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MODIFICATION OF EATING HABITS  
THROUGH THE USE OF  
SELF-OBSERVATION, COVERT CONTROL  
AND COVERT SENSITIZATION

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in the question

of obesity. Dynamic formulations (Freud, 1911) hypothesize that overeating

is a result of oral fixation during infancy, and/or societally inappropriate or

unfulfilled sexual impulses. Therapy involves understanding the historical

etiology of the problem. A behavioral approach to the question of overeating

(Ferster, 1962; Stuart, 1967; Stuart, 1971; Mahoney, Mours, Wade, 1972; Thoresen

and Mahoney, 1972) suggests that the problem is due primarily to a combination

of here-and-now environmental stimuli (the antecedent cues) and reinforcing

variables. The purpose of this n=1 intensive research design is to apply

certain behavioral techniques to a 23 year old, white, female graduate student

in counseling psychology. This student found that after having written a paper

(J. Shapiro, 1972) reviewing feminist literature and its implications for

counseling, she had in addition put on several pounds. She decided that

simultaneously with liberating herself from the restraints of a sexist society,

she had also to liberate herself from the restraints of excess flesh. Thus

is a research project born.

### Method

Subject and setting: The subject was a 23 year old white, female

counseling psychology graduate student at Stanford. The setting was her

natural environment.

### Procedure:

1) Defining the problem: The problem behavior was defined in two ways.

First, the subject felt she was overweight and wished to lose weight. Secondly,

she wished to modify poor eating behaviors which fell into two categories:

a) overeating, the antecedent behavior being stimulus control rather than hunger

b) eating when the antecedent behavior was either tension or a need for reward,

rather than hunger.