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An Embodied Challenge to Femininity as Disciplinary Power in the Contemporary American Young Adult Sports Novels

Abstract: The goal of this paper is to investigate the role of disciplinary power regimes of femininity in sporting institutions depicted in sports fiction. With a renewed interest in analyzing sports practices as specifically gendered, this paper addresses how contemporary narratives' deeper address of the affective encounters of characters has reconfigured the sports literary panorama. As represented in Miranda Kenneally's novel, *Coming Up for Air* (2017), friendship poses a challenge to the institutionalized, parental and gendered bodily vulnerability of sports. The analysis reveals how the adolescent body is manageable but can also contest, in direct questioning of the interests of authority. Enjoying friendship in sports, eventually, reveals paths towards more inclusive (bodily) practices in them. Finally, this paper speaks of the fact that juvenile fiction, traditionally considered an archive of negative influence on young readers' behaviors, can exercise the opposite effect too.

Keywords: YA fiction; sports fiction; contemporary American literature; disciplinary power; body; femininity; friendship; dietetics

Introduction

Prior to delving into the analysis of the novel, it is relevant to look at one basic Foucauldian discourse scaffolding young adult sports fiction, that of "disciplinary power."¹ Discipline, particularly, is a term Michel Foucault coined to refer to the regulation, subjection and imposition of docility upon individual bodies.² As it pertains to sports, Manley *et al.* argue that it is "the utilization of data for the control and regulation of the individual athlete" that adequately situates athletic bodies under the Foucauldian notion of disciplinary power.³

¹ Katie Davies, "Theorizing the Active Body in Children's Sport Fiction: A Foucauldian Textual Analysis," PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2014, ii–iii.

² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 137.

³ Andrew Manley, Catherine Palmer and Martin Roderick, "Disciplinary Power, the Oligopticon and Rhizomatic Surveillance in Elite Sports Academies," *Surveillance & Society* 10, 3–4 (2012): 306.

Foucault did not himself address the relevance of exercises as disciplinary techniques within an athletic context. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of academic literature by renowned sport sociologists who follow Foucault's theorizations. As Markula and Pringle insist, his focus on the body "as a site for force relations" resonates closely with sports studies.⁴ As the work by Katie Davies demonstrates, the tendency has touched sports *literary* studies as well. In this latter case, notwithstanding, the field remains rather unexploited.

A notion of discipline within a sports context does not only apply to the subjection of the body to exercise, but to diet as well. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault devoted an entire section to the study of dietetics. Hither, he argued that, in the time of the classics, "diet [...] was intended to be a deliberate practice on the part of an individual, involving himself and his body."⁵ Dietetics concerned a disciplinary technique to regulate one's corporeality and, as Foucault claimed, too, one's morality.⁶

Even though Foucault denied such same importance of food and dietetics for contemporary society, highlighting instead, the relevance of sex,⁷ there is an extensive academic corpus that claims otherwise.⁸ This is the case presented by corporeal feminists who, drawing on Foucauldian analysis, recuperate dieting "as a disciplinary practice that serves to construct docile bodies."⁹ The basal texts in this regard are Sandra Bartky's "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" and Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight*.

According to these authors, the bodies under the surveillance of dietetics are hardly always those of women. In their configuration as docile bodies, women take up 'feminine practices', such as regimes oriented at attaining weight-loss. As Markula and Pringle suggest, notwithstanding, a Foucauldian framework significantly allows for the consideration of how "individual exercisers [...] attempt[t] to resist such a disciplinary, panoptic arrangement."¹⁰ In turn, Foucault himself claimed that one might use "resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations."¹¹

In fiction written for the youth, notably, food and dietetics remain a major object of concern, particularly for girl characters. As current literary criticism has it:

Considered as part of a broader ideological phenomenon, YA [young adult] novels work alongside magazines and other media in targeting

⁴ Pirkko Markula, and Richard Pringle, *Foucault, Sport and Exercise* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), x.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 107.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷ Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 229.

⁸ On this note, see Elspeth Probyn, *Carnal Appetites: Foodsexidentities* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁹ Cressida Heyes, "Foucault Goes to Weight Watchers," *Hypatia* 21, 2 (2006): 132.

¹⁰ Markula and Pringle, *Foucault, Sport and Exercise*, xi.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4 (1982): 780.

young girls and featuring pervasive, often explicit and decidedly gendered directives for makeup, clothing, exercise, and diet. Instead of including step-by-step instructions or glossy photographs of supposed ideals, YA novels provide models for behavior by showing characters dealing with rules about self-presentation.¹²

The appearance-oriented motifs of girl characters in a vast quantity of modern novels¹³ make understandable the disapproving regards held by feminist literary critics like Dorothy Karlin. When female corporeality has been at stake, modern forms of young adult fiction have functioned as loci for the representation of disordered relationships with food of girl characters. Many seem to reproduce what in the sociology of eating disorders is known as the ‘domino effect’. The label addresses the contagion of abnormal eating pathologies that allegedly takes place in groups of girlfriends, athletes or not, with an alarming frequency.

Today, it has been shown that juvenile fiction can have detrimental effects over their young women readership. Fiction presenting characters with eating disorders, precisely, has been demonstrated to be able to reinforce anorexia.¹⁴ Paralleling society’s concerns, young adult fiction regarding sports of the kind targeted at girl audiences, hence, has largely restricted the representation of athletic characters who *confront* this view of disordered corporeality.

Yet not all fiction for girls is created equally. For Karlin, teenager fiction is, certainly, also capable of constructing girl characters in a judicious way. Karlin insists upon the authority of the critic and her ability to discern those young adult titles which count as ‘body-friendly’ examples. In this paper, I suggest that contemporary forms of young adult sports fiction, corresponding to the 21st century examples, do depict such alternative possibilities. Miranda Kenneally’s *Hundred Oaks* series is a case in point. The novel object of study here, *Coming Up for Air*, is offered as a site where the dominant view that girl teenagers, in general, and athletes, in particular, are compliant with the disciplinary power of dietetics, is challenged.

Dedication to sport, in this novel, cannot be merely considered a way for characters to subjugate to a bodily regime. Sports are a practice highly socioaffective in nature, as they involve the possibility of contest and of team. Especially among youngsters, motivations for engaging in sport are not simply corporeal. A. Smith, in fact, contends that “youth consider physical appearance and athletic prowess as important to popularity” but also “engage in sport because of the desire to make friends and affiliate with peers”¹⁵ and to enjoy themselves.

¹² Dorothy Karlin, “How to Be Yourself: Ideological Interpellation, Weight Control, and YA Novels,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 6, 2 (2014): 72.

¹³ See Ellen Singleton, “Grace and Dorothy: Collisions of Femininity and Physical Activity in Two Early Twentieth-Century Book Series for Girls,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 35, 2 (2004): 113–34.

¹⁴ Emily Troscianko, “Feedback in Reading and Disordered Eating,” in *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues between Literature and Cognition*, ed. M. Burke and E. Troscianko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 177.

¹⁵ Alan L. Smith, “Peer Relationships in Physical Activity Contexts: a Road Less Travelled in Youth Sport and Exercise Psychology Research,” *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 4 (2003): 33.

In *Coming Up for Air*, affect dynamics between the group of friends depicted are at work in such a way, exactly. Together, the characters of Kenneally's piece impose their own desire to enjoy food and sports over the aspirations of trainers and parents alike. In the story, a girl named Georgia is the one to rebel against a diet both imposed by her coach and encouraged by her mother. As it will be seen, despite being a supporting character, Georgia is one to strongly identify with, given the relevance the narrator grants to her story. The narration, expressly, is in the first-person of Maggie, the swimmer protagonist of the novel. Additionally, the narration is internal, allowing for the protagonist's stimulating evaluations of the action and dialogues taking place.

Methodological framework

In this paper, Foucault's notion of discipline is applied. By means of close reading, the analysis will focus on how disciplinary power affects, in particular, the situation of Georgia within the university sports context of the novel. The discussion will pay attention to how disciplinary techniques are represented as being gendered in the story. Specifically, the analysis studies the meaning behind the weight-loss diet imposed upon this character. Introducing the gender variable in the discussion, it will be shown how dietetics appear as a normalized disciplinary practice of femininity. In turn, the analysis will incorporate the notion of affect dynamics to examine how friendship frames Georgia's resistance to disciplinary power against norms of femininity.

Punching above their weight: analysis of supporting characters in *Coming Up for Air*

Adults, whose role as educators is "inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching", Foucault suggested, have "a relation of surveillance" over children.¹⁶ In *Coming Up for Air*, Georgia, Maggie, Hunter and Levi, a group of friends, contest the sports university system by ignoring the expectations of parents and trainers. The age group contrast, albeit fictional, is relevant in that, as A. Smith insists, "the overwhelming bulk of research on social influence in youth sport and physical activity has focused upon the role of adults in governing youth psychosocial and behavioral outcomes", putting the emphasis on "coaches, teachers, and parents."¹⁷ He concludes that "it is puzzling the degree to which research on peers has paled in comparison given the relevance of these social agents."¹⁸

In the novel, the emphasis is drawn to how friendship regulates the actions undertaken by young characters. Resolved to prioritize happiness, the group of friends

¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 176.

¹⁷ Smith, "Peer Relationships in Physical Activity Contexts," 26.

¹⁸ Ibid.

confronts disciplinary power present within the sports life depicted in it. One such abuse, readily introduced in the first pages, is the extreme diet commanded to Georgia, Maggie's best friend. To come to the point, Georgia is a gymnast turned cheerleader who becomes required to commit to this diet in order to enter the University of Tennessee Athletics. The imposition of diets in gymnastics, typical in the modern young adult sports panorama,¹⁹ is the main sports misuse of disciplinary power *Coming Up for Air* seeks to dismantle. As a narrative strategy, the novel relies on direct dialogue as well as on the protagonist's stream of thoughts to denounce this practice.

Georgia's problem is first shown during a meet-up of the group at the local burger place. After realizing that her friend does not appear comfortable about the food on the table ("That's when I notice she's only been picking at her fries and her shake is untouched"),²⁰ Maggie expresses her concern to her: "You okay?" [...] "I got an email from an assistant coach at Tennessee."²¹ The dialogue continues in this vein: "what did the coach say?" [...] "That I need to follow a strict diet." Georgia pops a French fry in her mouth and chews. "Like, I have to eat a certain amount of calories per day and have to count grams of carbs and fat."²²

Georgia's announcement sets the dialogic structure of the hang-out scenario: when going out, they eat and talk about their life problems. In this setting, *not* eating is regarded as problematic. Significantly, being asked if she is okay alters Georgia's thoughts concerning the diet. Before, notably, Georgia is only "picking" at her fries, a verb selected on the basis of its emotional cargo of negativity, as it is associated with restriction of food intake.²³ In turn, Georgia's speech style makes use of a scientific description of restrictive nutrition ("calories per day", "count grams"). Counting calories, decidedly, resonates with Foucault's words when he argued that "the disciplines [...] distribute along a scale."²⁴ Here, Georgia seems to be reporting the content of the conversation in the terms of the coach. Bray sustains that such an "obsessive attention to the calculation of calories [...] indicates that weight-loss regimens, disordered or otherwise, articulate the body through a numerical grammar involved in an eschatology of the flesh"²⁵ 'Picking' also suggests lack of enjoyment of the food, as if she had been eating without much interest. The moment she voices her anxiety, she suddenly 'pops' a fry, which onomatopoeically connotes a moment of fun consumption of food. The semantic dichotomy established between both verbs emphasizes that she needed to be asked that question, because it is what prompts her out of her paralyzed intake.

The reactions that follow Georgia's revelation are also interesting to note. Maggie's is to gasp, while Levi and Hunter stop eating. This can be acknowledged as a show

¹⁹ See Steven Levenkron, *The Luckiest Girl in the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

²⁰ Miranda Kennealy, *Coming Up for Air* (Illinois: Sourcebooks Fire, 2017), 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ Rocío Riestra-Camacho, "Niching New Materialist Studies: Contemporary North-American Young Adult Sports Fiction as Anorexia Bibliotherapy," MA diss., University of Oviedo, 2018.

²⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 223.

²⁵ Abigail Bray, "The Anorexic Body: Reading Disorders," *Cultural Studies* 10, 3 (1996): 426–27.

of respect and as a gesture of solidarity, in that food is something to be enjoyed together as a group or not at all. At this point, moreover, their reactions convey surprise, as if it were illogical to require a regimen of Georgia. This, it is suggested, contributes to breaking the naturalized association between cheerleading and diet culture. Hunter is the one to recuperate from the shock and to quickly state “you don’t need to lose weight. You look great.”²⁶ His comments are the first in explicitly contradicting a figure of authority, the university coach, in this case.

Hunter’s statement, more notably, demonstrates the relevance of discussing disciplinary power among friends. In fact, as claimed by A. Smith, this is often productive as it represents an enrichment of perspectives: “in the physical activity setting, [...] peer-based interventions designed to promote dialogue on moral dilemmas and subsequent attempts at reaching moral balance among involved parties can be successfully implemented.”²⁷ In that sense, upon hearing Hunter, Georgia “gives in and slurps her milkshake.”²⁸ This scene resonates with the study conducted by Schutz and Paxton on the constructive aspects of friendship relationality, which showed that communication, trust and peer acceptance are certainly determinants of body satisfaction.²⁹ The novel’s later treatment of Georgia’s case, however, emphasize what I believe to be the most powerful body-friendly asset of the novel.

Specifically, the protagonist’s first-person narration outweighs direct dialogue in addressing its critique of restrictive sports diets. During another evening meeting, Georgia adds a layer of preoccupation to the diet issue, as her mother has been notified of this requirement: “Mom found out that the Tennessee coach gave me a diet plan to follow”, [...] “I couldn’t wait for college, to get away from my parents and do my own thing, but it looks like my coach is going to be just as controlling as Mom. Ugh.”³⁰ As it can be seen, Georgia’s mother does not respond to the stereotype of the “mother as food provisioning.”³¹ She is, conversely, depicted as one obsessed with complying with the role of disciplinary power as it pertains to regimes of beauty. Like Georgia’s Tennessee coach, she agrees with Georgia’s committing to a diet and encourages it. In this sense, disciplinary techniques, indeed, “refer individuals from one disciplinary authority to another.”³² However, unlike the coach, she is not concerned only about her daughter’s sports performance.

Georgia’s mother is directly abusive of her daughter’s appearance, in fact. This is known at the narrator’s contrasting thoughts about her own parents: “Unlike my parents, who support me no matter what, Mrs. Layne won’t let her daughter leave

²⁶ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 6.

²⁷ Smith, “Peer Relationships in Physical Activity Contexts,” 32.

²⁸ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 6.

²⁹ Helen K. Schutz and Susan J. Paxton. “Friendship Quality, Body Dissatisfaction, Dieting and Disordered Eating in Adolescent Girls,” *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 46, 1 (2007): 67–83. doi: 10.1348/014466506x115993

³⁰ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 6.

³¹ Lisa Rowe, “The Apple of Her Eye: The Mothering Ideology Fed by Best-selling Trade Picture Books,” in *Critical Approaches to Food in Children’s Literature*, ed. K. Keeling and S. Pollard (New York: Routledge, 2009), 58.

³² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 226.

the house without makeup and thinks eating at Jiffy Burger is a bad idea because grease ‘ruins your complexion.’³³ Hither, ‘complexion’ does not only suggest body build and its connection to athletic performance. Linked with the idea of makeup application,³⁴ it is evident that Georgia’s mother considers herself entitled to manage her daughter’s beauty regimes, including the maintenance of ‘appropriate’ weight. Her expectations of her daughter’s body, in that sense, are gendered in nature. The passage, really, speaks to a reproduction of a normative reproduction of disciplinary power. On normativity, notably, Foucault stated that “the power of the Norm appears through the disciplines.”³⁵

The novel provides critical proof that disciplinary normativity is gendered. Incidentally, let it be recalled that Foucault theorized his notion of disciplinary power apart from gender, as he claimed that it “produces homogenous effects of power.”³⁶ Nonetheless, instead of simplistically reinforcing the norm, the story resorts to the narrator’s thoughts so as to bring it under a critical spotlight. Particularly through the usage of quotation marks in “ruins your complexion”, it is implied that Maggie mocks Mrs. Layne’s ideas of what counts as beautiful in a girl’s body. This is a robust mechanism to make readers directly question the fact that teenage girls should be loyal consumers of appearance media. The narrator continues her stream of thoughts in this line:

Georgia used to be an elite gymnast, but grew too tall and wasn’t good enough to stay competitive in the sport at the highest levels. That’s why she switched to cheerleading. Regardless of what Georgia’s gymnastics coach said – that she most likely wouldn’t ever make a national or Olympic team – Mrs. Layne thought Georgia should’ve stuck with it and tried harder.³⁷

At this point, recalling the reason why Georgia left gymnastics reinforces Maggie’s critique over Georgia’s mother. Being too tall and not skilled enough, Georgia had to abandon gymnastics. Georgia’s mother appears, therefore, irrationally depicted, unable to accept that her daughter was unsuited for gymnastics. Thus, she appears obsessed with controlling something actually subject to control, that is, her daughter’s weight. This pattern is continued during Maggie’s reflections on Georgia’s mother’s own personal fixations: “Georgia’s mom married her high school boyfriend, was the star of the University of Alabama gymnastics team, and hasn’t aged a day in twenty years. She thinks Georgia needs to follow the same perfect life plan, and that requires sticking to a diet.”³⁸

³³ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 6.

³⁴ For Bartky, this “presupposes that a woman’s face unpainted, is defective” (Sandra Bartky “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. K. Conboy, N. Medina and S. Stanbury, 129–54 /New York: Columbia University Press, 1997/, 139).

³⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 184.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁷ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 56.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Touching on ageism (“hasn’t aged a day in twenty years”) and repeating the diet requirement, Maggie’s dismissal of Georgia’s mother’s obsession with appearance is strengthened. For example, normative ageism is cleverly dismissed through Maggie’s own use of “thinks” as the chosen reporting verb. “She thinks”, which sounds close to “she believes”, deprives Georgia’s mother’s assumptions of acceptability. Meanwhile, the terms in which the life plan calculated for Georgia are described (“perfect” and “same”) contribute to averse the idea. In particular, they suggest that it is unrealistic to expect that following her mother’s example is anywhere near to desirable. Maggie’s reflections constitute, then, another evident challenge to a figure of authority; here, to Georgia’s mother. After this narrated passage, the dialogue between Maggie and Georgia continues in a protesting tone by Georgia.

“How’d your mom find out?” I [Maggie] ask, hoping she didn’t hack her email. I wouldn’t put it past Mrs. Layne. “I hadn’t gotten around to answering the coach’s email [...] so she called our house and left a message on the answering machine. Then Mom got pissed because ‘a lady always responds to correspondence’ and said I need to follow the diet.” Hunter puts a friendly arm around her shoulders. “You look great. Don’t listen to them.”³⁹

Georgia criticizes the idea of embarking on a diet through a reported speech style. Specifically, Georgia mockingly repeats her mother’s speech to parody it. The quotation marks in “a lady always responds to correspondence” are a formal device that indexes a ridiculing tone of voice of her mother. The exact reproduction of words like “lady” and “correspondence” suggests that Georgia finds her mother’s conception of gender roles and their corresponding politeness conventions archaic and ludicrous. The quote, in turn, seems to reproduce the schema of “parents and teachers [...] [as] hav[ing] extensive influence admonishing girls to be demure and ladylike.”⁴⁰ It is significant to note that the direct idea of her mother requiring Georgia to stick to the diet is in proper reported speech (“said”) and constitutes a neutral word. This portrays her mother’s statement about Georgia’s diet as a severe one, not open to further discussion (“need to follow the diet”).

On the other hand, Georgia’s mother’s reaction is consistent with Foucault’s ideas about the “parent-children cell”, when, following Bentham, he argued that anyone, “in the absence of the director” can sustain disciplinary power, including “his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants.”⁴¹ In this case, it is the mother that establishes the family as “the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal.”⁴² It is useful to remark, also, that Foucault defended that

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” 102.

⁴¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 202.

⁴² Ibid., 216.

“disciplinary punishment is, in the main, isomorphic with obligation itself; it is not so much the vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence.”⁴³ In fact, Georgia’s mother’s way to punish her daughter is simply to insist that she must comply with the diet. Hither, normativity, that is, femininity, is hence presented as inescapable.

Inescapability is further suggested through the usage of technology for surveying Georgia’s body. Without being physically there, as a “faceless gaze,”⁴⁴ Georgia’s coach has been able to transmit the desired system of supervision in relaying it to her home answering machine. In that sense, technology functions ubiquitously, as “a system of surveillance without walls, windows, towers or guards.”⁴⁵ Once again, however, Hunter insists on lifting Georgia’s body confidence (“you look great”) and categorically rebels against such imposition (“don’t listen to them”). In establishing a “them”, as distinct from an “us” (the group of friends), he powerfully dismisses the authority of this restriction of Georgia’s eating behaviors.

Later onwards, the resorting to the first person narrator’s inner monologue becomes once more a powerful literary mechanism to voice an explicit challenge to Georgia’s diet impositions.

We sit down [Levi and Maggie] at our regular table by the windows with Hunter and Georgia. After saying hi, I unpack my lunch of pasta and energy drinks. Hunter’s already halfway through his sub sandwich, and Georgia’s devouring a grilled chicken salad... and some bread and soup. She’s way over the calorie count suggested by the college cheerleading coach, but I think that went in one ear and out the other, which is good. It doesn’t seem healthy to be that restrictive given her workouts.⁴⁶

How the scenario is framed through Maggie’s perceptions is vital for achieving a robust critique. In terms of spatiality, “our regular table” is indicative of them being used to spending time at the cafeteria. The canteen is a place which, for none of them, conveys food avoidance: thus, Hunter is described as “already halfway” through his sandwich, whereas Georgia is perceived as “devouring” her lunch. According to Maggie’s perceptions, food is mouthed with celerity. I would suggest that this constitutes an effective way of recovering a physiological sense of nourishment.⁴⁷ The narrator’s logic follows the premise that because there is hunger, food is eaten; so there is not, in other words, an emotional relationship with it. Georgia’s lunch contents, moreover,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁵ Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 93.

⁴⁶ Kenneally, *Coming Up for Air*, 93.

⁴⁷ Susie Orbach warns that “the high visibility of food and its apparent abundance has created a cleavage in our perceptions of it [...] no longer felt to be simply the adequate response to physical hunger” (Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic’s Struggle as a Metaphor for our Age* /London: Karnac, 2005/, 32).

are not food-group restrictive. The *grilled* salad counts as an example of a plate high in fat, whereas the bread is the carbohydrate stereotypically feared in the world of dieting. Georgia has, therefore, definitely ignored the anxiety of having to restrict macronutrients, as Maggie herself acknowledges.

The narrator's line of thought is also worth analyzing formally. Maggie directly observes that the nutritional value of that lunch exceeds what her best friend would have to be consuming otherwise. The inclusion of suspension points between “salad” and the “bread and soup” imply that Maggie is aware of the fact that such food quantity would have been too much, had someone in the group of friends agreed with Georgia's weight-control plan. In turn, the popular saying “that went in one ear and out the other” constitutes a formal device effective in wholly dismissing, through over-simplification, the traditional association of girl's sport and diet.⁴⁸ In actuality, “in many of [YA] novels, boys are depicted losing weight by means of participation in sports or in order to play better [...] diet and light exercise are noted more often when novelists write about females.”⁴⁹ Note that Georgia is never required to exercise as a way to lose weight, only to diet. It is with this saying that Georgia's problem is resolved in the novel, nonetheless. It shows that Georgia is capable of resisting the discipline of dieting, quite easily, actually; at least once her friends' support has reinforced her desired dismissal of the diet.

Maggie's silence, in avoiding mentioning her analysis of the situation to Georgia, on the other hand, speaks to the value of Georgia's decision, without compromising that there is inherent solidarity towards her. The narrator's final assessment, significantly, resumes why explicit opposition to disciplinary power was, however, necessary at the beginning. At the thought of “[i]t doesn't seem healthy to be that restrictive given her workouts”, Maggie exerts the ultimate critique to the sense both Georgia's mother and coach-to-be have demonstrated lacking. In favoring weight-loss, both adults were dismissing Georgia's metabolic basal rate requirements.

Maggie's approach, thus, cancels out Mrs. Layne's archaic ideology of femininity and at the same time puts the necessity of excellence in cheerleading performance through weight-modification in question. Eventually, the main protagonist and Georgia show a sensible eating philosophy. The meaning of food is not related to “feminine restriction”: its function, simply, is that of energizing the organism. Moreover, “alimentary choices” remain “a means of expressing adherence to a social group”, exactly.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Pierre Bordieu, “Sport and Social Class,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. C. Mukerji and M. Schudson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 372.

⁴⁹ Marci Glessner, John Hoover and Lisa Hazlett, “The Portrayal of Overweight in Adolescent Fiction,” *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 15, 2 (2006): 121.

⁵⁰ Chloë Taylor, “Foucault and the Ethics of Eating,” *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010):73.

Conclusion

All in all, how affective dynamics function in *Coming Up for Air* reveals that teenage hood is a time to care for and be cared by friends. In turn, they highlight the potential inadequacies of adults. In the novel, group friendship has been shown to mediate norms of disciplinary power present in the sports education system represented. Coaches and parents, as figures of authority, constitute a mere, if necessary, figuration in the narrative, allowing for feelings of disenfranchisement both to surface and to be navigated throughout the plot. As claimed by Ferriss and Young “dependence on friends or peers points to [a] theme across [...] chick-lit genres: the shortcomings of parents.”⁵¹ Hither, the dichotomy established between adult figures and peers aids the reinforcement of the relevance of friendship affect dynamics in the sports context, as opposed to dependence on and control by authorities.

The contrast of different aged characters evaluated in the paper offers a rich example of how affect dynamics is changing the juvenile fiction panorama of sports. Contrary to modern titles, analyzing a novel like *Coming Up for Air* shows how in contemporary examples “friendship becomes a valuable replacement for the omniscient [...] parents from young childhood books.”⁵² This story does not grant active dialogic space to adults, and, equally, they are not allowed reliability as characters, since it is their shortcomings that are highlighted. Ultimately, it can be concluded that Georgia’s mother and coach are eventually “nowhere”. Adults, therefore, constitute a surface canvas where disciplinary power provides the excuse for teenagers’ relationality to strongly come into the picture. Conclusively, their coercive views of sportive and eating lifestyles this paper has discussed brings them to a judgmental standpoint: that of the possibility to enjoy foods and friends when committing to sports. This analysis, finally, expands the view that juvenile sports fiction can constitute an archive rich in providing critical insight to young readers, especially with regard to a constructive politics of corporeality.

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⁵¹ Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 151.

⁵² *Ibid.*

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