jeffery also had a fat neighbour who entered his fantasies. Byron remembers his attraction to fat bodies and gaining, beginning “since time immemorial. My earliest feeding related memories go back to preschool where I’d get all interested about something involving gluttony. Like a story where a character eats a lot. I felt a particular interest/guilt about large tummies. A strange attraction to a larger aunt who happened to have a healthy appetite.” The attraction to a fat neighbour or relative seems to be a very strong indicator for both “feeders” and “feedees” of their enjoyment of fat.

As with the “gainers”/ “feedees” who mention dancing hippos and other cartoons, this is a common theme among “encouragers” and “feeders” as well.

I remember getting erections when watching the ‘blueberry’ scene in Willy Wonka, being read a brief thing about force-feeding to immobility in 1st grade from a book called “Ten in a Bed” and there was obvious stuff from Hansel and Gretel. And I also dog-eared children's books that made mention of weight gain, force-feeding, or embarrassing reaction to fatness, etc.. (Derek)

These childhood memories are echoed by Perry in relation to, “an episode of ‘Our Gang,’ a.k.a. ‘The Little Rascals.’ It was about the kids stealing a box of ‘cheesed apples’ from someone and eating them all. The result was belly inflation. That fascinated me.”

Did you ever watch Happy Days? It was an old sitcom. I had a crush on the family's teenage daughter, Joanie, especially when she got a little plump...probably as a result of puberty. Stuff like that. There was this girl who rode my bus whose belly was so large that the lower part of it would shake with the slightest bumps of the bus. And a lot of fat girls at my high school wore revealing clothes, which I loved. I guess you could say it was natural for me to think about making them even fatter. (Calvin)

These early memories, be it neighbours, aunts, friends, stories, or cartoons are the first clues participants can remember triggering their attraction to fat and weight gain. These initial clues towards these predilections are a common experience by respondents towards what Goffman (1963:32) calls their 'moral career.'

The memories about a predilection for fat bodies in themselves or others and/or for weight gain from childhood are described as rather innocent or playful instead of being described as necessarily stressful. This may be due to the idea that as children, respondents did not yet know what the societal norm was in regards to what one should find sexually intriguing. Goffman (1963:34) suggests that this type of moral career begins when one "becomes stigmatized late[r] in life, or learns late[r] in life that he [*sic*] has always been discreditable. . . . Such an individual has thoroughly learned about the normal and the stigmatized long before he [*sic*] must see himself [*sic*] as deficient." So while the stigmatized individual may have always had the predilection for fat bodies and weight gain, he or she may not have recognized it, admitted it, or acknowledged it until later in life. Goffman argues that by coming to recognize one's stigma later in life he or she will have come to learn the division between the self and the other, the stigmatized and the normal. Elsewhere Goffman (1963:7) propose s that this very recognition can lead to negative feelings such as shame.

The standards he [*sic*] has incorporated from the wider society equip him [*sic*] to be intimately alive to what others see as his [*sic*] failing, inevitably causing him [*sic*], if only for moments, to agree that he [*sic*] does indeed fall short of what he [*sic*] really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his [*sic*] own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess . . . The immediate presence of normals is likely to reinforce this split between self-demands and self, but in fact self-hate and self-derogation can also occur.

The following quotes highlight that respondents feel or felt shame, weirdness, and embarrassment about their attraction to weight gain.

I can remember being very closeted about it [my interest in feederism] for quite some time. I can remember being *extremely ashamed* of myself for it and *hating myself* for it. I can remember how hard it was to come out. (Mary, emphasis added)

I fantasized about sensually feeding someone and seeing him gain weight. I did not actually act on those feelings until a while later, because I felt like it was a *weird* thing. (Katrina, emphasis added)

I always liked larger people and watching them eat, it has always been something I've enjoyed seeing. Growing up *this caused me huge identity crisis*. I kept *thinking it was wrong* and *I was very confused by not knowing*. I kept *thinking I was a freak*. (Jeffrey, emphasis added)

I didn't want to gain weight when I was still a kid because I was very *embarrassed* about it then and *I couldn't bear the thought of my parents knowing about it*. (Rosie, emphasis added)

Big breasts caught my eye, because they were a novelty to a prepubescent boy. Often, a fatter belly accompanied those breasts, and *I was chastised by my peers for not minding a 'fatty.'* That took me aback at times, and *I tried to deny my preference for the endomorphic body type*. It was in vain, though. Against all the perceived societal norms of slim figures and dieting, these [fat] women flew in the face of convention, and I admired

them. [Feederism] is an important element in my life, even though not in the flesh. I've thought about it almost daily for so long, I think it defines me in some ways, *yet no one who knows me well knows about it*. It's *embarrassing*, because of societal norms and peer pressure. But I'm starting to reveal myself more as I get older. At least I feel like I am. [I am] *out of denial* now, and gradually coming out of the closet about it. (Perry, emphasis added)

These quotes illustrate how individuals feel or felt stigmatized by their desire for weight gain in themselves or in other people and/or their preference for fat bodies. These feelings of embarrassment, weirdness, and shame may demonstrate how respondents felt their stigma when comparing themselves to normals (those who do not desire weight gain nor having a predilection for fat bodies).

Brianna explains that while she secretly desired to gain weight she held back on the desire because it felt "crazy" until she met her husband.

I guess meeting [my husband] really put the wheels in motion. When you think you like something in *secret* and perhaps think your [*sic*] *crazy* for it, [it] really puts a damper on things. When I met him there was some acceptance and even better was the abundant resources and information on the subject. I had the opportunity to see other beautiful women on-line and it was inspiring. And the encouragement from him meant that I would actually be attractive to someone for what I was doing. I had no idea prior to meeting him that there are people out there that had the same preferences. (Brianna, emphasis added)

Another commonality among respondents was feeling alone and isolated during their initial learning experiences with or about feederism. For many this was overcome by using the internet. "On the internet an individual with a deviant sexual identity can



receive reinforcement and affirmation. Virtual communities are a place where someone can be assured that they are not alone since there are others with the same identity. The realization of others who have similar thoughts and desires can result in a sense of liberation for the individual” (Durkin, 2004:135). Goffman (1963:36) writes that this is an interesting time because as one learns that they possess a stigma they are “likely to be thrown into a new relationship to others who possess the stigma too.” Perry says, “in my late teens, I noticed some fat ‘porn’ on a newsstand. Until then, I thought I alone was interested in fat women.” “Dimensions [website] has given me quite a bit more confidence in myself and my desires and love of fat women and feederism. [From this website] I realized that I am NOT ALONE in the feelings I have” (Adam). Odette, Cathy and Susan experienced similar feelings. Feelings of isolation have been felt by several respondents.

The learning experiences were similar for respondents in that many remember an inclination towards fat bodies and/or weight gain during childhood, many feel or felt ashamed, embarrassed or weird about their desires and stigmatized identity, and they began to feel less isolated when finding websites online that catered to their stigmatized identities. These sites then become a way in which participants could cope with having a stigma, as will be discussed below.

### ***Secrecy vs. Disclosure***

The language used to describe the process of “coming out” (used within writings on homosexuality for example) is used by some participants to describe the process of revealing one’s stigma to others.

Even when an individual could keep an unapparent stigma secret, he will find that intimate relations with others ratified in our society by mutual confession of invisible failings, cause him either to admit his situation to the intimate or to feel guilty for not doing so. In any case, nearly all matters which are very secret are still known to someone, and hence cast a shadow. (Goffman, 1963:73-4)

This is the case for those who have the stigma of an erotic interest in weight gain. It is possible that these individuals can keep their stigma hidden and never disclose it to intimates. For example, an “encourager” could say, if asked, that his wife “loves to eat” rather than admit that he encourages her to gain weight. Likewise, a “gainer” could say, if asked, “I have tried to lose weight for 10 years with no success so I do not try as hard anymore” instead of admitting to purposeful weight gain. This type of “passing” (Goffman, 1963:73) would allow those interested in purposeful weight gain to permanently hide their secret stigma. If such an individual had a partner who shared the stigma they could rely on each other for mutual aid in “passing” (Goffman, 1963:97) to ensure their stigma remained hidden from others. Furthermore, because the case with feederism is that one’s desire for weight gain is sexual it means that individuals are not expected to disclose such information: “the individual’s stigma may relate to matters which cannot be appropriately divulged to strangers” (Goffman, 1963:74). Because most sexual acts have low visibility and because they take place away from public view, such acts may be immune from public labeling (Plummer, 1975:77). Sexual interests are considered a private matter so those interested in weight gain for sexual pleasure would not be expected to disclose this information to anyone who did not share a certain level of intimacy with them. This is the case for Byron. He feels his brother, an intimate of his,

should know about his interest in fat women and feederism. Goffman suggests that people in this circumstance may feel guilty about hiding information from intimates. “Because there are people who should know and don’t, so I feel guilty. [For example,] my little brother. He’s just so vehemently anti-fat I don’t even want to think about discussing it with him” (Byron). However, for some respondents it is not a simple case of disclosure. Cathy summarizes the backlash one may receive from being “out” about their preferences for fat people and/or weight gain.

I think there are more FAs/Feeders around than most people realize, but because they know nothing about the subculture they are ‘in the closet’ about their preferences because society says it’s wrong. There are still always going to be people who think there’s something wrong with you, and by being ‘out’ about your preferences you face some negative feedback.

There are multiple considerations in regards to disclosing information or keeping it secret: “to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1963:42).

What constitutes “coming out” about one’s desires is problematic. Is telling one’s romantic partner but no one else in their daily lives enough to constitute “disclosure”? Is telling a plethora of online friends, acquaintances and strangers but no one in real life enough to constitute “coming out?” How many people does one have to tell in real life to count as “full disclosure?” Another aspect which affects my respondents in terms of secrecy vs. disclosure, as was revealed to me during the interviews, is that there are different politics involved in “coming out” as an admirer of fat people and “coming out”

as someone who enjoys weight gain in themselves or in other people. These two aspects have been depicted in a table in Appendix I. This table displays the level to which respondents are “out” about their preference or interest in fat people *and* to what level they are “out” about their interest in feederism. I have used the language of “coming out” because this is the language that was used by my participants to describe the question of secrecy vs. disclosure about their stigma. All respondents are “out” at least to some extent in both areas. Half (15) of the respondents are “fully out” about their interest in fat people and/or fat bodies while only three respondents are “fully out” about their interest in feederism. Due to the nature of the inherent subjective meaning of these levels, “fully out” or “somewhat out,” the quotes below will highlight how the different respondents feel about the level to which they are “out” in each case.<sup>47</sup>

When respondents were asked the extent to which they are “out” about their preference for fat people, responses indicated a rather high level of comfort with revealing this aspect of their sexuality.

I feel that I am 100% out. When I go to special events (which are often because of my work and my political activities) I most often have a BBW as my date for the evening whom I happily introduce as such [my date] to colleagues. (Stewart)

Very out – it’s actually a thrill to go out with a much larger woman in public. It’s an attraction to have everyone staring and looking. (Dewayne)

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<sup>47</sup> Further complicating this table is the fact that in many instances categorizing respondent’s ‘outness’ was challenging because the respondent was either not asked the question directly (as it was a question added to the interview schedule after their interview had occurred) or because their answer did not fit neatly into one of the categories. In these cases I hypothesized a ‘best guess’ based on their other answers. Due to the fact that I was required to do this in more than fifteen cases, the information on this table is not only highly subjective, it is highly speculative.

But for the most part, everybody knows that I'm the fat fanatic. (Calvin)

[I am] as out as possible without wearing a sign on my back. I've been out since 1991-1992 as an FA. Most men struggle with it longer than I did, and often some men never come out of the closet. (Damon)

Very [out]. My girlfriend is plus sized, and just about every girl I've ever dated (with the odd exception) has been full figured. My friends and family I'm sure have figured out my FA [Fat Admirer] preference by now, only because I've pretty much brought home bigger girls whenever I've been dating someone. I have no problem showing affection in public to a girl who I'm with. So I consider myself very 'out.' (Grant)

You bet I am [out]. My friends and family all meet my girlfriends. I never have had to explain myself to anyone. My friends and family EXPECT my dates/girlfriends to be fat. (Adam)

[I am out] much more now than I used to be. I explain my preference for the more voluptuous figure, but don't go into detail with most folks, as they wouldn't understand. (Randy)

It is interesting to note that these respondents sometimes use descriptive words such as "plus sized," "full figured," "bigger girls" (Grant), "larger woman" (Dewayne) and "voluptuous" (Randy) instead of "fat" or "overweight" or "obese" in an attempt to perhaps reduce the amount of stigma that they may feel by being associated with these partners. Perhaps using these more positive size descriptors reduces the "courtesy stigma" (Goffman, 1963:31) attached to being associated with an obese partner.

When respondents were asked to what extent they are "out" about their enjoyment of feederism, the responses suggest that those interviewed are less comfortable with this part of their sexuality and in fact, they find it much more stigmatizing.

I am carefully out about it. I'm only 'out' to the people who are familiar with it and into it; which means *a very small number*. My wife and online friends know. *No-one in real day-to-day life knows. That would be suicidal – the harassment and abuse would be unbearable.* (Jeffrey, emphasis added)

Well a lot of my family members know about it [my personal and purposeful weight gain] but *I prefer not to talk about it with people it will make feel uncomfortable*. It takes a lot of acceptance to be able to talk about it with certain people. (Brianna, emphasis added)

Most people know I am ok with my weight and have no wish to lose any. Two friends know I am a feedee and then of course lots of online friends. I did not tell my family. *Most people would freak; big time!* Because they do not feel the same way and *view fat as a bad thing*, I grew up hearing how *I was killing myself by being over weight*. [In fact, I] still hear that from all kinds of people family and complete strangers, who offer helpful advice on weight loss. They mean well I just don't have the need to explain myself to them; I have no one to answer to for my choices (Odette, emphasis added)

[I'm only 'out'] with my partner and people I know through feederism... as a few of my friends have had bad experiences with feeder guys in the past, so I'm not going to be yelling it from the rooftops or anything. (Susan)

I'm openly an FA and *privately* a feeder. I'm not showing my friends my porn; they know I like fatties but *I don't need them to know* I call her piggy and shove her face into a cake. (Derek, emphasis added)

I'm out about my preference for them [fat women]. I'm *still very much reserved about my desire to fatten them*. [I'm 'out'] only to the online community who has similar interests but *no one face-to-face*. (Perry, emphasis added)

That's between me and close friends. It's more easily accepted to enjoy bigger girls. *It's less so to admit you like seeing them gain some*. (Brandon, emphasis added)

*I don't think it's necessary for me to come out [to my parents]. Although, I must admit, it IS one of the reasons I can't actively gain right now. I couldn't do it while my parents are still alive. My mother already doesn't like that I'm a BBW. (Mary, emphasis added)*

A VERY different story! I have found that *I must use discretion in discussing feederism*. I have learned to only discuss this interest with those who already understand or those who might tend to have the least *negative reaction*. (Stewart, emphasis added)

[My interest in feederism] gets me into *trouble* sometimes, so I am *more discrete about volunteering* [information about] it. But I'll still talk about it with some of my friends. Many folks have a hard time understanding why I would want to fatten my beautiful and already dangerously overweight wife even further. Let's just say that the urge to be judgmental comes naturally to most folks. (Calvin, emphasis added)

Respondents, on the whole, feel stigmatized for their interest in feederism and avoid divulging this information. Some respondents have had negative experiences in the past by telling friends about their desires. For example, Stewart recounts a negative experience when attempting to explain his desire to gain weight to a friend.

A while back I was visited by a friend who had not seen me in a few years so my extreme weight gain was a surprise to him. When I attempted to begin explaining that I had ballooned intentionally, he began laughing so hard that I had to stop talking. I never was able to finish the explanation and, the next time he saw me, I had lost the weight so it was not an issue.

The perceived risks of disclosing their interest in feederism prevents many respondents from sharing this aspect of their lives with others. Overall, respondents are less “out” about their enjoyment of feederism than they are about their preference for fat partners. These two sets of quotes clearly highlight that respondents find their interest in fat bodies or partners less stigmatizing than their interest and desire for weight gain. For this

reason, respondents are more willing to disclose their interest for fat partners but choose to keep their interest in weight gain hidden from most people. This is only true for their real lives. As will be discussed below, participants are more open and “out” about sharing their preferences within the online community. Respondents may be living a “double life” (Goffman, 1963) in that they are more fully “out” online about their interest in feederism and often “closeted” about that interest in real life.

Another important aspect here is the fact that with weight gain there is a point at which it may no longer be possible to keep weight gain entirely hidden and secret. I have suggested that even with noticeable weight gain, varying rationalizations and reasons can be used to avoid the stigma that would be attached to purposeful weight gain (e.g. “I have a medical condition”). Weight gain *because* of a health complication is seen as less stigmatizing than purposeful weight gain and may be used as a way to hide the actual stigma (Goffman, 1963:94). However, the additional weight, which over time becomes apparent on gaining individuals who are gaining certain amounts weight in real life, makes such rationalizations difficult to sustain. For example, while Dewayne is less “out” about his enjoyment of encouraging weight gain than his preference for fat women, his “close friends and family know that I am helping my wife gain weight: it’s pretty obvious at this point.” Because his wife is a certain size he feels that it is fairly obvious that she is gaining on purpose.

I work online as a freelance writer and editor, and in my professional life I don’t bother telling people about all this [involvement with feederism]. I spend a lot of time online, and, oftentimes, when I get into chats and message board discussions, I don’t typically feel the desire to reveal this



'little' detail to virtual strangers. However, in my personal life, yeah, I think everybody close to me knows. For one thing, I'm over 800 pounds and bedridden. That makes it kind of obvious. (Rosie)

Rosie does not have to disclose her desire to gain weight within her online dealings.

However, she too feels that in her real life, her predilection for weight gain is obvious (for example, when friends come to visit her). Dewayne notes that 800 pounds cannot "just happen," so generally people, in an attempt to make sense of the situation, force one into being "out" about this preference. These ideas stem from the overarching societal discourse that *no one would allow themselves to gain that much weight* which makes it *obvious*, according to these respondents, that they enjoy it.

See, that's the thing with feederism. Most other people can hide their fetishes when they're done with them. You put the ropes away. You stop sniffing shoes. But for us, if we indulge in our fetishes IRL [in real life], we [gainers] carry it around with us where-ever we go. It's a little like being trans[gendered] in that way. You can't hide being transgender. Well, you can, but once you start to transition, it's obvious to anyone who knew you before. (Donna)

Because a "gainer's" / "feedee's" weight gain may become noticeable, one is forced to disclose and to be "out" as a "gainer"/ "feedee" once they are recognized as having gained large amounts of weight, whereas, as an "encourager"/ "feeder" one can remain secretly "closeted" forever.

### ***Stigma Management***

*Stigma management is an offshoot of something basic in society, the stereotyping or 'profiling' of our normative expectations regarding conduct and character. (Goffman, 1963:51)*

Once an individual has disclosed him or herself they move from being “an individual with information to manage to that of an individual with an uneasy social situation, from that of a discreditable person to that of a discredited one” (Goffman, 1963:100). Instead of managing information in an attempt to conceal the stigma, once disclosed, the individual must find a way to manage their stigma. I am using the word “manage” here as a way of coping. One must “manage” their stigma by finding ways to be able to live comfortably and with some type of ease with their stigma. This research found that respondents use the internet as a way to locate one’s “own” group and fantasy in attempting to cope with or manage living with the stigma of being sexually aroused by weight gain.

### **Discovering “the own”**

Those interested in feederism reported that coming to learn of “the own” (Goffman, 1963:20) and being able to communicate with them was a useful stigma management strategy. “The own” are the group of individuals sharing the same stigma. Learning of and making contact with other like-minded individuals occurs in two places for my respondents: print magazines (especially prior to 1995) and the internet (after 1995).

Several participants spoke about the role magazines played in helping them realize that they were not alone. These magazines also helped respondents learn the vocabulary and expand their horizons in regards to what sexually aroused them. Henry, a non-practicing “feeder,” also enjoys the idea of gaining weight himself. Magazines helped him to solidify his attraction to fat and weight gain: “in university, when I was trying to understand why porn didn’t interest me, I went into an odd shop with vast bins of old

issues of every sort of magazine, looking for something that would grab my attention, and I found two issues of a magazine called *BUF*<sup>48</sup> --it featured only fat women. In there was a weight gain story. So it was like ‘wow, someone else obviously appreciates weight gain!’” There were only a few magazines which catered to those interested in fat women. “The magazines were called *Plumpers* and *Big Women*. I picked them up, because they were pretty much the only pieces of erotica/pornography that ever catered to my interests. A few issues later, a column in the same magazine addressed the issues of feederism” (Grant). This interest in print magazines occurred before sites developed on the internet.

For “encouragers” and/or “feeders” magazines accomplished three things. Magazines confirmed the individual’s enjoyment or preference in fat bodies/partners. They gave names and titles to their preferences and also allowed them to recognize that there was a whole community of like-minded individuals. “When I read a story in *BUF* magazine about weight gain and how the weight was distributed on the female character’s body, I became turned on by it. Weight gain stories appeared more and more over time and continued to arouse me. I then knew it was what I liked sexually” (Randy).

I had various glimpses into who I was along the way but no external or social confirmation of what it was. Then I discovered *BUF* magazine and I was immediately turned on by the larger women and it allowed me to recognize what I was attracted to. From here I could identify it and I felt that there were other people out there who shared my preferences. *BUF* magazine and a fat girl wrestling video I found allowed me to stare and look at fat to my heart’s content. It was a truly wonderful experience. (Jeffrey)

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<sup>48</sup> BUF stands for “Big Up Front” (breasts) but it featured larger women more generally.

Randy and Jeffrey both came to realize they were interested in fat and weight gain from magazines which catered to this preference. Magazines gave Damon an established vocabulary. “At age 21 or 22 I learned of this underground world and the names for these things; in a magazine of some sort.” Such magazines were also pivotal to Perry’s experience:

In my late teens, I noticed some fat ‘porn’ on a newsstand. Until then, I thought I alone was interested in fat women. I almost thought I had ‘invented’ the concept! But I was not alone. When I discovered Dimensions magazine, and learned there were others called feeders. I decided I had always had those desires. What really blew me away, though, was discovering that women existed who were the perfect complement to feeders...women who wanted to get fatter, or better yet, wanted someone to fatten them up! And not just a few pounds, but immense amounts of weight, even to immobility!

Magazines not only showed Perry he was not alone in his desires but they also showed him there existed a counter part to his feeding desires; those wishing to gain weight. For some “encouragers” and/or “feeders” and “gainers” and/or “feedees” magazines proved to be an important part of how they came to recognize their desires and came to learn that there were others interested in the same things they were. The internet plays a similar role for some of the younger respondents.

At some point many participants find their way online (as all of the respondents I spoke to did) through direct searching by using words like ‘fat’ or ‘weight gain’ in search engines. “Before then [the discovery of feederism on the internet], I knew I was attracted to fat partners. [One website in particular] helped me find feederism as a sexual fetish and find out there were others like me” (Donna). Respondents spoke about discovering

not only the lingo to go along with their particular interests but also learning that there are others like themselves who are interested in the same things. “I have been interested in feederism for most of my life. But it wasn’t until my late teens that I actually discovered there is a whole community of people who are into this, complete with their lingo and all the rest of it. This happened through the Internet” (Rosie).

Shawn (age 21), an “encourager” says, “by reading stories on Stuffed Online, I immediately keyed in on the fact I enjoyed stuffing/feeding, and mild to moderate weight gain; it turned me on” “In 1996, there were only so many websites, so finding fat online led to Dimensions [online] no matter what you did. Dimensions already had an outline [*sic*] of all these terms and plenty of cartoons, morphs, pics, stories, and actual people, to ‘test’ myself on. So imagine me at age 12 sneaking downstairs to use the family computer at like 4 am and looking at all this stuff” (Derek, age 22). The internet allowed Derek to articulate his interest in being a “feeder.” Brandon’s “first case of masturbation was to online weight-gain literature.” Calvin’s initial involvement was solidified by the information accessible to him via the internet. “With the Internet, I discovered fat erotica, and then the weight gain fantasy stories. That helped shape my ambiguous desires into a definite goal: feeding women. I think it was a case of my brain catching up with my crotch.”

The most important aspect of one’s discovery of the online feederism community is that it is a way that respondents cope with their stigma. By finding a group of “own,” individuals recognize they are not alone: “knowing from experience what it is like to

have this particular stigma, some of them can provide the individual with instruction in the tricks of the trade and with a circle of lament to which he [sic] can withdraw for moral support and for comfort of feeling at home, at ease, accepted as a person who is like any other normal person” (Goffman, 1963:20). Having an “own” group means that individuals do not have to face their stigma alone and can “meet” (Goffman, 1963:22) online to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For Sonya, “the best part about the online community is that it gives me a sense of normalcy and I have made some great friends there.” Cathy says, “from the community I gain a lot of support. It’s nice to know you’re not alone in your views, especially views that are misunderstood and looked down upon by much of society.” These respondents note that the online community provides them a safe haven from the feelings of stigma where they are seen as ‘normal,’ just as Goffman suggests.

Henry highlights that making connections with others is important: “Just being somewhere [online community] where these feelings and desires are normal, where other[s] share some of them or at least understand and accept them...that is the biggest reason I keep coming back.” Again, being considered “normal” is an important aspect for these respondents. The online community gives Jane, “a sense of belonging, camaraderie, [and] not feeling like a freak.” Participation in the online community normalizes these respondents’ feelings of stigmatization.

Jeffrey and Shawn note that they enjoy the communication aspect. “[I visit online communities] because it’s a way for me to find related resources, and people who are

wired in similar ways to myself” (Shawn). “I enjoy talking to other ‘feeders’ and the social interaction” (Jeffrey). For respondents, the online ‘feederism community’ is an important part of how they manage their stigma. Having people to talk to who see them as ‘normal’ is important to many. The online community is used to reinforce or help many articulate their preference for fat partners and weight gain, to know they are not alone in their desires and to communicate with like-minded individuals.

“In the sociological study of stigmatized persons, one is usually concerned with the kind of corporate life, if any, is sustained by those of a particular category” (Goffman, 1963:22). Goffman’s catalogue of group formations does not include the internet given the date his work was published. However, in terms of community engagement, respondents participate in the online feederism community through visiting and participating in discussion forums, looking at pictures, reading stories and articles, and/or chatting with community members over instant messaging programs. Most noted involvement in these communities as something they do on a regular basis. The amount of time spent engaging in the online feederism community varies.

- ? a few hours a day (Harold, Patricia, Jackie, Derek)
- ? more than an hour a day (Hailey, Byron)
- ? an hour a day / 7 hours per week (Brandon, Grant, Shawn, Stewart, Damon, Adam)
- ? 5 hours or so a week (Jane, Henry, Odette, Brittney, Katrina)
- ? a couple hours a week (Dewayne, Calvin)
- ? various amounts of time when the interest strikes (Randy, Mary)

“Dimensions [website] is the perfect example of where fat lovers can come together . . . there is a gainer board [there], and the site itself can inform and educate people as to the existence of these countercultures” (Calvin). “I just go there to keep up on the goings on.

I've made a few friends (some I hang out with in real life). I visit in hopes that I'll find something wonderful [a real life relationship]" (Byron). Engagement with like-minded individuals within this community is important to many respondents.

Another aspect raised by respondents is that of meeting a partner or friend. Goffman (1963:23-4) suggests, "in being a member of the category, an individual may have an increased probability of coming into contact with any other member, and even forming a relationship with him [*sic*] as a result." Harold and Patricia met through the online feederism community. Odette and Jeffrey and Rosie and Calvin also met online.

I met him [my husband] in Dimensions chat. We started chatting and I knew he was an FA and he knew I was fat. But neither of us were looking for or expecting things to turn out the way they did. I had it in my profile that I was a 'feedee,' so when we were chatting he was asking me about it. He said he was a 'feeder.' [Although] that still did not mean we were going to have a relationship it just turned out that way. When we realized that it had changed from just chat buddies to a very strong attraction on all levels and that we were going to be an item, we knew it would be a feeding relationship. He was in the U.S. I was in the U.K. so it was very hard. I flew over three times a year, we chatted online and cammed<sup>49</sup> and phoned every day (our phone bills were huge!) [Eventually,] I left my job, sold my home and moved over here [to the U.S.]. Very big changes but worth it. (Odette)

I would not have met my husband without the Internet. . . When we started dating, we already knew that I was a 'feedee' and he was a 'feeder.' I made it clear that I was a 'gainer' and that this would be a weight-gain relationship. It excited him, even thrilled him, to learn that I intended to make myself as fat as I could, frantically devouring as much food as humanly possible before my untimely end. He wanted in on that deal, because that's what feederism is. So, as soon as we were together regularly, it became a feeder-feedee fattening process. (Rosie)

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<sup>49</sup> A type of communication over the internet which involves video cameras displaying each other's live streaming video to the other person. "Camming" can include voice and sound or can be only visual.



I have some male friends who have been 'in the scene' for some time. We discuss the subject often, encourage each other, talk about our elusive search for a true female feeder, etc. Most of them live in other parts of the U.S. and other parts of the world so we have not met on a regular basis; however, we chat online and via telephone with regularity. We met hanging out for several years in various internet groups, chat rooms, etc. I used to travel extensively on a regular basis so I have had the opportunity to meet many of them at one time or another. It's good to have people to talk to. (Stewart)

Using the online feederism community to find one's group of "own," sharing experiences with like-minded individuals, which sometimes leads to forming relationships of either a romantic or platonic nature, is one way that respondents cope with having a stigmatized identity.

## **Fantasy**

*I'm not sure if you encountered this yet, but one thing about feederism is that it's one of the few fantasies (like necrophilia or cannibalism fantasies) where I don't think a feeder or feedee's real life goal is always a match to his or her fantasies. (Derek)*

*Certainly as a fantasy I think that a feeding lifestyle is hot! But a lot of fantasies are not so practical in reality. (Henry)*

The line between feederism in fantasy and feederism in reality seems to be blurred for many respondents of this study. Not only are there participants for whom feederism occurs **only** in fantasy, there is an important level of fantasy at play for all participants, even those who claim to practice feederism within their real lives. Fantasy is important to the majority of respondents of this study. "In short, the term *sexual fantasy* refers to almost any mental imagery that is sexually arousing or erotic to the individual" (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995:470). These thoughts can occur at any time during the

day but are often used to heighten sexual experiences either with a partner or on one's own. As the introductory quotation from Derek suggests, fantasies within feederism can be quite divergent compared to what respondents claim to actually do in their real lives. Fantasy provides respondents with a way to manage their stigma. Respondents recognize that practicing feederism within fantasy is much less stigmatizing than practicing it in real life with the real consequences of weight gain.

Sexual fantasies are arousing, enjoyable, and considered healthy (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995). I asked respondents to consider why they fantasize about certain aspects of feederism now or why feederism has only been a fantasy for them rather than a reality. There are three rationales given as to why respondents fantasize about feederism. First, many participants note that they either were or are afraid of their interest in feederism. This is spoken about as fear because of the taboo against weight in our society, fear for one's health in a real life gaining situation, or a fear to admit to one's self about their sexual interest in feederism. In other words, fear of their stigma. "I was too inhibited/scared about what 'everyone else' would say/think, etc. I did not have the courage to live my life for ME" (Stewart). Worrying what others would think if they found out about his desire to gain weight, fantasizing about it allowed Stewart to still participate without having to admit to anyone that he was really into gaining in real life. Thus, he was able to hide his stigma. Patricia's interest in gaining remained a fantasy for some time because she questioned if she could be, "OK in the world as a fat person" knowing how hard it can be.

When asked why at one time he was only fantasizing about gaining, Harold says, “bravery.... escalation... not believing it could happen or that people would find it attractive.” He then says, “by exposing myself more and more to the gainer and feeder society I got brave enough to meet someone and it wasn’t until I met someone that I realized I could turn the fantasies into a reality.” Harold’s stigma was lessened not only by participation in the feederism community but also by meeting someone and becoming more comfortable with his identity. This allowed him to make some of his fantasies a reality. Donna fantasized before taking an active role in real life because she “was still closeted. At other times, because of a number of issues with actively gaining such as money, clothes, parental acceptance, health, and just simply it not being right for me.”

It’s a fantasy I guess because it’s me looking forward to the day that it comes [when I will start gaining weight], and enjoying the fact that it’s a fantasy. I don’t have to worry about health problems, mean comments from strangers and the reality of being fat just quite yet. I can enjoy in my head a strings-free ideal of me being as big as I want, and can end it at any time. (Grant)

Jane, a female “feeder,” says that the stigma surrounding her interest in feederism made her feel it was too odd to share so she kept her desires alive through fantasy: “For a few years, even when I was in a relationship, it wasn’t something that I was 100% comfortable sharing with my partner. I felt maybe it was a little too odd. So it was simply a fantasy thing for a while.” Katrina, another female “feeder” experienced similar feelings: “before I really admitted that I was a feeder, there were periods when I was inactive with it or tried to not act on those feelings because I considered it to be something taboo in our society.” The stigma felt by an interest in weight gain forced

some respondents to keep their desires in the realm of fantasy only. Fantasy is one way that respondents manage their stigmatized identities as either “encouragers,” “feeders,” “encouragers,” or “gainers.”

There are two other reasons worth discussing about why fantasy is an important part of feederism. The second reason is the lack of a partner. “The fact that feederism was only fantasy was more so the lack of someone to do it with than any other reason” (Brandon). Perry, Henry, Calvin, Shawn, Adam, Susan, and Byron all state that while thinking they are or were ready for feederism in real life, not having a partner to practice it with, made or makes feederism only a desire practiced inside their thoughts.

The third reason why fantasy is important is quite significant. Fantasy allows respondents who enjoy these thoughts to think about things that lie beyond the realm of possibility or desirability in real life. A rapidity of weight gain so fast as not to be feasible in real life remains fantasy. “I often fantasize about being able to gain more rapidly than humanly possible” (Stewart). Hailey and Jane also fantasize about certain body parts inflating rapidly. “[I fantasize about] rapid weight gain, especially in my hips, getting so big I get stuck” (Hailey). Thoughts about gaining several hundred pounds in a few minutes allow these respondents to fantasize about things that are not humanly possible.

Sometimes respondents speak about their partner gaining impossible amounts of weight. “Growing to the point of 2000 lbs is not possible. So fantasy lies beyond the point of

what is realistically possible” (Dewayne). Jeffrey says that fantasy allows one to think of their partner larger than is desired in real life.

You might fantasize because your partner is not at a certain place size-wise. For example, we both fantasize about her being 600 lbs. This is realistic for her to achieve. Our fantasy also goes towards 800 lbs. and even 1000 lbs... but these remain strictly in fantasy because while they may be possibly achievable, they are not practical and not in either of our best interests. At 600 lbs. she can be reasonably healthy.

Gaining large amounts of weight that are impossible or undesired in real life remain a fantasy for some participants. This suggests another important dimension to fantasies within feederism: extreme weight gain.

Extreme amounts of weight gain, often to the point of immobility, are an important fantasy for many respondents. Leitenberg and Henning (1995:480), in their review of sexual fantasy literature, find that “doing things sexually that you would never do in reality” is a common type of sexual fantasy. While many respondents have no interest in immobility in real life they enjoy fantasizing about it. For respondents who fantasize about immobility the focus is on the extreme size of someone who would be *so* large that they would be unable to get out of bed or attend to their own personal needs. The following four quotations illustrate this point.

It’s a great thrill for visual shock value. It arouses me when I hear a lady say she wants to get that fat. It’s arousing that someone could get so fat that they couldn’t move and that their belly got so big that it prevented them from doing normal things. But actually committing to that is not something I would do. (Perry, male “feeder”)

The fantasy of immobility very much turns me on. The idea that you're THAT FAT, it's the letting go, it's the indulging, it's the fact that you've quit caring, it's the giving in to all of your 'animal' desires: very erotic. If I could try it FOR one day and one day only, I'd totally try it. Maybe even a week. But to try it for good? Oh, hell no! If I couldn't move, I'd go nuts! (Donna, female "gainer")

There is more to a life than eating and becoming massively obese. I want my partner to be able to at least waddle around and get around ok on her own. I do get excited about immobility though also and often fantasize about feeding someone to the point where they are unable to leave the house and depend on me for everything. Cleaning, eating, hair, nails, hygiene, social companionship...etc The bulk of the weight gain stories I read are ones where the women become so huge they can barely get around but that's not a practical thing for me... it's the fantasy side. (Adam, male "feeder")

Immobility is something that I think can only exist in my fantasies. While I think it's very hot to let myself go OR be fattened up by someone else that much that I'm helpless and unable to move... I do enjoy being able to move, having a 'normal' life... so that's why I have my "realistic" goal set to 450 but its not to say I would stop there... I don't know. I have mixed feelings but it's something I can see only being a fantasy for now. (Hailey, female "feedee")

To be immobile is to weigh, depending on one's height and body structure, more than 500 pounds. It is the sheer enormity of the fat body at this stage that these respondents express as the appeal with the immobility fantasy. A body, fat enough to force it to be immobile, is sexually arousing to these respondents. Within fantasy, immobility can be a temporary condition whereas, in real life, reaching the level of immobility due to weight is almost irreversible for most people. The fact that immobility can be short term is another important aspect. "I mean even the idea of immobility is pleasing in fantasy if there was some way to change your size at will (the whole 'magic pill' weight gain

fantasy idea)” (Cathy). This fantasy of temporary immobility is shared by other participants.

It has entered into fantasy and in some of my fantasy fiction. But even there it’s a temporary thing. Whereas, the thought of it in reality isn’t at all something I’m interested in. The complications that come into play do not appeal. The thought of someone being trapped within their own body is something that really disturbs me. (Jane, female “encourager”)

Immobility is a turn on for me. I’ve often fantasized about making myself so fat that I’m immobile, but the reality is enough for me to be satisfied in keeping it in my head only. I’ve also had fantasies where I’m only temporarily immobile (as in being fed so much that I’m unable to get up and need to wait a while before I can move). (Grant, male “gainer”)

The brief and passing nature of immobility within fantasy is an important aspect to those who fantasize about it. Because there is no magic pill and because weight gain to these extremes is not temporary or even likely reversible, the fantastical nature of extreme weight gain to the point of immobility is heightened.

Within this group, participants are able to articulate why immobility remains inside their minds instead of a reality and under what “magical conditions” they would consider it in their real lives. Derek, a male “feeder,” explains the reality as he sees it. “The fantasy is like a giant marshmallow woman who can’t exist. The reality is bedpans, ulcers, and the realization that after a good bout of sex there’s no fork lifting her to the movie theater for a movie date.” Adam suggests: “if money and health was [*sic*] not an issue and my partner wanted to become immobile I think I would love it. However, in practicality I can’t imagine supporting an immobile woman in real life. I would need to be with her

24/7 to assist with her needs and don't see myself wanting to do that ALL of the time.”

“I just don't have the physical means to even begin contemplating such a life decision. In a world with infinite resources and room for vast amounts of experimentation, I'd have to say maybe [I'd do it] though” (Brandon). Because immobility requires a tremendous amount of care giving, time, energy, financial and basic resources, it remains in the realm of fantasy for many respondents.

There are three reasons why fantasies are important. Fantasy allows respondents to participate in feederism before they are ready to practice it in real life due to the fear and uncertainty this stigma presents. Fantasies also allow respondents to participate in feederism before and during the search for a like-minded or willing partner to indulge in some or all of those fantasies with. Finally, it allows respondents to think about things such as extreme weight gains that are not possible or desired in real life. Fantasies provide respondents with a way to manage their desires for weight gain, their stigma, without having to practice it in real life.

Actual fantasies within feederism are varied. Many fantasies involve eating and feeding partners different kinds of foods which often lead to various sexual acts. They also include a progression of noticeable weight gain for the majority of participants. More specifically, the variety of fantasies about feederism are shown include:

- ? force-feeding machines: Derek, Bryon
- ? extreme force feeding being tied down, stuffing: Sonya, Katrina, Cathy
- ? magic pills: Cathy
- ? feeding farms, food orgies, and feeding contracts: Harold
- ? gaining club: Henry
- ? being injected 'against my will' with some weight gain serum: Donna



- ? giant blueberry from Willy Wonka: Donna, Perry, Derek
- ? not being able to masturbate anymore: Rosie, Sonya
- ? when the feedee has zero health or hygiene problems: Calvin
- ? being fed to death: Rosie
- ? immobility: Brandon, Jane, Derek, Donna, Hailey, Damon, Stewart, Grant, Susan

Leitenberg and Henning (1995:480) note that often people fantasize about things they actively do in real life or relive previous sexual experiences. So while this is a list of specific fantasies, it should also be recognized that these activities may also be occurring in their real lives. The reverse also holds true. While some participants think, visualize, and fantasize about extreme force feeding, for example, it does not mean that they include it or desire it to happen in real life. “The degree of fantasy to which ‘feeders’ and ‘feedees’ seek to fulfill in reality is always different and based on all kinds of other criteria such as morality or health” (Derek).

The level to which respondents feel fantasy is important in their lives varies. According to Leitenberg and Henning (1995:490), 95% of men and women have had sexual fantasies. All respondents of this study say that they fantasize to some extent about feederism. Four different answers were given when participants were asked how important those thoughts are in their lives. Only one participant felt they were not that important: “they’re not incredibly important. I maybe find myself wandering off mentally on the subject about once a week at the most” (Jane). The majority of participants either felt their thoughts about feederism were very important (15) or at least somewhat important to them (9). Others said that while their fantasies were important, their real life activities were much more important (5) which means they can fit also

within the “somewhat important” group. For example, “it is more important for me to live out the fantasy as much as possible than to spend a lot of time on the fantasies” (Stewart). “At this point in my life, there is little fantasy. Most of what I could want, I have” (Calvin). Jackie, Lenny, and Odette also feel this way either due to already having what they want or wanting to spend their energy on actually *doing it* rather than *thinking about it*.

Respondents who feel that feederism fantasies are somewhat important in their lives speak about it as enjoyable and important but that it is not the only sexually enjoyable thought they have. “I interact with the fantasy a great deal...but if it were to go away, I wouldn’t be totally doomed. It’s definitely a part of my sexual interests, but it’s not the be-all-end-all” (Brandon). Shawn, Randy, Jeffrey, Katrina, Brianna, Brittney, William, and Dewayne also feel this way about fantasy: important but not vital. However, exactly half of the respondents feel that fantasy is extremely important to them.

Half of the respondents feel that their thoughts and fantasies about feederism are of tremendous importance if not vital to their sexuality.

It’s a pretty big part and very important to my sexual gratification. (Cathy, female “gainer”)

I enjoy the fantasy, they help me shape what I want and want to be. So yes, it is very important. I love thinking about this subject, either as a concept or as a fantasy (Harold, male “gainer”)

It is an important element in my life, even though not in the flesh. I've thought about it almost daily for so long, I think it defines me in some ways, yet no one who knows me well knows about it. (Perry, male "feeder")

These quotations illustrate that thoughts and ideas about feederism, even if not practiced in their real lives, are still very important. The quotations below show a heightened level of importance placed on these sexual thoughts:

It's my primary sexual fetish. It's the ONLY thing I can get off to during masturbation. And it's a sure fire way to get me off during partner-sex. (Donna, female "feedee")

Sexually, it's VERY IMPORTANT to me! (Sonya, female "feedee")

Totally vital to my life. I can't imagine getting turned on without it. I need fat women and feederism in my life. (Adam, male "encourager")

VERY! It's the only sexuality I have. It's the only version of eroticism I experience. (Damon, male "feeder")

Henry, Grant, Hailey, Patricia, Susan, Byron, Derek, and Rosie share similar sentiments. These participants feel that their sexual thoughts about feederism are absolutely critical to their sexual identity. Overall, half of my participants feel that fantasies surrounding feederism are very important and most agree it plays an important role within feederism. Through fantasy respondents are able to participate in feederism in a less stigmatizing way. In fantasy they are able to imagine anything they want, no matter how stigmatizing that might be in real life. Fantasy is a very important way that respondents cope with the stigma attached to their desire for weight gain.

### **Desiring Extreme Weight Gain in Real Life**

Immobility in fantasy is seen as tolerable by those within the feederism community because it is not happening in real life and therefore, no one is harmed. In fact, immobility is a fairly common fantasy for respondents. However, three of my male “feeder” respondents actually desire their partner to become immobile in real life. This is considered by most respondents to be rare: “there are varying degrees of feederism from fantasy to extreme (immobility) though the latter is quite rare” (Cathy). Some considered it less acceptable. “There are also the types of feeders which give feederism a bad name because they will fatten their women to immobility which in my opinion is abuse” (Brianna). Those who wish to immobilize their partner are at the extreme in terms of how they practice feederism. Using the continuum developed to illustrate the “encourager” and “feeder” identities (please refer to Table One in the previous chapter), these respondents would seem to fit to the far right of the continuum indicating a high level of intensity.

“Feeders” that desire their partner to gain so much weight that he/she becomes immobile are what Randy calls “immobilizers.” It is their “brand” of feederism that upsets and enrages members of the fat acceptance community and even some members of the feederism community. Not surprisingly, these three “feeders,” who may be considered “immobilizers,” participate less in the online feederism community than others I interviewed. Presumably this is because their extreme desires are not shared by the majority of those within the feederism community *at large*. Due to the fact that their viewpoints or differing ideals would be frowned upon within the feederism community, it is understandable why they do not frequently participate there. Murray (2004), Kulick

(2005) and to a lesser extent Blank (2000), tend to focus on this extreme form of feederism where it is assumed that feederism in all or most feeding relationships is occurring in this manner. While I did find examples of these extreme versions, one cannot assume, as previous authors have, the extent to which feederism exists in this manner. The ideas which follow in the “techniques of neutralization” section below are suggestive of a very particular subset of “feeders,” those who may be considered “immobilizers.”

Just as being hugely obese is stigmatizing (Goode and Vail, 2008), desiring your partner to become so hugely obese that he or she has become immobile, unable to leave the house or sometimes to even leave “bed,” is also gravely stigmatizing. Not only would these individuals be stigmatized by society at large, these individuals are in some ways stigmatized by people within the feederism community who call this “abusive” and who do not agree that feederism should be taken “this far.” Because these respondents engage in a version of feederism that is less accepted and more stigmatizing, my findings seem to demonstrate that those who may be considered “immobilizers” attempt to manage their heightened stigma through employing several neutralization techniques.

### **Techniques of Neutralization**

Sykes and Matza (1957) defined five techniques of neutralization<sup>50</sup> used by juvenile delinquents. Since then, their schema has been used in many different studies to

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<sup>50</sup> William Minor (1981) identified two other techniques that were employed for his purpose which he called metaphor of the ledger (“Sure, I have done some bad things but I’ve done many more good things in my life time”) and defense of the necessity (“I had to steal to feed my family”). Cromwell and Thurman (2003) also identified two new techniques when they interviewed shoplifters: justification by comparison

understand various forms of deviance and criminal behaviour. The five techniques identified are: denial of responsibility (“I didn’t mean it; wasn’t my fault”), denial of injury (“I didn’t really hurt anybody”), denial of the victim (“They had it coming to them”), condemning the condemners (“It’s no worse than what he/she/they/you do.”), and appeal to higher loyalties (“I didn’t do it for myself”) (Sykes and Matza, 1957:669). This theory has been used as a framework to investigate how persons may attempt to rationalize or justify their involvement in various types of disreputable, illegal or stigmatizing behaviour including delinquency, (Ball 1966; Hindelang 1970; Rogers and Buffalo 1974), “hogging” (Gailey and Prohaska 2006), shoplifting (Cromwell and Thurman 2003), abortion (Brennan, 1974), topless dancing (Thompson and Harred 1992), wife battering (Dutton 1986), marijuana smoking (Priest and McGrath 1970), deer poaching (Eliason and Dodder 1999) drinking behavior (Dodder and Hughes 1993), and genocide (Alvarez 1997).

Sykes and Matza (1957:664-5) envisaged these techniques as operating as cognitive defenses against guilt: “there is a good deal of evidence suggesting that many delinquents do experience a sense of guilt or shame.” While their concept was originally developed as a way to understand juvenile delinquency, their theory also applies to other forms of disreputable, illegal, or stigmatizing behaviours. Their basic argument is that these individuals attempt to deflect blame from themselves to avoid a sense of guilt or shame. Individuals do this by giving reasons or excuses for their behaviours or situations.

“These justifications are commonly described as rationalizations. They are viewed as

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(“If I wasn’t shoplifting I would be doing something more serious”) and postponement (“I just don’t think about it”).

following deviant behavior and as protecting the individual from self-blame” (Sykes and Matza, 1957:666). While all those who have an interest in weight gain for sexual reasons carry a stigma, not all attempt to rationalize their behaviour. Those who do, however, are those who practice a more extreme version of feederism, who may be referred to as “immobilizers.” Three respondents may fit within this general group.

One of the “feeders,” Calvin, age 28, is in a long term relationship with an immobile woman who claims she has not been out of bed for two years. The second, Dewayne, age 39, is in a long term relationship with a nearly immobile woman. His first “feedee” wife died in an immobile state over ten years ago.<sup>51</sup> While his current wife is still able to get around, he is more than willing to encourage her to also become immobile. The third “feeder,” Damon, has had some experience with near-immobility. His ex-wife got very close to immobility during their relationship but she decided to lose weight. Now, single, at age 38, Damon desires to be in a relationship with a woman who would become immobile over time. He currently has an online relationship with a woman who he encourages to gain online and on the telephone. They are planning to meet and carry out plans together for her to become immobile. Each of these three respondents in an attempt to deflect guilty and shame from their own desires or actions used three techniques of neutralization during my interview with them.

### **Denial of Responsibility**

Denial of responsibility is explained as, “[one] can define himself as lacking responsibility for his deviant actions . . . [where] delinquent acts are due to forces outside

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<sup>51</sup> He was not willing to discuss the details of this relationship or his first wife’s death with me so I have very little information about it.

of the individual and beyond his control such as unloving parents, bad companions, or a slum neighborhood” (Sykes and Matza, 1957:667). Respondents who may be called ‘immobilizers’ used denial of responsibility by stating that feeding is part of their identity, who they are, and that they cannot stop. Extrapolating further, it is beyond their individual control.

At least for male feeders, if you’ve accepted yourself as a feeder and gain pleasure from it, *it’s not going to go away. I don’t see it going away. I’ve never met someone who it went away for.* It is part of their sexual identity. *It would be shocking to see someone ‘cure’ themselves of this fetish,* in my opinion. (Damon, emphasis added)

Damon is telling us that in his experience, being a male “feeder” is linked to his identity, his self and that it is something that is unlikely to be resolved or “fixed.”

Dewayne, discusses another male “feeder’s” partner who may die. “If he’s a real feeder,<sup>52</sup> if he is actively participating in her demise, he will move on after she dies [to another “feedee”] because *he won’t be able to turn off the switch*” (emphasis added). He indicates that once the switch is in the “on” position, it is unlikely a male “feeder” would be able to turn off “the feeder switch” in future relationships. Dewayne’s use of denial of responsibility is that he cannot help himself. At another point during the interview Dewayne states, “expecting them [male “feeders”] to switch on and off their deep seated behavioral emotional tendencies is unrealistic and goes against human nature.” This suggests that Dewayne believes he is not responsible for his desire to feed because it is a part of who he is; Stopping the desire is beyond his control. He is not responsible.

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<sup>52</sup> For Dewayne, a real or true feeder is someone who is truly committed to the practice. He says that for the true ‘feeders,’ “sexual arousal comes from wanting to grow their partner to immense sizes and make their partner dependent on them for help to varying degrees.”



Calvin uses the denial of responsibility in a similar way when he talks about feeding and gaining in terms of a fixation and feeding impulse.

If somebody really does have the *fixation to feed*, or to feed their partner, *that doesn't just go away*. So the people who don't acknowledge that either are not true feeders and feedees, or they are denying what they are . . . Because *the feeding impulse is so strong* in both Rosie and me I think most people who are truly in possession of the feeding impulse are either too scared to act on their real desires, be it for external or internal reasons, or are simply discrete enough not to talk about it in public spaces where the audiences would not be understanding. *The feeding impulse really doesn't go away* (emphasis added).

Calvin understands feeding and gaining to be an impulse behaviour which allows him to deny personal responsibility or choice for his actions and desires. He too, cannot help himself but to feed. These three respondents all used denial of responsibility in a similar way. They deny personal responsibility because they believe that their desire to feed is part of their identity, part of who they are and that they cannot stop it or “cure” it. These respondents may use this defense as a way of coping with their stigma.

The second way that the three respondents who may be considered “immobilizers” deny responsibility is by claiming their gaining partners are not victims but are consenting adults in charge of their own fate. This was a common theme for all three of these respondents. They attempted to make it very clear to me that they are not to be held responsible for their partner's fate because their partner is a consenting participant.

Damon believes that there is no victim because for him, feederism occurs with full consent of both parties. When speaking about having a partner gain to immobility, Damon says, “the biggest thing about [it] for me, though, is the feedee being totally comfortable with it and in it. Because of its permanence and process of it, I want the feedee to be completely comfortable and psychologically prepared... all of the health concerns will have been thoroughly discussed before and during the weight gain process.” At another point he states, “as long as both partners are fully consenting adults it’s like enabling an alcoholic to drink, it’s the same. I don’t feel that my contributing to her unhealthiness is any worse than smoking, alcohol, and drugs.” Ensuring full disclosure with and consent from his partner are enough for Damon to deny his own personal responsibility in the end result (immobility or perhaps death). If his partner is aware of the intent and she agrees, there is no victim as she is responsible for her own actions.

This is similar for Calvin. He believes that because his wife has chosen this life for herself she is to be held responsible. When asked how much of his wife’s decision to continue gaining is due to his influence he says,

First, she would not have been able to go much past 400 pounds without me (or someone) to help her, because her mobility was already so bad. Second, she really does have the desire to gain, but, like any challenge, she sometimes has doubts and benefits from the support of those close to her. If I were to guess, I think she might have stopped gaining weight a couple of hundred pounds ago (when she was 600 or so), were it not for my influence and persuasion . . . [However,] If you ask her that same question, I’m almost sure she would tell you that the decision was entirely hers and that she had never doubted it. She really believes that, and she is very strong-willed.

This quote highlights, especially at the end, that Calvin believes that his wife thinks that the decision to gain this amount of weight was truly her own. This belief allows Calvin to deny responsibly for having “talked her into it,” for example, because he believes she made the decision of her own volition. Furthermore, he says, “you could not spend two days with her [Rosie] and come away thinking she is anything less than happy with *the life she has built for herself*. I think that counts for something” (emphasis added). Calvin strongly believes that Rosie has chosen to be in the position she is in allowing him to deny personal responsibility.

When asked about the idea that “feedees” could be considered victims, Dewayne was quick to say that this perception is “craziness.” There has to be some level of consent by the “feedee” to participate in their own weight gain. “No-one is so isolated to the point that they wouldn’t realize that they’ve gained that much weight. At some point there is awareness and personal responsibility.” Dewayne’s strong belief in personal responsibility allows him to deny responsibility for his partner’s actions (over eating and gaining weight). Dewayne told me that he does not think his wife will enjoy becoming immobile. I asked him if he anticipates her becoming unhappy would he not like to remedy the situation before it happens. He replied, “no, it’s up to her entirely! I would be fine if she weighed 1000 lbs. As long as she wants to continue to lead the lifestyle she does, that’s up to her until she wants to change. It’s her personal responsibility, up to her.” Dewayne will not take responsibly for his wife’s lifestyle, which he encourages, and he believes it will lead her to become immobile in the near future.

While any sane feeder doesn't want his feedee to die, dying is an inescapable part of life and is and always will be dictated and tied to how you live your life. *If you are a glutton and you pig out every day of your life you will pay the price for it.* It matters not if you are an emotional eater or you are always physically hungry the effects will be the same and only those living under rocks or totally isolated from society do not have a grasp of the effects that overindulgence brings. *Claiming you were forced into a life of gorging and gluttony until you became too big to escape is almost comical in today's world. It's almost like saying that I didn't know I would get burned when I played with matches.* (Dewayne, emphasis added)

I don't believe anyone can be forcibly coerced into *eating themselves* into weighing 800 or a 1000lbs. Most *feedees know full well that eating grotesque amounts of food will come to no good* and only cry abuse at the end when health and personal welfare have become compromised. Anyone *willingly entering a relationship of this sort must expect an obvious outcome.* (Dewayne, emphasis added)

Dewayne indicates through these quotes that he believes in a high level of personal responsibility in terms of his partners being actively accountable for their role in their weight gain, immobility and possible death. He denies that he is personally responsible for their positions because they knew what they were going to get by "playing with fire."

### **Denial of the Victim**

Denying the victim is the neutralization strategy also used by these three respondents.

Even if the delinquent accepts the responsibility for his deviant actions and is willing to admit that his deviant actions involve an injury or hurt, the moral indignation of self and others may be neutralized by an insistence that the injury is not wrong in light of the circumstances. The injury, it may be claimed, is not really an injury; rather, it is a form of rightful retaliation or punishment. By a subtle alchemy the delinquent moves himself into the position of an avenger and the victim is transformed into a wrong-doer. (Sykes and Matza, 1957:668)

These respondents used this technique as Sykes and Matza (1957) suggest, by claiming that their gaining partners *deserve* to be treated in this way (i.e. encouraged to gain weight, fed beyond their means) because they lack the will power and self esteem to do otherwise. For example, they cannot stop themselves because they are “greedy pigs.” “She has a terrible time resisting food that is put right in front of her greedy mouth. Even when she’s full, I can usually talk her into eating more.” Calvin sees his wife as lacking self control and he can capitalize on it by giving her more food. Calvin portrays his wife as weak willed and gluttonous, perhaps to strategically place the blame on her because of her perceived faults which deflects the blame from him. Calvin believes that he, “give[s] her everything she needs to live this perfect life of extreme gluttony.” Calvin believes his wife is deserving of what she gets (fed more and more, gaining more and more) because he sees her as having a difficult time resisting food.

Dewayne makes a similar statement about his wife: “at this point it is highly unlikely she will want to lose weight because of her own gluttony, it’s an uncontrollable compulsion for her to eat. Sometimes, she will eat and eat until I have to say she’s had enough [which I do] because I do not want her to throw up.” Dewayne also believes that his wife’s compulsion to eat makes her deserving of extreme weight gain.

While I love severely obese women, I still think many are very unhappy with the life their appetite has created for them and are looking for a scapegoat to hang their gluttony and lack of self-discipline on. I think after years of trying to fit into a society that rejects them, many develop an ‘I don’t care anymore’ attitude and actually *go looking for a partner that will feed into and support their personal demons*. It is only at the end when their gluttony gets the better of them do they want out. (emphasis added)

Dewayne can capitalize on the deficiencies he perceives, thus fulfilling his own desire. He then denies them as “victims” because he sees them as deserving and responsible for their own fate:

I allow people to make that choice but by doing it (gaining massive amounts of weight) that’s what you are (a non contributing member of society) so don’t whine and cry about your situation *when you are responsible for it.* (emphasis added)

In an attempt to deflect shame and guilt (Sykes and Matza, 1957:664-5) associated with the stigma attached to their desires for immobile partners these three respondents attempt to rationalize their desires by explaining that their partners are deserving of being over fed.

### **Condemnation of the Condemners**

Also called “a rejection of the rejectors” (Sykes and Matza, 1957:668), the condemnation of the condemners occurs when, “the delinquent shifts the focus of attention from his [*sic*] own deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of his [*sic*] violations. His condemners, he [*sic*] may claim, are hypocrites, deviants in disguise, or impelled by personal spite.” Respondents suggest that perhaps some people should mind their own business and perhaps some people are too quick to judge.

So long as no laws are broken, *what is performed between two consenting adults in the privacy of their own home is no one else’s business. Making someone get fat is not a crime* in this country, (at least the last time I checked) as I’ve previously stated, abusive feeder/feedee relationships, I think are in reality a fallacy. (Dewayne, emphasis added)

Many folks have a hard time understanding why I would want to fatten my beautiful and already dangerously overweight wife even further. Let’s just

say that *the urge to be judgmental comes naturally to most folks*. (Calvin, emphasis added)

These three respondents were also quick to point out that their involvement in feederism is no worse than the things that other people do to themselves.

I don't feel that my contributing to her unhealthiness is any worse than smoking, alcohol, and drugs. (Damon)

Well, of course, but we all are going to die. There is little difference, in my view, between facilitating immobility and, say, enabling my partner to engage in something like skydiving. (Damon)

Damon is using this technique by shifting the focus away from his own actions to those who partake in skydiving, smoking, alcohol, and drugs, asking us to question if what he does (encourage women to eat so much that they may become immobile) is any worse than these activities.

If you're going to live that kind of life, you need to accept that reality. People do horrible things all the time to themselves. Feederism is not something you play with lightly, and if you do, keep it light, when you *really* do it, it isn't done lightly. (Dewayne)

[It's] the same as other types of destructive behaviour. (Dewayne)

Dewayne is suggesting that encouraging someone to gain weight or subsequently gaining massive amounts of weight is no worse than the horrible things that others do to themselves. Thus those in society who may condemn him for his participation in the gaining pursuit are no better than he is.

Red meat: We all know that it's not terribly good for us. But most of us continue to eat it, feed it to our partners and even our children, sometimes in very generous quantities. Keep that habit up, and anyone is likely to lose some time from the end of their lifespan. Are they suicidal? Or are they fond of red meat? For feedees, 'red meat' becomes 'grotesque and immense quantities of all the most unhealthy foods imaginable,' and thus the amount of lifespan lost is far greater. But, other than that degree, what is the difference, really? Others say that everything we do, and every second we live, wounds us, bringing us that much closer to our end. While that isn't strictly true (exercise, for instance, can prolong life), the point is this: Should we all try to live as long as we can? Or should we try to live as well as we can, based upon our desires? (Calvin)

Workaholics work themselves into an early grave for money. We call it noble. Feedees eat their bodies into plush rapture for the pleasures of the flesh, and we call it sick. (Calvin)

Calvin also says that destructive things people do, such as being a workaholic or eating red meat, while socially acceptable, are not very healthy. Therefore, he deflects the shame and guilt in his own actions of encouraging immobility (or weight gain in general) by saying these actions are no worse than anyone else who engages in or encourages unhealthy actions. These three respondents, who may be called "immobilizers," attempt to neutralize their feelings of stigma by claiming that their behaviours are no worse than what their condemners (other people in society) may do in their lives; the difference is the level of social acceptability.

### **Recognizing Injury**

Sykes and Matza (1957) explain that, "for the delinquent, however, wrongfulness may turn on the question of whether or not anyone has clearly been hurt by his deviance" (667) and that, "the delinquent frequently, and in a hazy fashion, feels that his behavior does not really cause any great harm" (667-8). This is how they describe the denial of



injury technique. Interestingly, these three respondents *do* recognize that weight gain can cause significant injury and possible death. Damon says, “everyone in the [feederism] community is concerned with health issues. It’s not taken lightly.” He then quickly adds, “I will curtail the [feeding] relationship if health issues arise.” Damon’s former wife came close to immobility but decided to stop gaining for health reasons, which he says he supported because he loved her. However, he also notes that this was partially the reason why the marriage failed. Damon recognizes that injury, in terms of health consequences, are involved.

Calvin and his wife Rosie clearly recognize the injury caused to her from her weight gain. Not only do they say that she is immobile, not having gotten out of bed in about two years, they also recognize that she is soon to die. Rosie is unsure if she will see her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is less than two years away. When asked if, in the end, when she dies, will it have been worth it Calvin says, “definitely worth it. Helping an avowed feedee gorge herself to death is a gift that keeps on giving, for both of us. I need people like her to achieve my sexual fantasies, and she needs people like me for the same reason.”<sup>53</sup> He constructs the health consequences and eventual death as just the end result and not something he feels the need to justify. Calvin recognizes the fragility of his wife’s health which he finds sexually appealing.

The fragility of her health [is] very arousing. The way her flesh perspires so fiercely even though she almost never exerts herself...the way her breath sounds like the last gasps of somebody who’s smoked two packs a

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<sup>53</sup> Calvin was asked a follow-up question on this point: “But it’s only a gift that keeps on giving until she dies... then she can’t ‘give’ any further?” He replied, “Right. It’s the gift that keeps on giving for now. But all pleasures are like that. Nothing lasts forever. Nor do we” (Calvin).

day for forty years...the way her pulse never drops below 100, signifying the incredible strain on her heart...it's all very appealing. (Calvin)

This quote while perhaps disturbing in terms of Calvin's sexual attraction to his wife's failing health, displays that he recognizes the injury to his wife but, as previous quotes have shown, he does not take personal responsibility for its occurrence.

Dewayne also recognizes that "eating grotesque amounts of food will come to no good" in terms of immobility and potential death. "I don't want her to die, but ya, it is part of it. There ARE feeders that would actually get off on the death part, that's not me. I don't relish it but it is part of the reality." When asked, "it's the inevitable outcome to get your rocks off?" he replies, "Yes, exactly!" Dewayne, like these other two "feeders," recognizes the danger and injury caused by extreme weight gain but he too uses the denial of responsibility ("It's her choice; this is consensual") explanation to reduce any guilt or shame he might feel from encouraging this stigmatizing behaviour.

While employing four of the five techniques to some extent, the technique of neutralization most used by these "feeders" who may be considered "immobilizers" is denial of the responsibility. These respondents feel that their partners choose their own fate and are therefore responsible for the outcome, be it immobility or even death. This allows these respondents to deflect feelings of shame or guilt associated with their involvement. These respondents are perhaps more likely to use these techniques of neutralization because they assert to practice a type of feederism that is more stigmatizing than other respondents. Their extreme version of feederism is closer to the type of

feederism that Samantha Murray (2004) writes about in her article. Their brand of feederism is the type of feederism that receives disapproval from other participants, those within the feederism community, and those within the larger Size Acceptance community. For these reasons it would seem that these participants are more likely to attempt to neutralize their more extreme behaviours using the techniques put forward by Sykes and Matza (1957).

### ***Summary of Findings***

While the exploratory nature of this research yielded findings in numerous areas, this thesis focuses on the findings most applicable to the discussion of feederism as a stigmatizing interest or identity. During my interviews feederism was constructed as a fetish, an orientation, a sexual identity, a lifestyle, a preference, a fantasy, a behaviour, and as a type of relationship. The terms used to describe the feeding identities within feederism are complicated. “Gainers” and “feedees” enjoy gaining weight, usually for sexual enjoyment, either in real life or in fantasy, and both identities have the option of having a partner aid in the process (or not). “Encouragers” and “feeders” enjoy seeing or encouraging weight gain in others. These identities may be defined along a continuum where the “feeder” identity can be understood as a way in which respondents participate in the “encourager” role. An “immobilizer” may be a type of “feeder” and/or “encourager” who desires their partner to become immobile. All of these feeding identities share a stigma in that they are sexually arousing by weight gain (either their own purposeful weight gain or other people’s weight gains); something that is taboo within our society. Because one’s interest in feederism can be concealed during social interaction it is a discreditable stigma. My findings show that respondents tend not to

disclose their interest in feederism to others due to the fear and uncertainty this stigma presents. Respondents have similar learning experiences about their stigma where they come to recognize they are not alone and that a community of like-minded individuals exists either online or through print magazines. The online feederism community is one way that respondents cope with having this stigma. Respondents find that being able to talk with like-minded individuals, “the own,” helps them feel more “normal” and less stigmatized by desiring something outside the norm. Another way that respondents cope with their stigma is the use of fantasy. All respondents note that fantasies surrounding feederism play a role in their lives. By fantasizing about feederism participants are able to cope with having this stigma because fantasy allows them to participate in the arousing thoughts about weight gain without the physical or social consequences. Those “feeders” desiring a more extreme type of feederism, who may be called “immobilizers,” used “denial of responsibility” most commonly, followed by “denial of the victim” and “condemnation of the condemners” as techniques to neutralize feelings of guilt or shame they may experience by their extreme desires and heightened stigma. Overall, feederism is presented as a complex sexual and social phenomenon which is explored through Goffman’s concept of “stigma” and “stigma management.”

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This research was an exploratory study which examined how those interested in feederism explain and describe what feederism is and how they assert to be involved in it within their lives and within fantasy. Within the existent academic literature on feederism, it is defined narrowly focusing on extreme versions of feederism. The academic literature has attempted to examine feederism as a sexual fetish and as a sexual subculture (Giovanelli and Peluso, 2006). None of the academic articles on feederism note that their conclusions or analyses were based on any type of empirical data gathering method. Previous empirical research on feederism appears to be non-existent. It is being written about within academia so this calls for empirical research to support or refute the arguments being made. As a social phenomenon that is happening within our society that goes against societal norms regarding beauty ideals, healthy weights, and sexual preferences, it makes for an interesting topic to be analyzed sociologically.

This research found that respondents construct feederism to be a sexual fetish, a lifestyle, a preference, a fantasy, a behaviour, and many claim it to be part of their sexual identity. From within a symbolic interactionist framework this research examined the phenomenon of feederism based on participants' experiences and the meanings they associate with their differing involvements. Using Goffman's seminal work on stigma, this research illustrates how respondents recognize that they are stigmatized by their desire for weight gain in themselves or in other people. By possessing a discreditable attribute, an unnatural passion, respondents attempt to conceal their desires from others in their real

lives. Online, respondents feel more comfortable disclosing their interest in weight gain and they use the online feederism community as a way of coping with the stigma attached to it. Fantasy is also used as a way that respondents cope with having desires that fall beyond the “norm.” Fantasy is a way to participate in feederism without doing so in real life. A small subset of “feeders,” which may be called “immobilizers,” are especially stigmatized, even within the feederism community, for desiring their partners to become immobile. These three respondents use various techniques of neutralization to deflect feelings of shame and guilt associated with their extremely stigmatizing desires. Overall, all those involved with or interested in feederism are stigmatized by a “blemish of individual character” (Goffman, 1963:4) because they are sexually attracted to what most people abhor: weight gain.

As this research began questioning Murray’s (2004) portrayal of feederism in her article, it is fitting to return to her discussion. While my research supports the assertion that among a small group immobility may be occurring or desired, it is not the common practice or wish among my respondents. The goal weight is not always 500 pounds for participants and “feeders” do not often wish to “incapacitate” their partners. While Murray suggests that force-feeding through a funnel is the “norm,” it is not. Very few of my respondents have ever tried this. Her use of the terms “dominant male master” and “submissive servant” (2004:244) from my impression having conducted this research, would offend many of my respondents because it is unlikely that they would see themselves participating in this practice at that level. Furthermore, not all “feeders” are

male and not all “feedees” are female. Overall, Murray’s rendering of feederism is as I suspected initially, overly exaggerated.

This research could have been improved upon had it begun with a more formulated theoretical framework. Due to the exploratory nature of this study it did not attempt to test any previously existing theory. This means that rather than testing a particular theory it attempted to “see what was going on.” Therefore, the concepts from Goffman’s work on stigma, or more specifically the techniques of neutralization, were applied *post hoc* which meant attempting to fit the data *into* the theory. Had the opposite approach been taken, for example, formulating the research question such as “what techniques of neutralization are used by respondents and how?” it would have then guided the research in a more focused direction as interview questions could have been framed based on the theory. Had this research attempted to answer more specific research questions it would have produced more focused findings. This was not feasible given the exploratory purpose of this research.

Future research into feederism could do many things. Rather than such a large emphasis on the internet, future research could attempt to focus more on how feederism is practiced in real life. Perhaps this could be done with face-to-face interviews where the internet was not used as both the basis for recruiting respondents and the method (in many cases) for conducting the interview. Face-to-face interviews would be expensive, given the dispersion of potential participants geographically, but it could heighten the level of authenticity as you would be able to see respondents, their reactions, hear their stories in

real life, and read their body language. As Quinn and Forsyth (2005) suggest, being able to compare the online world with the offline world is meaningful, so this type of approach would allow for a comparison between the two.

Another suggestion for future research would be a longitudinal study into how these relationships progress over time. Because weight gain is something that occurs over time, it would be interesting to investigate how “feedees,” for example, feel about their weight gain and their relationship at the beginning of their weight gain journey, the middle and even towards the end, when they have perhaps reached their goal weight. How would they construct their perception of self, their “feedee” identity and their “feeding relationship” at different points along the way? For example, I read an online post from one of my “feedee” respondents where she writes that she is now having serious health issues and she now regrets gaining so much weight. Likewise, a male “feeder” from my sample, who had told me he had no desire for children nor for his partner to stop gaining, told me in an email that his partner is now on a diet because she is pregnant. These types of “life events” would make a longitudinal study into how these relationships progress over time worthwhile.

Another important aspect, to which this research did not attend, is the differences and similarities between feederism that occurs in heterosexual spaces and relationships compared to that which occurs in homosexual spaces and relationships. It was beyond the scope of this research but it would be a meaningful comparison for future research.



All research could be improved and with any new topic there are always new areas to research. The current research provides some of the groundwork necessary for future studies into feederism. Not only does the current research give insight into this uncommon sexually stigmatizing phenomenon, it also highlights how research can be done using the internet not only as a means for recruiting potential participants but also as a method for conducting interviews. This research adds to the body of sociological literature on sexual practices, stigma, fetishism, sexual deviance, sexual subcultures, and qualitative internet research.

## Appendix A - Interview Questions

### Introduction Script

Before we begin the interview, I would like to mention some of the key information from the letter which you signed and returned as a consent form. In the letter I said that I would be giving you another alias from the one you currently use online. There will be no way that you can be personally identified in this research.

And you may skip questions you do not wish to respond to.

If you have any questions along the way about me or anything; feel free to jump in. :)

Are we under a specific time restraint? (e.g. you have a meeting in an hour or something)?

### Classifications

1A) Into which of the following classifications do you feel you best fit: BBW SSBBW BHM FA FFA OTHER (what?)

[These are classifications used online and people know what they mean, if not, I will define for them: Big Beautiful Woman, SuperSize BBW, Big Handsome Man, Fat Admirer]

1B) Do you personally identify as any or some of the following: Feeder Feedee Gainer Encourager Fantasy-Feeder Fantasy-Feedee (which ones?)

### I'd like to ask you about how you define certain terms.

#### 2. Defining

2A) How do you define feederism?

2B) What role does food and/or feeding (weight gain) play in your definition of "Feederism" ?

2C) What part of 'feederism' takes precedence in your mind? The food and eating/feeding or the weight gain? The weight gain 'turns you on' more than the feeding aspects?

2D) How do you define "feedee/feeder"?

2E) What is the difference between *active* feeders/feedees and *non-active* feeders/feedees?

2F) Do you consider yourself an *active* feeder/feedee?

2G) What does being *active* in the practice of feederism mean to you?

2H) [If active] For how long have you been *active* in the practice of feederism?

2I) For how long have you been *interested* in feederism?

2J) How did you come to realize you were interested in feederism?

2K) To what extent are you "out" about your enjoyment of FAT women/men?

2L) To what extent are you "out" about your interest in "feederism" ?

2M) Many have called feederism a sexual fetish. Do you consider feederism a sexual fetish?

2N) Some have said that for something to be considered a fetish it HAS TO BE PRESENT, in this case, either feeding or gaining has to be present, in order for the person to "get off" (become aroused). Do you agree? Is that the case for you? (Probe: can you be turned on/aroused without actions or thoughts relating to feeding/gaining?)

2O) Some have said that feederism is not a fetish but that it is a lifestyle. Do you consider feederism a lifestyle?

2P) What conditions need to be present for "feederism" to be considered a lifestyle?

2Q) Several practices are tied to "feederism" -And I'd like to ask you about them now.

What are your thoughts about and experiences with hand feeding?

What are your thoughts about and experiences with funnel feeding?

What are your thoughts about and experiences with tube feeding?

What are your thoughts about and experiences with force feeding?

What are your thoughts about (and experiences) with immobility?

What are your thoughts about and experiences with "belly sex"?

(Probes: Is it something you want to try? Does the idea of it turn you on?)

2R) Tell me about your last relationship (if any) that included *active* feederism?

**I'd like to hear what you think about the fantasy and reality aspect of feederism.**

### **3. Fantasy/Reality**

3A) [For those active] At any time in the past has feederism been entirely a fantasy for you, where you were not active but fantasized about feeding/gaining?

3B) [For those inactive] Why is feederism only a fantasy for you? Why are you not active?

[For those active] Why was feederism only a fantasy for you at that time? Why weren't you active?

3C) [For those active] Even though you're active, is there still a level of fantasy for you? What parts of feederism remain a fantasy (Probe: immobility)?

3D) [For those inactive] How important is the fantasy of feederism in your life?

3E) [For those inactive or active] What do your feederism (feeding/gaining) fantasies entail?

**I'd like to shift questions a bit and talk specifically about relationships now.**

#### **4. Relationships**

4A) Are you currently in a relationship? (If yes, continue) (If no, skip to # 4L)

4B) What is the status of your relationship? (Married, Common law, etc.)

4D) How long have you been in this relationship?

4E) Does your partner identify as either a feeder/feedee? (if yes, continue) (if no, skip to # 4I)

4F) How do you both perform/fulfill your role as feeder/feedee?

4G) Do you have an ideal weight or goal in mind (for the feedee)?

4H) What types of strategies do you use to gain weight? Do you keep records of your progress?

4I) [No active partner/Yes to Relationship] If you identify as a feeder/feedee and your partner does not, what types of problems (if any) does this create in your relationship?

4J) [No active partner/Yes to Relationship] Does your partner know that you are interested in feederism?

4K) [No active partner/Yes to Relationship] Have you tried to convince your partner to become interested in feederism? If so, how?

4L) [No current relationship] Do you think your interest in feederism makes it hard to find a relationship?

4M) [No current relationship] Do you wish to find a partner who is also interested in feederism?

4N) [No current relationship] What steps, if any, have you taken to find a partner also interested in feederism?

4O) [Feedee, with active partner] How would your partner feel if you decided to stop gaining weight? How would this change your relationship? (Change for feeders with active partners)

4P) [For more extreme versions] How do you reply to people who think this is abusive? (What are your thoughts on that claim?)

**The next set of questions are about your internet usage and thoughts about the internet in regards to feederism.**

## **5. The Internet**

5A) If you wanted to find yourself a feedee/feeder; how would you go about finding one?

5B) How do you use the internet in regards to your involvement with feederism? (Probes: to learn about it, to find people, to talk about eating etc.) How much time, on average, do you spend online in regards to your involvement with feederism?

5C) How do you think the internet can be used for feeders and feedees to find each other? Are there any other ways for them to find each other?

5D) Do you have any face-to-face connections with other people interested in feederism?

5E) [If members] How long have you been a member of \_\_\_\_\_ feederism website?

5F) [If non-members] Are you a member of any online websites devoted to feederism? Which ones? For how long?

5G) What do you gain from your membership of feederism websites? Why do you visit them?

5H) [If members] Finish this sentence please: "The worst thing about participating in the online feederism community is that....."

## **Demographics**

6A) What is your age?

6B) What is your gender?

6C) What country are you located in?

6D) Do you work full or part time? If yes, what is your occupation?

6E) Do you have children? (Do they reside with you fulltime/parttime?)

6F) Have you ever had a same sex relationship? Do you have a same sex relationship now?

6G) What is your ethnicity?

### **Concluding Script**

Thank you for your time to answer these questions. Would you like to receive a copy of the notes I have taken during our conversation to check for accuracy and the opportunity to add any additional comments?

[If yes] Can you provide me with the email address where I may send this.

[If no] Ok, no problem. It is entirely up to you.

May I send you a note of appreciation via email? [which will include the distress phone number listing]. Please confirm your email address for me. Thanks again for your time.

## **Appendix B – Introductory Email**

Dear {online nickname},

I am Alyshia, a master's student at the University of Waterloo in Ontario Canada. I am currently conducting research on feederism for my master's thesis in Sociology. My goal is to provide more information that may add to the understanding of what feederism is from the viewpoint of those who participate in it.

I am contacting you because as a member of a feederism website you may have an interest in my research. Whether you identify yourself as a 'feeder' or 'feedee' or are simply interested in fantasy feeding or eating, I am asking for your participation in my research by taking time to do an interview. There is no cost to you, only your time. Interviews should last between one to two hours. We can either talk over the telephone or through instant messaging. I will ensure your confidentiality and anonymity. If you would be willing to hear more about my study and what would be asked of you as a participant, or if you have any questions, please reply to this message or email me at: [feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca).

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005.

Thank you in advance for your time and I hope to hear back from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Alyshia

M.A. Candidate, Sociology  
[feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca)  
University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
Tel: 519-888-4567 extension 32606

## Appendix C – Information Letter and Consent Form



University of Waterloo, Sociology  
200 University Avenue West  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1  
(519) 888-4567 Ext. 32421

Dear Potential Participant,

This interview or discussion is being conducted for the purposes of Sociological research in pursuit of an MA thesis by Alyshia Ostrom under the direction of Dr. Alicja Muszynski at the University of Waterloo (519) 888-4567 Ext. 32606. This research may add to an understanding of what “feederism” is about and may clear up misunderstandings about it.

You are being asked to participate in a telephone interview or online conversation through instant messaging surrounding the topic of “feederism.” The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of what “feederism” is from those who participate in it. The interview will explore themes such as fantasy, fetish, your experiences, and basic demographic information. For example, here are a couple of sample questions I will be asking: How do you define a feedee/feeder? Do you keep records of the weight gain progress? This interview or conversation is anticipated to last at least one hour but could last up to three hours. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time without reprisal. You may skip questions you do not wish to respond to. At a later date, within six months of our initial interview or conversation, I may contact you via email to clarify your answers or to ask you a supplementary question. You also have the right at this time to decline to answer. To ensure an ending point to your involvement I will not contact you after February 2008 with further questions. To withdraw from the research at any time, email me and tell me you no longer wish to participate and all notes I may have made from our conversation will be immediately destroyed. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. It is possible that some of the questions may raise issues or upset you. If this occurs you can stop the interview and all notes I may have made from our conversation will be immediately destroyed. I will also be able to provide you with contact numbers for help and guidance in your area. You are not reimbursed for your time for this study. Your name, current alias, email address, telephone number, and any personal details will remain confidential as it will be stored within password protected areas on the researcher’s personal computer. You will be given a study alias, different from the alias you normally use, for the purpose of this research. If you participate in an online instant messaging conversation a transcript of the conversation will kept for analysis purposes. It will be destroyed when the final paper is complete. There is a possibility of publication of the study results. If quotations are used in the final paper or any further publications they will not include your name, only your study alias. There will be no way that you can be



personally identified in this research. Information, in terms of notes or instant messaging transcripts, from this study will be destroyed (deleted and shredded) after five years. You should also be aware that excerpts from the interview/conversation may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. If you have any questions pertaining to your involvement in this research, please do not hesitate to call me at (519) 888-4567 ext. 32606 or email me at: [feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca). This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005.

If you agree to participate, please type your name/alias and email address below. Check off the check boxes that you agree and click on the SUBMIT button. This will send me an email to notify me that you agree to participate.

Thank you in advance for your participation,  
Alyshia Ostrom

---

### CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter above about the feederism study being conducted by Alyshia Ostrom of the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview/conversation may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be **anonymous**.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

Name or Alias:  Email Address:

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study  
< **SUBMIT** >

If you have any questions please email me: [feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca). Once I receive this consent form I will contact you via email to arrange a time for our interview or conversation.

## Appendix D – Follow-up and Thank you Letter

Dear [Insert Alias of Participant],

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to learn more about feederism from those who participate in it. This research is for my master's thesis. The data collected during interviews may contribute to a better understanding of the practice of feederism.

Please remember that any data pertaining to yourself as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If quotations are used in the final paper they will not include your name, only your study alias. There will be no way that you can be personally identified in this research. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns related to the study, please contact me at the email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address. When the study is completed, I will send it to you. The study is expected to be completed by August 2008.

In the case that the topics we discussed during our interview or conversation raised concerns for you, you may wish to refer to the non-exhaustive list of agency resources at: <http://artsweb.uwaterloo.ca/~aostrom/numbers.htm>

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005.

Alyshia Ostrom

University of Waterloo  
Sociology

(519) 888-4567 ext. 32606  
[feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca)

## **Appendix E – Crisis / Distress Hotlines**

**This list is being provided to all participants of this study.**

### **U.S.A**

National Suicide Hotlines

1-800-SUICIDE 1-800-273-TALK

1-800-784-2433 1-800-273-8255

National Crisis Line

1-866-334-HELP

1-866-334-4357

The Listening Ear; East Lansing, MI (517) 337-1717 (24-hour Crisis Line)

### **Canada**

#### **Ontario**

Londom Mental Health Crisis Service (519) 433-2023

Distress Centre of Niagara: St. Catherines (905) 688-3711

Toronto - Distress Centre (416) 408-4357

#### **B.C.**

1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Greater Vancouver 604-872-3311

Courtenay Crossroads Crisis Centre (24 hours): 1-250-334-2455

Kootenay Region Crisis Line: 1-800-667-8407

#### **Northern Alberta**

Distress and Suicide Line 1.800.232.7288

Edmonton Distress Line: 482-4357

#### **Manitoba**

Klinic Crisis Line (24 hours): 1-888-322-3019, in Winnipeg dial 786-8686

#### **Saskatchewan**

Regina Mobile Crisis (24 hours): 757-7803

Saskatoon Crisis Intervention (24 hours): 933-6200

#### **Newfoundland**

Nain Labrador Help Line: 1-709-922-2277

### **Australia**

LifeLine (24 hour crisis hotline) 13 11 14

### **United Kingdom and Ireland**

Samaritans

UK (24 hours): 08457 90 90 90

Republic of Ireland (24 hours): 1850 60 90 90

### **Please note:**

? This list is not intended to be complete or exhaustive of possible resources in your area.

? Neither the researcher nor the university are endorsing the agencies/resources in the list

## Appendix F - “Fantasy Feeder” Public Forum Thread

\*\* Names have been removed. This thread has since been deleted at my request.

**possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 24-09-2007 12:22**

I received a pm today from a woman with the user name [Researcher].. she joined March 28, she is from Canada... anyway she sent me a message and here it is..

Dear [removed],

I am Alyshia, a master’s student at the University of Waterloo in Ontario Canada. I am currently conducting research on feederism for my master’s thesis in Sociology. My goal is to provide more information that may add to the understanding of what feederism is from the viewpoint of those who participate in it.

I am contacting you because as a member of this feederism website you may have an interest in my research. Whether you identify yourself as a ‘feeder’ or ‘feedee’ or are simply interested in fantasy feeding or eating, I am asking for your participation in my research by taking time to do an interview. There is no cost to you, only your time. Interviews should last between one to two hours. We can either talk over the telephone or through instant messaging. I will ensure your confidentiality and anonymity. If you would be willing to hear more about my study and what would be asked of you as a participant, or if you have any questions, please reply to this message or email me at: [feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca).

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes at 519-888-4567, Ext. 36005.

Thank you in advance for your time and I hope to hear back from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Alyshia

M.A. Candidate, Sociology  
[feed@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:feed@uwaterloo.ca)  
University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
Tel: 519-888-4567 extension 32606

If anyone else has received this message and or knows anything about her, etc I am only letting you all know what I have received, it sounds kind of fishy to me.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 24-09-2007 12:26**

I'd say it looks 100% legitimate.

RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake  
Posted on 24-09-2007 17:08

It may sound fishy because many other offers of 'publicity' resulted in twisted, hateful sensationalist "documentaries".  
But. As [removed] has pointed out, this message does look legitimate, and for that matter I don't think you should have forwarded contact info from your personal message like this.

That said, I doubt that it's a good approach to researching this subculture. If I were you, I would probably have directed the person to Wikipedia which has well written articles on "feederism", "fat fetishism", "fat admirer" etc., all linked together and quite descriptive.

Or she could post a topic here on the forum and conduct her interview in public.  
Let's just say, when I was curious, I didn't have to ask for personal interviews in private

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 24-09-2007 17:38**

Not to be an \*\*\*\*, but how could this be a fake? She isn't saying she is overweight, she wants to conduct a personal study for a research project for A COLLEGE. And not to be an ass again, you can't conduct ANY study off of wikipedia. Case and point, her study is about feederism, and feederism is OPINION BASED, meaning that she can't research something that everyone has different views of from a book, or internet site; she needs FIRST class information via INTERVIEWS of the people she is studying, and thats what she is requesting. Not to even start, feederism is one of the latest fetishes to appear in the scene. Before the internet, I doubt you could hardly find traces, maybe several feedee and feeders, but not like it is now, and even now, feederism is one of the smallest (har har) fetishes. Without the spread of information using fiber obtic cables and the webbernets, feederism probably would hardly exist. And, how the hell are you going to research something that is so ambiguous? You ask one of the few that practice it.

Sometimes I feel that a lot of people on this website don't have simple logic, and I'm not going to name any names, I'm a lurker, and I have picked up many subtle things in my lurkage. I'm just fed up with ill common sense. I'm saying it how I see it, and I'm trying to do it in the least offensive way possible; I'm sorry if my message feels condescending, but its important that you guys realize from a third party source.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 24-09-2007 17:45**

[removed] wrote:

Not to even start, feederism is one of the latest fetishes to appear in the scene. Before the internet, I doubt you could hardly find traces

Actually there is bountiful proof that feederism started a very long time ago, take for example the Venus of Wilendorf \*sp?\* and also the Shinto, Greek, Roman, and other gods of the feast and partys. Actually the newer thing out there is being into thin girls/guys. but i guess u would be right in assuming that there would be less fandom without the internet. But its been around for a very long time all the same

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 24-09-2007 22:22**

Seems legitimate to me. Just by visiting Waterloo's website, the domain name matches her e-mail, and the phone number also matches:

Graduate Studies Office  
Needles Hall, Room 2072  
University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1  
519 888 4567 ext. 35411

You can never be too careful. A few simple checks erased some doubt anyhow. I think it would be worthwhile helping her out.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 24-09-2007 23:52**

I apologize for starting the thread at all.. saying possible problem or fake was a strong way to start or say anything about a person. I do not know how to look up information about people,if I had the knowledge or time to do so I would had and I would not had started this thread. I guess I was wanting to know myself if I was the only one receiving this message, by letting others from the site be aware of the person wanting info, and let them know they are not the only person who received it.

I am a fairly private person, who is not one to "spill my guts" per say, to people I do not know anything about. I do not have any information up on my profile, I have had one other message I had received from a person wanting information about me and my love for this fetish.. (others from the site had proved that person was a fake). I am not really all that sure if I even have this fetish... I am only a bigger woman whom my husband had asked to get bigger opposed to los ing weight which I did before he let me even aware of the fact that there was men and women who prefer the bigger form and asked me to stop trying to gain, and maybe allow myself and gain instead and love my bigger body aposed to trying to make it not as attractive by trying so hard to have rock hard abs, little to no

body fat (which I have never had, however wanted at one point of time). I love my body now and have so much more confidence in myself then I EVER had before. I used to want to fit into the mold that society says all women should fit in. I now know that I am just right the way I am, and love myself soo much more then ever before as well. My husband found this site for me to show me that he was not the only one that loved fat women. I started chatting here and felt that I could chat here with people who also enjoyed fat women.

So anyway with all that said if the mods find need to take this thread down, please feel free to do so.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 25-09-2007 00:50**

Im not sorry you started the thread. I think it could become a very informative thesis. Whether you, or someone else helps her out, perhaps it could enlighten some of the mass majority of the thin obsessed society in which we live in. In that way, I agree with [removed]. There could very well be socialogical and biological reasons for feeding/feeder fantasies. I also believe (speaking as a man) that there are many more men out there that find larger women desirable, then care to admit.  
My 2 cents

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 26-09-2007 18:22**

Reseacher wrote:

My study is legitimate through the University of Waterloo here in Ontario Canada. I would appreciate my personal information being erased from this PUBIC forum as I contacted you in PRIVATE for a reason. If you do not wish to participate that is fine, you dont have to reply to my PM.

I have had very good response from the DIMs community and have completed more than 10 interviews already. However, I am still seeking more participants who are WILLING to participate. Again, there is no pressure for anyone to participate; it is voluntary to those who believe they may be able to share their understands and experiences with active feederism. It's only voluntary and I apologize if my introduction "PM" message offended you (or anyone else).

Thank you for your time.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 26-09-2007 19:00**

Hi, all,

Hard as it is to believe, all of the documentation [Researcher] has provided is legitimate, and I'm convinced she is who she says she is. This kind of study is perfectly within the



routine practice of Sociology, though it will be the first study of our subculture that I know of, which makes it important.

If you're inclined to participate, my instinct is to say yes.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 27-09-2007 09:30**

I got the same message. I'm not too sure she's for real. She said about arranging phone sessions with me so she obviously didn't read my profile or she'd have known I'm in Austrlia. Plus she used my logon name, not my real name so she obviously didn't look at my profile. Surely she'd have looked at my profile to see if I was suitable and used my name. It seemed very much a "one message suits all" kinda thing. Is anyone in uh "Ontario" is it? If I lived there I'd ring the number. My logon name is "[removed]" but I'm now a feeder as well - how would she know I'm what she's after anyway? It just strikes me as way too suss

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 27-09-2007 10:47**

Reseacher:

You must understand, there are many scammers and fakes trying to mess with our heads. This is a community where members share their concerns and ask advice from people that pm them. We all have had PMs whose only interest was to promote thier product and send us a mass amount of junk e-mail. If you don't want to be part of this community, fine, then leave. But don't expect your private messages not to be posted.

**RE: more information**  
**Posted on 27-09-2007 11:36**

Reseacher wrote:

In response to [removed] and anyone else who wishes to know:

"She said about arranging phone sessions with me so she obviously didn't read my profile or she'd have known I'm in Austrlia."

Yes, I am doing phone or IM interviews; at the choice of the participant.  
I can make phone calls overseas at my expense if that's the option chosen.

"Plus she used my logon name, not my real name so she obviously didn't look at my profile. Surely she'd have looked at my profile to see if I was suitable and used my name."

Because my research is ANONYMOUS I am not interested in knowing or using real names or identities: only aliases and nicknames. I assure anonymity to my participants by using only aliases.

"It seemed very much a "one message suits all" kinda thing."

Yes it is. That is because this 'introductory message' has been approved by the university ethics department. In fact my entire project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (as the message states). There is also an information letter and consent form for those interested in more information.

"My logon name is "[removed]" but I'm now a feeder as well - how would she know I'm what she's after anyway?"

The purpose of these interviews is to learn all about each person's way of interpreting their involvement in 'feederism.'

Thank you to those of you who have agreed to participate after reading this thread. I am very excited to hear your thoughts and ideas about this topic.

Again, my research is entirely voluntary and I apologize if my introduction "PM" message offended you (or anyone else).

Thank you for your time.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 27-09-2007 12:19**

But don't expect your private messages not to be posted.

I strongly disagree and feel the need to apologize to [Researcher] on your behalf.

It's an old law of netiquette that personal messages (E-mail or equivalent) may not be publicly disclosed without the sender's prior consent.  
Exceptions to this rule are quite few, and only in extreme cases.

At the very least, [removed] should have removed all sensitive information from the message. Like phone numbers.

On a side note to [Researcher]-- you should be aware that any information that you release to the Internet, public or private, on the web or in e-mail, can and probably will be preserved and distributed further along in ways you could never have predicted. The reasons range from malice to ignorance [of netiquette], to information theft [e.g. by spammers who hack into PCs to steal e-mail and IM databases and harvest addresses]. So be careful in what you post.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 28-09-2007 05:56**

[removed] is right, sadly. I've heard two version of the same warning:

Don't post anything that

a) you wouldn't want to see on a billboard while driving down the highway, or  
you wouldn't put on a postcard

For my two bits, the latter is too understated.

On the topic of [Researcher]'s project, I've spoken further with her, and seen her documentation, and everything adds up just as it should. As an academic myself, I'm pretty sure I'd find the holes in her story if there were any

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 09:23**

Why are you posting behind my back [Researcher]? You're quite happy to try and pick me apart on the main board but you haven't pm'ed me or anything explaining how I may have "mis-interpreted" what you said. Don't use me to try and validate urself here. I have every right to doubt what a stranger pm's me without being randomly picked off the forum board and "being made an example of". Accept it, you could have handled urself a bit better. People are always gonna be suspicious because of how unaccepted some of our fetishes are. That's just the way it is.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 09:34**

Behind your back? I'm confused, [removed]. In every online setting I've ever been in, correct netiquette is to respond where you were addressed--or spoken about. That's what [Researcher] did, no? she responded in the same thread you posted to.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 09:35**

I'm sorry to be so incredibly feral but I noticed that I'm the only person on the entire forum board that got so rigourously pulled apart like that for simply having an opinion. No body else got isolated like that. That's 5-year-old mentality there [Researcher]. Clap, clap, because that's another person's help you've now lost.

I'd already agreed to help her before I saw what she'd posted here. I'm pulling out now. Not at all impressed with ur conduct [Researcher]. My apologies to everyone else who has to read these posts. I just feel I have to defend myself when I'm singled out as a target. Thank you for your time.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 09:37**

How many other people were saying what I was saying and didn't get dragged out? That's why I'm upset

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 09:45**

Sorry, maybe I should clarify. I just came in, did a quick post on what I knew and then all of the sudden she starts getting snappy. And she decides to drag me into the problem by heading her message off "In response to [removed] and anyone else who wishes to know:" I wasn't even talking to her!!! I just happened to come in and join the convo and all of the sudden she's taking apart MY post - no one elses - just mine, like I started a launch on her. I didn't.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 10:09**

In response to [removed]'s comments. I don't mean to beat a dead horse with a stick, and I don't want to quote, so scroll up if you wish. If [Removed] is a new member, that is for real, and I made here feel anything less than welcome, then I apologize for that. But I won't apologize for what I wrote. I still hold on to what I said earlier, despite the poor grammar. If I am PMed by someone that I have TAKEN TIME TO GET TO KNOW, and that PM is posted on the forum, then I have lost all sorts of trust in that individual. I don't believe that to be the case here. I am under the assumption, that many members got this random e-mail. [Removed] was simply asking for advice on what to do about it. There was enough information for me to base my first opinion on the matter. If she left anything out, my opinion would have been different. I don't think she did anything inappropriate or wrong. If someone wants to randomly e-mail a bunch of members that they don't even know with personal information, then that is there mistake, and know one elses.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 28-09-2007 10:51**

[removed] wrote:

She didn't attack you. She replied to the things that you pointed out.

Bingo. The only one I see being rude and snappy is [removed].

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**

**Posted on 29-09-2007 01:10**

I most humbly apologise for my conduct on this particular board. I have been pulled aside by others and they helped me realise that I was waaaaay too over-sensitive. I know now that there was no attack upon me. I simply misinterpreted what I read. To everyone I offended or hurt I'm sorry. I had no right to launch like that and steal away the point of the board. Oh, and [removed]? I'm not rude, but I will agree with snappy. Sorry everyone.

**RE: possible problem. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 30-09-2007 01:28**

[Researcher]? ive tried to pm u and apologise but ur inbox is full so this is for u: im very sorry i behaved so badly towards you. No one has the right to mistreat others

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 30-09-2007 12:36**  
Reseacher wrote:

Thank for letting me know my mailbox was full - I had no idea I had to manually empty stuff ... so thanks for letting me know.

Apology accepted. No worries. I understand the caution and skepticism when an "outside" comes in and wants to know more. Being a BBW myself with my own sexual kinks, I appreciate where you are all coming from. I only want to learn from you all not cause any problems or undue distress. No worries and thanks for recognizing I mean no ill harm to you or anyone else.

**RE: possible problem.. maybe a fake**  
**Posted on 30-09-2007 21:17**

I'd be more than happy to help you with any questions you may have: don't worry, I'll wear a muzzle lol

## Appendix G - Node Summary

### **Feeding Identity**

Words Coded 59  
Paragraphs Coded 5  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

### **Feeder**

Words Coded 334  
Paragraphs Coded 21  
Coding References 15  
Sources Coded 14  
Cases Coded 14

### **Feedee**

Words Coded 432  
Paragraphs Coded 25  
Coding References 19  
Sources Coded 11  
Cases Coded 11

### **Fantasy feeder**

Words Coded 35  
Paragraphs Coded 7  
Coding References 7  
Sources Coded 7  
Cases Coded 7

### **Fantasy feedee**

Words Coded 4  
Paragraphs Coded 1  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

### **Gainer**

Words Coded 273  
Paragraphs Coded 11  
Coding References 7  
Sources Coded 7  
Cases Coded 7

### **Encourager**

Words Coded 134  
Paragraphs Coded 14  
Coding References 11  
Sources Coded 11  
Cases Coded 11

### **BBW**

Words Coded 21  
Paragraphs Coded 4  
Coding References 4  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

### **SSBBW**

Words Coded 21  
Paragraphs Coded 5  
Coding References 5  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

### **FA**

Words Coded 139  
Paragraphs Coded 21  
Coding References 19  
Sources Coded 18  
Cases Coded 18

### **Female FA**

Words Coded 30  
Paragraphs Coded 7  
Coding References 7  
Sources Coded 7  
Cases Coded 7

### **BHM**

Words Coded 26  
Paragraphs Coded 5  
Coding References 5  
Sources Coded 4

Cases Coded 4

### **Define feederism**

Words Coded 3,555  
Paragraphs Coded 226  
Coding References 74  
Sources Coded 30  
Cases Coded 30

### **emphasis on weight gain**

Words Coded 2,558  
Paragraphs Coded 124  
Coding References 56  
Sources Coded 25  
Cases Coded 25

### **emphasis on food & eating**

Words Coded 1,217  
Paragraphs Coded 67  
Coding References 26  
Sources Coded 20  
Cases Coded 20

### **confusions problems with defintion**

Words Coded 358  
Paragraphs Coded 17  
Coding References 13  
Sources Coded 8  
Cases Coded 8

### **Define feeder feedee etc.**

Coded 1,103  
Paragraphs Coded 52  
Coding References 9  
Sources Coded 5  
Cases Coded 5

**definition of feeder**

Words Coded 2,221  
Paragraphs Coded 135  
Coding References 56  
Sources Coded 28  
Cases Coded 28

**definition of feedee**

Words Coded 2,642  
Paragraphs Coded 130  
Coding References 55  
Sources Coded 27  
Cases Coded 27

**definition of gainer**

Words Coded 571  
Paragraphs Coded 31  
Coding References 14  
Sources Coded 8  
Cases Coded 8

**definition of****encourager**

Words Coded 4,362  
Paragraphs Coded 388  
Coding References 20  
Sources Coded 12  
Cases Coded 12

**definition of foodee**

Words Coded 421  
Paragraphs Coded 43  
Coding References 4  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

**definition of fantasy  
feeder/feedee**

Words Coded 113  
Paragraphs Coded 4  
Coding References 3  
Sources Coded 2  
Cases Coded 2

**Active vs. Non-Active**

Words Coded 148

Paragraphs Coded 17  
Coding References 5  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

**difference between  
active & nonactive**

Words Coded 2,141  
Paragraphs Coded 120  
Coding References 36  
Sources Coded 26  
Cases Coded 26

**being active means**

Words Coded 1,601  
Paragraphs Coded 96  
Coding References 34  
Sources Coded 23  
Cases Coded 23

**active for how long**

Words Coded 857  
Paragraphs Coded 75  
Coding References 25  
Sources Coded 22  
Cases Coded 22

**Initial involvement**

Words Coded 71  
Paragraphs Coded 2  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

**early childhood**

Words Coded 2,996  
Paragraphs Coded 136  
Coding References 37  
Sources Coded 22  
Cases Coded 22

**through or with a  
partner**

Words Coded 1,788  
Paragraphs Coded 136  
Coding References 21

Sources Coded 10  
Cases Coded 10

**magazines**

Words Coded 995  
Paragraphs Coded 46  
Coding References 10  
Sources Coded 8  
Cases Coded 8

**internet**

Words Coded 1,870  
Paragraphs Coded 128  
Coding References 26  
Sources Coded 15  
Cases Coded 15

**Initial involvement  
when**

Words Coded 468  
Paragraphs Coded 25  
Coding References 15  
Sources Coded 15  
Cases Coded 15

**Out about enjoyment  
of fat**

Words Coded 53  
Paragraphs Coded 3  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

**not at all**

Words Coded 25  
Paragraphs Coded 3  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1  
Created

**somewhat a bit**

Words Coded 333  
Paragraphs Coded 15  
Coding References 9  
Sources Coded 7

Cases Coded 7

**fully**

Words Coded 986

Paragraphs Coded 45

Coding References 17

Sources Coded 14

Cases Coded 14

**Out about interest in feederism**

Words Coded 259

Paragraphs Coded 16

Coding References 6

Sources Coded 3

Cases Coded 3

**not at all**

Words Coded 660

Paragraphs Coded 44

Coding References 14

Sources Coded 9

Cases Coded 9

**somewhat a bit**

Words Coded 1,756

Paragraphs Coded 118

Coding References 18

Sources Coded 14

Cases Coded 14

**fully**

Words Coded 0

Paragraphs Coded 0

Coding References 0

Sources Coded 0

Cases Coded 0

**Fetish**

Words Coded 209

Paragraphs Coded 19

Coding References 4

Sources Coded 3

Cases Coded 3

**yes, its a fetish because**

Words Coded 2,080

Paragraphs Coded 158

Coding References 37

Sources Coded 23

Cases Coded 23

**no, its not a fetish because**

Words Coded 830

Paragraphs Coded 38

Coding References 15

Sources Coded 8

Cases Coded 8

**necessity of eating & gaining for arousal**

Words Coded 1,976

Paragraphs Coded 130

Coding References 28

Sources Coded 20

Cases Coded 20

**Lifestyle**

Words Coded 491

Paragraphs Coded 44

Coding References 3

Sources Coded 3

Cases Coded 3

**yes, its a lifestyle because**

Words Coded 1,658

Paragraphs Coded 102

Coding References 34

Sources Coded 24

Cases Coded 24

**no, its not a lifestyle because**

Words Coded 163

Paragraphs Coded 13

Coding References 5

Sources Coded 5

Cases Coded 5

**conditions that make it a lifestyle**

Words Coded 1,805

Paragraphs Coded 73

Coding References 24

Sources Coded 20

Cases Coded 20

**hand feeding**

Words Coded 3,005

Paragraphs Coded 237

Coding References 29

Sources Coded 24

Cases Coded 24

**funnel feeding**

Words Coded 1,637

Paragraphs Coded 135

Coding References 28

Sources Coded 20

Cases Coded 20

**tube feeding**

Words Coded 1,456

Paragraphs Coded 117

Coding References 33

Sources Coded 21

Cases Coded 21

**force feeding**

Words Coded 2,408

Paragraphs Coded 153

Coding References 31

Sources Coded 20

Cases Coded 20

Created

**immobility**

Words Coded 3,368

Paragraphs Coded 219

Coding References 40

Sources Coded 26

Cases Coded 26

**belly sex**

Words Coded 2,233



Paragraphs Coded 155  
Coding References 31  
Sources Coded 22  
Cases Coded 22

**sex with food**

Words Coded 88  
Paragraphs Coded 3  
Coding References 3  
Sources Coded 3  
Cases Coded 3

**other feeding experiences**

Words Coded 1,577  
Paragraphs Coded 119  
Coding References 17  
Sources Coded 10  
Cases Coded 10

**sex and other turn ons**

Words Coded 2,294  
Paragraphs Coded 108  
Coding References 37  
Sources Coded 15  
Cases Coded 15

**power, control, victims, abuse**

Words Coded 3,300  
Paragraphs Coded 154  
Coding References 19  
Sources Coded 8  
Cases Coded 8

**reality of immobility**

Words Coded 4,390  
Paragraphs Coded 169  
Coding References 28  
Sources Coded 6  
Cases Coded 6

**death**

Words Coded 5,888  
Paragraphs Coded 278  
Coding References 18

Sources Coded 3  
Cases Coded 3

**Fantasy**

Words Coded 445  
Paragraphs Coded 26  
Coding References 12  
Sources Coded 6  
Cases Coded 6

**why a fantasy**

Words Coded 1,665  
Paragraphs Coded 99  
Coding References 26  
Sources Coded 24  
Cases Coded 24

**importance of fantasy**

Words Coded 1,249  
Paragraphs Coded 95  
Coding References 38  
Sources Coded 26  
Cases Coded 26

**only in fantasy, not real life**

Words Coded 1,412  
Paragraphs Coded 81  
Coding References 26  
Sources Coded 18  
Cases Coded 18

**actual fantasies**

Words Coded 5,345  
Paragraphs Coded 323  
Coding References 63  
Sources Coded 26  
Cases Coded 26

**Relationships**

Words Coded 5,479  
Paragraphs Coded 368  
Coding References 45  
Sources Coded 20  
Cases Coded 20

**partners' identity and role**

Words Coded 4,601  
Paragraphs Coded 270  
Coding References 65  
Sources Coded 22  
Cases Coded 22

**weight gain strategies etc.**

Words Coded 1,875  
Paragraphs Coded 136  
Coding References 27  
Sources Coded 17  
Cases Coded 17

**desire for partner interested in feederism**

Words Coded 3,854  
Paragraphs Coded 301  
Coding References 55  
Sources Coded 28  
Cases Coded 28

**goals**

Words Coded 2,626  
Paragraphs Coded 201  
Coding References 35  
Sources Coded 21  
Cases Coded 21

**Internet**

Words Coded 24  
Paragraphs Coded 1  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

**finding a partner**

Words Coded 2,250  
Paragraphs Coded 105  
Coding References 46  
Sources Coded 25  
Cases Coded 25

**internet usage re  
feederism**

Words Coded 2,083  
Paragraphs Coded 152  
Coding References 41  
Sources Coded 25  
Cases Coded 25

**time spent on internet  
re feederism**

Words Coded 557  
Paragraphs Coded 52  
Coding References 24  
Sources Coded 21  
Cases Coded 21

**usage & benefits of  
membership**

Words Coded 1,268  
Paragraphs Coded 64  
Coding References 31  
Sources Coded 23  
Cases Coded 23

**downside negatives to  
feederism online**

Words Coded 1,266  
Paragraphs Coded 77  
Coding References 33  
Sources Coded 27  
Cases Coded 27

**offline connections or  
relationships**

Words Coded 669  
Paragraphs Coded 45  
Coding References 15  
Sources Coded 12  
Cases Coded 12

**Weight gain**

Words Coded 5,030  
Paragraphs Coded 308  
Coding References 56  
Sources Coded 24  
Cases Coded 24

**Body shapes**

Words Coded 847  
Paragraphs Coded 65  
Coding References 12  
Sources Coded 8  
Cases Coded 8

**enjoyment of food**

Words Coded 78  
Paragraphs Coded 9  
Coding References 3  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

**why**

Words Coded 76  
Paragraphs Coded 3  
Coding References 1  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

**gluttony**

Words Coded 459  
Paragraphs Coded 17  
Coding References 8  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

**Pay sites**

Words Coded 208  
Paragraphs Coded 16  
Coding References 6  
Sources Coded 2  
Cases Coded 2

**started when & why**

Words Coded 944  
Paragraphs Coded 64  
Coding References 6  
Sources Coded 5  
Cases Coded 5

**income revenue**

Words Coded 510  
Paragraphs Coded 32

Coding References 8  
Sources Coded 5  
Cases Coded 5

**family friends partner  
reactions**

Words Coded 259  
Paragraphs Coded 15  
Coding References 3  
Sources Coded 3  
Cases Coded 3

**gaining for profit vs.  
enjoyment**

Words Coded 702  
Paragraphs Coded 49  
Coding References 8  
Sources Coded 4  
Cases Coded 4

**Sub-Culture**

Words Coded 1,251  
Paragraphs Coded 61  
Coding References 15  
Sources Coded 10  
Cases Coded 10

**Convincing ideas....**

Words Coded 360  
Paragraphs Coded 41  
Coding References 6  
Sources Coded 1  
Cases Coded 1

## Appendix H – Demographic Summary Tables

Table of Participants by Study Alias and Feeding Identity

<b>Study Alias</b>	<b>Feeding Identity</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Interview Type</b>
Jeffrey	male feeder	36 - 45	Phone
Calvin	"	26 – 35	IM
William	"	26 – 35	IM
Derek	"	25 & under	IM
Adam	"	36 - 45	IM
Perry	"	46 - 55	IM
Damon	"	36 - 45	Phone
Dewayne	"	36 - 45	Phone
Brandon	"	26 – 35	IM
Susan	female feeder	26 – 35	Phone
Jane	"	26 – 35	IM
Katrina	"	25 & under	IM
Grant	male feedee	26 – 35	IM
Sonya	female feedee	25 & under	Phone
Cathy	"	25 & under	IM
Hailey	"	25 & under	IM
Brianna	"	26 – 35	IM
Donna	"	25 & under	IM
Odette	"	36 - 45	IM
Rosie	"	26 – 35	IM
Patricia	female gainer	46 - 55	Phone
Jackie	"	25 & under	IM
Harold	male gainer	26 – 35	IM
Stewart	"	26 – 35	IM
Randy	male fantasy feeder	46 - 55	Phone
Henry	"	36 - 45	IM
Shawn	"	25 & under	IM
Byron	"	26 – 35	IM
Brittney	female fantasy feeder	25 & under	IM
Lenny	male encourager	46 - 55	IM

Children

<b>Children</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
Yes, all/some live with	4 (13%)
Yes, do not live with	5 (17%)
None	21 (70%)

Ethnicity

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
Caucasian	28 (93%)
Black	2 (7%)
Other	0 (0%)

Work Status

<b>Work Status</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
Work Full time	19 (63%)
Work Part time	4 (13%)
Student Full time	5 (17%)
Unemployed	2 (7%)

Weight Identity #2

<b>Weight Identity #2</b>	<b>Count n=30</b>
Not Applicable	19 (63%)
BHM	1 (3%)
FA	3 (10%)
Female FA	7 (23%)

## Appendix I – Disclosure and Secrecy

	"Out" About				"Out" About		
	Interest in Fat Bodies				Interest in Feederism		
	Not	Somewhat	Fully		Not	Somewhat	Fully
Randy		X			X		
Sonya			X		X		
Susan		X			X		
Brittney		X*			X*		
Jackie		X*			X*		
Jane		X*			X*		
Henry		X*			X*		
Katrina		X			X		
William		X*			X*		
Cathy			X*		X*		
Shawn		X*			X*		
Derek			X		X		
Patricia		X*			X*		
Adam			X		X		
Hailey		X*			X*		
Harold		X			X*		
Perry			X		X*		
Lenny			X		X*		
Brianna		X*			X		
Brandon			X		X		
Donna			X		X		
Odette		X*			X		
Grant			X		X		
Damon			X			X	
Dewayne			X			X	
Rosie			X			X	
Stewart			X		X		
Byron		X			X		
Jeffrey			X		X		
Calvin			X		X		
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	

\* Indicates that the extent to which the respondent is “out” was challenging to categorize because the respondent was either not asked the question directly (as it was a question added to the interview schedule after their interview had occurred) or because their answer did not fit neatly into one of the categories. In these cases I hypothesized a ‘best guess’ based on their other answers. Due to the fact that I was required to do this in more than fifteen cases, the information on this table is not only highly subjective, it is highly speculative.

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