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‘Little Lena’s a Big Girl Now’: Lena Zavaroni and the Anorexic Star

Abstract: Lena Zavaroni became famous as a child star on the British TV talent show Opportunity Knocks in 1974, suffered from anorexia from age 13, and subsequently died from complications associated with the problem in 1999, age 35. This article uses 165 press articles from 1974-99 to analyse how Zavaroni’s relationship with anorexia was constructed in the British popular press. Existing feminist work suggests that stars with anorexia are worth studying because they make eating disorders popularly visible, with the coverage providing an occasion to analyse how the media constructs anorexia in relation to particular ideologies of femininity. But this article argues that it is important to explore how discourses on fame become intertwined with discursive constructions of anorexia, shaping how such problems are explained and gendered. Because Zavaroni appeared in the media as a child, her trajectory also dramatises how anorexia is seen to be linked not only with the role of the media, but with the development of female identity. Thus, whilst bringing stardom and celebrity into the frame, this article thus seeks to contribute to the feminist work which interrogates how popular constructions of anorexia mark out normative/ disordered femininities.

Key Words: Anorexia, Stardom, Celebrity, Zavaroni, Femininity, popular press

Lena Zavaroni became famous as a child star after singing on the British TV talent show Opportunity Knocks (1956, 1964-78, 1987-90) in 1974, suffered from anorexia from age 13, and subsequently died from complications following brain surgery to ‘cure’ her in 1999, age 35. As such, Zavaroni represented one of the most visible media images of anorexia during my own experience of growing up with the eating disorder in the early 1990s. Still today I recall particular forms of media encounter, such as watching slow-motion clips of the young and bubbly star, and trying to reconcile this youthful exuberance with what later became a portrait of a tiny shrunken face, hollow cheekbones and a deathly pallor.

Autoethnography has become an alternative qualitative method for giving voice to the relationship between personal and social experience, particularly for feminist research. This is not primarily an ethnographic account of my experience of anorexia, which (as with Zavaroni) lasted for 20 years. But I have begun like this as it would have felt impossible to write this article without explaining my personal and political investment in the topic, and how this has shaped my intervention, approach and argument.

In embarking upon this research, it quickly became apparent that, when compared to the famous example of Karen Carpenter in the US, there was no extant academic work on Zavaroni, despite her status as the key historical media case study of anorexia in the British context. Furthermore, it was clear that the anorexic star or celebrity had not received as much scholarly attention as might be perceived, and that when they were studied, they were approached in very particular, and limited ways. So

Paula Saukko's (2008) analysis of Karen Carpenter and Princess Diana, and Julie E. Ferris' (2003) analysis of Tracey Gold and Carnie Wilson, are key pieces of note here. But in these otherwise insightful examples, the stars are largely seen as worth studying by feminists because they make eating disorders popularly visible --- providing an insight into how the media constructs anorexia, and its relationship with ideologies of femininity. In other words, the discourses of stardom and celebrity themselves are not seen as key to the analysis.

Second, I was personally troubled by the role given to the voice of the anorexic star or celebrity in existing feminist work. Whilst it is taken as given in Star and Celebrity studies that the star or celebrity is necessarily always and only an image to us (Dyer, 1998), it is striking how the anorexic star's voice has been marginalised or even dismissed in feminist work. So the famous anorexic (in the contemporary celebrity environment at least) can be framed as essentially 'performing' anorexia in a bid to boost the economic value of their image (e.g. Sweeney, 2005: 71). It is crucial to recognise how confessional narratives, especially with regard to female celebrities, function as a commercialised spectacle within celebrity culture (Negra and Holmes 2008), and Zavaroni likely earned her main income from the sale of 'expose' stories about her anorexia at a time when she was otherwise too frail to work. The coverage of Zavaroni --- which pored over the details of her ravaged frame and consequent 'failure' to maintain her career success --- may also prefigure the pervasive fascination with the (economically lucrative) female celebrity 'train wreck' in the contemporary media landscape (see Ibid).

This certainly suggests a wider media investment in female celebrities who appear to challenge particular conventional norms of femininity (and who make for profitable sensationalist copy when doing so), but it is problematic to evacuate

Zavaroni's voice from the equation. Although she did not get to freely represent 'herself' (and her own explanations of her anorexia were clearly part of, and shaped by, the particular discursive context of the time), she played a role in the production of her own narrative(s), and I have deliberately sought to include traces of her voice. This is firstly because female celebrity voices appear to be seen as somehow politically 'inauthentic' in critical feminist work on eating disorders, and secondly, because this dismissal ends up complementing a wider logic in which the 'disordered' anorexic voice is seen as being 'outside of the true' (Saukko, 2008: 6).

This is also a form of silencing that I have experienced myself. When suffering from anorexia, I used to write a lot about my experience of starvation and treatment, yet these writings were sometimes presented back to me, within therapeutic or medical discourse, as simply part of my 'illness', and its obsessive, over-active and manic tendencies. Whilst I am in no way seeking to speak for Zavaroni, this aim to give voice dovetails with my own desire to speak back to medical, popular and sometimes feminist approaches to anorexia which, despite the increasing inclusion of anorexic stories, voices and experiences [e.g. MacSween, 1995, Malson, 1998]), still necessarily make political claims on behalf of the anorexic subject about which they are not invited to respond.

In bringing the celebrity anorexic (back) into the spotlight, I not only want to think seriously about how Zavaroni was constructed as an anorexic star and listen to her voice within these narratives; I also want to foreground discourses of stardom and celebrity, and explore the role they play in shaping how anorexia is gendered and explained. After all, stardom and celebrity are more than just mechanisms for bringing images of eating disorders into media visibility: in the case of Zavaroni, her anorexia

was often explained in terms of the normative script of the ‘damaged’ child star in which fame itself led to her demise.

In this regard, the importance of the ‘media’ here should actually be well-served by the social constructionist perspectives offered by feminist approaches to anorexia given that these have often (although not without disagreement and contention) foregrounded the role of the mass media in providing part of the social context in which femininity is objectified, and anorexia produced (Bordo, 1993, Bray, 2005, Saukko, 2008). Yet Zavaroni did not simply consume media texts, she was a media text. Thus, the case study raises questions about how we should position star or celebrity anorexia in relation to ‘ordinary’ anorexia --- something not addressed in existing work. Female stars and celebrities live under a constant media spotlight of surveillance which in turn demands a prescriptive regime of self-maintenance, and in this regard, they can be seen to represent an extreme version of the condition of femininity within patriarchal culture (Holmes and Negra, 2011). This sits alongside the extent to which feminist interpretations of anorexia (Lawrence, 1984, Chernin, 1985, Orbach, 1986, Bordo, 1993) have argued that ‘troubles relating to self-determination and gender identity affect all women in sexist societies, with anorexics simply representing the gravest end of the continuum [my emphasis]’ (Saukko, 2008: 5). In this regard, the female celebrity can arguably be read as a hyperbolic representation of the female anorexic self which, whilst certainly sitting on a continuum with wider media representations of anorexia and femininity, demands analysis in its own right.

This article examines the media construction of Zavaroni from 1974-1999, using 165 articles accessed via the press clippings at the BBC Written Archive Centre, the Nexis newspaper database, as well as online fan sites (such as www.lenazavaroni.com). During the 1970s and 1980s, coverage of Zavaroni appeared

in the British tabloid press and (to a lesser extent) women's and girl's magazines, and there was also commentary from the broadsheet press surrounding her death. In analysing this material, my interest is in what the case study of Zavaroni can reveal about the popular (media) construction of anorexia at the time, and how her role as a star was invoked within this context (and to what effect). Thus, whilst firmly bringing stardom into the frame, this article contributes to the feminist work on anorexia which interrogates how political 'gender agendas' are at work in constructions of the disorder (Saukko, 2008: 5). As Saukko asks, within constructions of anorexia, 'what kinds of selves are defined as disordered? What kinds of selves and femininities are defined as "healthy"?' (Ibid: 2). In exploring three particular areas of discourse --- explanations of the aetiology of Zavaroni's anorexia; constructions of control and appetite; and suggestions of a 'cure' --- I argue that the media spectacle of her anorexia illuminated particular gendered tensions in the wake of Second Wave feminism. In this regard, the media narrative of Zavaroni's anorexia and its relationship to ideologies of femininity dramatised a tension between 'work' (and success and visibility in the public sphere) and the expectations of heterosexual domesticity. Unable, or unwilling, to conform to the latter, her fate provides a unique and revealing insight into the confusing and contradictory discourses which prescribed what the ideal 'woman' could (or 'should') be in the period under question.

A 'direct political weapon against women': Feminism and Anorexia

Lena Zavaroni was born in 1963 and grew up in a working-class family in Rothesay on the Scottish Isle of Bute. Her father Victor owned a fish and chip shop and both of her parents were involved with music on a local level: her father played the guitar and her mother Hilda sang in public houses. Zavaroni was said to have been 'discovered' in Rothesay by a record producer prior to her unprecedented 5 week win on Opportunity

Knocks, after which, with her characteristically deep and adult voice, she launched the album 'Ma! (He's Making Eyes At Me)' (The Sun, February 15, 1975). She performed internationally before attending the Italia Conti stage school in London, and by 1979 Zavaroni was given her own programme on the BBC called Lena Zavaroni and Music, and she subsequently starred in her own variety programme, Lena (1980-2). As her eating disorder worsened in the 1980s she worked considerably less, but made several appearances on chat shows and variety programmes. The general pattern of the press coverage in the 25 year period, however, was that, after her initial diagnosis of anorexia at age 13, Zavaroni made repeated claims to either full or partial recovery with hopes of a full 'comeback', only for the cycle of decline, hospitalisation and hopes for recovery to start again.

The coverage of Zavaroni's anorexia was most prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, the period in which the early canonical feminist writing on the subject began to emerge. In seeking to depart from and contest the medicalised psychiatric constructions of anorexia (see Hepworth, 1999), feminist work sought to explore anorexia in relation to the socially constructed nature of female identity. There are certainly differences between the feminist accounts, but the early authors --- writing just after Second Wave feminism and in a culture that was seen to be witnessing a considerable rise in eating disorders --- linked the problem to the consequences of the Women's Movement, and the resulting contradictions and pressures surrounding the female (Chernin, 1985, Orbach, 1986). A number of feminist writers, including the later contributions of Naomi Wolf (1991) and Susan Bordo (1993), also saw the promotion of the increasingly slender female body as a 'direct political weapon against women' (Bray, 2005: 119), arguing that the valorisation of a thin female ideal was especially visible in

periods following women's political progress. Yet the anorexic was not only figured here as a victim of a patriarchal backlash, as a number of feminist writers positioned such subjects as deeply contradictory (Probyn, 1988, Orbach, 1978, 1986), with sufferers signifying both an (ultra) conformity to 'the ideal of feminine beauty and [a] rebelli[on] against it [my emphasis]' (Saukko, 2008: 26).

The feminist re-reading of eating disorders has expanded considerably since this early period (see Malson and Burns, 2009), but I pay particular attention to the early authors here given that they were writing as part of the Second Wave, and at the same time as Zavaroni became anorexic. (They doubtless also hold a particular fascination for me as my own experience of anorexia began during the tail end of the period they were talking about).

Yet such feminist perspectives were rarely an explicit part of the discourse about anorexia in the popular press at the time. Out of the 165 articles on Zavaroni, only one critiqued dominant medical explanations of anorexia and gestured toward the feminist work on the problem, suggesting that she 'would do well' to read Susie Orbach's Fat is a Feminist Issue' (The Times, December 7, 1982). Although it is arguably not surprising that the British tabloid press, aimed primarily at a working-class male audience, didn't engage with such material, this absence might be seen as indicative of the 'failure' of the feminist project to make inroads into public discourse about eating disorders. Conversely, the absence of the feminist discourse here might be seen as evidence of the threat such arguments posed to dominant (masculine) psychiatric definitions, as well as a commercialised culture of female beauty and stardom. Either way, this absence offers a sharp historical insight into the economic and cultural power relations at work in the popular media construction of anorexia, and the ways in which particular voices gain ascendancy in its definition and explanation. In the relatively

lengthy period under consideration here it was the psychiatric discourses, and simplistic popular ideas distilled from the latter, which dominated the discursive terrain. At the same time, the idea of a feminist ‘failure’ here seems both limiting and reductive. Even if Zavaroni’s construction was not explicitly attended by feminist discourses on anorexia, her case study dramatised a struggle surrounding normative definitions of the female body, female sexuality, and women’s social role, and it did so in the heart of the mainstream mass media.

With regard to method, the BBC press clippings, which are by no means limited to Zavaroni’s work at the BBC, ranged from 1974-1993, whereas the Nexis database, which began in 1981 (and which I searched using the terms ‘Zavaroni and anorexia’), mainly yielded articles from the 1990s, as its coverage for this period is more extensive than the previous decade (Saukko, 2008: 63). Although I knew that I was interested in analysing discourses of stardom and gender, I did not use a priori codes, but coded the material according to the dominant themes that emerged. On a surface level, the discourses which structured Zavaroni’s relationship with anorexia largely circulated around the following categories: a discussion of the aetiology of her anorexia, the question of control; a fascination with her physical appearance, weight and food intake; and ruminations on what might ‘cure’ her. Given that these themes overlap I do not go through each of these in turn, and concentrate specifically on the issue of aetiology, the construction of control and appetite, and the question of a ‘cure’.

‘Opportunity Knocks the Pounds off Lena’: aetiological discourses

Most of the articles examined contained some speculation about why Zavaroni developed anorexia. These ranged across a simplistic emphasis on cosmetic concerns;

the desire to stay a child; her perceivably premature uprooting from her home in Bute; inherited depression from her mother; and the general pressures of child stardom. Often several of these were intertwined at once, with stardom sitting at the core: so Zavaroni ‘paid the ultimate price for bowing to this pressure to stave off puberty. Her battle with anorexia was a direct consequence of an obsession to hang onto her infantile figure for the sake of her career’ (The Guardian, March 6, 2000).

The extent to which Zavaroni’s problems were seen as the outcome of child stardom conforms to what Jane O’Connor (2008) calls the normative cultural script of the child star. O’Connor argues that child stars are often seen as ‘anomalies in our culture’ and ‘are subject to controlling techniques which serve to re-establish the social order...’ (2008: 67). They challenge the “natural” right of power over children that adults have bestowed upon themselves’ (Ibid: 83); the status of the child as economically dependent (there is a veritable obsession in the press with the money amassing in Zavaroni’s trust fund and the growing gap between her affluent lifestyle in London compared to the ‘simple life’ of her parents in Bute); and the importance of education in the quest for personal and financial success (Zavaroni said she hated school, and ‘didn’t take any O-levels... but I don’t think it matters very much in my case’ [The Sun, April 19, 1980]). If we think about stardom and celebrity as forms of ‘disciplinary regime’ (Tyler and Bennett, 2010) which serve a pedagogic function in marking out desirable and undesirable forms of identity, then it is instructive to note the naturalised media narrative that insists that child stardom inevitably leads to disaster, tragedy and misfortune in later life (Ibid). So the year Zavaroni died, it was perceived that the child star who had ‘paid the price of fame’ had gone from ‘rags to

riches and back to rags again, ending up in a dingy council flat in Hertfordshire' (Daily Record, October 2, 1999).

But whilst the ideologies which seek to discipline the transgressive and liminal figure of the child star may have in part driven the claim that stardom itself explained the aetiology of Zavaroni's anorexia, such an interpretation is politically problematic. First it locates the problem in Zavaroni's inability to cope with the stardom that her voice bequeathed, and it removes it from the realm of the everyday, and the social, in so far as stardom was positioned as a world apart. As such, the discourse of stardom did some nifty ideological work here in so far as Zavaroni's anorexia was often presented as an individualised problem, fuelled by a narcissistic obsession with her own physical form. So we heard how the 'superstar remained a little girl tormented by personal worries. She worried about getting too fat....that her tiny figure would be spoiled by a big bottom...[my emphasis]' (Daily Mirror, November 8, 1982). Zavaroni's own explanation of her problem changed over time, but her comments in the early interviews confirmed this simplistic perspective, with the suggestion that she suddenly felt 'fat' in her leotard during her ballet class at stage school (Daily Mirror, November 29, 1982). In some of the later articles however, she either moved the explanation away from stardom ('It was the process of growing up' [Weekend, August 6, 1985]), or explicitly linked the female star or celebrity to the wider construction of female identity, thus in fact offering the closest explanation to the feminist theories. In 1989 she stated that 'If anyone is to blame it is society, which says everyone has to be slim. I feel really sorry for the royals because every time Fergie and Di are photographed their weight is commented on' (The Sun, June 12, 1989).

Indeed, a prevalent theme in the 1974 articles about the child star is the monitoring of her weight as a 'natural' part of her career success (and this surely sat

uneasily with the claim that she was simply and personally narcissistically vain). In ‘Opportunity Knocks the Pounds off Lena’, published as part of the Daily Mirror’s ‘Slimmer’s Club’ page (May 15, 1974), Zavaroni’s manager, Dorothy Solomon, explained how ‘pudgy’ 9 year old Lena ‘needed to lose some weight’. The young star became well-accustomed to her ‘new eating regime’ --- which was set out meal by meal for readers to peruse --- and this regulation was presented in a favourable light given that nutrition ‘experts say that if a child is too heavy at ten it will have a weight problem for the rest of its life’ [my emphasis]. Repeatedly referred to as ‘plump’ when she was no such thing, Zavaroni explained how she received ‘£1 a week for sticking to [her]... diet...’, and how she wanted ‘to lose half a stone before [she goes] ... to America.... I’m far too fat’ (The Sun, April 20, 1974).

One press critic described how during 1970s Britain, anorexia was largely ‘unheard of’ within popular consciousness (Daily Record, October 2, 1999), and the only potential ‘weight problem’ for a young girl here was envisaged in terms of obesity and excess. The press article is also indicative of how, regardless of relative talent, the (slim) body was perceived to be central to the cultural and economic capital of the girl/ female star which, in the UK, was arguably still epitomised by models such as Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton. Although this need for careful body surveillance was presented as specific to Zavaroni’s role within the entertainment industry, it also reminds us how young girls are generally taught to view their bodies as commodities from an early age (Orbach, 1986). In this regard, the construction of girl stardom here appears to dramatise this process in a more hyperbolic form, making it impossible to position Zavaroni’s ‘worries’ as the result of an individual pathology.

Although discussion of weight maintenance continued to be part of Zavaroni's profile, it was not until 1978, when she was 13, that there was the suggestion that there might be a serious problem: the term anorexia nervosa was not initially used, and she was seen as suffering (in her own words) from 'too much dieting' (Daily Mirror, June 10, 1979). It is only after what are presented as two more 'bouts' of this that the label 'the slimmer's disease, anorexia nervosa' appears (in 1981-2), and it was widely reported that she spent her 16th birthday in hospital for treatment. The use of the term 'slimmer's disease' dominated the coverage until around the mid 1990s. This phrase both trivialised and gendered the problem whilst also othering it: 'self-inflicted' starvation was only defined as a disease by the emerging field of male psychiatry in the late 1800s (Hepworth, 1999: 22).

Psychiatric discourses were prominent in much of the coverage across the period, even though such explanations sat uneasily with the common sense perception that the culture of child stardom was to blame. This was exemplified by a comment in 1983 from Professor Arthur Crisp, the leading authority on anorexia in Britain at the time, when he commented how the pressures of child stardom may have caused 'her illness', only to then go on to observe how '10,000 teenage girls in Britain --- mostly from middle class families --- are starving themselves' (The Sun, September 24, 1983). Particularly in the post-war period when white middle-class girls were seen to dominate the profile of the anorexic, emphasis was placed on the potentially dysfunctional nature of the middle-class family which gave rise to the 'origins of the classical notion of the anorexic woman as an insufficiently autonomous "goody" girl fallen victim to media and parental pressures to be pretty and to achieve' (Saukko, 2008: 9) (e.g. Bruch, 1978).

Zavaroni's working-class background, so useful to her star dramatisation of the 'success myth' [Dyer, 1998]), did not fit this typical paradigm although, as explained below, the idea of classed femininities played a clear role in constructions of her anorexic self. But even whilst lacking the conventional class background of the 'stereotypical' anorexic, interpretations of Zavaroni's anorexia still conformed to the 'insufficiently autonomous self' popularised by the post-war psychiatric theories. Later on in 1990 for example she looks back to the beginnings of her problems with food and offers what was by then a classic interpretation of the anorexic self:

Everyone was trying to stop me starving myself, but I felt they were trying to control me – like they did with everything else in my life. Eating was the only thing I could control. It was the only way I could show my independence [my emphasis] (The People, March 5, 1989).

The common sense view here, also fostered by Zavaroni above, was that child stardom had denied her sufficient autonomy over her life and future. As a result, there were repeated suggestions that she was seeking to 'reclaim' her identity in articles such as 'The Mouse that Roared' in 1985 (Daily Express, March 30). Zavaroni explained: 'I liked being "nice little Lena" and it worried me that people might think I was stropky if I argued about anything' (The Sun, January 28, 1985). In many ways, stardom (which is strikingly not seen by the press as specifically gendered) is again invoked in ways which obfuscate the significance of gender: Zavaroni's comments about 'nice little Lena' come across as deeply gendered (as well as classed), reflecting the early feminist arguments that anorexia speaks to women's troubles relating to self-determination and entitlement (Lawrence, 1984, Orbach, 1986).

In fact, feminist work emerges as all the more important in the UK context given that the leading British psychiatric theories on anorexia – in which the anorexic was often simply seen as retreating into childhood due to a ‘maturation crisis’ - (see MacSween, 1995) paid little or no attention to issues of culture. The popular emphasis on Zavaroni’s stardom as the prime causal factor sat (uneasily) alongside this paradigm, either functioning to move anorexia further away from any socially gendered context --- it was simply the pressures of ‘exceptional’ child stardom --- or to draw attention (if the reader is so inclined) to Zavaroni’s regulated and surveilled female self as a hyperbolic version of ‘everyday’ femininity.

‘Eating her way to happiness’: Control and Desire

The last section detailed how Zavaroni’s anorexia was positioned as primarily the outcome of individual circumstances for which she was generally not to blame. As a result, it is not surprising that her anorexia was largely mediated through discourses of victimisation, confirming other analyses of the discursive construction of anorexia in popular media forms (Whitehead and Kurz, 2008, Ferris, 2003). This discourse of victimisation, in which the sufferer is seen to be in the ‘grip’ of an all-powerful force, also enabled the media to position itself as an ‘innocent bystander’ who was merely ‘disseminating the facts’ (Whitehead and Kurz, 2008: 348) rather than (as in the early 1974 article which positioned her body and diet under direct media surveillance) actively contributing to the social reality it reported. Whitehead and Kurz also observe how, in popular media profiles of anorexia, such discourses paradoxically sit alongside those of self-control and mastery, which serve to remind readers that a ‘thin woman is... a powerful woman’ (Ibid: 352) --- although only with regard to the ability to self-deny and starve.

Much feminist work on anorexia has emphasised the remarkably enduring myth that eating is somehow an unfeminine activity --- as bound up with the perception of women as nurturers, as well fears surrounding the articulation of female sexuality and desire. Bordo argues that anxiety about women's 'insatiable' hungers has historically peaked at times when women are 'asserting themselves politically and socially' (1993: 161). In surveying a range of adverts from the 1980s and early 1990s (the period often associated with a backlash against the Second Wave), Bordo observes how the 'depiction of women eating, particularly in a sensuous surrender to rich exciting food, is taboo' (1993: 110).

The coverage of Zavaroni in the same period is striking, in so far as the comeback articles are frequently full to bursting with references to food, as well as pictures of Zavaroni eating. In the first of these in 1978 for example, some of the tabloid headlines are, 'For the star of the Palladium, heaven is the chocolate counter at Harrods' (Sunday Mirror, September 6, 1978); 'Lena is eating her way to happiness' (Sunday Mirror, June 25, 1978); or 'Life is So Sweet for Lena' (The Sun, April 18, 1980). In the latter we are told that 'she had shrunk to an alarming five and a half stone. "Now I'm back to my old weight" she says. "I ate a whole top layer of a box of chocolates the other day"'. In the 1985 comeback, the Daily Mirror (April 3) and The Sun (April 3) featured images of Zavaroni licking not one but two Cornetto ice creams, offering a rare media image of an incredibly slim woman (preparing to) feed herself. The fixation with seeing her eat didn't just point toward a simplistic understanding of anorexic recovery in the 1980s. What was presented as an almost gluttonous desire for ('sinful') food was only allowed to be celebrated because she had been starving (to death).

It is widely noted that prior to the transition from a religious to a medical authority, and the medical ‘discovery’ of anorexia in the late 1800s, fasting women and girls were positioned in relation to sainthood (Brumburg, 1988, Hepworth, 1999). It is thus unsurprising that the dichotomy between abstaining /gorging mapped neatly onto the historical archetypes of female sexuality: the Madonna and the Whore (Hepworth, 1999). Whilst the former represents purity and the mind in control of the body, the latter represents ‘sin, self-indulgence’ and the ‘body in control of the mind’ (Whitehead and Kurz, 2008: 346) --- with the latter representing the very opposite of the anorexic aim.

In the early press coverage in the mid 1970s, the sexualised connotations of Zavaroni’s persona were a constant undercurrent, and she functioned as a paradigmatic example of the girl star who invoked ‘simultaneous adoration and abhorrence, concurrent delight and despair’ (Projanksy, 2014: 44). The discourse of abhorrence here often circled around (precocious) sexuality. In the early period, there were references to how, with her first record, Lena was being looked at ‘as a red hot mini momma’, and ‘like a little sex doll for schoolboys’ (The People, February 3, 1974), and emphasis was placed on unpalatable ‘gyrations, grinds and bumps...’ (The Scotsman, July 27, 1974). There is also a class distaste at work here, not uncommon in constructions of female child stardom (Walkerdine, 1998), in so far as **the** working-class Zavaroni is implicitly characterised as brash, cheap and excessive.

With regard to girl stardom, Melanie Williams notes the media fascination with the ‘transformation from girl to woman, and [the]... prolonged occupation of the liminal area in between’ (2005: 365), and this aptly captures the surveillance under which Zavaroni’s body is placed in the years that follow. Largely male critics were quick to pore over what are seen as ‘natural’ corporeal and sartorial changes in her

image. So between the late 1970s and early 1980s we hear how ‘Little Lena’s a Big Girl Now’ and ‘The child songbird has filled out into a fully-fledged star’ (Daily Star, April 23, 1980); ‘Gone are the hair ribbons and lollipops’ (Evening News, March 8, 1977) and how Zavaroni wants ‘to show off her budding figure in low-cut dresses’ (Daily Mail, May 12, 1980). We might note how the agency in the last comment is attributed to Zavaroni herself rather than, for example, to the demands of a sexualised media economy in which the female star is sold. But the words used in the articles, such as ‘bursting out’, ‘popping’ and even ‘She’s wild- she’s sexy’ (with an image of Zavaroni looking pseudo-punk, dressed up as Debbie Harry) (Daily Mirror, March 25, 1981), betrayed undercurrents of anxiety which drew upon long-standing myths of the female body as somehow corporeally and sexually ‘uncontrollable’ (Lawrence, 1984: 34).

Indeed, the extent to which Zavaroni was seen as offering a more aesthetically, as well as socially pleasing version of femininity once she ‘regressed’ from this budding adult sexuality and began to starve herself is suggested by a male journalist in the Daily Mirror in 1979:

This tiny waiflike figure with the enormous grey, trusting eyes, opens the door. ... The wispy floating dress reaching down to her fine-boned ankles and the high-heeled shoes complete the picture of a fragile wraith only slightly in touch with earthly things. Lena Zavaroni... is oddly different to her screen image where she seems massively over-confident, almost irritating in her perfection of performance... (June 10, 1979).

Wolf argues that the anorexic may commence her journey as defiant, ‘but from the point of view of a male-dominated society, she ends up as a perfect woman. She is

weak, sexless and voiceless, and can only with difficulty focus on the world beyond her plate' (1991: 197). Zavaroni's fragile passivity above is certainly applauded as deeply feminine, but with particular historical echoes. In her discussion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses which informed the construction of eating as an unfeminine activity, Lawrence foregrounds the importance of an 'ethereal... other-world[ly]...' quality --- suggesting a girl/ woman who is 'imminent danger of wasting away' --- as important aspects of 'feminine charm' (1984: 35). With Zavaroni described above as only 'slightly in touch with earthly things', the historical parallels in this regard are striking. But these discourses on femininity also clearly intersected with ideas of class. In popular discourse, Zavaroni moved from the 'cheap', 'brash' and 'excessive' working-class child star to the 'wispy', 'fine-boned' waif (who is polite and doesn't 'roar'). In this regard, although understandings of Zavaroni's trajectory did conform to the idea of the anorexic as a victim of middle-class restriction and repression, her anorexic self was implicitly positioned as more acceptable because it carried connotations of a middle-class ideal. As such, Zavaroni (inadvertently) accrued a form of aesthetic and social capital through starvation, with anorexia 'enabling' her to transcend what were implicitly constructed as the corporeal and social markers of working-class femininity.

The extent to which Zavaroni's anorexia self might be valued brings into relief the contradictory constructions of femininity which structure the cultural circulation of anorexia: 'disordered' sufferers are seen as needing to develop a suitably autonomous self in ways which suggest that they should 'surpass their feminine sweetness, lightness and softness' (in order to pursue what is often interpreted as a more bounded, masculine self [Saukko, 2008: 69]). Yet the anorexic Zavaroni, at least on an aesthetic and social level, is seen as what Wolf describes as the 'perfect [middle-

class] woman', and in fact far from disordered at all. This idea of Zavaroni as simultaneously ideal/ aberrant, normative/ disordered, was most clearly played out around the construction of domestic femininity, an identity that was seen as holding the key to her ultimate 'cure'.

'Pork Chops and Peter...': Marriage and Domesticity

The psychiatric, and sometimes the feminist, theories of anorexia as form of biological regression often demonstrated the influence of the post-war popularisation of Freudian psychoanalysis which reduced interpretations of anorexia to a 'dichotomy about the rejection/ acceptance of heterosexual femininity' (Hepworth, 1999: 49). Heterosexual desire is represented, for most of her career, as a problem or absence for Zavaroni. Although she is asked by interviewers about boyfriends from her early teens, in the early articles she claims that she is 'too busy'. By the time she was diagnosed as anorexic we heard how she had 'been out with boys a few times in the past but it has never worked. [She]... just felt like a child being looked after' (Daily Mirror, September 28, 1983). In this regard it is important to note that, despite what is perceived as her curious 'failure' to have a relationship with a man, it was not at any point suggested that she might be lesbian. This is despite later reports in the 1990s of her 'very close' relationship with friend and fellow anorexic Elly Dalziel (who significantly changed her surname to Zavaroni), who said that they would both rather 'drink a cup of tea with sugar than have sex [with men]' (The Guardian, October 7, 1999). The psychiatric theories assume that the anorexic needs to 'resolve' her developmental anxiety in order to take up her 'rightful' place as a heterosexual woman, and although it is this very identity that the early feminist work sought to

critique, it too pivoted on an assumed heterosexism which inadvertently reproduced some of the normative discourses on femininity that it set out to critique.

The apparent ‘absence’ of heterosexual desire in Zavaroni’s image began to change in the mid 1980s when interviews suddenly positioned a heterosexual relationship as something that would complete her happiness (1985 sees more convincing claims to recovery). In 1987, when Zavaroni was 23, there were a series of articles on how she had met a man called Peter Wiltshire: the press crowed how ‘Love has put 7lb on tiny Lena’, and reported how Zavaroni ‘glowed with health as she excitedly told how Peter popped the question’ (The Sun, February 16, 1987).

Zavaroni explained how she was still a virgin, so Peter was sensationally positioned as the ‘man who awoke her sexually’ (Woman’s Own, May 2, 1987). The gendered dichotomy of active/passive was even more explicit in the tabloid descriptions of how Zavaroni lost her virginity to Peter, a scenario in which she was presented as effectively absent, both in person and desire. The star admitted that she got a little bit ‘tipsy’ to calm her nerves, so had to ask Peter the next day: ‘Did we do it last night?’, to which he replied: ‘Yes darling’ (The Sun, February 16, 1987). The logic here was also in keeping with dominant medical understandings of the ‘problematically’ asexual anorexic. Crisp for example advocated that enough weight must be gained so that hormonal development will be ‘switched on’. Sexuality can then be re-experienced and the anorexic can get back in touch with ‘her more natural psychological self’ (Crisp, 1980: 140, in MacSween, 1995: 30).

In this regard, it is useful to consider what this natural psychological, and consequently social self was perceived to entail at the time. After meeting Peter, Zavaroni declared she was going to give up her career and become a housewife, a

decision that was met with positive reactions in the press. The Sun described a typical day in Zavaroni's new life:

She listens out for his car and the key going into the lock. She ... cooks him dinner. His favourite right now is pork chops... She looks so pleased with herself... And, when you think it wasn't long ago that she couldn't even buy a bus ticket, why shouldn't she? (The Sun, April 9, 1987).

Zavaroni's role as a domestic housewife --- reminiscent of a post-war middle-class ideal --- is positioned here as a natural step in her growth into an autonomous adult woman, although this newfound autonomy is only to be exercised within the confines of the domestic realm.

The 1980s is widely regarded as a difficult time for feminism, when the influence of right wing political ideologies and related media discourses fostered a backlash which sought to reincorporate or revoke the progress made by the Second Wave (Fauldi, 1992, Genz and Brabon, 2009: 53). The critique of women's 'private' domestic repression had been a key source of critique for Second Wave feminists. As such, the idea of the 'new traditionalism', in which women were figured as having made a deliberate choice to abstain from paid work (Genz and Brabon, 2009: 52), is often perceived as existing parallel to, or as part of, the backlash. It is certainly striking that the narrative which had constructed Zavaroni's struggle to recover in relation to singular pursuit of her career (she always claimed that she was trying to get well enough to sing again) should suddenly take such a different turn. When asked if she missed her work she replied: 'I get the odd twinge of nostalgia... but I don't really have any ambitions any more [my emphasis]' (Daily Mirror, November 24, 1987).

Indeed, Faludi's suggestion that the prevailing message of the era, in which women were told that 'if they gave up their unnatural struggle for self-determination, they could regain their natural femininity' (1992: 490), could just as easily be applied to the anorexic, and particularly the economically successful anorexic female star. After all, despite Zavaroni's oft-expressed desire to return to her career, 'Doctors ... warned that she would have to be kept out of the limelight' (in the realms of the private and the domestic) if she was ever to recover (Daily Star, December 23 1982).

What was presented like a fairy tale did not, however, have a happy ending, and after 18 months the press announced the end of the marriage. The causal factor here was predictably presented as Zavaroni's eating disorder, and in making clear that the idea of the anorexic as the 'perfect woman' had its physical limitations, Wiltshire insisted that she was a 'good wife but not a good mate' (The Sun, May 23, 1991). Zavaroni's version however was notably related to the wider expectations of her domestic, wifely role. She explained that Wiltshire had wanted to start a family but she was not sure that she wanted babies, as 'I've seen so many friends have them and they cause hassle' (The Sun, May 24, 1991). This highly reasonable and lucid comment was conveniently read in relation to her 'slim phobia' rather than as a potential rejection of women's normative social script and role. The 'disordered' voice of anorexia is used here to silence her, highlighting it as 'an embodied moment of negotiation: as a site which shows up the articulations of discourse', female identity and power (Probyn, 1988: 202).

Conclusion: 'I'm waiting for my happy ending...'

In 1999, and apparently at her own request, Zavaroni underwent the controversial procedure of a leucotomy - in order to 'stimulate appetite and reduce anxiety' (The Guardian, October 10, 1999) - which is effectively seen as the modern version of a lobotomy. Weighing under 4 stone at the time, Zavaroni contracted a chest infection and died 3 weeks after the surgery was performed. Her death certificate shockingly recorded that she died from 'natural causes' (The Times, December, 9, 1999) a verdict which not only dismissed 20 long years of starvation, but also evacuated any social and cultural factors, and thus any societal responsibility, from the equation. This was, incidentally, the decade of the super waif in popular culture and the popularisation of the emaciated image of 'heroin chic' (see Ferreday, 2013: 7). Zavaroni's physicality, which was both valued and deplored, was on a continuum with such popular cultural images. Nevertheless, 'when thin ... become[s] "too thin", anorexia is there to take the blame' (Whitehead and Kurz, 2008: 351).

Like me, Zavaroni lived with anorexia for 20 years, and researching and writing this piece was qualitatively different to anything else I have explored in my academic career, offering up moments of recognition, anger, humiliation and sorrow. In the 1990s, I inhabited the same discursive context with regard to the discussion of the 'modern' and increasingly pervasive 'slimmer's disease', and reading the newspaper articles was an uncomfortable reminder of how I was positioned, defined and 'othered' in relation to both popular and medical discourse at the time. Yet despite the existence of this connection, I have not --- I hope ---- sought to speak for Zavaroni, nor force interpretations (feminist or otherwise) with regard to what her eating disorder was really about. Rather, this article has sought to offer an analysis of how the meanings of her problem were constructed by the discourses that helped to define what

‘anorexia’ was in the period under question – a context in which, with the apparently wider incidence of anorexia, as well as the emergence of the anorexic star or celebrity into public discourse, the meanings of the problem were urgently explored and debated. The feminist work was clearly part of this context, but its near invisibility in the archival evidence of Zavaroni’s construction, as well as the particular way in which she ultimately met her needless and tragic demise, offers a stark insight into how particular meanings (and thus treatments) prevailed, while others did not. It is still the case today, as I have experienced first-hand, that critical feminist approaches to anorexia do not form part of mainstream treatment.

In arguing for a greater conceptual dialogue between stardom/ celebrity studies and critical feminist approaches to eating disorders, my suggestion is not that we need a separate analytic paradigm. But the case study of Zavaroni exemplifies how it is important to take account of how discourses on fame become intertwined with and shape how anorexia is explained (away). In Zavaroni’s case, they often functioned as an ideological alibi which effectively drew attention away from the tensions and contradictions surrounding the female role, whilst at the same time the female star can be read --- at an analytic level ---- as a hyperbolic representation of the female anorexic self, rich for interrogation with respect to the impossible contradictions involved in inhabiting a female identity.

Whilst the construction of Zavaroni’s anorexia plays out the ascendancy of psychiatric discourses, as well as the popular and individualising discourses which positioned stardom as the root cause of her demise, it was also shaped by her uneasy relationship with the commodification of female celebrity. In their discussion of how discourses of judgement have become the predominant framework through which female celebrities are mediated in the contemporary, post-feminist context, Diane

Negra and Su Holmes argue that: ‘One reason why stories of ... personally troubled female celebrities circulate so actively is that when women struggle or fail, their actions are seen to constitute "proof" that for women the "work/life balance" is really an impossible one’ (2008). It is not my intention to draw a simplistic link between then and now, but anxieties surrounding women’s relationship to the public sphere were evidently at a height in the wake of Second Wave feminism, as Zavaroni’s highly celebrated retreat to the domestic sphere make clear. Under an earnest guise of medical concern, there was undoubtedly a somewhat prurient revelling in Zavaroni’s shocking physicality and her physical and financial descent into reclusion and poverty. Yet she was not, unlike the contemporary female celebrity ‘train wreck’ (see Ibid), primarily constructed as threatening, boundaryless, and ‘out of control’. Indeed, although Zavaroni eluded and frustrated the ideological norm of the female celebrity as heterosexual commodity, her anorexic self --- **often constructed in ways which suggested a transcendence of her ‘problematic’ working-class roots** --- was also presented as the ‘perfect’ woman, passive, victimised and contained.

I began this article by re-posing the question that, in the media construction of anorexia, ‘What kinds of selves are defined as disordered? What kinds of ... femininities are defined as “healthy”?’ (Saukko, 2008: 2). The answer to this is complex given that there emerged no straightforward dichotomy between the anorexic and the ‘normative’ female self, both could be ideal and ‘other’. The coverage of Zavaroni positioned her as insufficiently autonomous and infantilised; aggressively ambitious and independent; physically ideal and visually repugnant, and sexually pure and sexually ‘deviant’. This is perhaps the best illustration of the feminist argument that it is not ‘the girl herself who is confused due to her own inadequacies, but rather the

social world which is riven with conflict about how women should behave [original emphasis]’ (MacSween, 1995: 67).

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