

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

# The Spirituality of Anorexia:

Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman

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This Thesis has been completed as a requirement for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.

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Abstract

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The following body of work is concerned with the female body in contemporary society, specifically the development of anorexia nervosa, and what this expression communicates about female embodiment. Drawing upon the work of a variety of theorists, social commentators, liberation theologians and theologians I argue that anorexia develops as a consequence of living in a patriarchal society that creates a disjunction between women and their bodies. The consequence of this destructive rhetoric has kept women disempowered, disembodied and disconnected from a strong and powerful feminine heritage.

My contribution to originality is the postulation that Goddess feminism can provide the framework- through its myths, symbols and rituals- for a female empowering and healing therapeutic model to address anorexia and more broadly, the slender ideal touted by society. I suggest that if enough women engaged with Goddess feminism, a shift would take place within society, as our patriarchal heritage would be balanced by female empowering rhetoric, addressing the gender inequalities that still permeate society. I discuss the adoption of female focused myths, symbols and rituals, drawing upon the work of Marion Woodman and Naomi Goldenberg, to theorise on a theological approach to anorexia aimed at displacing the damaging discourses that underlie female disembodiment in the twenty-first century. *The Spirituality of Anorexia: Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman* utilises the principles inherent to Goddess feminism to displace anorexia and the slender performance as we work towards constructing alternative models of embodiment for women within society today.

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## Introduction

She wakes in the morning fatigued and frightened. Her first thoughts are about food. Will it invade her today, or will she manage to resist?... she finds solace in not eating, in overcoming desire, in creating a self who goes without.

Susie Orbach<sup>1</sup>

One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.

Virginia Woolf<sup>2</sup>

The aim of my thesis is to develop a Spirituality of Anorexia as I draw upon evidence that eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, are physical symptoms of the general repression of feminine nature in our culture. The research and theories of a number of social commentators and female psychotherapists, feminist liberation theologians, theological commentators and theologians will be discussed as I aim to rediscover the lost Goddess not only in society but within every woman. My work is explicitly concerned with the psychology of women and what anorexia and the slender ideal communicate about their place within contemporary society. As you shall see in the following pages, anorexia is still a predominantly female disorder and as such, the experiences and voices of women are my primary concern. A central focus of this piece of work is the theorising of a theological response to societies construction of the feminine, how this directly affects female embodiment and leads to the subsequent manifestation of anorexia. This thesis marks the start of a broader research project concerned with developing alternative therapeutic responses to anorexia which utilises the symbolism of the Goddess within a theological framework providing women with access to empowering and embodying symbols of the feminine. As you will see in the following pages, anorexia here is understood as symbolic of a female yearning for meaning, significance and value (expressed through utilising cultural preoccupations with the slender female body) in a patriarchal society that continues to value male over female virtues. I argue that the mainstream societal adoption of a theological framework will help to displace and subvert damaging female idealisations and stereotypes that contribute to the individual's utilisation of the anorexic expression whilst offering empowering symbols of female embodiment and a connection to a broader empowering framework. Whilst this piece of work is focused on how theology may theoretically benefit the contemporary experience of female embodiment, post-doctoral work will focus on how theology may be incorporated within current mainstream therapeutic responses to broaden approaches to healing whilst displacing the social norms that lead to the utilisation of this expression. Despite my

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<sup>1</sup> Orbach S (1993) *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age*. London: Penguin, xviii.

<sup>2</sup> Woolf V (1929, 1981) *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 18.

focus on theory, current therapeutic responses will be touched upon throughout when necessary to provide a thorough overview of the theories I am discussing.

Themes of control, low self-esteem, disempowerment, rejection, suffering and the desire for a youthful aesthetic are recurring themes throughout literature on eating disorders. A plethora of writing spanning decades speculate on the aetiology of anorexia and focuses, with increasing rapture, on the observation that appearance norms have become increasingly invasive and oppressive for women.<sup>3</sup> In less than two decades the acceptable female body size has dropped by one third<sup>4</sup> and most women not only do not fit it, but attempting to do so is threatening their lives and significantly damaging their place in this world. Increasing amounts of time, money and attention have to be spent on reducing the body and maintaining their weight loss. This had led many social commentators<sup>5</sup> to conclude that these beauty norms are a form of female oppression aimed at keeping women suppressed, sedated, numb and politically castrated. What is really worrying is that this slender ideal has become mainstream and is considered the “norm” for girls and young women. This slender/reductionist rhetoric has been internalised by billions of women all over the globe and the message is painfully clear- the only way to be happy, successful, desired and loved is by adhering to these strict beauty demands at all costs. What is truly shocking is that these women are not questioning why they feel this way. They are too busy trying to drop pound-after-pound of “fat” that they forget to question why- to probe below the surface of this body hatred and disgust to discover the real issues underpinning their obsession with control and power over female flesh. This is what the following body of work is concerned with. As such, themes I shall explore throughout the following chapters include anorexia as a form of “male interpretation” in which women seek to sever their relationship with the traditionally ample and curvaceous female body and escape their sexuality, the influence society and visual images have on our perceptions of self and the mind/body dualisms inherent within the images and advertisements generated by the fashion, beauty, food and diet industries, the similarities anorexia shares with earlier female maladies such as hysteria and agoraphobia and how the Judeo-Christian tradition with its dualistic and patriarchal heritage has contributed to this discontent between society and the bodies of women. I argue that the aetiology

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<sup>3</sup> See: Chernin K (1994) *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York: HarperPerennial; Orbach S (1998) *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. London: Arrow Books; Heywood L (1996) *Dedication to Hunger: The Anorexia Aesthetic in Modern Culture*. California: University of California Press; Bordo S (1999) *Twilight Zones*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>4</sup> This was cited by Patricia Fallon, Susan Wooley and Melanie Katzman in 1994. See: Fallon P, Wooley S C, Katzman M A (1994) *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*. New York: The Guilford Press, ix.

<sup>5</sup> Bordo S (2003) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. London: University of California Press; Wolf N (1990) *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used Against Women*. London: Vintage Books; Wolf N (1994) Hunger. In: Fallon P, Katzman M A, Wooley S C (eds.) *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*. New York: The Guildford Press, 94-115.

of this disorder can be found within reflections on society, the politics of the female body and the influence religion has had on these body ideals within the environments we inhabit.

Drawing on the work of Michael Foucault, I work from the premise that the female body is constantly under the control and “in the grip” of cultural practices, and that what we know of the “natural” body is actually a performance of what we believe natural should look and feel like.<sup>6</sup> It is evident that society significantly influences our thoughts and feelings about our bodies and this is most clearly visible when we look more closely at the body of the anorexic woman and everything it is understood to represent. As is the case with anything that is human, it is true enough to say that our bodies are constituted by culture and that ‘the body is still the map on which we mark our meanings’.<sup>7</sup> The female body has historically borne the brunt of extreme cultural manipulation and one reason for this might be because women have been associated with bodies in ways that men have not. Bodies in general have been considered women’s “sphere” in mythology, family life, philosophical, scientific and religious ideology.<sup>8</sup> It is within the writings of Foucault that we are led to consider the way that bodies and sexualities are shaped by social pressures and have been the subject of a vast array of different practices and discursive regimes. Some feminist writers, such as Susan Bordo<sup>9</sup> and Sandra Bartky<sup>10</sup> have expanded upon this platform by arguing that femininity can be viewed as a disciplinary regime in which femininity is ‘achieved (if it is ever achieved) through a long process of labor to force the body into compliance with a feminine ideal, through depilation, cosmetics, exercise, dieting and attention to dress’.<sup>11</sup> The very act of dieting and restricting the consumption of food creates an all-consuming fear of hunger as it comes to symbolize how out of control the body is with its dangerous eruptions and needs. This hunger and struggle for control fosters within women an increasing sense that their bodies need for sustenance is wrong, dangerous and can overpower their carefully constructed and controlled self-restraint. The culmination of this is a tense balancing act and increasing intoxication and obsession with food in which food becomes the evil villain, threatening to take away the purity and innocence of the young woman.

Any response to anorexia must be as multifaceted as the disorder itself. My understanding of anorexia is distanced but not unconnected to those early instances of self-starvation, the female

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<sup>6</sup> As written by Susan Bordo ‘it is not a matter of cultural *repression* of the instinctual or natural body. Rather, there is no “natural” body. Cultural practices, far from exerting their power *against* spontaneous needs, “basic” pleasures or instincts, or “fundamental” structures of body experience, are already and always inscribed’. See: Bordo 2003: 142. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Warner M (1985) *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 331. Quoted in: Wykes M, Gunter B (2004) *The Media and Body Image: If Looks Could Kill*. London: Sage Publications, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Bordo 2003: 143

<sup>9</sup> Bordo 2003, Bordo 1999

<sup>10</sup> Bartky S L (1988) Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power. In: Diamond I, Quinby L (eds.) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Mills S (2003) *Michael Foucault*. London: Routledge, 93.



mystics who were encouraged to starve their bodies in order to stop menstruating and become honouree men<sup>12</sup> and the medieval fasting saints, but its increasing prevalence marks a modern day reaction to the environments in which we live and the ideals and values of those environments. Furthermore, my work is broader than a discussion limited to the boundaries of anorexia. It is about all those women who obsess about food and the consequences of eating too much. Their desire to emulate the slender ideal and conform to prevailing standards of beauty- that identify slenderness as an essential attribute- which are so deeply ingrained in their psyche that they are literally starving themselves to death.<sup>13</sup> I do not mean to simply blame men for all female wrongs, to unearth an age old conspiracy to keep women from taking an equal position next to their male counterparts, or to place the blame on any one group for the social forces that keep women located firmly as “the second sex”. As written by Bordo- quoting Foucault- that although a ‘perfectly clear logic, with perfectly decipherable aims and objectives, may characterize historical power relations, it is nonetheless “often the case that no one was there to have invented” these aims and strategies, either through choice of individuals or through the rational game plan of some presiding “headquarters”’.<sup>14</sup> We are not talking about plots or strategies to keep women downtrodden but what I am saying is that people will consciously pursue goals that will better their own situation but this does not mean that they are conscious of the overall direction these actions might advance in. They might even be unaware of the consequences these “harmless” decisions have on others. However, it is certainly true that what we know of the world we live in today has, on the whole, been constructed by men and as such, created to suit their needs and desires. Furthermore Naomi Wolf calls for us to look at how society ‘makes use of a manufactured conflict with women’s shapes’<sup>15</sup> instead of focusing all our efforts on individual women’s psychology. She reminds us that ‘individual men don’t spin out fashionable images... multi-national corporations do that’.<sup>16</sup> This is part of a larger political movement<sup>17</sup> to critically explore the advanced capitalist roots underpinning the dis-ease between women and their bodies. She cites the overwhelmingly powerful message of our culture as the reason why girls and young women diet so aggressively, something that ‘no amount of parental love and support [is] strong enough to override’.<sup>18</sup> She believes that until our

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<sup>12</sup> Bynum C W (1987) *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. California: University of California Press.

<sup>13</sup> Anorexia is commonly cited as having the highest death rate of any psychiatric illness. Frequent causes include suicide and organ failure (as a direct result of starvation). For more information see: Rachelle L, Lilienfeld R (2016) Suicidal Behavior in Eating Disorders. In: Latzer Y, Stein D (eds.) *Bio-Psycho-Social Contributions to Understanding Eating Disorders*. New York: Springer International Publishing, 65-77 (66).

<sup>14</sup> Foucault quoted in: Bordo 2003: 144-5

<sup>15</sup> Wolf 1994: 98

<sup>16</sup> Wolf 1994: 98

<sup>17</sup> As I explore in further detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>18</sup> Wolf 1994: 104

culture tells girls and young women that their bodies are valued simply because they are inside them, that women are valuable with or without the excuse of “beauty”, they will continue to starve. Polly Young-Eisendrath argues that for centuries all facets of a woman’s life- motherhood, sex, spirituality, appearance, money, career- have been defined by male desires and standards which are so ingrained within our psyches that we struggle to break the rules. She argues that the breaking down of these boundaries is of paramount importance if we are to become self-determining women. She writes that ‘[a]t the very essence of what it means to be human... is the freedom to change. And this can be realized only when we know our own intentions, when we know what we want’.<sup>19</sup> Following from this position, I believe that the starting point for liberation from anorexia and the broader slender ideal is through understanding the nature of the void these obsessive behaviours are filling and what we truly want and desire from our lives. This thesis works towards this end as I search for symbols, stories, myths and rituals powerful enough to help these girls and young women re-appropriate their bodies and psychologies.

The Spirituality of Anorexia marks a pursuit towards female embodied consciousness that utilises some of the core features of Goddess feminism within a political framework. It is a search for the divine feminine nature buried deep within the anorexic body and more broadly speaking, within every woman in society who is tightrope walking from one diet to another. It is in search of a reconnection to this hidden feminine nature, our desires, understanding our true hungers and emotions and as a political striving towards full equality and freedom within the environments in which we live. If we understand anorexia to be a deep-seated unease with the consequences of being a woman in our culture and as embodying a struggle for control and agency, I believe that liberation can take place through the search for meaning, authenticity and embodiment as a new way to understand and experience the world in which we live. To unpack this further we need to delve into the literature of feminist spirituality.

Feminist spirituality in the last thirty years has ‘emerged as an expression of the creative transformations envisioned by feminist approaches to the study and practice of religion’<sup>20</sup> and has been used to ‘denote the positive aspects of the ancient religious traditions, unencumbered by the “dead hand” of the church, and yet something which provides a liberation and solace in an otherwise meaningless world’.<sup>21</sup> I am concerned with using the term “spirituality” as a model within which to deconstruct and subvert the patriarchal and androcentric agenda that still presides over the lives of women. I use the term spirituality in the place of religion as I believe that the latter

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<sup>19</sup> Young-Eisendrath P (2001) *Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted*. London: Judy Piatkus Ltd, xv.

<sup>20</sup> Mantin R (2001) Carol Christ: Feminist spirituality and narrative theology. In: Erricker C, Erriker J (eds.) *Contemporary Spiritualities: Social and Religious Contexts*. London: Continuum, 93-113 (93).

<sup>21</sup> Carrette J, King R (2005) *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. London: Routledge, 1.

carries a deeply androcentric heritage that is too deeply ingrained to shake off. As argued within the writings of Mary Daly, Naomi Goldenberg, Nelle Morton, Carol Christ and others,<sup>22</sup> language and metaphor is of central importance in the re-visioning of structures that keep us oppressed. Alison Jasper writes that spirituality is a 'concept or metaphor for feminist-friendly thinking... that has the capacity to flourish... expanding- when it is strongly defended- public capacity for understanding the implications of difference/s and articulating in consequence some important and transformative visions'.<sup>23</sup> These difference/s have been manipulated into hostile "otherness" in the past as we see when it comes to gender inequality and the subjugation of women. Through the use of the term spirituality it is my intention to disrupt the gender binaries that reinforce androcentric society as I work towards a gender-neutral space (initially focusing on female empowerment) for human flourishing. With this in mind we disable the potential for this sex difference debilitating hostility that results in psychological maladies, such as anorexia. I argue the term spirituality has the potential to penetrate social norms and values in a way that might be restricted by the term religion given its patriarchal heritage.

Using an approach that holds at its core the principles inherent within feminist liberation theology and thealogy, I will examine the female body in society and analyze what anorexia says about women's embodiment in the twenty-first century. As Lisa Isherwood writes 'patriarchal structures that underpin both society and religion feed upon each other and produce patterns of relating that seem to be free and liberating but are in reality narrow and constraining'.<sup>24</sup> Through an approach with holds at its core values of embodiment, liberation and female empowerment<sup>25</sup> I seek to examine the current models for redemption of the female body within a feminist liberation theological model, which draws upon the developments in body theology and thealogy, to work towards an understanding of anorexia as subversive resistance to both the macro and micro consequences of living in an androcentric society. From anorexia and the contemporary slender ideal to the location of the female body within society and religion and the battleground that inevitably takes place on the female body, I will explore the benefits of a model of healing located within Goddess feminism as access to powerful female role models, sitting comfortably within their own flesh. Unashamed, unabashed and powerful, calling out and demanding freedom from these

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<sup>22</sup> Daly M (1992) *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press; Goldenberg N (1979) *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Morton N (1985) *The Journey is Home*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Christ C (1997) *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

<sup>23</sup> Jasper A (2015) *Womanspirit Still Rising? Some Feminist Reflections on 'Religious Education' in the UK*. In: *Feminist Theology* 23 (3): 240-253 (246).

<sup>24</sup> Isherwood L (2000) *Sex and Body Politics: Issues for Feminist Theology*. In: Isherwood L (ed.) *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 20-35 (20).

<sup>25</sup> As it is estimated that 89% of anorexic sufferers are female, it is the issue of contemporary female embodiment that I am principally concerned with. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter One.

discourses that would see them starve themselves until they disappear. In doing this, I have divided the following body of work into six chapters.

In Chapter One I define what is meant by the term anorexia nervosa. This chapter identifies key characteristics as we explore the strengths and weaknesses of the medical classification systems used to make a diagnosis of anorexia alongside a consideration of the triggers and risk factors associated with disordered eating as we unpack the complex aetiology of anorexic behaviour. I argue that the aetiology of anorexia is multifaceted but ultimately develops out of our society's insistence that 'thin is good'.<sup>26</sup> As we shall critically explore in Chapter Two, this message is relayed in myriad ways throughout our environments, from the moment we are born to the moment we die. This slender, diet and reductionist rhetoric envelopes every sphere of our public and private life as our ultimate fear becomes succinctly embodied by the calories and fat caught between the crinkled edges of a muffin wrapper. In Chapter Three, on the female body as a politically mediated form, I discuss the "docile body" as conceptualised by Foucault and how the female body in society is constructed according to a very specific definition of femininity. As we shall see, adherence to the pejorative definition of femininity is essential if we are to become legitimate subjects within society. This idea of a legitimate performative subject is unpacked and analysed from within the writings of Judith Butler and the idea of a slender performance is explored as we consider the ways in which fat as taboo has become an entrenched concept within our environments with dire consequences for women. Chapter Four unpacks the female body as a historically mediated form as we look more closely at how anorexia is situated next to diagnosis's of agoraphobia and hysteria indicative of the nineteenth and twentieth century's. The female body as an area of control and domination is also broached as we explore, amongst others, the work of Richard Gordon, Naomi Wolf, Paula Saukko and Kim Chernin. The second half of this chapter focuses on the question of whether there is any psychological benefit or spirituality to result from the anorexic experience in the context of "cutting" and other self-harm practices. The theme of Chapter Five is the female body as a religiously mediated form, specifically how the female body has been represented within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Here I critically examine our dualistic heritage and explore the history of sexism within the Judeo-Christian tradition. I will examine the link between contemporary accounts of anorexia and the aestheticism of "Holy Anorexics" in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. This will be followed by an exploration of contemporary religious diet practices such as the Slim for Him and Weight Down programs. I will make and substantiate the argument that they are the extreme manifestations of our society's construction of femininity that demonstrates the religious roots of these idealisations. In Chapter Six we take a look at discourses on the Goddess as we explore

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<sup>26</sup> Lynn C (2012) *Hope with Eating Disorders*. London: Hay House UK LTD, 231.

Goddess feminism and theology as a challenging to our patriarchal heritage and the inherently androcentric worldview. It is here that I theorise on the idea that it is through theology and Goddess feminism that women, through the creation of individually meaningful myths, can reconnect with their bodies and experience a greater sense of embodiment as women. Drawing upon the idea of the Goddess, I explore ways to subvert and ultimately breakdown and destroy the power these oppressive female body standards hold over us.

The Spirituality of Anorexia: Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman examines the different facets of women's entry into culture and society. It addresses issues surrounding control, low self-esteem, disempowerment, rejection, suffering and the desire for a youthful aesthetic. In assessing the relationship between the individual and society through an examination of body theology and theology- which draws upon the childhood struggle for identity and issues surrounding sexuality- we may re-evaluate our approaches and create a healing theology based upon empowerment and embodiment. Literature from the academics referred to in this body of work show us that liberation from an obsession with food and weight takes place slowly. It is a central aim of this thesis to transform an obsession with food into an authentic ritual of transformation.<sup>27</sup> This ritual of transformation may be found here within the Goddess, her voice in the silence that says: 'In God is a woman like yourself. She shares your suffering'.<sup>28</sup> This is my framework for the healing and liberation of the Goddess in every woman.

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<sup>27</sup> This ritual of transformation works towards the evolution of a new type of female identity, a theme we shall explore throughout this thesis. Chernin K (1985) *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, xxii.

<sup>28</sup> Christ 1997: 2

## Methodology

The first step in the elevation of women under all systems of religion is to convince them that the great Spirit of the Universe is in no way responsible for any of these absurdities.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton<sup>29</sup>

Really moving beyond god the father and his surrogates means Living the process of participation in Powers of Be-ing.

Mary Daly<sup>30</sup>

My focus in the following body of work is to examine the female body in contemporary society using a framework of feminist liberation theology, body theology and thealogy. The aim of which is to identify and isolate the damaging societal “norms” and feminine stereotypes that keep women at a dis-ease with their bodies which in turn limits their participation in society and from disrupting the gender status quo in challenging androcentric rule. In particular, my focus is on the desirability of the slender female aesthetic indicative of contemporary society and the attributes it is understood to represent. My work therefore carries a political agenda as I seek to unpack the patriarchal undercurrents that find their roots within traditional Judeo-Christian theologies and Greek dualistic thought which become manifest within contemporary bodily practices such as anorexia, extreme emaciation, eating disordered behaviour and a rhetoric we see regurgitated in diet culture more broadly. Through a lens of feminist liberation theology, and drawing upon the resources and developments made by body theology and thealogy, I work towards the development of a model of healing through which the possibility of dismantling and subverting the damaging rhetoric underpinning these actions and desires becomes possible.

Boiled down to its core principles, feminist liberation theology can be understood as the praxis of theology from the perspective of women. At the heart of this discourse lies a striving towards liberation from all forms of oppression whilst advocating the full humanity of every individual.<sup>31</sup> Feminist liberation theology calls for the equal representation of women within theological discourse. It places female bodily knowing as a central component in the interpretation and re-visioning of the Christian faith, something far removed from the traditional theology espoused by the church fathers. It is a movement towards constructing ‘theological doctrine whereby the experience of women, whether described in terms of oppression or the positive

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton quoted in: Inbody T (1997) *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Daly 1992: xx

<sup>31</sup> Peacore L (2008) Feminist Theologies. In: Dyrness W A, Karkkainen (eds.) *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 317- 322.

aspects of a women's world, plays a particular and significant role in shaping Christian theology'.<sup>32</sup> One of the core arguments is that patriarchal and androcentric hierarchies of power have historically been central to a wide range of theologies and traditions and it is these disorders that need to be re-imagined if humanity is to become liberated from the current structure of gender hierarchy and the inequality of sexism. As experience and incarnation are central aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is impossible for women to become equal partners in its construction if their experiences, participation and dialogue are excluded from the debate. As such, throughout this body of work, I take the female body as normative. Whilst so doing, I understand the constraints of this position as the very principles of feminist liberation theology limit the construction of a universal definition of what it means to be a woman. The consequence of this position means the very foundation of my work will continuously fluctuate as I work towards a model of subversion. It is important however to state that my own perspective is that of a white, Anglo-American female living within the United Kingdom, subject to all the vagaries of such a position. I write from my perspective of the damaging diet/slender/reductionist rhetoric this position affords me. The foundation of which I find within the patriarchal and androcentric Western world-view that finds its grounding within traditional Judeo-Christian theologies. As Rosemary Radford Ruether reminds us, the foundation of Western society has been heavily influenced by both historical and theological reflections, that 'religion has been not only a contributing factor, it is undoubtedly the single most important shaper and enforcer of the image and role of women in culture and society'.<sup>33</sup> Religion, as a social institution, has been the cultural sanctioner of the ideological reflection of our cultures sexual domination and subjugation. Therefore, it follows that if we are to dismantle contemporary beauty ideals we must first understand how religion contributed to the Western world-view that created them. She urges us to understand liberation in terms of political action and that is where I start, as you will see in the pages that follow.

Body Theology is concerned with taking our 'body experiences seriously as occasions of revelation'.<sup>34</sup> It places bodily knowing as central to the construction and imaging of the divine and our relationship with it. A theology of the body is based on a cycle of reflection, identification and action, as we identify damaging disembodied and dismembered rhetoric about the female body and its place within theological discourse. As an important methodological tool, an approach with places the female body, and questions regarding its value as a site of divine revelation, as central to theological discourse is invaluable to my study as I work towards a model of deconstruction and subversion to counteract the patriarchal diet and slender rhetoric many women are caged by.

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<sup>32</sup> Peacore 2008: 317

<sup>33</sup> Ruether R R (1974) *Religion and Sexism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson J (1992) *Body Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 9.

In analyzing diet rhetoric and its connection to traditional Christian Theology the work of Lisa Isherwood is a central tool in the development of this thesis. In *The Fat Jesus* Isherwood introduces us to a Jesus whose body boundaries are broken down and thus fears of one's own body and the bodies of others are overcome. She challenges the fat phobia inherent within contemporary Western society as she questions why the size and shape of women should come to speak of their moral goodness and sanctity. She develops a Christology of embrace and expansion as she searches for incarnated embodied women 'glorying in their divine fleshiness, women being happy and creative in the skin which they find themselves'.<sup>35</sup> This is in response to the development of the billion-dollar Slim for Him and Weight Down industries that have developed as a branch of conservative theology predominately in the United States. The approach of these programs is to label fat as sinful and those who indulge in the consumption of food as out-of-control, promiscuous, dirty and morally weak whilst preaching the moral virtues of being thin, controlled and mastered. Eternal condemnation is reserved for those who do not meet these exacting standards and with every pound dropped our sins are shed and life can be born anew with new opportunities, new lovers (heterosexual of course!), designer couture (because everyone knows Jesus favored Gucci over Primark!) and the expectations of happiness and security. Isherwood brings to our attention the advanced-capitalist agenda lurking beneath the surface of this diet industry (inherent in both the Slim for Him program and secular diet fads) whilst broadening the parameters of the "norm" to develop an inclusive and all-encompassing theology of the body that holds at its core a message of liberation from patriarchal constraints. When considered within the context of secular contemporary society, she argues that dieting has become a cultural rite of womanhood: 'In the absence of rites of passage for young girls we have offered them a diet culture in which we will remove from their physical desires, their sense of self-worth and their empowerment, in short we will remove them from the stuff of life, their birthright, their dunamis'.<sup>36</sup> At the heart of these groups is an inherently dualistic message, one that we can thank our Judeo-Christian heritage for. Western society has tried so hard to remove religion that it has forgotten what its heritage is. This, Isherwood writes, has 'meant that the damaging split of body and spirit so beloved by the church fathers has continued in our society as the erroneous belief that mind and body are not one and that mind can control the unruly passions of the body'.<sup>37</sup> As a methodological tool, this solidifies the message that full incarnation will be delayed until we can identify the roots at the heart of these oppressive systems and destroy them. We must see the body controlling and denying dualism lurking behind the slender

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<sup>35</sup> Isherwood L (2007a) *The Fat Jesus: Feminist Explorations in Boundaries and Transgressions*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 124

<sup>37</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 137



images and reductionist rhetoric if we are to disrupt and dismantle these structures. This plays a significant role in the opening chapters of this body of work.

The political agenda lurking behind the diet industry must also be unpacked. By this, I refer to what Isherwood describes as a politics of distraction whereby the individual woman is continuously engaged in a battle against her body, her female nature and feminine principles. As most dieters did not need to diet in the first place, the weight lost in an attempt to meet the slender ideal takes her below her ideal weight and is consequently regained.<sup>38</sup> These women have been trapped by the capitalist agenda and locked into an endless treadmill of despair and disdain for female flesh and all it represents. In this the industry has a steady supply of endless dieters who make their sole purpose in life to shed *just-one-more-pound!* What a wonderful distraction from actively engaging in life and god-forbid public policy and advancing the feminists cause! I believe that a lot can be achieved from developing her Christology in light of Goddess feminism and it is here that the symbolic importance of food and society's fear of the chaotic and out-of-control body may be unpacked further. A tool in the development of this Goddess is to draw upon the work of Marion Woodman and her search for the buried female nature within both society and every woman.

Central to Woodman's thesis is the suggestion that for centuries women have been living in a male-orientated culture that has kept them at a dis-ease with their bodies and their own feminine principles. In struggling to find their way in this environment they have unknowingly accepted male orientated values and goals, 'compulsive drivenness, and concrete bread which fails to nourish their feminine mystery'.<sup>39</sup> In such an environment, their unconscious femininity can rebel and manifest in a somatic form, in the development of anorexia or obesity (believed to be counter-poles of the same neurosis). In other words, whether obese or anorexic, the body is one cultural manifestation of the desperate search of women for spiritual meaning as 'society as a whole has to find the lost goddess'.<sup>40</sup> She argues that there is no feminine community anymore and so secretive food acts (such as the hidden binges and purging of the bulimic, the anorexic's isolated eating habits and the overconsumption of food by the overweight) must be understood as 'a distorted instinctual drive towards wholeness'.<sup>41</sup> In Woodman's study, 'the Great Goddess either materializes in the obese or devours the anorexic'.<sup>42</sup> The Goddesses victim must come to grips with her femininity by dealing with the symptoms and so it is only through 'discovering and loving the goddess lost within her own

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<sup>38</sup> This is discussed at further length in Chapter Four.

<sup>39</sup> Woodman M (1980) *The Owl Was a Baker's Daughter: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa and the Repressed Feminine*. Canada: Inner City Books, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

<sup>41</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

<sup>42</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

rejected body'<sup>43</sup> that a woman can hear 'her own authentic voice'.<sup>44</sup> This is a movement away from the confines of a male divinity and into the world of Goddess feminism and the discourse of thealogy.

The late twentieth century saw the re-emergence of a reverence for female deities that culminated in the development of Goddess feminism and the religio-political discourse of thealogy. The politics of sexual difference were addressed as the movement strove towards gender equality through 'imaging the divine with qualities traditionally or biologically associated with being female'.<sup>45</sup> Thus, thealogy can be defined as a form of 'radical feminist religious discourse that identified itself as opposed to many of the male-identified discursive and methodological practices that have preceded it'.<sup>46</sup> Within this discourse the 'Goddess can be seen as the symbol, the normative image of immanence'<sup>47</sup> as she 'represents the divine embodied in nature, in human beings, in flesh'.<sup>48</sup> I argue that thealogy provides the basis for a liberating and empowering framework towards which women can begin to understand and re-appropriate their bodies within society, to reclaim the feminine nature that has not just been lost but torn from their bodies. Christ writes that the return of the Goddess inspires us to hope 'that we can heal the deep rifts between women and men, between "man" and nature, and between "God" and the world'.<sup>49</sup> For Christ, the Goddess is the 'power of intelligent embodied love that is the ground of all being'.<sup>50</sup> She looks towards the figure of the Goddess through which women are endowed with pride and self-affirmation, to recuperate the qualities that have been 'depleted by patriarchal platitudes'.<sup>51</sup> Christ writes:

The symbol of the Goddess has much to offer women who are struggling to be rid of the 'powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations' of devaluation of female power, denigration of the female body, distrust of female will, and the denial of women's bonds and heritage that have been engendered by patriarchal religion. As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the Goddess would reemerge as symbol of newfound beauty, strength, and power of women.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

<sup>44</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

<sup>45</sup> Reid-Bowen P (2007) *Goddess as Nature: Towards a Philosophical Thealogy*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 6

<sup>47</sup> Starhawk (1982a) *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex & Politics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 9

<sup>49</sup> Christ 1997: xiv

<sup>50</sup> Christ 1997: xv

<sup>51</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 42

<sup>52</sup> Christ C (1987) *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*. New York: Harper and Row, 131.

Christ's imagining of the Goddess provides us with a model towards presenting the Goddess as a meaningful, relevant, and powerful symbol for contemporary spirituality in its emphasis on narrative and the use of storytelling in placing the experience of women central to the creation of theology. This leads us towards new understandings of the meaning of embodied spirituality. Her books are autobiographical as they describe her journey and rebirth within the Goddess movement. Whilst I will take the time to elaborate on the impact her journey has had on theological discourse in Chapter Six, it is important here to emphasize her shift away from "God-talk" by which she, and other Goddess feminists, refer to androcentric language used to sanction oppressive structures and patterns of domination. The supposition is that the term "God" cannot function as an empowering symbol of the sacred for women after centuries of gender inequality. The term Goddess-talk is introduced as a means of providing an alternative language for the divine situated within female imagery and symbolism. Within this framework transformations can only happen when we can use female language as an expression of divinity. The work of Morton played a major role in the construction of Goddess-talk as referred to within Christ's work. She argues that Goddess-talk is necessary if we are to move beyond the world of dualisms into a post-metaphysical spirituality. It is only then that we will have an alternative divinity to the masculine God and not the same damaging rhetoric encased within a female body. As 'language is the house of being'<sup>53</sup> and 'the liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves'<sup>54</sup> it makes sense that a shift in the understanding, usage and creation of new language must take place if we are to disconnect from the patriarchal agenda and reground ourselves within the symbolism of the Goddess. I see this Goddess as fully imminent within our lived realities and it is in sharing our experiences through Goddess-talk that women, as Morton describes it, may be heard into speech.<sup>55</sup> However, a change in vocabulary must be accompanied by an alteration in the context of the words spoken. Without this change of consciousness and behaviour we are condemned to repeat the same mistakes. This process does not have to change a woman's life, rather 'a boundary-living woman may appear to be working at the "same kind" of job she held previously... [however] expansion of her Elemental powers of perception affect all of her activities'.<sup>56</sup>

Accompanying this recognition of the androcentric power underlying female reflections on embodiment is the co-construction of alternative embodied frameworks. Here I dive into the work of Naomi Goldenberg and her work on religion as fiction and the construction of individually

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<sup>53</sup> Heidegger M (1998) *Pathmarks*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 254.

<sup>54</sup> Daly 1992: 8

<sup>55</sup> Morton 1985

<sup>56</sup> Daly 1992: xxi

meaningful myths.<sup>57</sup> Drawing upon the flexible nature of Goddess feminism we explore elements of psychoanalysis, such as object relations theory, and the potential of new stories and new myths to heal. Goddess symbolism here is heavily drawn upon to help structure positive and empowering frameworks for women whilst demonstrating its translatability for therapeutic applications. This expands beyond the patient/analyst relationship by extending into daily rituals and activities which, when underpinned by this developing female consciousness becomes transformative. Whilst discussions surround psychoanalysis, in the form as object relations theory, the method used to address the themes and avenues for embodied reflection will be theological in nature. This is a theological exploration of the embodied potential of myth to heal the female utilization of the anorexic expression whilst, more broadly, offering psychologically healthy frameworks for women in society.

Within this text and as an experiential discourse, political and psychological challenging, theology is considered as a means of providing a liberative framework for how women experience their bodies within our constrained society where embodiment for women has been limited. For me it is through academic examination and analysis that we have the potential to broaden its application and increase its relevance in society today. Demonstrating that theology is not limited to the stereotypical, and sometimes damaging,<sup>58</sup> representations of witches, ritual work and circle dancing invoking the elements under a full moon, the elevation of a female divinity in place of the male and a self-interested psychology with emphasis on inwardly focused divinity instead of broader

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<sup>57</sup> Here I will be drawing upon the work of Goldenberg in: Goldenberg 1979; and, Goldenberg N (1993) *Resurrecting the Body: Feminism, Religion, and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Crossroads.

<sup>58</sup> Media representations of witches often serve to reinforce patriarchal rhetorical strategies of either disciplining witches into normative gender roles (as girlfriends, sisters, wives, or mothers) or punishing women for their transgression of patriarchal norms. Evidence of this can be found in a wide variety of fantasy television and film representations such as those found in: *The Craft; Practical Magic; Hocus Pocus; Buffy the Vampire Slayer; Charmed*; and, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. This also remains the case in supposedly postfeminist twenty-first century media. Evidence of this can be found in the *Harry Potter* series; *The Vampire Diaries*; *Once Upon a Time*; and, *Good Witch* to name a few. Reinforcing patriarchal control, representations in popular media utilise frequent use of love spells and glamour's whilst reinforcing the witch's reliance on outside power to 'construct women as only gaining identity or power from their relationships with patriarchal males or their representatives' and portraying women as having very little power themselves as they derive power from spell books, amulets, and other external sources. For more information see: Godwin V L (2012) Love and Lack: Media, Witches, and Normative Gender Roles. In: Ruggerio A A (ed.) *Media Depictions of Brides, Wives, and Mothers*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 91-101 (92). Understandings of witches that stem from these patriarchal constructions are wholly unhelpful for women seeking an empowering forum for the embodiment and liberation that we have been discussing. Discussions surrounding societies stereotypical misconceptions of witches are also discussed by Kathryn Rountree, she writes: '[w]hen I first told people that I had chosen witches as the subject of the doctoral research... [m]y mother fretted that I would 'discover too much' and that 'they' would retaliate by kidnapping my baby. Other people joked about midnight orgies in graveyards and New Age spiritual masturbation... [w]hen I was away from my university department attending rituals, I was said to be 'off on my broomstick''. For more information see: Rountree K (2004) *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-makers in New Zealand*. New York: Routledge, 13.

interest in the community, ecology and global issues.<sup>59</sup> At its best, thealogy and Goddess feminism is the means towards gender equality, the full humanity of all, an understanding of the interrelated world and the development of a true ecological respect and full and unreserved embodiment regardless of size or shape, colour, sexuality etc. It is a breaking down of the dualisms that have been woven into the fabric of our lives. It is not my aim to romanticize a golden age of matriarchy and to speculate on a pre-patriarchal lineage that some Goddess feminists utilize as a starting point of their practice (although I will touch upon this within this thesis). My aim is to examine the thealogy of Goddess feminism and spiritual feminism to determine if this might offer an alternative and more fulfilling embodiment for women in-lieu of patriarchal rule. With this in mind, the question that I keep in the back of my head throughout this thesis is whether thealogy, as it exists today, is capable of such a global awakening. I will use the term Goddess feminism to encapsulate the values of both Goddess feminism and spiritual feminism, interchangeably with thealogy, which denotes academic literature and examinations. My use of these terms is not intended to totalize all Goddess feminists as believing the same thing but to attempt to present an overview of the discourses potential for female embodiment and patriarchal challenging through demonstrating its impact on female experience to date. When referring to the Goddess as a singular contemporary feminist entity I will capitalize the “G” as “God” is capitalized, referring to “Her” to symbolize divinity. I will use lower case when referring to ancient and contemporary goddesses in general. I will also take this opportunity to clarify that whilst my focus from the start has been on female embodiment and a feminine divinity; it is not my intention to claim that divinity only manifests itself in femaleness. What we find within the female body is apt metaphors for the divine but it is not the only embodiment that does. However, the post-patriarchal male reversal of ‘sapped and distorted energies’<sup>60</sup> has never been my direct focus. As reinforced by Melissa Raphael in *Thealogy and Embodiment*, I appreciate that ‘patriarchal values are not a consequence of having a penis, any more than feminist values are limited to those in possession of a womb’.<sup>61</sup>

A criticism commonly leveled against Goddess feminism within the context I have employed for this thesis has been concerning essentialism and the essentialising of women.<sup>62</sup> As Paul Reid-Bowen identifies in his book *Goddess as Nature*, ‘arguably the core conceptual problem that Goddess feminists must confront, if they are to articulate their reality-claims in a manner that is to

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<sup>59</sup> Criticisms discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>60</sup> Raphael M (1996) *Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Raphael 1996: 11

<sup>62</sup> It could also be argued that my work, whilst essentialising women, also relies heavily on a binary understanding of gender. Throughout this body of work it is my intention to subvert the patriarchal binary production of gender, explored utilising the work of Judith Butler in Chapter Three, but to do this, my starting point must be with the damaging discourses that bind us.

be accepted to a wider feminist audience, is that of essentialism'.<sup>63</sup> Essentialism proves to be a problem for Goddess feminists because it has long been understood by feminist's scholars to be an unavoidable consequence of living within a patriarchy. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, feminists recognise that they are...

... necessarily complicit in reproducing patriarchal values. In claiming that women's current social roles and positions are the effects of their essence, nature and biology, or universal social position, these theories are guilty of rendering such roles and positions unalterable and necessary, thus providing them with a powerful political justification.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, it is risk-laden for Goddess feminists to draw heavily on gendered attributes or essences given the context of patriarchy. Essentialist approaches typically take two directions, towards behavioural patterns which focus on biological differences between the sexes; and, within the implication that women are, by way of their gender, closer to the Goddess than men (issues of ontology and being-in-the-world). Dismissing the claim that Goddess feminists are essentialist, Reid-Bowen states that Goddess feminists are not social determinists. He writes that 'nearly all Goddess feminists reject the idea that men are irredeemably evil and immoral while women are necessarily good and moral exemplars. The social/political/religious reality of patriarchy is theologically understood to be a historical aberration rather than a permanent state of affairs'.<sup>65</sup> For example, those who subscribe to an earlier matriarchal prehistory understand that women and men once had egalitarian and harmonious social relationships. For those who steer clear from these events there is an underlying shared belief that religious and political action can dramatically transform and improve the social organisation of the world. For Goddess feminists the religious, political and social behaviour of humans is not a fixed reality, there are opportunities to change the structures within which we live and there is much activity in this field, as we shall explore in Chapter Six.<sup>66</sup> Despite the fact that Goddess feminists value human behaviour that is caring, life affirming and nurturing, you would be hard pressed to find a Goddess feminist who claims that these characteristics are essentially associated with women. Men exhibit the same behaviour patterns despite patriarchy's gender polarities and so sex differences (despite obvious physical biological differences) are generally regarded as being relatively small within Goddess feminism. An example of this can be found within the work of Christ who writes that:

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<sup>63</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 156

<sup>64</sup> Grosz E (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. London: Routledge, 49.

<sup>65</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 156

<sup>66</sup> Here I refer to the work of Starhawk and Charlene Spretnak to name two examples of Goddess feminists working towards social and political change. For more information see Chapter Six.

Recognising that there are or may be differences between men and women does not negate the basic qualities we share. Both men and women are embodied. Both men and women are relational and interdependent. Both give and receive love and nurture. Both have created technologies. Both reflect on their lives and on the lives of other beings. These qualities are neither female nor male. In the most significant ways, we are alike.<sup>67</sup>

Goddess feminists are more likely to talk in terms of predispositions or tendencies as opposed to firm absolutes but may agree that some aspect of being human has been lost or suppressed in the development of patriarchy. This lost connection is often cited within work on the Goddess and nature. The loss or distance is referred to as having considerable consequences on human behaviour and gender relations but even here this is not attributed to essential differences between the sexes. What Christ and many other Goddess feminists are doing is criticising, and looking to deconstruct, patriarchal society's essentialist construct of the male and female, masculine and feminine polarities. I consider myself part of this movement. As part of this effort, as I critically examine patriarchal constructs of femininity, I will be breaking down the concept of the Goddess as represented in the symbolism of maiden, mother, crone. Whilst I believe it is important to emphasise the value and importance inherent in all stages of life, the emphasis on the Goddess as represented in motherhood may be an isolating image for many women today. Furthermore, a drawback for identifying a theological methodology also surrounds community structures. As I discuss the creation of individually meaningful myth and a movement towards individual reflections on embodiment, we may be moving further away from the support structures that can be found within other traditions. Addressing this Goldenberg suggests that the process of myth creation can support the development of community bonding. We shall explore this in Chapter's Three and Six.

Methodologically, this body of work uses as a starting point the advancements made by feminist liberation theology's critique of the dualistic influence our Judeo-Christian heritage has had on contemporary society in fostering dissociation between women and their bodies. This reflection and identification of the oppressive slender framework is then addressed through a lens of theology as through this we are provided with invaluable female symbols of empowerment and embodiment as we work towards action against this damaging patriarchal rhetoric. Bringing the two disciplines together provides us with a new access point to the psyche of women which both addresses the political undercurrents whilst providing a framework for liberation and life in creative abundance. It is perhaps prudent at this junction to clarify the feminist principles underpinning this body of work. Here I refer to Sharlene Hesse-Biber's definition of the four common principles of feminist research which are as follows: 1) asking new questions; 2) taking up issues of power; 3) seeking social change;

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<sup>67</sup> Christ 1997: 149-150

and, 4) working at the margins.<sup>68</sup> Working to conform to this framework my thesis aims to consider the development of anorexia in the context of theology as a means of addressing the gender inequalities resulting from the androcentric undercurrents of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Through an approach which places female embodiment first, theology in its providing of positive and powerful role models can be utilized as a powerful therapeutic tool. Developing this further, I will utilize the work of Goldenberg and Woodman along with the notion of subversive re-citation from the work of Butler to co-construct a transformative ritual within which we can work towards destabilizing androcentric power structures. Thus, power plays a central role in this thesis as we are discussing anorexia as a product of the patriarchal societies in which we live and the androcentric worldview that developed from this starting point. Theorizing on methods of deconstruction and subversion of these power dynamics is essential if we are to discuss methods of subversive resistance of beauty and slender pressures. Social change is envisioned as a rebalancing of gender hierarchies and the striving towards gender equality within Western society. The starting point of this discussion takes its shape from reflections on the anorexic experience as understood from the perspective of girls and women trapped within the damaging discourses. It is from this marginal starting point that we can begin discussions and formulate a response to these pressures.

The body should be a site of love and celebration, only the influence of Greek dualism has torn most of this embodiment away from women within the Judeo-Christian tradition and leaves in its trail generations of women who fear their bodies and the knowledge they carry. A central interest throughout this study is how these dualistic values and philosophies of the body are reflected within contemporary Western bodily practices. For me, this is clear to see. Contemporary diet culture is obsessed with maintaining control and discipline over the body. Men are not excluded from these pressures but the focus for the sexes is different. Whilst men are encouraged to display “shredded”, “ripped” and “hard” muscular bodies, women are encouraged to “diet”, “reduce” and “minimize” the weight they carry. No one is safe, and the whole system must change if anyone is to experience full humanity. Only I question how this can be achieved within a framework of theology in any of its guises. Both feminist liberation theology and body theology still operate within a patriarchal framework that has in its wake centuries of androcentrism and female oppression. Thus, one of the central questions of feminist liberation theology is whether the Judeo-Christian tradition is patriarchal beyond redemption. The following body of work argues from the position that it is. Whether the foundation of Jesus’s teachings worked towards this outcome or not, traditional Judeo-Christian theology sees the body as something to be overcome in anticipation of the joys of heaven

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<sup>68</sup> For more information see: Hesse-Biber S N (2012) *Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology and Method*. In: Hesse-Biber S N (ed.) *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. London: Sage, 17-18.



(although I appreciate that some feminist scholars have incorporated concepts of finitude into their theological re-imaginings). However, thealogy and Goddess feminism has not been without its own criticisms.

Goddess feminism represents views, issues and strategies that divide feminists rather sharply. For example, reformist feminists (who seek liberation from patriarchal ideologies through religious and legal negotiation and reform) seek to distance women and femininity from an association with nature and naturalness as this may be interpreted as a reinforcement of a stereotypical understanding which implies a divorce from rationality and moral intellection. They also critique the idea that 'femininity can be simply "re-meant" in a post-patriarchal context'.<sup>69</sup> This leads us to one of the central questions to reoccur throughout literature on thealogy: how exactly does this re-visioning of divinity affect our being in the world? How useful is this figure of the Goddess? And furthermore, will the liberation of women and the development of a female divinity actually result in new characteristics assuming the same old roles, which ultimately do nothing to change oppressive values, structures and ideologies? Simply changing the gender of God will not bring about real change. These are questions that we must be conscious of as we work towards a model of subversion through a methodology weighted towards Goddess feminism and the discourse of thealogy.

Thealogy has also been criticized for its uncritical use of "women's experience" and for limiting its application to the experiences of white middle class women<sup>70</sup> which are far removed from the lived realities of women from other ethnic groups. We must be conscious of the concept of "Otherness" and not reinforcing the boundaries established by the patriarchal order. Thought must also be given to the tendency to blame all social ills on one scapegoat, in this case men,<sup>71</sup> and to understanding the differences between the terms being used, remembering that "power", "patriarchy" and "patriarchal religion" carry different meanings and operate within different frameworks. It has also been suggested that it provides no systematic way of articulating challenges and critiques of existing religious categories and methods that may render thealogy inaccessible to other forms of religious discourse and enquiry although Carol Christ,<sup>72</sup> Melissa Raphael<sup>73</sup> and Paul-

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<sup>69</sup> Raphael M (1999) *Introducing Thealogy: Discourse on the Goddess*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 158.

<sup>70</sup> Pam Lunn writes that the Goddess movement has universalized white middle class women's values and experience as if they apply to their sisters around the globe. For more information see: Lunn P (1993) Do Women Need the GODDESS? Some Phenomenological and Social Reflections. In: *Feminist Theology* 4: 17-38.

<sup>71</sup> Angela West argues that spiritual feminism has to be careful not to follow in the ancient religious pattern of recapturing purity and innocence by projecting all evil onto one scapegoat. For more information see: West A (1995) *Deadly Innocent: Feminism and the Mythology of Sin*. London: Cassell, xviii.

<sup>72</sup> Christ 1997

<sup>73</sup> Raphael 1999: 158. It is worth noting that Raphael is a Jewish Goddess Feminist.

Reid Bowen<sup>74</sup> have attempted to fill this gap. These issues are unpacked throughout the final chapters of this thesis. Many secular feminists<sup>75</sup> have also questioned Goddess feminism for its emphasis on individual psychology stating that political change should not be contingent on mass individual psychological transformation and the tendency to simply want to wish things away. They would implore the application of a broader approach that interacts with the economic, social and political in a movement towards reformation. However, whilst the emphasis may be placed on ritual and psychological transformation, this should not be underestimated as a means towards a social and political transformation of the environments we live in. The Goddess is so much more than a female divinity, she represents our right to equality and the emphasis on ritual and individual psychological transformation plays into a larger community of women awakening from the spell of inequality and its consequences (like the slender ideal) and taking a stand against it. This is very much a political movement towards an equal society. Within this context, the Goddess is a vessel for female equality as a response to the androcentric Western world-view. This facet of the Goddess is evoked in response to our deeply patriarchally imbued society in an attempt to right the scales in favour of those who have been oppressed by its rules and sanctions. This imaging of the Goddess therefore does little to help women in geological areas where oppression takes a different form. An additional strength of theological discourse in the context of my work, as will become clear throughout the duration of this thesis, is the malleability and flexibility of theology as the core features lend themselves to multidisciplinary dialogue. This is central to my discussions surrounding the incorporation of theological discourse into therapeutic frameworks within which we can work to dismantle the anorexic expression.

Despite the criticisms leveled against theology, my feeling is the only way towards a true liberation from the current oppressive systems (which culminate in the development of psychological “disorders” such as anorexia) in which we live is to reinforce the acceptance and beauty inherent in every-body and for me, a female divinity plays a central role in this reimagining with its emphasis on female experience, equality which starts with putting women first and the implementation of body affirming symbols and language. In terms of the liberation framework offered by feminist liberation theology, there is no avoiding the fact that when you think of God, you think of Him as male and within this text, this is a fundamental problem with working within the constraints of a theology regardless of whether it is a feminist liberation theology or a body theology. These disciplines have questioned the Christian faith and there is no doubt that the results have been profound. However, to fully escape the male patriarch, I believe that we must be born anew within Goddess feminism as both a political movement away from a male divinity and as an

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<sup>74</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007

<sup>75</sup> For more information see Raphael: 1999.

attempt to erode the years of female oppression within these structures. As Goldenberg writes in *Changing of the Gods*:

Jesus Christ cannot symbolize the liberation of women. A culture that maintains a masculine image for its highest divinity cannot allow its women to experience themselves as the equal of its men. In order to develop a theology of women's liberation, feminists have to leave Christ and Bible behind them.<sup>76</sup>

The message relayed throughout society, through the media and advertising industries speaks of a religion of consumerism,<sup>77</sup> and everything else is outdated. If we are to permeate society in any meaningful way, the Goddess must be viewed outside of circle dancing under a full moon and the Wicca movement and instead be viewed as a female divinity equal to the male, living and participating in our lives. She is rounding, powerful, real and unapologetic. She is the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the home we live in. She is with the poor and the rich. She transgresses boundaries and asks for us to listen to our bodies, to really feel our emotions and hungers. To understand what we desire and most importantly why we desire these things whilst unpacking the often hidden agenda these desires play into. She demands us to see things for what they really are. In so doing, we see the capitalist agenda underpinning advertising campaigns and we become conscious of the airbrushing and manipulation behind the images we desperately attempt to emulate as we question whether women and men are indeed as equal as society would have us believe.

You might ask why this matters. After all we are discussing the female body in a contemporary society that appears to hold at its core increasingly secular ideals.<sup>78</sup> If the general

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<sup>76</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 22

<sup>77</sup> Bruce Rittenhouse suggests that 'consumerism is an existential stance in response to the existential threat of meaninglessness... by displaying purchases that have meanings as signs that are intended to procure recognition from other persons. When successful, such recognition temporarily validates the subjective value that a person places on the meaning of his or her own individual life'. He explores the idea that consumerism has, for many, replaced traditional religion within contemporary society. For more information see: Rittenhouse B P (2013) *Shopping for Meaningful Lives: The Religious Motive of Consumerism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Determining Europe's relationship with religion has been described as a 'complicated' (Greeley 2004: xii) and a 'challenging task' (Cumper, Lewis 2012: 1). Peter Cumper and Tom Lewis write that the historic co-existence of strong faith and secular traditions in Europe, coupled with immigration and the introduction of diverse philosophical and religious perspectives has culminated in a confusion as to whether contemporary Europe can be described as "Christian", "secular" or "post-secular". Their research draws upon studies that show the decline of participation in mainstream churches across many European states and cites reasons such as the rise of religious extremism (for example, militant Islam, high-profile terrorist acts such as: '9/11'; the 2004 Madrid; and, 2005 London attacks), child-sex scandals within the Catholic church and conflicts between science and some faith groups (the debate between evolution and creationism). At the same time there is a plethora of factors that are cited to have caused resurgence in religious practitioners in Europe and amongst these is a growth in "alternative" forms of spirituality, the growth in new religious movements and the influence of religion in domestic discourse. For some, this has resulted in a 'backlash against secularism' (Armstrong 2004: 40) in the West in recent years. Growing interest is also developing in the area of critical

belief is that we are living in near-complete freedom from religion, how might a feminist religious discourse with a unapologetically abundant, ample, rich and embodied Goddess at its core make a real impact on the psychology of women caught in the seemingly never ending web of diets, disdain and distrust of their bodies? I believe that theological nature is essential when you consider the harmful way theological systems and symbols emerge within contemporary society and attitudes towards the body. This is painfully apparent in a society with emphasizes, encourages and sells in myriad ways, second-by-second, the benefits of control and discipline over the female body in diminishing flesh, dispelling fat, and eradicating the signs of aging. As Isherwood writes: 'Once we ask about the ideological underpinning of notions of size we begin to move the debate from one of moral weakness, abnormality and pathology on behalf of the fat woman to one of control and power and exclusion on behalf of cultural forces and those who create them'.<sup>79</sup>

I see the benefit of a method incorporating the developments made by feminist liberation theology, body theology and thealogy as essential if we are to disrupt and subvert the damaging patriarchal rhetoric underpinning these body attitudes. What makes feminist liberation theology so relevant for my thesis is its striving to unmask forms of female oppression that have been, intentionally or not, built into the fabric of most societies as we know them today. This oppression takes many forms but my focus is the female body and the manifestation it takes within Western society. Feminist liberation theology *reflects* upon the body as a historically mediated form and unpacks the layers of destructive discourses that are inscribed upon the female body whilst looking to dismantle the origins of these discourses. Taking this one step further, body theology 'creates

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religion, a group of scholars (Timothy Fitzgerald, Naomi Goldenberg, John l'Anson and Alison Jasper to name a few) who are working to break down the boundaries of the "religion/secular" divide. These scholars are working towards examining religion from a positive critical position 'with a view of showing how open to re-interpretation or re-conceptualisation the term 'religion' is today in our intellectual, social, and cultural spheres' (The Critical Religion Association 2016). As written by Alison Jasper 'until recently feminist scholarship has tended to identify 'religion' or 'the spiritual' within a 'religion/secular' binary, as a mechanism for limiting women's agency which is seen as a posture of resistance to dominant male-normative frameworks and institutions. However there is growing recognition that these identifications may in fact be viewed as positive and significant by women, thus challenging understandings of agency in these terms' (Jasper 2016). For more information see (in order of reference): Greeley A M (2004) *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers; Cumper P, Lewis T (2012) Introduction: freedom of religion and belief- the contemporary context. In: Cumper P, Lewis T (eds.) *Religion, Rights and Secular Society: European Perspectives*. Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 1-17; Brown C G (2000) *The Death of Christian Britain*. London: Routledge; and, Davie G (2002) *Europe: The Exceptional Case*. London: Darton, Longman and Rodd; Armstrong K (2004) Resisting modernity: the backlash against secularism. In: *Harvard International Review*, 25 (4): 40; The Critical Religion Association (2016) *Critical Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Available at: <http://www.criticalreligion.org/> [09/08/2016]; and, Jasper A (2016) *Critical Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Available at: <https://criticalreligion.org/scholars/jasper-alison/> [09/08/2016].

<sup>79</sup> Isherwood L (2008) Will You Slim for Him or Bake Cakes for the Queen of Heaven? In: Isherwood L, Althaus-Reid M (eds.) *Controversies in Body Theology*. London: SCM Press, 174-206 (181).

theology *through* the body and not *about* the body'.<sup>80</sup> This is an important distinction to be made. It is not simply Christian theologians reflecting upon the female body but body theology takes the body as a site of direct divine revelation. In so doing, we relocate the bodies of women central to the re-visioning of Christian doctrine. Whilst this breaks down many boundaries, we are still operating within a theology that holds a masculine figure as its principle deity and we are still specifically referring to the body, it is not integral to the creation of theology. This is a weakness for my thesis as the female body and its place within our environments is of central concern. This is where I turn to the discourse of theology and the importance it places on the creation of new languages and symbols for the divine and its emphasis on narrative and storytelling in communicating the experiences of women, theology engages with the body more fully. The body in this is a central and integral component to the creation of theological discourse.

As touched upon earlier in this methodology, a weakness of all three categories is the difficulty of defining women's experience accurately in order to provide an all-inclusive category. It has been argued that feminist liberation theology and theology is predominantly written for (and about) white, middle class women. Given the context of this body of work and my position within my environment, this is something I need to remain mindful of. Also, as Leslie Peacore reminds us, we must also be conscious of putting 'excessive stress upon the subject element... [and thus] failing to provide an adequate account of the objective aspects'.<sup>81</sup> However, despite the potential drawbacks, this category is still necessary and valuable to the reconstruction of *theo/thea*-logical discourses. Utilizing all three methods allows me to develop a broader understanding of how social discourses came to dominate over the female body whilst providing a fuller picture of how each of these models work together to provide a framework for liberation from anorexia and the slender ideal. As with any methodology the discourses I draw upon have a very specific way of asking and answering questions. Certain areas like female emancipation and the politics of control will always feature high on the agenda. However unlike Judeo-Christian theology, the answers are not set in stone and the explorations that develop from these answers are multidisciplinary and offer a contribution to the ongoing debate in the hope that new strands of thought will develop offering new possibilities for life in creative abundance.

The aim of my thesis is to develop a Spirituality of Anorexia as I draw upon evidence that eating disorders are physical symptoms of the general repression of feminine nature in our culture. The basic premise of my argument is that it is only through understanding and engaging with the

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<sup>80</sup> Isherwood L, Stuart E (1998) *Introducing Body Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 22. My emphasis.

<sup>81</sup> Peacore L D (2010) *The Role of Women's Experience in Feminist Theologies of Atonement*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, xi.

underlying features and drives of anorexia (by which I also include the broader slender ideal) that we can fully liberate ourselves from the patriarchal constraints that underpin these actions. I believe that the Judeo-Christian tradition is inherently and irredeemably patriarchal and so within a framework of theology we are unable to satisfactorily liberate ourselves from the inequality of sexism, there will always be a hierarchy and men will always reside at the top. I believe that we need to employ a female, strong, powerful, empowering and embodied divinity, one that is located in reality of our lives. This divine being carries the power to challenge our androcentric society and our patriarchal lineage asking why men are worth so much more than women and why the female body continues to be the battleground for this gender war. In this, we start to conceive of a new future modeled on equality. In reclaiming female power and liberating the crone, hag, cat lady, witch, harlot, whore from demonization and the mocking humor cruelly thrown at those women who do not fit into the "normal" role ascribed by our patriarchal society. This divinity advocates full embodiment with an aim to fully bind together the body and mind as we breach the gap made by our dualistic heritage. To work away from the concept of the body as an object to be refitted and reshaped at will. Whilst feminist liberation theology can help transgress these boundaries, to truly liberate ourselves from these patriarchal ideologies we need an alternative divine image to reflect upon. This is the female Goddess who resides within every-woman.

## Chapter One- Anorexia Nervosa

“This bird’s nest is not a bird’s nest,”... I will not accept your version of reality; I am a woman who will not accept this nest as destiny.

Ellen West quoted by Kim Chernin<sup>82</sup>

*Sometimes I think we’ve all gone crazy. Sometimes I feel like a feminist at a Right-to-Life conference, an atheist in Puritan New England, a socialist in the Reagan White House. Sometimes I fear that fat women have become our culture’s last undefeated heretics, our greatest collective nightmare made all-too-solid flesh. I worry- despite our new ethos of sexual freedom- that female bodies are as terrifying and repulsive as ever, as greatly in need of purification and mortification. Certainly these days, when I hear people talking about temptation and sin, guilt and shame, I know they’re referring to food rather than sex. ... Everything, for women, boils down to body size.*

Carol Sternhell quoted by Ester Rothblum<sup>83</sup>

As we explore the influence our androcentric society has, and continues to have, on the female body and the development of anorexia, it is important to highlight just what we mean when we use this term and both the historical and contemporary understandings, treatment and experiences of the individuals who inhabit these bodies. This is the focus of the following chapter. As such, I will examine the current medical classification systems used to make a diagnosis of anorexia and the complications of applying this to such a multi-faceted and complex cluster of symptoms. In this we start to unpack the undercurrents of anorexia and to identify the meaning behind the statistics that show a growth in incidences over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The second and third sections of this chapter will provide an overview of the history of anorexia as we explore the aetiology of this eating disorder and identify common “risk” factors as drawn on by researchers in the field. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of contemporary research and developing understandings of anorexia before examining contemporary therapeutic and medical responses to the expression.

The term “Anorexia Nervosa” was first named and identified in medical literature by Sir William Gull in 1873. However, very similar afflictions dating back to the fourteenth century of fasting girls and Catholic saints have been found in historical accounts. Features common to these accounts include, but are not limited to, deliberate self-starvation, excessive activity, amenorrhea (absence of menstrual cycle for at least three months in post-menarcheal women), a fear of being fat or gaining weight and ‘a fear and terror of food and an obsession- although secretive- interest in

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<sup>82</sup> Chernin 1994: 168

<sup>83</sup> Rothblum E D (1994) “I’ll Die for the Revolution but Don’t Ask Me Not to Diet”: Feminism and the Continuing Stigmatization of Obesity. In: Fallon P, Katzman M A, Wooley S C (eds.) *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*. New York: The Guildford Press, 53-77 (53). Author’s emphasis.

food’.<sup>84</sup> Those who suffer from anorexia express their preoccupation with food by becoming thin ‘to the point of emaciation and sometimes even to the point of death through starvation’.<sup>85</sup> The term anorexia, originates from the Greek *an* meaning “little”, and *orexis* which translates as “appetite”. Thus, the literal translation can be summed up as a lack of desire to eat. This could not be further from the truth as anorexic individuals do not escape the pangs and cramps of hunger, rather ‘this extreme form of self-starvation is distinguished by a *struggle* to transcend hunger signals’<sup>86</sup> and to *control* the hungers and desires of the body. Thus, medical conditions and mental disorders that lead to significant weight loss should be excluded from a diagnosis of anorexia as the individuals desire to reduce their weight is absent. Therefore, the primary distinction made should be whether or not the weight loss is intentional.

Anorexia is considered a mental illness and is therefore classified according to a clinically approved list of symptoms and behaviours. The most common of which are taken from *The Diagnostics and Statistics Manual for Mental Health Disorders* (DSM-5) and the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD-10). There is a slight discrepancy between these two definitions but for the most part the following description covers the “essence” of the disorder from a medical and treatment perspective. In the ICD-10 anorexia is defined as:

A disorder characterised by deliberate weight loss, induced and sustained by the patient. It occurs most commonly in adolescent girls and young women, but adolescent boys and young men may also be affected, as may children approaching puberty and older women up to the menopause. The disorder is associated with a specific psychopathology whereby a dread of fatness and flabbiness of body contour persists as an intrusive overvalued idea, and the patients impose a low threshold on themselves. There is usually under nutrition of varying severity with secondary endocrine and metabolic changes and disturbances of bodily function. The symptoms include restricted dietary choice, excessive exercise, induced vomiting and purgation/purging, and use of appetite suppressants and diuretics.<sup>87</sup>

A different focus is captured in *The Diagnostics and Statistics Manual for Mental Health Disorders* (DSM-5), which places more importance on self-evaluation (as opposed to the ICD-10’s ‘dread of fatness and flabbiness of body contour’). The DSM-5, a slightly amended version of the previous DSM-IV, was revised from the following diagnosis classification system: ‘refusal to maintain body weight over minimum expected for age and height’<sup>88</sup> (usually a body weight less than 85 per cent of

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<sup>84</sup> Orbach 1998: 151

<sup>85</sup> Orbach 1998: 152

<sup>86</sup> Orbach 1998: 152. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> World Health Organisation (2012) Anorexia Nervosa. In: World Health Organisation (eds.) *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*. Geneva: WHO, 583-9.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon R A (2000) *Eating Disorders: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 189.



what is expected); an intense ‘fear of gaining weight or becoming fat’;<sup>89</sup> a disturbance in ‘the experience of body weight and shape, undue influence of body weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight’;<sup>90</sup> and, amenorrhea (the absence of three consecutive menstrual cycles). The updated version removes the word “refusal” as it infers intention on the part of the individual which can be difficult to diagnose along with the inclusion of amenorrhea as this excludes men, women taking contraceptives, pre-menarchal or post-menopausal women. A patient exhibiting partial criteria would fall into the Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) diagnosis. Both of these definitions require the individual to have lost a significant amount of weight (although the actual weight lost in order to constitute a diagnosis is ambiguous and open to interpretation in both classification systems). This ambiguity can lend itself to the pejorative understanding that anorexia is limited to those individuals who display extreme emaciation; a common misconception. For example, a study carried out by researchers at Australia’s Murdoch Children’s Research Institute found that between 2005 and 2010, there was a ‘fivefold increase in the incidence of hospitalised adolescents who, apart from not being underweight, met all of the criteria for the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa’.<sup>91</sup> Professor Susan Sawyer, director of The Royal Children’s Hospital Centre for Adolescent Health maintains that ‘[e]ating disorders can emerge at any weight’<sup>92</sup> and can be indicated by any sudden weight loss, even if ‘the young person is not underweight at the time they present’.<sup>93</sup> She argues that many health professionals overlook or delay a diagnosis of anorexia based on the individual’s weight loss and because of this, the patients may be extremely unwell before they are finally admitted to hospital. Carrie Arnold identified the moment she became anorexic as follows... ‘I wasn’t clinically underweight... but I was unable to start eating on my own, I was terrified of gaining weight, and I was unable to see what the issue was’.<sup>94</sup>

The clinical classifications used to make a diagnosis of anorexia, whilst standardising the symptoms and allowing for a common approach towards diagnosis and treatment, have been criticised for their limited scope and exclusionary nature. For example, the previous inclusion of amenorrhea meant that a diagnosis of anorexia in post-menopausal women<sup>95</sup> and pre-menarchal women was prevented although, as we have discussed, steps have been taken to make the criteria

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<sup>89</sup> Gordon 2000: 21

<sup>90</sup> Gordon 2000: 21

<sup>91</sup> Anon (2014) *Eating disorders not exclusive to those who are underweight*. Available at: <http://www.mcric.edu.au/news/2014/august/eating-disorders/> [31/01/2015]

<sup>92</sup> Anon (2014) *Eating disorders not exclusive to those who are underweight*. Available at: <http://www.mcric.edu.au/news/2014/august/eating-disorders/> [31/01/2015]

<sup>93</sup> Anon (2014) *Eating disorders not exclusive to those who are underweight*. Available at: <http://www.mcric.edu.au/news/2014/august/eating-disorders/> [31/01/2015]

<sup>94</sup> Arnold C (2013) *Decoding Anorexia: How Breakthroughs in Science Offer Hope for Eating Disorders*. East Sussex: Routledge, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Hill R, Haslett C, Kumar S (2001) Anorexia nervosa in an elderly woman. In: *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 35: 246-248.

more inclusive. Anorexia varies between individuals and it is quite possible for a person to exhibit eating disordered emotions and behaviours whilst meeting only partial ICD-10 and DSM-5 criteria. Also, standardised criteria lend themselves to a similarly standardised approach in therapy which, as we will explore throughout this thesis, can be problematic. The use of bespoke therapies that utilise a number of approaches whilst working towards recovery is often necessary in order to truly unpack the varied and complex factors that led to utilising this expression. Whilst I will not go into detail here about the pros and cons of the diagnostic criteria (which is by-and-large far beyond the scope of this thesis), it is important to clarify that questions have been raised about the absolute nature of the classification criteria and where the line should be drawn between dieting behaviour and anorexia. Incorporating all aspects of eating disordered behaviour into one working definition is a problematic task. The clinical criteria are clearly an attempt to recognise the physical effects of anorexia and to move away from, what could be criticised as, vague psychological features such as the inability to recognise internal states and emotions (as we shall examine later with the work of Hilde Bruch) and a deficient sense of self. The inclusion of amenorrhea was an example of this. However, the criteria are clearly moving towards becoming more inclusive. It is worth remaining mindful of the classification systems subjective nature and what the consequence of a diagnosis might mean for the women suffering from such extreme eating behaviours. For example, by including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and EDNOS into the DSM-5 and ICD-10, we pathologise disorders and label them as “abnormal”, which is in itself damaging for the individual exhibiting symptoms. This movement towards pathologising mental health disorders, which find its grounding within biological and “concrete” developmental explanations, may also result in people seeking pharmaceutical interventions<sup>96</sup> instead of considering the benefits of behavioural and therapy driven strategies. The latter of which is usually side effect free.

Anorexia shares many of its traits with other mental illnesses, such as mood and anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders, which can lead to additional complications when it comes to correctly diagnosing and treating the underlying issues. Furthermore, the effects of starvation can exacerbate some characteristics. For example, anhedonia (the inability to feel pleasure in usually pleasurable situations), insomnia (an inability to sleep) and depressed mood can be explained as a consequence of starvation and malnutrition. The same could be said for the anorexic’s obsessive and secretive interest in food and the ritualization of eating. Therefore, a

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<sup>96</sup> For more information on the use of anti-depressants on patients diagnosed with both anorexia and depression see: Jaafar N R N, Daud T I M, Rahman F N A, Baharudin A (2007) Mirtazapine for anorexia nervosa and depression. In: *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 41: 768-769. In this study, major depression was diagnosed by depressed mood exhibited as a consequence of anhedonia, poor concentration, insomnia and recurrent death wishes. This particular case utilized a number of approaches which included therapeutic treatment alongside medical, dental and nutritional support.

depressed mood and anxiety diagnosis should not be made if the symptoms could also be explained as features of anorexia. The same is true for the compulsive desire to calculate calorie intake, which should not be confused with obsessive-compulsive syndromes and the need to keep belongings in a certain order (although commonalities clearly exist). Other common features of anorexia can be identified as social phobia and reluctance towards eating food in front of family and friends for fear of being challenged or judged. This judgement is not just limited to the quantity of food being consumed (whether too much or too little) but also the act of eating itself. Other common features of anorexia are the presence of body image disturbance 'in the forms of fear of weight gain or denial of the seriousness of low weight'<sup>97</sup> and a fixation on the body as an arena for control and discipline.

Anorexia often begins with the decision to diet which provides the individual with powerful feelings of control and mastery for both internal (power, control and euphoria for someone who previously felt weak, depressed and empty) and external reasons (conforming to the slender ideal in an environment where the thin body represents a great achievement). A secondary satisfaction might also be gleaned from the power of manipulation that the individual exerts over her family and friends. As Richard Gordon writes: 'in a situation in which she may have felt herself discounted, the refusal of food evokes a powerful response from others, an assertion of her presence that can no longer be ignored'.<sup>98</sup> In addition to these social and psychological factors, there will be physiological consequences that result from the effects of starvation. These factors can be independent of the causes that produced the initial symptoms. As dieting becomes fasting and fasting becomes wilful starvation, the body has little energy left to heat the outer extremities and focuses instead on keeping the internal organs warm, this results in the anorexic individual feeling continuously cold. Malnutrition can also lead to heart irregularities (bradycardia) and electrolyte disturbances such as low potassium and chloride levels. As the body is put through gruelling exercise regimes, the consequences of starvation can become even more exacerbated. The "fasting high" that is often experienced at the start of this disorder is quickly replaced by feelings of hopelessness, emptiness and depression. It is these feelings that come to have dominance throughout the life of the disorder. When the weight loss becomes extreme, tactics of deception and secrecy are employed by the individual to defend herself from reprisal. She attempts to fool both the people in her immediate environment and herself as she seeks to justify this behaviour by denying the seriousness of her condition. This denial can often extend to families and friends who seek to rationalise this behaviour as a "passing phase". Thus, when the diagnosis is finally made, the individual is already caught in a

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<sup>97</sup> Keel P K, McCormick L (2010) Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment Planning for Anorexia Nervosa. In: Grilo C M, Mitchell J E (eds.) *The Treatment of Eating Disorders: A Clinical Handbook*. London: The Guildford Press, 3- 28 (4).

<sup>98</sup> Gordon 2000: 23

complex web of physiological disturbances and psychological attitudes. Similar effects were captured by the Minnesota studies which examined the mind-set of the conscientious objectors of World War Two. Attitudes identified here included an obsessive preoccupation with food, social withdrawal, difficulty concentrating and depression.

Anorexia has been identified as a disorder of adolescence (with peak ages between fourteen and eighteen) as the disorder is typically ‘triggered by stresses that challenge the individual’s sense of personal identity and competence’<sup>99</sup> which is pivotal during this period especially in an environment which values the slender disciplined body.<sup>100</sup> Issues here are resolved by weight loss and bodily discipline. For some young women, the adolescent period offers challenges that are more easily masked by the development of anorexia than by addressing them directly. These challenges can be identified as independent decision-making, the intimacy of sexual relationships, and the need to identify and pursue self-chosen activities and goals. Playing a significant part in this is their desire to please others and “be good” which can be exacerbated over time when coinciding with other pressures (exams, puberty and the development of “womanly curves”) or experiences (loss of a friend, failure to live up to personal expectations, romantic rejections). These experiences can increase feelings of powerlessness and trigger (for those who already have low self-esteem and a tendency towards perfectionism) an eating disorder such as anorexia. Whilst these experiences are not limited to adolescence, they are most common during this period. If the underlying issues are not addressed, when faced with similar experiences in later life, they can once again resurface.

In terms of gender as a risk factor, approximately ten times more women are diagnosed with anorexia than men.<sup>101</sup> As we will explore in the following chapter this is commonly attributed to the

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<sup>99</sup> Gordon 2000: 21

<sup>100</sup> The manifestation of anorexia is not limited to development within this adolescent period. The onset of anorexia can occur at any age but it is usually triggered by an event or trauma. Onset in middle age may be the consequence of earlier diagnoses rematerializing or new stresses which challenge the individual’s sense of identity (such as divorce or a relationship breaking down, death of a loved one, etc.). For a BBC article on late onset see: Anon (2017) *Eating disorders can strike in mid-life*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38635082> [24/01/2017]

<sup>101</sup> Recent studies show that the numbers of men stepping forward for treatment of anorexia, whilst still significantly lower than female diagnosis’s, are on the rise. Reasons for the increased prevalence include changing understandings of anorexia as broader than a disorder limited to the female sex alongside more reliable statistical data. Whilst there is a general lack of research in the area, there appears to be commonalities between female and male incidences. These include: age of onset (typically times of transition such as puberty, middle age, etc.); its employment as a coping mechanism; expression of underlying emotional stress; as a consequence of dieting; peer pressure (losing weight); and, the influence of the media and advertising campaigns. Whilst looking good appears to be low on the list of things boys worry about, it is becoming clear that pressure from social media, from advertising and celebrity images, are influencing the way men reflect on their embodiment. There is also debate surrounding the growing prevalence of anorexia in gay or bisexual male communities. It is suggested that these men may be judged on attractiveness in the same way as women, leading to increased body anxieties. The “perfect body” is becoming increasingly aspirational for the male sex. However, focus may be applied to “sculpting” and “building” the body for a more “chiselled” aesthetic and the subsequent development of “bigorexia” (focus on getting bigger and engaging in body

differences between male and female body image ideals within Western societies. This indicates the importance of environmental factors on the development of eating disorders. This is not just the case within contemporary accounts of anorexia but this bias towards female prevalence has been a common feature throughout the history of the disorder.<sup>102</sup>

## History

Although the term was first coined in 1873,<sup>103</sup> as a clinical entity, accounts of anorexic behaviour have been identified as far back as two centuries earlier. One of the first documented cases was recorded in 1689 when Richard Morton, an English physician, detailed two cases of a “wasting” disease that appeared to be of nervous origin. The primary symptoms described by Morton were a radical weight loss and a loss of appetite that he attributed to ‘sadness and anxious cares’.<sup>104</sup> One of his female patients, experienced indifference to extreme cold conditions, amenorrhea and spent a significant amount of time ‘poring upon Books’.<sup>105</sup> Following diagnosis she rejected treatment and died as a consequence of a fainting fit. The second case documented was of a 16 year-old boy who abandoned food and bodily needs whilst focusing, with increasing rapture, on his studies and pursuits of the mind. However, he regained health following the recommendation that he abandon his studies and ‘pursue his health in the country’.<sup>106</sup> Over the next two centuries very few accounts of this disorder make their way into medical reports.

It was in 1945 that interest really started forming around this “new symptom” with Dr Ludwig Binswanger documenting the case of Ellen West, described as an intelligent young woman, who exhibited symptoms that had rarely been exhibited outside the religious community until this point.<sup>107</sup> Exhibiting many symptoms common to contemporary accounts of anorexia, at the age of

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building activities). For more information see: Anon (2016) *Men Get Eating Disorders Too*. Available at: <http://mengetedstoo.co.uk/> [15/01/2017]; B-eat (2016) *New Report Gives Insight into Body Image Issues Among Boys*. Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/latest/5397-new-report-gives-insight-into-body-image-issues-among-boys> [15/01/2017]; and, Langley J (2006) *Boys Get Anorexia Too: Coping with Male Eating Disorders in THE Family*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>102</sup> Self-starvation in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in the form of fasting Saints and “Holy Anorexics” is discussed at length in Chapter Five.

<sup>103</sup> Catherine Garrett in *Beyond Anorexia* writes that the labeling and defining of anorexia at the end of the nineteenth century was part of a strategy by the medical community to control knowledge of the body and mind in a period of increasing political power and freedom for women. Garrett C (1998) *Beyond Anorexia: Narrative, Spirituality and Recovery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 48.

<sup>104</sup> Gordon 2000: 14

<sup>105</sup> Richard Morton quoted in: Treasure J, Alexander J (2013) *Anorexia Nervosa: A Recovery Guide for Sufferers, Families and Friends*. London: Routledge, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon 2000: 15

<sup>107</sup> Explorations into self-starvation in a religious setting will be discussed in Chapter Five.

twenty, she started to develop a 'dread of becoming fat, avoided food, and went on long hikes'.<sup>108</sup> This change in body perception is identified as a consequence of her brother becoming fatally ill, her father's rejection of her engagement to a 'romantic foreigner'<sup>109</sup> and appears to have been triggered by a holiday with friends where she was 'teased for being fat'.<sup>110</sup> This obsession took its grasp and lasted thirteen years until she died at the age of thirty-three. Throughout these years she struggled to understand this obsession but reported feeling spiritually satisfied because she was thin.<sup>111</sup> She later admits to her husband 'that she is living her life only with a view to being able to remain thin, that she is subordinating everyone of her actions to this end, and that this idea has gained a terrible power over her'.<sup>112</sup> She understood the dangers of her situation as her reason rebelled against her attempts to starve herself but she was choked by her obsession and was ultimately unable to free herself. West grew up at a time when women were seeking greater freedoms and access to previously male dominated domains. It was also a time of changing fashions as the voluptuous female body gave way to the slender aesthetic ideal. Her internal struggles and conflicts (her desire for freedom pitted against her wish to meet and exceed her families expectations), in the context of her personality and family, met in the desire to control and reduce her body and the space it demands. The conflicting aspects of her personality (passionate, creative and sensual in opposition to her desire for control, order and success and their gender associations) developed as a reaction to the dilemmas of the culture she lived in. She rebelled against the constraints of the female role seeking to reject its limitations. Throughout her childhood she longed to be a boy as a consequence of her ambitions and thirsts. In her diary she wrote 'you realize that the existing social order is rotten... rotten down to the root, dirty and mean; but you do nothing to overthrow it'.<sup>113</sup> She struggled but was unable to find a meaningful means of deposing the system. Bound by the 'iron chains'<sup>114</sup> of her life, she instead focused on her desire to be 'delicate and ethereal'.<sup>115</sup> During the thirteen years of this obsession, West took up to sixty to seventy laxative tablets every evening, became a vegetarian (skipping meals but consuming up to twenty oranges and several pounds of tomatoes per day), hid food at meal times and attached weights to her body whenever she was weighed. Her menstrual cycle ceased following a miscarriage, she suffered from severe depression and anxiety, developed an obsession with death which culminated in four suicide attempts, the final

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<sup>108</sup> Russell G R M (1997) The History of Bulimia Nervosa. In: Garner D M, Garfinkel P E (eds.) *Handbook of Treatment for Eating Disorders*. New York: The Guilford Press, 11- 25 (17).

<sup>109</sup> Russell 1997: 17

<sup>110</sup> Russell 1997: 17

<sup>111</sup> Chernin 1994: 174

<sup>112</sup> Ellen West quoted in: Chernin 1994: 174

<sup>113</sup> Ellen West quoted in: Chernin 1994: 170

<sup>114</sup> Chernin 1994: 170

<sup>115</sup> Chernin 1994: 172

one resulted in death. She wrote: 'I am in a prison and cannot get out. It does no good for the analyst to tell me that I myself place the armed men there, that they are theatrical figments and not real. TO ME THEY ARE VERY REAL'.<sup>116</sup> The prison and the armed men were real. They came to represent the entire unknown cultural, social, and psychological forces within which West was fighting against. As they remained unknown and unnamed, they suffocated and ultimately destroyed her. The final hours of her life make for an uncomfortable read:

On her third day at home [she is transformed], Ellen ate more freely- so much so that for the first time in 13 years she felt satisfied and really full. In the afternoon she ate coffee creams and Easter eggs. In the evening she went for a walk with her husband and read poetry. She appeared cheerful. Later that evening, however, she took a lethal dose of poison, and on the following morning she was dead.<sup>117</sup>

For West, developing an understanding of the underlying issues and ultimately finding equilibrium was the only way she could save herself from the condition but despite searching for an answer, her desperation consumed her. The decision to take her life in the face of irreconcilable feelings can be understood as an act of release from the crushing pressures of her life. Her anxiety surrounding the consumption of food and the size of her body meant that she felt trapped and unable to find a meaningful existence.

Over the next twenty to thirty years, psychoanalytic interpretations emerged from American psychiatry that theorised on the sexual origins of anorexia and the hypothesis that anorexic women were defending themselves 'against fantasies of oral impregnation, or against promiscuous impulses'.<sup>118</sup> This appeared to follow the footsteps of Freud who attributed self-starvation in girls and young women to depression caused by sexual underdevelopment in 1896. However, significant breakthroughs in contemporary understandings of this disorder emerged following the publication of Hilde Bruch's work *Eating Disorders* in 1973 in which she distinguished between two types of anorexia; primary and secondary. She argued that the development of anorexia took its form from body insecurities but that it also indicated problems in the young women's psychological development. She stated that there were intimate connections between disorders of the body (and anxieties over its shape and weight) and disorders where the consumption of food became a psychological conflict. She categorised the primary type as a determined refusal to eat as opposed to a loss of appetite. The attributes displayed by individuals categorised by this type were identified as a distorted body image and delusional misconceptions surrounding the body's size and shape, being unable to identify internal feelings and needs (such as hungers and emotions), and a powerful and

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<sup>116</sup> Ellen West quoted in: Chernin 1994: 176. Author's emphasis.

<sup>117</sup> Russell 1997: 17

<sup>118</sup> Gordon 2000: 17

overwhelming sense that their actions, thoughts and feelings are ineffective and simply products of external expectations as opposed to expressions of the self. She argued that this behaviour (particularly the deficient sense of self) was grounded in childhood experiences which helped explain why the disorder typically becomes manifest in adolescence (a time when self-mastery, independence and identity is essential to achieve independence from parents). Secondary anorexia was understood as a more diverse condition and its central feature was weight loss due to psychogenic (emotional or mental) distresses. These involved psychological conflicts arising from underlying personality difficulties. Distinguishing between these anorexic “drives” helps us to identify the most helpful (and thus, potentially beneficial) path towards healing. For example, someone driven by the cultural slender female ideal will need a different approach to treatment than someone suffering from anorexia as a consequence of depression or an anxiety disorder. Despite how beneficial the theory of Bruch’s was in understanding the aetiology of anorexia, it has not been fully accepted and incorporated into the contemporary criteria within the diagnostic manuals (aspects of this classification are however, closely linked with the diagnostic criteria for EDNOS).

At the time of publication in 1973, Bruch was still able to describe anorexia as ‘rare indeed’.<sup>119</sup> However, in the years that followed the incidences experienced a meteoric rise. It was in the 1980s, Gordon writes, that anorexia was ‘widely publicized, glamorised, and to some extent romanticized’<sup>120</sup> which led to it becoming an acceptable vehicle ‘for the expression of mental illness in Western, industrialised culture’.<sup>121</sup> As written by George Devereux, anorexia became the prescribed template for mental illness ‘[d]on’t go crazy, but if you do, do it this way’.<sup>122</sup> It was labelled the “disease of the 80s”, which reflected how easy it is for diseases to become “fashionable”. Gordon wrote that the central feature of anorexia is the intense pursuit of thinness and a morbid fear of getting fat which he saw as a cultural, not just a clinical problem. So, it was in 1984 that Susan Bordo (one of the leading experts in the aetiology of anorexia) wrote that ‘one in every 200-250 women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two suffer from anorexia, and that anywhere from 12 to 33 percent of women control their weight through vomiting, diuretics, and laxatives’.<sup>123</sup> Moving forward thirty one years from Bordo’s figures, in a report commissioned by Beat (the leading UK charity for people with eating disorders) and produced by PwC in 2015 titled *The Costs of Eating Disorders- Social, Health and Economic Impacts* estimates that more than 725

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<sup>119</sup> Bruch H (1973) *Eating Disorders*. New York: Basic Books, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Gordon 2000: 3

<sup>121</sup> Goldstein L, Rissman J (2008) Anorexia. In: Gilman S L (ed.) *Diets and Dieting: A Cultural Encyclopaedia*. New York: Routledge, 7-11 (7).

<sup>122</sup> George Devereux quoted in: Gilman S L (1980) *Diets and Dieting: A Cultural Encyclopaedia*. New York: Routledge, ix.

<sup>123</sup> Bordo 2003: 140



thousand people in the UK are affected by an eating disorder of which 11% are male.<sup>124</sup> B-eat also references estimates provided by the NHS information centre (which draws upon the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey<sup>125</sup>) which suggest that up to '6.4% of adults displayed signs of an eating disorder'<sup>126</sup> and (in contrast with the B-eat report) that 25% of reported cases result in males. Also cited are figures published by The Health and Care Information Centre in February 2014 which demonstrated 'an 8% rise in the number of inpatient hospital admissions in the 12 months previous to October 2013'.<sup>127</sup> The same report says this is indicative of trend as research shows that the percentage is increasing year-on-year: 'a 34% increase in admissions since 2005-06- approximately 7% each year'.<sup>128</sup> B-eat claim that of those with eating disorders, 10% are sufferers of anorexia, 40% are bulimic, and the remaining 50% fall into the EDNOS category which includes, for example, binge eating disorders and those individuals that only partially meet the criteria for anorexia or bulimia (most will be aged between 14 and 25 years old although cases of young children and post-menopausal women have also been recorded).<sup>129</sup> This however, does not represent the many women who have eating habits which give cause for concern or are dieting or exercising aggressively. When reflecting on the statistics it is also worth noting that they are limited to those who are affected by eating disorders who have received inpatient NHS treatment and they therefore exclude all those who have not come forward, have not been diagnosed, are receiving private treatment, are being treated as an outpatient in the community or who do not currently meet the diagnostic criteria used for diagnosing an eating disorder. There is definitely a need for more reliable statistics and for broader understandings of what constitutes an eating disorder if we are to understand and treat the issues lying at the heart of a diagnosis of anorexia.

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<sup>124</sup> B-eat in conjunction with PwC adopted a new methodology for this trial believing that the results are more robust than previous similar studies. The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence estimates around 11% of cases are reported by men. For more information see: B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics.

Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

<sup>125</sup> Quoted by Beat: B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics.

Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

<sup>126</sup> NHS information centre referenced by B-eat. For more information see: B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics.

Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

<sup>127</sup> Quoted by B-eat: B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics.

Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

<sup>128</sup> Quoted by B-eat: B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics.

Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

<sup>129</sup> B-eat (2016) Eating Disorder Statistics. Available at: <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/about-beat/media-centre/information-and-statistics-about-eating-disorders?gclid=CMSWhIKync4CFUJmGwod17kFMQ> [03/08/2016]

## The Aetiology of Anorexia

As a multifaceted disorder, determining the aetiology of anorexia can be a highly contentious and emotive issue. From cultural influences, fashion and feminine ideals to biological predispositions, discussions surrounding the “starvation gene”, the construction of identity and the influence of family members, there are a plethora of causes cited as providing the bedrock for the development of anorexia. Whilst these will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow, we shall explore some of these theories now.

Cultural and environmental factors are often cited as providing the groundwork for a negative relationship with the body. These factors include society’s emphasis on thinness, the link between self-control, self-discipline and dieting, the participation in sports with emphasis on an lithe, svelte physique and the attainment of a slender body as a consequence of desiring attention and respect from peers and family members. These factors make up the underlying features which lead to the development of low self-esteem and the desire towards perfectionism that find their expression within the development of anorexia. These values are communicated throughout media and advertisement campaigns and find reassurances through family and friends who have themselves internalised such ideals. We live in a society that endorses a fear of fat and a repulsion of gaining weight. Within this framework fear of rejection becomes the “drive” or “motivation” for weight loss. As Susie Orbach writes, it is clear that ‘our bodily codes and behaviours constitute who we are’.<sup>130</sup> Our bodies communicate crucial aspects of our identities and affiliations, as has been the case throughout history. The way we display ourselves marks us as belonging to a particular group of people as bodies communicate the period, religious values and geography through displaying forms of body modification such as lengthening the neck, tattooing skin, decorating faces, binding feet, covering heads, etc. The body ‘is neither natural nor pure but a body that is inscribed and formed by the accretion of myriad small and specific cultural practices’.<sup>131</sup> Within Western society, anorexia has come to symbolise a great achievement as control and discipline have been implemented to reduce the body’s boundaries. This all takes place within our androcentric and patriarchal society which has been heavily influenced by our dualistic heritage which values domination, control and order over the bodies of those who inhabit its spaces (a theme we will explore further in Chapter Five). The development of anorexia takes place as a consequence of these values. Victor Turner in *The Body in Society* writes that anorexia expresses patriarchal anxieties regarding women’s bodies and conveys the contemporary view of thinness as beauty. Anorexia has been a predominantly Western

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<sup>130</sup> Orbach S (2009) *Bodies*. London: Profile Books Ltd, 7.

<sup>131</sup> Orbach 2009: 7

disorder,<sup>132</sup> however in recent years the incidence of anorexia in non-Western cultures has experienced an increase.<sup>133</sup> One reason cited for this growth is that globalization has ‘caused popular culture to infiltrate non-western cultures’<sup>134</sup> and with it, thinness as a beauty necessity has become popularised. The debate surrounding the role of social factors in the development of anorexia is ongoing. It is widely accepted that anorexia is both culturally and historically situated and that sociocultural factors play a significant part in its development and continuation amongst girls and young women. The industries culpable for these insidious messages and values are the beauty and fashion industries, advertising and marketing campaigns (focusing solely on desirability of the slender form and the associated attributes) and television shows which relay, through visual representation, that success, wealth, happiness and love are granted to those who conform to these narrowly defined ideals (Gossip Girl, Sex and the City, Friends... the list is endless!). This has led to the understanding of anorexia as a culture-bound syndrome. This will be the focus of the following chapter as we explore and critically analyse the cultural factors that culminate in the development of low self-esteem and body anxieties in women.

Whilst some features of anorexia appear to be culturally bound, there is a plethora of research that argues the aetiology lies within our biology. The biological risk factors include genetic vulnerability, obsessive-compulsive traits, depression, perfectionism along with exactness and precision, the early onset of puberty and sexual maturation, low self-esteem and the constant desire for approval and reassurance, the need for control, restrictive dieting, avoiding risk and harm and the pursuit of an eating disorder identity.<sup>135</sup> Broadly speaking, for many cultural analysts and those operating within the medical community, it is argued that our genes ‘load the gun but the environment pulls the trigger’.<sup>136</sup> For example, Joan Brumberg in *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa*<sup>137</sup> writes that anorexia develops as a consequence of cultural, biological and psychological variables but that the two latter factors are “culturally neutral” and therefore, not shared by all dieters. This would account for why only some women will develop anorexia. She argues that individuals diagnosed with anorexia require objective psychiatric treatment which might not be granted if the assumption made is that the condition is purely the consequence of sociocultural factors. Gordon takes a similar approach as he refers to ‘developmental

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<sup>132</sup> Anorexia is often referred to as a culture-bound syndrome indicative of contemporary Western society as a consequence of the popularised slender ideal. This is a theme unpacked in greater detail in Chapter Two (society’s slender ideal) and Chapter Four (the political undercurrents of anorexia as a culture bound syndrome).

<sup>133</sup> As we explore in Chapter Two.

<sup>134</sup> Goldstein, Rissman 2008: 10

<sup>135</sup> Goldstein, Rissman 2008: 8

<sup>136</sup> Anon (2015) *General Information*. Available at: <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/general-information/> [03/01/2015]

<sup>137</sup> Brumberg J (2000) *Fasting Girls: A History of Anorexia Nervosa*. New York: Vintage Books.

vulnerabilities<sup>138</sup> to describe the difference he sees between anorexic women and “normal” dieters. The key argument here is that there must be some biomedical or psychological problem that would account for why some, and not all, women develop an eating disorder such as anorexia. However, what appears to go unnoticed is that each of us will experience the world differently. Whilst there are culturally bound ideals and stereotypes that are universally acknowledged, each of us will have unique experiences of these in the context of our individual lives; not everyone will live or experience these social discourses in the same way. Whilst the clinical model may be to identify and treat the “internal” causes (internal to both families and individuals), cultural theorists such as Susan Bordo (explored further in Chapter Two) focus on anorexia as a “crystallization” of numerous cultural streams which revolve around the body as a site of control. Anorexia becomes an internalisation of sociocultural ideals that express an extreme or exaggerated form of “normal” behaviour. Within this model, under the right conditions, anyone can develop an eating disorder such as anorexia. Thus, with what we already know about the glamorisation of anorexia in the 1980s, this position might go some way to explain the dramatic rise in diagnoses.

Other arguments that gravitate towards biological risk factors identify the importance of hormone imbalances. One such argument is that anorexia is caused by a serotonin imbalance in the brain (a popular stance within the medical community that the ‘common cause of depression and eating disorders is located in brain chemistry’<sup>139</sup>), that tiny differences in the HT2A serotonin receptor could have people ‘pre-wired for anorexia from birth’.<sup>140</sup> When triggered by a weight loss diet these differences can ‘set off a series of events that trip... [these] neurochemical wires... out of control’.<sup>141</sup> Other research looks at the relationship between anorexia, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety disorders. Arnold in *Decoding Anorexia* believes that a large number of sufferers also show signs of having an anxiety disorder that could predate the eating disorder. As such, she argues that if ‘anxiety is a pathway into the disorder... finding alternative ways to manage anxiety is a pathway out’.<sup>142</sup> She argues that anorexia is a biologically based mental illness and not the sole consequence of our environments, parents or peers. Continuing along this thought process, there is increasing interest in gene and environmental interaction and how a combination of the two may be involved in the aetiology of eating disorders. For example, advancements in technology have resulted in an increase in the number of studies that focus on epigenetics, the ‘study of changes in gene expression that occur without any alteration in the sequence of the

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<sup>138</sup> Gordon 2000: 96

<sup>139</sup> Goldstein, Rissman 2008: 9

<sup>140</sup> Arnold 2013: 5

<sup>141</sup> Arnold 2013: 5

<sup>142</sup> Arnold 2013: xi

DNA'.<sup>143</sup> These epigenetic modifications to the gene expression can take place at different stages throughout the life of the individual and can also be influenced by the environments we live in. In the case of anorexia, it has been suggested that prenatal risk factors such as maternal malnutrition, stress and the early development of the foetus, acute environmental changes (exposure to malnutrition or high calorific foods) and the epigenetic processing in learning and memory<sup>144</sup> can have an influence on the development of eating disorders. However, despite recent advancements, research regarding epigenetics and eating disorders is still in the early stages of development<sup>145</sup> and so the conclusions we can draw are limited. I do not wish to enter into a debate about how likely modifications in the gene expression are in the development of eating disorders such as anorexia. The literature demonstrates that our environments, development and leaning play a significant role in these gene modifications. If a biological risk factor is present, it is clear that without an environmental pressure, this would remain dormant. For now, focus should still be applied to sociological factors and pressure should be applied to those social discourses that encourage and promote anorexic behaviours.

Research has also been carried out to ascertain the familial transmission of anorexia as some studies have shown that it may reoccur in families affected by eating disorders.<sup>146</sup> It is the role of our genes that takes centre stage here as 'molecular genetic studies have pointed to a number of possible genetic variations that may be linked'<sup>147</sup> to a risk of developing anorexia. The theory goes that an episode of dieting or weight loss can trigger this change in the gene and this is when anorexia takes its hold. However, these studies have not been replicated and a starvation gene has not, and is unlikely to be, identified. As Arnold writes:

[r]esearchers haven't found a single gene that causes anorexia, and it's unlikely they will... genes generally increase and decrease your risk of developing the disorder... [which is] subsequently influenced by the environment in which a person lives.<sup>148</sup>

Consideration should not only be given to the processes that occur prior to the anorexic symptoms but also to the effects on the body throughout the illness. In terms of psychobiology (the use of biology to study normal and abnormal cognitive and emotional processes) and the effects that

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<sup>143</sup> Pjetri E, Schmidt U, Kas M J, Campbell I C (2012) *Epigenetics and eating disorders*. Available at: [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martien\\_Kas/publication/225056288\\_Epigenetics\\_and\\_eating\\_disorders/links/0deec51a335cb9dce2000000.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martien_Kas/publication/225056288_Epigenetics_and_eating_disorders/links/0deec51a335cb9dce2000000.pdf) [15/08/2015]

<sup>144</sup> This is of particular interest when you consider that learnt behaviour contributes to the development and maintenance of eating disorders.

<sup>145</sup> There is a lack of live brain tissue to study and this will continue to hamper progress within the area of psychiatric disorders.

<sup>146</sup> Becker AE, Keel PK, Anderson-Fye EP, Thomas JJ (2004) Genes (and/or) jeans?: Genetic and socio-cultural contributions to risk for eating disorders. In: *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 23: 81-103.

<sup>147</sup> Keel, McCormick 2010: 9

<sup>148</sup> Arnold 2013: 11

starvation can have on the body, studies have shown that brain matter can actually decrease in patients with anorexia.<sup>149</sup> Research has identified reductions in the right dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), an area of the brain related to both weight loss and weight recovery.<sup>150</sup> It is believed that studying this area of the brain can lead to an accurate prediction regarding the individual's recovery and changes to this area prior to diagnosis might indicate risk towards a later development of the disorder.

As we have seen, there are a number of studies that focus on the effect our biology and our genes have on the development of eating disorder behaviour and the development of anorexia and this is still a growing area of academic interest. From changes to our gene expressions and hormone imbalances to the influence of depression and anxiety disorders on the physical body, the argument for biologically based explanations in the development of anorexia is strong. However, this research is relatively new and still under development. As such, there are a few things that we must remain wary of. For example, assigning biological responses typically necessitates the use of drugs in treating the “underlying” causes that are viewed in terms of abnormal bodily functioning. This can be a “one-size-fits-all” fix for Doctors who are under increasing pressure to turn patients around and limit the need for further tests and expensive surgery bills. These drugs can also have damaging side effects and act only as a plaster to mask and cover-up the underlying issues that become dormant and may manifest in other ways later in life. In applying this understanding to the treatment of anorexia, we also move away from the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach that values the use of therapy and ritual in helping the individual to find a path away from an eating disorder.

As evidenced whilst examining the medical classification systems used for a diagnosis of anorexia, in the majority of cases, this eating disorder becomes manifest during puberty at a time when the construction of identity is pivotal in the development of self-identity and attaining independence from parents. It is a process that depends on both social and individual factors that bring together ‘divergent and conflicting aspects of his or her social experience’<sup>151</sup> which is influenced by ‘historical and sociological conditions, the particularities of family experience, biological predispositions, and the accidents of development’.<sup>152</sup> This is a process that occurs throughout the life of the individual but the most critical period is during adolescence, as the individual must navigate the process of merging the experiences of childhood, which structured the foundation of the self, with the challenges and demands associated with early adulthood. Threats to

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<sup>149</sup> Keel P K (2005) *Eating Disorders*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice-Hall.

<sup>150</sup> McCormick LM, Keel PK, Brumm MC, Bowers W, Swayze V, Anderson A (2008) Implications of starvation-induced change in right dorsal anterior cingulate volume in anorexia nervosa. In: *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 41: 602-610.

<sup>151</sup> Gordon 2000: 96

<sup>152</sup> Gordon 2000: 96

this process can come in the form of dramatic changes in cultural expectations and social roles that can lead to identity confusion, an extreme example of this can be found within the development of anorexia. Gordon, in his book *Eating Disorders*,<sup>153</sup> argues that 'eating disorders are the extreme expression of radically altered social expectations on women that have emerged on a mass scale since about the mid-twentieth century, but particularly since the 1960s'.<sup>154</sup> He writes that new pressures and expectations that focused on attributes oriented towards achievement, independence and competitiveness were suddenly expected of young women within a relatively short time frame. These values found themselves in sharp contrast to the traditional Western embodiment of the female role. This shift in social expectations heralded confusion with developing identities as these young women struggled to embody both worlds. For some it caused self-doubt, confusion and fragmentation. Within this framework, anorexia (which holds at its core issues surrounding self-esteem, achievement, perfectionism and the struggle for autonomy) can be understood as a magnified reflection of these conflicting demands. He writes that anorexia can be understood as a core expression of the stresses, tensions, anxieties and unresolved problems of a particular culture or historical period, that it reflects a crisis of identity following the contradictions of being female in Western society. Within this environment, the only way the individual can manage this crisis of identity is through controlling various aspects of her life. Within this framework control of the body becomes an attractive source of reassurance as an area completely at her disposal in an environment where control of the body communicates themes of transcendence, invulnerability and adherence to societies strict body ideals. Seeking to both survive and subvert, the young woman strictly monitors her food intake and attempts to weave a web of control. This act embodies both a protest of the conflicting female roles whilst also conforming to the pejorative definition of femininity. Gordon writes that 'anorexics and bulimics draw upon the common cultural vocabulary of their time, through latching onto the contemporary mania about dieting, thinness, and food control that have become endemic to the advanced industrial societies'.<sup>155</sup> They utilise cultural preoccupations as defences that enable them to escape from, and achieve some sense of control over, unmanageable personal distress as they achieve specialness through deviance. Thus, resonating throughout discussions on eating disorders is a political undercurrent since they are so closely connected with the issue of control of the female body. As a political act, anorexia is a striking visible statement that takes place on the public stage. It's not just her size and weight that

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<sup>153</sup> The work of Gordon is based heavily on the work of George Devereux, a psychologist and anthropologist, who was interested in the complex relationship between culture and psychopathology. His key interest was the relationship between the normal and the abnormal and the link between cultural anxieties and the manifestation of these in individuals. He developed the concept of an "ethnic disorder" (which can also be described as a culture-bound syndrome) as we will explore in Chapter Four.

<sup>154</sup> Gordon 2000: 96

<sup>155</sup> Gordon 2000: 12

become the most visible feature, but the refusal to eat, her adamant *NO!* in the face of family and friends. This becomes an act of rejection, of building boundaries and a foundation upon which she can start to build her identity that becomes increasingly disembodied, dualistic and cellular as she departmentalises the different elements that make up the life that she knew to make way for the life that she desires. In this, she attempts to address her unbalanced world and to make sense of, and ultimately change, her social position. Within the individual we see a thoroughly schizophrenic pattern take its form as ‘one side of the personality is in fierce rebellion against the society that is starving them... [and] the other side is killing them in order to attain the image that society requires’.<sup>156</sup>

Discussions surrounding the part played by families in the development of anorexia usually focus on the relationship between the daughter and her mother. As written by Psychotherapist Marilyn Lawrence in *The Anorexic Experience*: ‘I can say with certainty that I have never worked with an anorexic woman who has a ‘straightforward’ relationship with her mother’.<sup>157</sup> She states that the relationship is usually complex and baffling for both the mother and the daughter. Broadly speaking, “mothering” is associated with caring, feeding, and the giving of life, sustenance, nourishment and love and therefore it is easy to see how the rejection of food can symbolise a rejection of her mother’s love especially given the timing of the anorexic symptoms which typically take shape around major life events (examinations, starting a new career, leaving home to progress studies at university). The stresses of such periods ‘may involve conflicts surrounding achievement, but the difficulties of these situations are often described by anorexics in terms of separation... [of] leaving home... [and] leaving mother’.<sup>158</sup> This is a time when opposing feelings clash, when desires for independence, autonomy and separation conflict with a desire for closeness, support and safety. Rejecting the mothers love through the rejection of food can ease this separation anxiety by emotionally distancing the daughter from her mother. One anorexic woman wrote that her mother prepared the food for her family and so the act of wilful starvation became an act of metaphorically rejecting her without actually severing the relationship.<sup>159</sup>

Another common observation of the family dynamics concentrates on the behaviour exhibited by the mother. Bruch writes that ‘nearly all of the mothers... [are] submissive to their husbands but very *controlling* of their children’.<sup>160</sup> She therefore advocated the position that anorexia had to be understood in terms of the ‘development of the total personality in the *context*

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<sup>156</sup> Woodman M (1982) *Addicted to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 30.

<sup>157</sup> Lawrence L (1995) *The Anorexic Experience*. London: The Women’s Press Ltd, 67.

<sup>158</sup> Moorey J (1991) *Living with Anorexia and Bulimia*. Manchester: Bell and Bain Ltd, 59.

<sup>159</sup> Arnold 2013: 3

<sup>160</sup> Bordo 2003: 156. My Emphasis.



of the family'.<sup>161</sup> The mother is also a source of guidance, providing information about the world and her place in it. Its through the mother that her daughter learns about her body and so the transference of both positive and negative body esteem can be gleaned from this relationship.<sup>162</sup> For example, if the daughter sees her mother critically analysing her body in the mirror, pinching her thighs in disgust and wishing away wrinkles, her daughter may be more at risk of developing the same critical view of her body. Parents can play a significant role in their children learning cultural obedience as they, like their children, are subjected to the same demands of society. Everyone operates in cultural time and space, as Bordo writes, 'no one lives in a bubble of self-generated "dysfunction" or permanent immunity- especially today, as mass media culture increasingly has provided the dominant "public education" in our children's lives'<sup>163</sup> and no one develops anorexia overnight. As written by Tania Kindersley and Sarah Vine: 'it is a gradual process, fostered by a culture which insists that if you are a very thin woman you can conquer the world'.<sup>164</sup> A message transferred in myriad ways. Whilst parents may not be the root cause of the development of anorexia, the relationship with their daughter can exacerbate her feelings are thus contribute towards the developing problem.

With regards to the wider network within the home, anorexic women are typically raised in families that place a great importance on achievement, external appearance, weight control and the individual may put considerable value on these attributes. These young women have an overwhelming desire to please their families and loved ones and so engage in damaging behaviours that appear to meet these expectations. However, underneath this façade of good behaviour and success they feel weak, unworthy and obliged to live up to these unrealistic and relentless demands for perfection. Underlying these feelings is a sense of powerlessness that can be triggered by experiences that challenge the brittle façade. It is through the control of food that the anorexic woman feels she is in a position to regain power and control over her experiences. However, Wolf writes, political and economic retaliation against female appetite is so much stronger than family

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<sup>161</sup> Roth G (2010) *Women, Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*. London: Simon and Schuster UK LTD, 18. My Emphasis.

<sup>162</sup> Problematizing the mother is fraught with tensions. Bruch's work relies heavily on family theory to analyse the manifestation of anorexia which was said to result from isolated and uncommunicative families where the mothers had failed to instil independence and self-sufficiency in their daughters. Thus, anorexia was framed as a result of poor mothering as the young woman rejected social and sexual maturity. Whilst my work rejects this supposition (as anorexic is discussed in the context of damaging patriarchal discourses of power) the mother's reflection on her embodiment does, I believe, influence the child's growing opinion surrounding her own bodies development. Both are the consequence of social discourses. For more information on the tensions surrounding mother blaming see: Malson H (1998) *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Poststructuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa*. East Sussex: Routledge; and, Dignon A (2007) *All of Me: A Fuller Picture of Anorexia*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

<sup>163</sup> Bordo 2003: xx

<sup>164</sup> Kindersley T, Vine S (2009) *Backwards in High Heels: The impossible Art of Being Female*. London: Fourth Estate, 44.

dynamics at this point. As an example for this, she states that 60-80% of college women struggle against the slender ideal and that it is very hard to believe that 60-80% of families are dysfunctional in this specific way. Anorexic behaviour 'can no longer be explained as a private issue'.<sup>165</sup> So, whilst the family may put considerable importance on their daughters displaying attributes of perfectionism, achievement, beauty and weight control, for Wolf these values have been constructed and reinforced by our environments and internalised by our families.

## Treatment

There are a number of approaches adopted by clinicians and therapists to treat patients presenting with anorexic symptoms. Treatment can utilise one or more of the following approaches: Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT); Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT); Interpersonal Therapy (IPT); Focal Psychodynamic Therapy (FPT); Family Intervention; Compulsory Treatment; and, Medication. The focus of Cognitive Analytic Therapy is on behavioural patterns. The belief is that mental health conditions such as anorexia are caused by unhealthy patterns of thought and behaviour which date back to childhood experiences. The three stages of Cognitive Analytic Therapy are: reformulation- understanding the influence past events have on present behaviour and patterns of thought; recognition- helping the individual understand the link between current patterns of behaviour and childhood experiences; and, revision- helping the individual identify changes that can break these unhealthy patterns of behaviour.

Central to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is the belief that how we think about a situation can affect how we feel and subsequently act. When considered in the context of anorexia, the therapist will explore how the condition is associated with unhealthy and unrealistic thoughts and beliefs about food, diet and their body. The focus here is exploring the roots underpinning this body, food and weight negativity. Ultimately the aim is to encourage the adoption of healthier and more realistic ways of thinking that are conducive to disrupting the cycle of harming behaviour whilst Interpersonal Therapy focuses on the consequences of relationships with others and their environment. A first step here may be to identify the root cause of self-esteem, self-doubt and bodily anxiety through analysis of relationships with peers and family members. Here healing is associated with transforming, resolving or disconnecting from negative and destructive relationships that feed body insecurities. Central to Focal Psychodynamic Therapy is the idea that past unresolved conflicts or traumas are being played out in the present through a refusal to eat. For the individual this can take the form of body punishment for what is perceived as an earlier weakness or as a

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<sup>165</sup> Wolf 1994: 100

coping mechanism to deal with unresolved negative feelings resulting from an earlier trauma. Therapy here could focus on helping the individual to come to terms with the underlying tensions so alternative expressions can be utilised in the present to acknowledge and subsequently address these unresolved feelings within a safe and healing framework.

Family interventions draw family members into the healing process. As anorexia can be traumatic for both the individual and wider family network, bringing everyone together in order to establish underlying tensions and negativities can help the process of healing. Compulsory treatment is implemented when the individual exhibiting anorexic symptoms refuses treatment despite being severely ill and putting their life at risk. In this scenario Doctors can decide to section their patient under the Mental Health Act in order to treat the individual compulsorily. In this setting the individual exhibiting anorexic symptoms may be prescribed medication to address elements of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder etc. There are two main medications: selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (a type of anti-depressant medication that is prescribed to help people manage additional psychological problems such as depression and anxiety); and, olanzapine (used to help reduce feelings of anxiety as a “last resort” when the individual is unresponsive to previous treatments). Medication is usually only prescribed when the individual has started to gain weight, as the side effects can be more serious for underweight patients. Patients under eighteen years of age are prescribed these medications cautiously due to the possible side effects. Psychological treatments undertaken by the NHS typically last between six and twelve months, the length of which is identified by a care plan that is established early in the treatment process. A central element of this plan will focus on weight gain usually at a rate of 0.5 – 1kg per week. This is achieved through small increases in food consumption.<sup>166</sup> These approaches can be incorporated into intensive inpatient programs, residential and partial hospitalization programs and various levels of outpatient care where the individual has access to general medical treatment, nutritional counselling and individual/group/family therapy sessions. A difficulty for both health care professionals and patients can be identifying the best course of treatment as many geographical locations outside urban locations can struggle to offer the varied resources often needed to offer bespoke treatment programs.<sup>167</sup>

The statistics discussed at the beginning of this chapter capture those individuals who met the definition of at least one of these classification systems. It therefore calls into question the accuracy of these statistics when we consider how many people may suffer from anorexia but do not lose three consecutive menstrual cycles or who are not considered sufficiently underweight by their physicians. As Bordo writes, do the college girls who chew pizza and then spit it out have an eating

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<sup>166</sup> For more information see: NHS (2016) *Anorexia nervosa – Treatment*. Available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Anorexia-nervosa/Pages/Treatment.aspx> [15/10/2016]

<sup>167</sup> For more information see: Keel, McCormick 2010: 3-28.

disorder? 'Of course not- look, they're eating pizza'.<sup>168</sup> My point here is that I believe that a high proportion of women within Western society (to varying degrees at some point in their lives) experience low self-esteem related to their body shape and size as a result of our society's high and unrealistic expectations regarding women's bodies but this is displayed most extremely in the aestheticism of the anorexic. As a consequence we diet, restrict calorie intake and experience a sense of hopelessness and depression. To a certain extent we have all bought into the beauty myth and it is damaging and limiting our development within society.<sup>169</sup> As we see when reflecting on the story of Ellen West, her obsession with starving her body came to symbolise a spiritual struggle for her very soul only she did not have the language to vocalise it as such. This struggle was instead hidden by the obsession of maintaining society's desired slender aesthetic. In attempting to forgo her feminine nature and embody masculine ideals she became alienated and distanced from an essential part of her "inner self". This alienation heralded the obsession with the thinness ideal and all the associated attributes (purity, transcendence, perfection, cleanliness). Therefore, food came to symbolise so much more than simple nourishment. It came to represent a reconnection with her female nature whilst the rejection of it represents her desire to embody masculine ideals and her despair and dissatisfaction of not being able to within a female body. Her hunger was misdirected and embodied a spiritual longing. Food merely provided a distraction, hiding the true desire. As Chernin writes: '[t]he demonic quality of obsessive longing arises from the fact that human beings cannot bear this alienation from an essential part of the self'.<sup>170</sup> When it finally came to it, the consumption of food was an inadequate substitute for the female psyche that had been lost. Hunger came to represent 'a state of being, a unified condition of the self, rather than for a piece of food'<sup>171</sup> as food cannot adequately satisfy the real nature of the longing. West writes: 'I even dread to go into the grocery store. The sight of groceries awakens longings in me which they [the groceries] can never still. It is as though a person tried to quench his thirst with ink'.<sup>172</sup> Ultimately, the obsession symbolises both the will to destroy the "inner self" and body and a longing to be reunited with it. As we shall explore in the chapters that follow, this experience is also indicative of many contemporary accounts of anorexia and the sense of desperation and longing are no less real. Whilst the medical classification systems may be an attempt to recognise disordered eating from a clinical perspective, it negates the development of a cultural model as an explanation in its focus on the biological features. This can severely hamper treatment and the way the anorexic individual comes to regard

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<sup>168</sup> Bordo 2003: xxvii

<sup>169</sup> A theme we shall explore further in Chapter's Three and Four.

<sup>170</sup> Chernin 1994: 191

<sup>171</sup> Ellen West quoted in: Chernin 1994: 191

<sup>172</sup> Chernin 1994: 191

her situation. This in turn restricts her developing understand of not just the “disorder” but also her place in society and the politics surrounding the slender ideal she desperately attempts to emulate.

I understand anorexia to be a contemporary disorder. A core argument throughout this thesis is that anorexia is a characteristic expression of our culture that highlights some of the central ills in our environments. I understand anorexia as an expression of the contradictions of the female role and expectations in an environment where women still struggle to define themselves in a patriarchal world. It embodies a struggle for control over her body and her immediate environment. I believe these to be some of the central issues lying at the foundation of the development of anorexia. The goal must be to understand the primary causes so the right therapeutic model for healing can be established. It is through unpacking the political and cultural undercurrents that women can work towards liberation and subversion of the androcentric ideologies inherent within our social structures that manifests within women as eating disorders such as anorexia. So, it is to the influence of society that we now turn our attention.

## Chapter Two- The Female Body as Mediated by Society

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

Mary Wollstonecraft<sup>173</sup>

That we live in an image-saturated culture has come to seem normal, routine to us. But our great-grandparents would probably have their brain circuits blown if they were plonked down in our culture.

Susan Bordo<sup>174</sup>

The idea that anorexia is a metaphor of our time has been heavily drawn upon throughout research on female bodies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. First mentioned by Kim Chernin in *The Hungry Self*, and drawn upon by Susie Orbach, it has been clearly asserted that '[f]ood is the medium through which women are addressed... (and) in turn, food has become the language of women's response'.<sup>175</sup> Writings on this disorder proliferate in theories surrounding the aetiology, triggers and risk factors with an aim to identify, isolate and ultimately destroy the disabling foundations of anorexia. The following chapter aims to examine and contextualise current understandings of anorexia through an investigation of psychological, sociological and anthropological responses to this expression. As in many areas, language is an important factor as it is so tied up in power rhetoric. I use the term disorder throughout this body of work in reference to society. It is my intention to demonstrate that anorexia is a culturally induced syndrome symptomatic of a larger societal disorder. In anorexia we see an individual's response to society's control and manipulation of the female form.

Broadly speaking, anorexia can be understood as a severe restriction of food intake that is sustained over a long period of time. As discussed in the previous section, self-starvation and anorexia are not new conditions. Cases of self-induced starvation date back to medical journals printed in 1689, along with other descriptions from the 1700s and 1800s. However, it was in 1873 that Sir William Gull first coined the term. As we will explore later, what is clear in the various historical and modern accounts, is that the motivation behind the drive towards self-induced starvation has changed somewhat. For example, in Europe in the 1600s 'the large curvy woman with extra fat on her body was considered beautiful, as can be seen in the art of the time'<sup>176</sup> and religious reasons were cited as the drive for her self-imposed starvation as opposed to the desire to be

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<sup>173</sup> Wollstonecraft M (1772) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New York: Dover Publications Ltd, 43.

<sup>174</sup> Bordo 1999: 2

<sup>175</sup> Orbach 1993: 3

<sup>176</sup> Samelson D A (2009) *Feeding the Starving Mind: A Personalised, Comprehensive Approach to Overcoming Anorexia and Other Starvation Eating Disorders*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 44.

slender.<sup>177</sup> Modern diagnoses on the other hand appear to be driven, in large part, by the culturally motivated desire to embody the slender ideal and the idea that ‘thin is good’.<sup>178</sup> In expanding on the reasons behind the argument that anorexia is a culturally induced syndrome, some of the questions I will answer in the following chapter are: is anorexia the consequence of nature, nurture or both?; can popular culture, the media and advertising campaigns be held accountable?; can we blame the pressures of today’s society?; and, is it a physical condition or a mental illness?

Two positions can be said to dominate discussions surrounding the aetiology of anorexia. One view is that they are deeply private and emotionally motivated mental illnesses. This view disregards media factors, such as airbrushing and fashion, as patronising and irresponsible. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those that argue it is impossible to ignore the increasingly artificial and unrealistic beauty demands made through the media and advertising campaigns, and that the pressure on young women to conform to these ideals is enough to set eating disorders, such as anorexia, in motion. My work is situated firmly within the latter of these two views. Here the development of anorexia is multifaceted, but ultimately develops as a response to our society’s gender stereotyping and idealisations of what it means to fully embody femininity. These “lessons” are communicated and reinforced by family, peers, husbands, lovers, the media and advertising campaigns, they are viscerally and insidiously borne upon us at conception, the point of our making, and not surprisingly, collectively embraced by the populations of women seeking to fit in, to attain that evanescent, sparkling dream of normality presented on an elite pedestal. These social pressures will be the focus of this chapter. I will examine the female body in Western society, principally the United Kingdom and the United States of America, with the intention of contextualising current societal influences and pressures.

This chapter will start with a critical examination of the cultural “trends” which have been identified as contributing to the development of anorexia within Western society. These factors include media and advertising representations of women (which utilise airbrushing and Photoshop applications) that focus on the desirability of an increasingly slender form, creating unrealistic and destructive standards of “beauty” for women. These images “sell” a deeply damaging ideal for girls and young women whilst teaching them powerful lessons about the value and place of women within our society. From this starting point we will examine the capitalist agenda underpinning these constructions whilst exploring the link between patriarchal society’s inherent sexism and how sex based differences have traditionally been translated into sexist discourse which in turn contributes towards this construction of femininity. This will be discussed in relation to neurosexism and the

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<sup>177</sup> Silverman J A (1997) Anorexia nervosa: Historical perspectives on treatment. In: D M Garner, P E Garfinkel (eds.) *Handbook of treatment for eating disorders*. New York: Guilford Press, 3-10.

<sup>178</sup> Lynn 2012: 231

many academics that are today arguing that there are fundamental differences in the male and female brain that determine our strengths and weaknesses throughout life. We will explore how this argument can be used to reinforce gender based stereotypes and contribute towards limiting gender roles. Female stereotypes and the sexualisation of childhood is explored next as we take a look at how these factors combine to create the tensions we see within the anorexic expression. Finally we finish with a consideration of Susan Bordo's "axes of continuity". Bordo explores the tensions of consumer culture and the part they play in the development of anorexia as she analyses eating disorders as a social formation as opposed to a personal psychopathology. Here I hope to demonstrate that anorexia is a powerful symbol of female discomfort which has a complex aetiology that is heavily influenced by the environments in which we live.

### The Female Body in Contemporary Society

Historical cultural attitudes concerning the female body in society, which value attributes of vulnerability, frailty and helplessness are finding new and worrying expressions within contemporary society. I am interested in why our culture appears to be so obsessed with maintaining tight, slim and young bodies that, as Bordo writes, when '500 people were asked what they feared in the world, 190 replied, "getting fat"'.<sup>179</sup> I want to understand why, as Susie Orbach writes, we live in a culture that praises thinness and frailty in women. Anthropologist Mary Douglas argued that the 'body often becomes the symbol of the social and religious structures to which it belongs and the anxieties of the society are played out on the human body'.<sup>180</sup> She states that we must understand the body as a symbol of society; 'to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body'.<sup>181</sup> It is only then that we may be capable of interpreting rituals that concern the body and thus, understand rituals concerning eating.

As we will explore in the following pages, many social commentators, therapists and psychologists have drawn parallels between the images glamorising slender models in the media and advertising campaigns and the development of eating disorders such as anorexia but this is only part of the story. Contributing to this situation are the contemporary realities of gender inequality, female stereotypes, control and power over female flesh, alongside our dualistic heritage and the contradictions of being a woman (wife, mother, cleaner, and businesswoman. Let Go! You can have it all!). In an environment where weight, appearance and popularity are synonymous<sup>182</sup> it is not

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<sup>179</sup> Bordo 2003: 137-140

<sup>180</sup> Isherwood, Stuart 1998: 53

<sup>181</sup> Douglas M (2002) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 142.

<sup>182</sup> Metcalfe K (2006) *Anorexia: A Stranger in the Family*. Mid-Glamorgan: Accent Press Ltd, 8.



surprising that teenagers and young women would come to associate success with the slender form. As Orbach writes in *Hunger Strike*, whatever their manifestation, eating disorders are a 'complex personal response to a set of interpersonal, intra-psychic, social and political phenomena that structure the individual women's relationship to self and other'.<sup>183</sup> The relationship women have with food and body image can be understood as a social phenomenon connected to women's social and psychological existence. Women are 'constantly engaged in trying to mediate the harrowing effects of culturally induced body insecurity... (and) anorexia... is perhaps the most dramatic outcome of the culture's obsession with regulating body size'.<sup>184</sup> In examining the relationship between women and food she argues that anorexia is a response to the inequality of the sexes. Finding its root in patriarchal culture, anorexia 'exemplifies through the language of the body the woman's attempt to enter and at the same time disappear from a culture that derogates and defies her'<sup>185</sup> and it is only by challenging the principles lying at the heart of this discursive system that women may find liberation.

Men and women are aiming for perfection in new and damaging ways and the result of this is the development of body dysmorphia syndromes,<sup>186</sup> eating disorders and a general discomfort or dis-ease with their bodies. This, alongside the development of new technologies, allows those who can afford to, to trade in the 'messiness and fragility of life, the vulnerability of intimacy, the comfort of human connection, for fantasies of limitless achievement'.<sup>187</sup> This all happens within an environment where cultural imagery cultivates, reinforces and constantly raises the bar of bodily "perfection". We are being trained to see defects in our bodies as we compare them to airbrushed celebrities on the front cover of magazines. The idea that bodily perfection is the gateway for a happy life is the undercurrent of such imagery adding additional pressure and urgency for the requirement of such procedures. A lifestyle of love, acceptance, happiness and wealth are all displayed. The problem now is that the discontent many women experience with their bodies does not just manifest in anorexia or bulimia, but in their daily rituals. The most devastating consequence is that many girls and young women with seemingly healthy eating habits are secretly analysing every morsel of food they consume and, in many cases, exercising obsessively. The glamorisation of eating disorders and exercise (particularly jogging and marathon running in recent years) and their association with the middle class, successful, businesswoman is one of the most debilitating images

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<sup>183</sup> Orbach 1993: xvii

<sup>184</sup> Orbach 1993: 4

<sup>185</sup> Orbach 1993: xxii

<sup>186</sup> For more information on body dysmorphic disorder see: Phillips K A (2005) *The Broken Mirror: Understanding and Treating Body Dysmorphic Disorder*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>187</sup> Bordo 2003: xvii

to be implemented by the media and marketing campaigns. To some extent, it has made anorexia (and emaciation) “fashionable”.

## Media

Fashion magazines, TV, movies, the Internet and advertising campaigns, all types of media, play a central role in the development of eating disordered behaviour. A plethora of emaciated, glamorised and artificially created images are promoted and idealized by these industries. The messages communicated to the audience are often unbalanced and misleading. They provide information about dieting and exercise whilst highlighting none of the dangers associated with extreme weight loss or exercise. Nor do they discuss healthy body shapes and sizes or what the models have done to attain their body shapes. Putting it into context, many of the celebrities displayed in the magazines have gruelling exercise regimes constructed for each day of the week coupled with strict diets in order to maintain their body shapes. As well as these measures, photographers use computer technologies, such as Photoshop and Lightroom, to perfect certain features, be it spot cover-up's, removing signs of old age, or distorting the body to reflect fashionable curves and desirable sizes. Despite repeated calls to display equal representation of diverse body shapes and to reduce the use of underweight models, this industry continues to “sell” one ideal. The avid consumers of such literature happen to be the most influenced and insecure, teenagers and young women who strive to “fit in” after all, it's only the thin, beautiful, popular girls in the advertising campaigns of Hollister and Jack Wills who are truly happy! A mistake is often made of regarding slenderness as a surface ideal, it's not, these marketing messages are internalised and unreal standards and expectations are established in the minds of these young women and become manifest in unconscious and damaging ways. For example, Bordo writes that images of slenderness are never “just pictures”, as many fashion magazines are quick to maintain. Not only are the ‘artfully arranged bodies in the ads and videos and fashion spreads powerful lessons in how to see (and evaluate) bodies, but also they offer fantasies of safety, self-containment, acceptance, immunity from pain and hurt’,<sup>188</sup> aspirations for many women (and increasingly men) today. In *Unbearable Weight* she describes the postmodern body which is increasingly fed on ‘fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the morality, and, indeed, the very materiality of the body’.<sup>189</sup> The extreme outcome of such an understanding is the conceptualisation of the biological body as a fiction, a canvas for change, often at the will of fickle fashions. We have become distanced from an appreciation of the sacredness of our bodies and the beauty of individuality and

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<sup>188</sup> Bordo 2003: xxi

<sup>189</sup> Bordo 2003: xvii

uniqueness. As new technologies designed to control and overcome our numinous biological clocks become commonplace we are distanced from an appreciation of the biological consequences of such extreme procedures. As Bordo notes, our bodies have 'become alienated products, texts of our own creative making, from which we maintain a strange and ironic detachment'.<sup>190</sup> Only it is not *our* making but the making of a society that inscribes upon us what aesthetic we should project! Demonstrating just this, in her research on the effects of the media on body satisfaction and the development of eating disorders, Bordo discusses a study conducted by anthropologist Anne Becker back in 1995 when the first, single station television was introduced to a remote location in the Fiji Islands. The programs broadcast originated from Great Britain, the United States and Australia and before its introduction 'Fiji had no reported cases of eating disorders... [and] showed that most Fijian girls and women, no matter how large, were comfortable with their bodies'.<sup>191</sup> After three years of viewing this channel, in 1998, '11 percent of the girls surveyed reported vomiting to control weight, and 62 percent of the girls surveyed reported dieting during the previous months'.<sup>192</sup> Quite surprising statistics when you consider these women had previously celebrated voluptuous bodies and encouraged the consumption of food.

It is not just media images promoting the slender ideal that consumers need to be wary of, but the exercise routines that are promoted as a means of achieving the "look". Images of Beyoncé, Madonna, Jennifer Lopez and more recently Kim Kardashian (to name a few) are flaunted and recommended as the means of achieving the same aesthetic in terribly patronizing and animated language. Take, for example, an article from *Ebony* in 2008 about the exercise routine of Beyoncé. Apparently 'star bodies are not necessarily born'<sup>193</sup> but sometimes they are actually made! The "good news" is that you can have that body too and all it takes is motivation. Taking into consideration that this magazine is aimed at the African American population in the United States, the average size of which is just over eleven and a half stone<sup>194</sup> which, with an average height of five foot and four inches, makes it highly improbable that motivation *is* all it will take. The consequence of such articles is to make millions of women feel dejected, hopeless and lacking (ironically crushing any motivation they might have started with).

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<sup>190</sup> Bordo 2003: 288

<sup>191</sup> Bordo 2003: xv

<sup>192</sup> Bordo 2003: xvi

<sup>193</sup> Chappell K (2008) *Celeb Workout Secrets: You Can Have a Body Like The Stars*. *Ebony*, 164-168 (166).

Available at:

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=I9MDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA166&dq=beyonce's+exercise&hl=en&sa=X&ei=tylqVLOuBYHeaMH4gJgJ&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=beyonce's%20exercise&f=false> [16/11/2014]

<sup>194</sup> Cloe A (2014) *Average American Women's Weight and Height*. Available at: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/357769-weight-height-for-the-average-american-woman/> [16/11/2014]

What many magazines fail to acknowledge is the manipulation these visual images go through prior to publication. No amount of exercise or healthy eating will change the contours of your face or body in the same way that computer-enhancing technology will. Airbrushing and Photoshop have a big part to play in the illusion portrayed by the magazines. Looking more closely, airbrushing can be defined as a 'process of retouching or altering photographs used in advertising numerous products'.<sup>195</sup> Following the patenting of the technology in 1876, by the makers of the Stanley Steamer, the technology was intended for use in painting watercolours and for artistic purposes. However, now in 2017, the term is almost solely associated with fashion photography. Its use here is to eliminate imperfections and change the size and shape of the models photographed. This practice, implemented by advertising campaigns, is said to trigger negative body esteem for teenagers and young women. For example, a study conducted by the University of Missouri has shown that 'after just one-to-three minutes of exposure to the type of advertising routinely found in magazines... young women just entering adulthood, [increasingly] hate themselves'<sup>196</sup> as they desperately seek to embody the impossibly flawless features. The study was carried out with eighty-one European-American women who were divided into two groups. The first group were provided with "neutral" images (ten images which did not include people) whilst the other group viewed five appearance related images (of European-American women who could be said to embody the desired beauty aesthetic) and five neutral images. The findings revealed that repeated exposure to this ideal, over time, had a significant negative effect on individual women's self-esteem.<sup>197</sup> This effect was the same regardless of the specific body shape or size of the individual viewing the imagery- 'thin or heavy, confident or prone to self-objectification, the result was the same: the women were equally affected by viewing the images of thin women and showed increased dissatisfaction after viewing appearance-related images'.<sup>198</sup> Through this visual communication, these airbrushed images reinforce the socially constructed standard of beauty by demonstrating a "better" version of the model. Many actresses in recent years have sought to educate their audiences by demonstrating the before and after effects of extensive make-up and hair sessions.

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<sup>195</sup> Reel J J (2013) *Eating Disorders: An Encyclopedia of Causes, Treatment, and Prevention*. California: Greenwood Press, 20.

<sup>196</sup> Holmes A (2007) *Memo To Women's Magazine Editors: White Women Hate Themselves After Reading Your Magazines*. Available at: <http://jezebal.com/248484/memo-to-womens-magazine-editors-white-women-hate-themselves-after-raeding-your-magazines> [22/11/2014]

<sup>197</sup> This article showed that the average European-American woman is five foot, four inches tall and wears a size 12. Yet, the ideal communicated through these images is of a Barbie-esque figure who 'wears a size 4 in the hips, a size 2 in the waist, and rocks a size-10 bust'. For more information see: Nelson J (2012) *Airbrushed Nation: The Lure and Loathing of Women's Magazines*. California: Perseus Books Group, 123.

<sup>198</sup> Nelson 2012: 123

Jamie Lee Curtis for *More* magazine<sup>199</sup> asked her photographer to take pictures of her without makeup, professional hair styling, jewellery or high couture, in unforgiving lighting and at a full body angle. As you would expect, she looked human, just like the rest of us. She said, 'I don't have great thighs. I have very big breasts and a soft, fatty little tummy. And I've got back fat. People assume that I'm walking around in little spaghetti-strap dresses. It's insidious, Glam Jamie, the Perfect Jamie, the great figure, blah, blah, blah... It's such a fraud. And I'm the one perpetuating it'.<sup>200</sup> In a similar manner, Emma Watson in the *Sunday Times Style* magazine said, 'with airbrushing and digital manipulation, fashion can be an unobtainable image that's dangerously unhealthy'.<sup>201</sup> Over the years, Watson has also been transparent about the beauty products, time and attention spent on getting her digital images "just right". In the last few years, regulations have been imposed which demand that advertisers are transparent about what is enhanced or altered in the photographs published; they are now required to provide disclaimers. In addition, marketing campaigns that advertise the benefits of beauty products with computer-enhanced and airbrushed models have come under heavy criticism and in some cases, have been banned by the Advertising Standards Authority, as they are 'not representative of the results the products could achieve'.<sup>202</sup>

While we cannot change the media representations of women overnight, what we can do is change the way we think about them. We can see the manipulation and disempowering rhetoric for what it is and attempt to rationalise and navigate the fear of our bodies, of food and the hatred we feel for our perceived imperfections. As Jennifer Nelson writes in *Airbrushed Nation* '[k]nowing you're being force-fed an unreal paradigm makes it easier to withdraw yourself from that which strips you from your sense of self'.<sup>203</sup> It is also worth remembering that "the media" also encompasses those individuals, organisation and publications that work ethically to promote a change in the way body image is represented in these industries. For example, in 2004, Dove launched their *Campaign for Real Beauty* following the findings of *The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report* which proved the hypothesis that the 'definition of beauty had become limiting and unattainable'.<sup>204</sup> The study found that only 2% of the global population of women would describe themselves as beautiful. Since then Dove has implemented various campaigns to challenge beauty

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<sup>199</sup> Wallace A (2002) *Jamie Lee Curtis: True Thighs*. Available at: <http://www.more.com/news/womens-issues/jamie-lee-curtis-true-thighs> [23/11/2014]

<sup>200</sup> Wallace A (2002) *Jamie Lee Curtis: True Thighs*. Available at: <http://www.more.com/news/womens-issues/jamie-lee-curtis-true-thighs> [23/11/2014]

<sup>201</sup> Selby J (2014) *Emma Watson: Noah and Harry Potter Actress 'Excited about the Aging Process.'* *She's only 23*. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/emma-watson-is-excited-about-the-aging-process-aged-23-9225728.html> [23/11/2014]

<sup>202</sup> Anon (2011) *Airbrushed make-up ads banned for 'misleading'*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14304802> [24/11/2014]

<sup>203</sup> Nelson 2012: xiii

<sup>204</sup> Anon (2014) *The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. Available at: <http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx> [19/11/2014]

stereotypes and broaden the discussion on beauty. In 2010 this effort was renewed when they launched the *Dove Movement for Self-Esteem*. Following this, the 2011 study (*The Real Truth About Beauty: Revisited*) of over 1,200 10 to 17 year olds (predominantly girls) found that 72% felt a great deal of pressure to conform to these narrowly defined ideals and that 'only 11% of girls around the world feel comfortable using the word beautiful to describe their looks'.<sup>205</sup> For the campaign this demonstrated that there has been a universal increase in the pressure these girls feel to meet prevailing standards of beauty that results in a decrease in their confidence as they enter adulthood. The Dove survey also revealed that 'the number of women who would like to see 'real' models used in advertising has risen from 74 per cent to... 95 per cent'.<sup>206</sup> Whilst low self-esteem resulting from exposure to these images of beauty may not be the sole root cause of the development of anorexia, they do demonstrate a connection between advertising and the development of low self-esteem and confidence. These reinforced ideals also create an anxiety and negativity about the body and food at a time when their bodies are still developing. As I shall demonstrate later, choices made about food at these young ages, significantly shape a women's relationship with her body years down the line.

My position is clear, as I have demonstrated, but there are many academics in the field that disagree with this argument and advocate the position that people do not passively internalise these moral values. The premise is that there are many different factors- such as political outlook, race, social class and value systems- at play when we make day-to-day decisions and that any messages gleaned from the media that are inconsistent with these values will ultimately be rejected. Following this argument, only those individuals with a biological predisposition towards low self-esteem and confidence are truly influenced by these messages and therefore, the images of slender, computer enhanced women portrayed in the media will not leave all women pre-disposed to developing an eating disorder such as anorexia. For example, Lucy Howard-Taylor in *Biting Anorexia* writes that whilst the 'media plays a role in furthering anorexia and, indeed, in seeding it in some young people... it is by no means a major factor'.<sup>207</sup> Instead she cites self-criticism, 'defeatism, an inability to deal with things, a need to absolve oneself of expectation, of one's SELF in its entirety'<sup>208</sup> as the building blocks. She argues that biological disposition, temperament and the genes we are born with have the most significant bearing on the development of anorexia and that environmental factors can do nothing more but set the spark which ignites the underlying neurosis. At face value this appears to be a fairly innocuous comment but the consequences of a biological standpoint can be deeply

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<sup>205</sup> Anon (2014) *The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. Available at: <http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx> [19/11/2014]

<sup>206</sup> Crilly L (2012) *Hope with Eating Disorders*. London: Hay House Insights, 234.

<sup>207</sup> Howard-Taylor L (2008) *Biting Anorexia*. Sydney: Finch Publishing, 77.

<sup>208</sup> Howard-Taylor 2008: 77

damaging for women as has been demonstrated throughout history. This position reinforces the nineteenth and twentieth century belief that women are of a delicate disposition ‘unequipped for anything but the most sheltered domestic life’<sup>209</sup> as written by Sigmund Freud in a letter to John Stuart Mill, ‘I implore her to withdraw from the strife into the calm... activity of my home’.<sup>210</sup> It also does not explain why diagnoses continue to increase year-on-year or the developing increases in male diagnoses. An argument for the biological underpinning of anorexia also plays into the hands of neurosexism. Something I will explore further in the next section.

As the media are ‘both a reflection and a shaper of social reality’<sup>211</sup> their influence and potential for transformative subversion is tantalisingly attractive. However, this industry is so entrenched in this damaging rhetoric that our only hope is to view and understand these images differently. It is through education and awareness, questioning and challenging these visually communicated messages that we have the power to subvert them. And how do we know that these unrealistic standards of beauty are still a problem? We know because a discomfort about our bodies is now considered standard and the “norm”. As explored in the previous chapter, a text book case for the development of anorexia takes place during puberty and often develops out of a desire to be more ‘fit, healthier and slimmer’<sup>212</sup> because she ‘wasn’t pretty enough... didn’t have quite the right figure’ or ‘didn’t feel as attractive to the boys in the class’.<sup>213</sup> Reinforcing the message that the development of anorexia is heavily influenced by the aesthetic pressures produced within society’s that value the slender ideal. Literature on the development of anorexia spans decades and yet it remains an issue, only now it has been popularised and made mainstream by our generation’s increasingly exaggerated female idealisations (that go far beyond the dimensions of the natural body). Bordo notes ‘you can be as cynical as you want about the ads... and still feel powerless to resist their messages’,<sup>214</sup> no matter what parents, teachers and clergy tell us, “inner beauty” is a big laugh in this culture’.<sup>215</sup>

## Neurosexism<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Bordo 2003: 159

<sup>210</sup> Jones E (1956) *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. London: Hogarth Press, 193.

<sup>211</sup> Ezzell M B (2008) Pornography, Lad Mags, Video Games, and Boys: Reviving the Canary in the Cultural Coal Mine. In: Olfman S (eds.) *The Sexualization of Childhood*. Westport: Praeger Publishers Inc., 7- 32 (8).

<sup>212</sup> Metcalfe 2006: 8

<sup>213</sup> Metcalfe 2006: 8

<sup>214</sup> Bordo 2003: xxvii

<sup>215</sup> Bordo 2003: xxvii. This striving towards meeting these social ideals might actually represent our failure or our lack of willing to fully engage with these surface consumerist values for fear of exclusion or social illegitimacy. For a broader discussion surrounding the idea of a legitimate subject see Chapter Three and discussions surrounding the work of Judith Butler and the notion of a slender performance.

<sup>216</sup> Scientific methodologies and the methodology I have employed throughout this work (weighted towards the contemporary Western cultural construction of femininity alongside feminist liberation theology and

Differences in the male and female brain are often cited as the bedrock for developmental differences between the sexes and are therefore of interest as we explore the aetiology of anorexia. In the blurb of *Why Gender Matters*, Leonard Sax claims to demonstrate and subsequently teach us ‘hardwired differences [between the sexes] to help every girl and every boy reach their fullest potential’<sup>217</sup> with research that follows in the footsteps of Simon Baron-Cohen in *The Essential Difference*. On the opening page of his book Baron-Cohen plainly states the claim that ‘[t]he female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems’<sup>218</sup> and his book systematically takes us through the research that led to the assertion that men ‘make the best scientists, engineers, bankers and lawyers’<sup>219</sup> whilst women make the best ‘counsellors, primary-school teachers, nurses, carers, therapists, social workers, mediators [and] group facilitators’.<sup>220</sup> Broadly speaking, he argued that there are two different “brain types”: empathisers (who are better at identifying the thoughts and feelings of other people) and systemisers (who are more interested in braking down and analysing systems). Whilst there are variations within each gender group, on the whole, he associates the systemising brain with males and the empathetic brain with females. He does not believe that this is the product of cultural conditioning but that the different levels of hormones the foetus is exposed to in the womb can influence the way brains work and thus influence subsequent behaviour.<sup>221</sup> These researchers would have us believe that there are fundamental gender differences that start within the very structure of the human brain. This brings to mind the age-old misogynist comment that women are not *inferior*, simply *different*. In *The Sexual Paradox* Susan Pinker asks us why women, with all the equal opportunities of men, choose different career paths. The answer is complicated as, after a lifetime of cultural conditioning, are the choices we make truly representative of what we want or what society wants? Is the world as equal as she would have us believe? Whilst the jury is out on the part biology plays in the decisions we make, there is much evidence to demonstrate that our environments and the social discourses we are exposed to, have a significant impact on our

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theology) have very different ways of asking and answering questions. As a multidisciplinary approach, I am interested to see how we can bring different areas of academic study together in order to develop our understandings of various cultural phenomena such as anorexia. This section on neurosexism is an example of this interdisciplinary approach.

<sup>217</sup> Sax L (2007) *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

<sup>218</sup> Baron-Cohen S (2003) *The Essential Difference*. London: Penguin, 1. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>219</sup> Fine C (2010) *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*. London: Icon books, xix.

<sup>220</sup> Fine 2010: xix

<sup>221</sup> This view is the consequence of his on-gong research following a large group of children pre-and-post birth. Sixteen weeks into the gestation period, amniocentesis tests were carried out which involved measuring levels of testosterone in the amniotic fluid and subsequently linking those levels to behaviour. For more information see: Baron-Cohen 2003.



conceptualisations of self. In an interesting programme on just this, *Horizon* on BBC Two, aired a documentary asking *Is Your Brain Male or Female?* hosted by Dr Michael Mosley and Professor Alice Roberts. Their goal was to determine ‘whether gender differences are innate or shaped by the outside world’.<sup>222</sup> Mosley argued these differences are ‘hard-wired into us from the womb’<sup>223</sup> supporting the “nature” position within this debate and Roberts supported the argument that these behavioural differences are learnt as a consequence of ‘social and cultural pressures’;<sup>224</sup> “nurture”. Roberts worries that placing too much emphasis on biological factors may discourage girls and young women from progressing with careers in the sciences saying ‘we live in a country where fewer than three out of ten physics A levels are taken by girls, where just 7% of engineers are women... and where men still earn on average nearly 20% more than their female colleagues’.<sup>225</sup> Whilst no firm conclusions were reached, the experiments conducted in the search for an answer were thought provoking and indicated that cultural pressures play a significant part in both our physical traits and our biological development (which I will come to explain in a few moments). Whilst it was demonstrated that, ‘[m]en scored higher in a special awareness exam[s]... [and] women prevailed in emotion recognition’,<sup>226</sup> it was unclear if this was the result of cultural conditioning as opposed to inherent differences in the biological make-up (encouraging boys to be good at Maths, providing Lego for building, etc. whilst encouraging girls to excel in language, to care and look after people, to play with pretty pink dolls from a young age). Another examination involved ‘a troop of Barbary macaques [who] were given toys to see if males were drawn to trucks and females to dolls’.<sup>227</sup> It turned out that this was correct; the females were drawn to the dolls whilst the trucks drew the attention of the males. However, as the female Barbary macaques raise the young, it may be that the males recognized that connection and drew their attention to the only remaining foreign object, the truck. The experiment that yielded the most definitive results involved babies. The children were each presented to an adult as the opposite sex (the boy was presented as a baby girl and vice versa).

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<sup>222</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: ‘thought-provoking’. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>223</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: ‘thought-provoking’. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>224</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: ‘thought-provoking’. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>225</sup> Mosley M (2014) *Is Your Brain Male or Female?* Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-29405467> [13/12/2014]

<sup>226</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: ‘thought-provoking’. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>227</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: ‘thought-provoking’. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

Without realizing it, the adults limited the children's activities and picked the toys most associated with the assumed gender role. The children appeared ambiguous towards the different choices but the adults continued to encourage the "girl" to play with the doll and the "boy" to play with the cars and trucks- gender specific toys. The show also found that mother's 'pushed boys to achieve more than girls'<sup>228</sup> which, Roberts notes, 'would affect their ambitions and carry over into adulthood... It would become a self-fulfilling prophecy'.<sup>229</sup> Research has shown that the human brain is plastic, throughout life it continues to change and adapt as per our surroundings, the experiences and people who influence us. As Roberts tells us '[t]he human brain is malleable, particularly during adolescence, and any differences you see could simply be the product of stereotyping and social pressure'.<sup>230</sup>

Whether or not you endorse them, your brain will make unintended associations based on your environments. In basic terms, for example, if you see women behind a Hoover or cleaning, over time, you will subconsciously associate women with cleaning or housework. Likewise, if you see the glamorization of slender female models in magazines and advertising campaigns, you will associate that image with desirability and come to assign success with those attributes. In terms of development, this is 'an effortless and efficient way to learn about the world around you'<sup>231</sup> as associations are constructed 'without the need for awareness, intention and control'.<sup>232</sup> However, unlike explicitly held knowledge (that you choose to take on board) this is unconsciously communicated and therefore, not filtered. Nilanjana Dasgupta and Shaki Asgari at the University of Massachusetts have carried out numerous studies to demonstrate how influential, damaging and limiting these associations can be for the development of women. Their study showed how life itself, the people in our environments and the media can give rise to these associations and demonstrated that 'seeing women leaders reduced implicit self-stereotyping relative to controls... when they were portrayed as similar to one's ingroup... and oneself'.<sup>233</sup> We would expect then, that women surrounded and taught by powerful women in senior positions, would encourage the implicit association of women with words associated with strength, intelligence, power, decision-making,

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<sup>228</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: 'thought-provoking'. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>229</sup> Hogan M (2014) *Horizon: Is Your Brain Male or Female?*, BBC Two, review: 'thought-provoking'. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/11129004/Horizon-Is-Your-Brain-Male-or-Female-BBC-Two-review-thought-provoking.html> [09/12/2014]

<sup>230</sup> Mosley M (2014) *Is Your Brain Male or Female?* Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-29405467> [13/12/2014]

<sup>231</sup> Fine 2010: 5

<sup>232</sup> Fine 2010: 5

<sup>233</sup> Asgari S, Dasgupta N, Stout J G (2012) When Do Counterstereotypic Ingroup Members Inspire Versus Deflate? The Effect of Successful Professional Women on Young Women's Leadership Self- Concept. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38: 370-383.

etc. One of their experiments examined the effects of counterstereotypic information by asking a group of women to list words they associate with their sex both before and after reading biographies of powerful and influential women (Ruth Ginsburg, US Supreme Court Justice and the then CEO of e-Bay, Meg Whitman). Following exposure to powerful female figures, the women in the study were more likely to associate leadership words with women. This demonstrates, at least in part, that 'the patterns of their environment... altered the gender stereotypes represented in the implicit mind'.<sup>234</sup> Basically, gender inequality becomes not just a part of our minds, but also part of our biology. The circuits of our brains are a product of our 'physical, social and cultural environments'<sup>235</sup> as well as our thoughts and behaviours. What we do and experience 'creates neural activity that can alter the brain, either directly or through changes in gene expression'.<sup>236</sup> This is known as neuroplasticity. The idea that gender difference is the result of biological factors, such as hormone levels in the womb, is often referred to as neurosexism as it categorizes us according to our sex and values, as is always the case in a patriarchy, men over women. As Cordelia Fine writes in *Delusions of Gender* 'if you cuddle a baby, get a promotion, see billboard after billboard of near-naked women or hear a gender stereotype that places one sex at a higher status than the other, don't expect your hormonal state to remain impervious. It won't'.<sup>237</sup> The biological turns out to be cultural after all.

Taking this information about the development of the brain, societies gender hierarchy, and anorexia together, we start to see the myriad affects this can have on women. Arguments for a biological basis ultimately portray women as the "second sex". This reinforces gender inequality and ends up validating female stereotypes and the objectification of women (they are prescribed worth by way of the male gaze). This creates an insecurity regarding their bodies and begins a constant struggle for equality whilst simultaneously desiring to take up as little space as possible, to reduce their body boundaries. Here there is a fine line to negotiate as young women seek to meet the female stereotypes (in order to belong) whilst striving for increased meaning and substance. In reflecting upon the development of anorexia- in light of neuroplasticity- we can see how cultural influences can be far more destructive and damaging than we might have first thought. If what we see and hear can actually change the way our brains function and operate, we start to understand how important our environments are for our development throughout life and how damaging arguments for gender difference can be. One of the consequences of gender difference is stereotyping and assigning the normalised or "natural"- perceived as "acceptable"- gender

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<sup>234</sup> Fine 2010: 7

<sup>235</sup> Fine 2010: 236

<sup>236</sup> Fine 2010: 236

<sup>237</sup> Fine 2010: 236

performance on the populations of people that inhabit that space. It has been theorised that eating disorders, in particular anorexia, can develop within this environment as a struggle to meet these normalizing standards and expectations. As Naomi Goldenberg writes that ‘the very concept of “essential” biological differences has itself been rendered problematic since no perception of male and female uniqueness can ever be separated from its political and social underpinnings’.<sup>238</sup> It is the subject of female stereotypes that we will explore further now.

## Female Stereotypes

Gender traits, often referred to as “femininity” and “masculinity” ‘reflect stereotypes about the beliefs and behaviours typically attributed to men and women, which are acquired as they learn about the world and their roles in it’.<sup>239</sup> This knowledge shapes and structures gendered behaviour and serves to reinforce the pejorative understanding of femininity and masculinity. For example, walk into any mainstream toy store and two colours- pink and blue- will divide your world. A pink cloud of romance, happiness, and delicate prettiness will envelop one side, level or floor of the department store solely marketed towards daddy’s little princess and everything her heart desires. This appears in sharp contrast to the blue isles of “boys” toys for the budding builder, driver, knight in shining armour. Amongst the shelves of blue merchandise, our little soldiers can find everything they need to build and protect their little den whilst the girls (in what some would call a complimentary manner) are equipped with the mini Hoover, kitchen appliances and button nosed dolls to complete these make shift homes. How very helpful for fulfilling their gender roles in adulthood. As Natasha Walter describes in *Living Dolls*: ‘not only does this division between the pink girls’ world and the blue boys’ world still exist, it is becoming more exaggerated than ever in this generation’.<sup>240</sup> With the aid of dressing up costumes, girls are even encouraged to become the dolls they worship, to become Disney princesses.<sup>241</sup> Having said that, the industry is starting to grow up and show a more empowering role for women within these films. On the silver screen we now see

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<sup>238</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 61

<sup>239</sup> Behar R (2007) Gender-Related Aspects of Eating Disorders: A psychosocial View. In: Rubin J S (ed.) *Eating Disorders and Weight Loss Research*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 39-65 (54).

<sup>240</sup> Walter N (2010) *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London: Virago, 1-2.

<sup>241</sup> Here I refer to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida and their offering to ‘step inside an enchanted beauty salon that offers magical makeovers for young princesses and knights 3 to 12’. The picture accompanying this shows a room full of little girls immaculately dressed as Disney princesses (make-up and hair-spray carefully in place) and their accompanying ‘Fairy Godmothers’ on hand for ‘almost any magical wish’. This is clearly tailored to the Disney princess with packages ranging from \$59.99 to \$199.95 whilst the knight package consists of hairstyling with gel, a ‘mighty sword and shield’ and confetti for \$19.99. For more information see: Disney (2017) *Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique- Disney Springs*. Available at: <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/shops/disney-springs/bibbidi-bobbidi-boutique-marketplace/> [25/01/2017]

Sleeping Beauty take on her father, the dominating and controlling patriarch with the help of Maleficent, the powerful and feared matriarch of the Disney original back in 1959. There is a history (Salome, Delilah) of powerful, strong and defiant women portrayed as seductresses, temptresses and demonised as baby-eaters, devil worshippers and vampires to scare women into embodying the feminine ideals of the time. We need look no further than the story of Lilith- the first wife of Adam who was demonised simply because she would not succumb to the passive role of dutiful wife, because she demonstrated free will- to see this. Its a shame that Maleficent was played by a slender Angelina Jolie conforming to the thinness ideal, but hey- we have to start somewhere!

The fact is that we live in a patriarchal society and so men tend to be in positions of power and authority.<sup>242</sup> Even in the twenty-first century, this gender division still permeates every sphere of public and private life. The consequence of this position is that desirable, “normal” and valuable attributes tend to be associated with masculinity and men, and so cultural preoccupation is on men and the things they do. In such an environment, ‘both sexes are brought up to behave the same: to worship men and deride women’.<sup>243</sup> Tahmima Anam writes:

[t]he world is unequal... at some point, probably between college and your first job, you will realise that the cards are stacked against you. It may start from a very small thing, for instance being interrupted at a meeting at work; or something quite significant, such as discovery that your salary is less than half your male counterpart’s... you will start to see the world differently, and realise that every moment of your life, every experience has been coloured and influenced by your gender.<sup>244</sup>

Faced with this gender-biased environment it is understandable that a woman might seek to embody masculine traits whilst masking evidence of her femininity. Many scholars<sup>245</sup> examining the manifestation of anorexia draw upon society’s stereotypes, ideals of femininity and a fear of

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<sup>242</sup> Many feminist scholars have detailed extensive evidence to attest to the fact that we live in a patriarchal society. For a selection of examples see: Faludi S (1993) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Vintage; Greer G (2006) *The Female Eunuch*. London: Harper Perennial; Banyard K (2010) *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today*. London: Faber and Faber; and, Oakley A (2015) *Sex, Gender and Society*. New York: Routledge. Evidence of the patriarchal society we live in is evident in online articles such as the following from the Guardian website. This article discusses the gender based pay gap and shows images of everyday sexism. See: Bates L (2017) *The pocket money gap- and 10 other ways girls are taught they’re worth less*. Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/24/gender-pay-gap-boys-girls-pocket-money?CMP=fb\\_gu](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/24/gender-pay-gap-boys-girls-pocket-money?CMP=fb_gu) [25/01/2017]

<sup>243</sup> Bidisha (2013) *The Red Room*. In: Appignanesi L, Holmes R, Orbach S (eds.) *Fifty Shades of Feminism*. London: Hachette Digital, 38-44 (39).

<sup>244</sup> Anam T (2013) *Things Your Mother Never Told You (for fear you would demand a sex change)*. In: Appignanesi L, Holmes R, Orbach S (eds.) *Fifty Shades of Feminism*. London: Hachette Digital, 17-23 (21-22).

<sup>245</sup> One such scholar and social commentator is Naomi Wolf who writes that for her, adolescent starvation was a ‘prolonged reluctance to be born into womanhood if that meant assuming a station of beauty.’ As we have seen throughout this chapter and we go onto explore in Chapter Four, this idea resonates throughout literature surrounding the development of anorexia. For more information see: Wolf 1994: 103; and, Wolf 1990.

developing sexuality to explain the underlying features of the disorder. For example, in her research, Bruch<sup>246</sup> records voices of anorexic women who struggle to escape the female body as femininity is often associated with softness, and softness is associated with body fat, weakness and a lack of control, all negative attributes in the eyes of a patriarchal order which values control, discipline, competency and action. It really is no surprise that some women would strive towards “looking like a man” in this environment by rejecting the markings of femininity. However, as Lesley Heywood writes, this ultimately ends up reinforcing the status quo:

Anorexia is a reaction to pervasive cultural symbols related to femininity, and it tries to create its own symbols, a female body that “can do as much as any man can do,” that signifies competence, rather than dependence. But in the creation of this “new” symbol and body, the anorexic ironically upholds the very definition she fights against, accepting the pejorative definition of femininity.<sup>247</sup>

It is my belief that a woman living with a deep-seated dis-ease with her body, the extreme manifestation of which takes its form in anorexia, is the consequence of living in a patriarchy. As written by Isherwood, ‘it is difficult for women to be fully embodied under patriarchy, as it has been demonstrated in works relating to sexuality, and it may just be that food is seen as just as physical and sensual, as so to be restricted in women in a way it is not with men’.<sup>248</sup> I also think its important to remember that, as with any system, the people in power make the rules and it follows that these rules will suit them. Since we live in a world largely ruled by men, it is men who benefit and women who come to be evaluated in relation to male-defined norms. As de Beauvoir writes, ‘one is not born, one rather becomes a woman’<sup>249</sup> and her making is in order to support the male status quo. Furthermore, as marketing and advertising industries focus on catching the interests of younger consumers in more direct and meaning ways it is clear to see how feminine stereotypes and slender physiques are capturing the interests of children.

The consequence of this movement towards broadening consumer interest and extending marketing campaigns to include younger consumers is the sexualisation of childhood as they attempt to emulate the desired advertised aesthetic which in turn results in their increasing dissatisfaction with their existing bodies and the development of body sensitivity in respect of size and shape. This developing awareness of “beauty” trends is fed by the television content of skinny and scantily clad celebrities, dancing and singing about mature, usually sex and relationship related

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<sup>246</sup> For more information see: Bruch 1973; and, Bruch H (2001) *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*. London: Harvard University Press.

<sup>247</sup> Heywood 1996: 68

<sup>248</sup> Isherwood 2008: 176

<sup>249</sup> Beauvoir S D (1997) *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage Classics, 1.

themes.<sup>250</sup> If you are in any doubt of the validity of my statement I invite you to turn on your television and select one of the many music channels sure to be at your disposal. Within the space of a few minutes, at any time of the day, there will be “risky” content which includes at least one of the above themes. It is worrying and becoming increasingly common to see young children desiring to be smaller in an environment where they are encouraged by peers, celebrities and marketing influences to purchase “sexy” bikinis and flesh revealing clothes to emulate their favourite pop star role models; when playing ‘lovely little games in high heels, strip-teasing, flouncing and jutting their chests out’<sup>251</sup> is increasingly understood as constituting innocent and without risk playtime as if they are testing their boundaries instead of exaggerating the mainstream female ideal. It is within this environment that we see primary school aged children dressing up as naughty witches and scatterings of mini sexy fairies running playfully through the streets on Halloween. Instead of stepping back and considering the consequences of such behaviour many parents are buying the costumes and chalking it down as a part of mainstream childhood, a “phase” that children pass through.

By and large the sexualisation of childhood reinforces the message that a girl’s primary worth resides in her ability to be a sexual object whilst teaching boys that sex and violence are synonymous and that ‘women should be valued primarily for their ability to give them sexual pleasure’.<sup>252</sup> It also assumes that children are sexually mature due to the outward appearance of makeup, clothes and advanced puberty, and it allows ‘corporations to use materials or methods of production that release endocrine-disturbing chemicals into the environment, contributing to early puberty’.<sup>253</sup> Taught to please others, to constantly strive to meet the cultural ideal for women whilst being systematically objectified and sexualised ‘creates constant self-doubt and insecurity, problems that the rituals and obsessions of eating disorders can temporarily mask’.<sup>254</sup> This culture produces generations of either young women with ‘damaged self-esteem and an eating disorder or young men who cannot experience sexual pleasure with a woman whose body has not been surgically altered to reflect pornographic images’.<sup>255</sup>

The education system is lacking in providing the sexual education that teenagers need for healthy development and as such, information is gleaned from our highly sexualised media which

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<sup>250</sup> Richard Gordon, regarding anorexia, writes that ‘reports suggest that the disorder is emerging with greater frequency in younger, preadolescent children... has been attributed to increasing degrees of weight preoccupation and dieting among younger children, as well as to earlier emergence of the physical signs of puberty in females’. For more information see: Gordon 2000: 21.

<sup>251</sup> Lamb S (2003) *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do- Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt*. London: Simon and Schuster, 43.

<sup>252</sup> Olfman S (2008) *The Sexualisation of Childhood*. Connecticut: Praeger Publishers Inc., 2.

<sup>253</sup> Olfman 2008: 2

<sup>254</sup> Olfman 2008: 71

<sup>255</sup> Olfman 2008: 3

serves to perpetuate those expectations. Boys and men are not impervious to the destructive force of gender stereotypes and the sexualisation of childhood. Cultural mythology about all men being potential rapists, paedophiles and wife-batterers can be just as pernicious;<sup>256</sup> both sexes live in this culture and both are susceptible to the pervasiveness of cultural ideology and images however it is clear that women bear the brunt of our sexualised culture.

Female stereotypes and the sexualisation of childhood alongside the objectification of women are all contributing factors to creating dis-ease amongst women regarding their worth in society and send the message that they are always evaluated and assigned worth in relation to men and male desire. This industry targets consumers at a younger age with denigrating images of female sexuality that causes psychological damage for many young women and teenagers. This becomes the breeding ground for body insecurity, the development of low self-esteem and body confidence that can subsequently lead to the development of a more serious disorder, namely anorexia. In the context of this literature it is clear to see how these aesthetic values have taken root within the collective female consciousness.

#### Dieting and Consumer Capitalism

Creating a dis-ease between women and their embodiment is a big money-maker. Broadly speaking, the female diet market relies on the low self-esteem of women, as cultivated by the industries we have been discussing, to secure and guarantee their global success. As we shall explore now, *Weight Watchers* (for example) relies on an 84% reuptake rate to secure its profit margins. The success of consumer capitalism hinges on its ability to exacerbate, on a reoccurring basis, our sense of desire. For it to succeed, it must constantly ignite within the consumer a hunger for “more”, this more is constantly being reshaped and redefined so the consumer stays engaged. The system fails when consumers become bored and detached from this constant striving to “better” their circumstance. As written by Paul Campos, a ‘satisfied consumer ceases to consume, until he [sic] is no longer satisfied: Thus a kind of institutionalized sense of recurrent dissatisfaction is critical to the health

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<sup>256</sup> In a Guardian article promoting her new film, Anna Hathaway was quoted discussing the difference between toxic masculinity and male energy. She said that “Male energy is beautiful. Male energy is welcome. Male energy is necessary... That said, there has been a perversion of the beauty of male energy into this macho ideal that I don’t think services anybody”. I cite this because I believe we are seeing more well-known names using their public platforms to discuss issues that feminist commentators have been mulling over for decades. In 2017, an increase in public recognition of the difference between creative male energy and toxic masculinity and the danger it poses to life on this planet is paramount. For more information see: Anon (2017) *Anne Hathaway has psychic connection to giant monster in colossal trailer*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jan/19/anne-hathaway-colossal-trailer> [23/01/2017].



and expansion of consumer markets'.<sup>257</sup> In relation to the food and fat obsessed culture, broadly speaking, this all boils down to virtue and who is in possession of it. Within the Western world (locations where involuntary starving is rare) the ability to control one's food hungers and impulses has become associated with a number of highly regarded virtues. The slender form has come to symbolise the ability to control and sublimate desire in general, but most specifically in areas of employment, finance and economic interests. Some social commentators such as Greg Critser have noted that being overweight for many American corporations is a sure-fire career-killer.<sup>258</sup> The inference here is if you cannot control your body contours, how can you control your workload, your budget and your staff? Despite the clearly absurd generalisation that body weight is in some way synonymous with work ethic, intelligence, or discipline, the diet industry has capitalised on this message and exacerbated the link between thinness and virtue. Surely, logic dictates that the most focused employee is not the one who is distracted by the restraints of a perpetual diet or by obsessive exercise routines, it is the employee who is focused on the work in hand, who has the physical and mental energy to be innovative, creative and dedicated. However, telling people they are accepted as they are has never been a particularly successful money-maker. Not only are women battling against sexism in the workplace but they also have to adhere to strict body rules (much stricter than their male counterparts) if they are to approximate male success (a success often granted on the basis of their gender). The vast majority of dieters fail to maintain long-term weight-loss as once a diet results in the desired weight decrease the individual assumes the same pre-diet lifestyle that maintained the previous body size (this is elaborated on in a few moments). Weight is slowly regained and the cycle of diet-weight gain-diet is repeated. Less advertised by these various diets is the fact that weight loss takes place as part of a life-style change. The golden tenet is one of moderation instead of rules; black and white food polarities are unhelpful. Fat, sugar and carbohydrates are important features of a balanced diet alongside various fruits, vegetables and proteins. Losing weight is about maintaining a balance between varieties of foods. Moderation dictates that sharing a weekly pizza with a side salad as part of a balanced diet is healthier than having a full pizza or full salad to oneself but who's going to pay for that advise? A moderate lifestyle in which the individual is working towards a deep level of acceptance does not come with a guaranteed weight loss schedule or a 12-week plan. It does not come with the satisfaction of a purchase, that euphoria that accompanies an acquisition that promises access to a happier and more successful version of yourself. The aristocracy of thinness is made up on two overlapping

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<sup>257</sup> Campos P (2004) *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to your Health*. London: Penguin Books, 231.

<sup>258</sup> For more information see: Critser G (2003) *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

classes: those who have managed to control their calorie intake in order to achieve unnatural thinness, and the naturally thin. Thinness represents genetic luck, a combination of individual willpower and social privilege (those who have sufficient resources to be whatever culture desires) or an eating disorder, a psychological malady played out on human flesh. Individuals with anorexia violently cling to their virtue by refusing to surrender to contemporary humanities most gluttonous impulses. The features of anorexia of refusing to maintain a healthy body weight, a terror of becoming “fat”, engaging in compulsive food rituals and dividing food into “good” and “bad” fixed groups are actually exhibited (to varying degrees) by many of the individuals engaging in day-to-day yoyo dieting. The difference is that the anorexic woman takes this dangerous logic to deadly extremes.

Capitalism plays on female insecurities and the weight women are “permitted” to carry is a constant source of insecurity as we have been exploring. As Orbach writes: ‘girls are growing up today who think that constant dieting and being frightened of food are natural states’.<sup>259</sup> The diet industry is a capitalist dream. It taps into a self-generating market, a widespread target audience and has an incredibly high failure rate. If dieting worked, you would only have to do it once. The simple fact of the matter is that diets do not work. As Richard Klein writes, they ‘[n]ever have; never will’.<sup>260</sup> The success of capitalism hinges on consumers consuming and the more people diet, the more they desire what they cannot or should not have especially when it plays into one of the most universal of human needs. Diet companies rely on return custom; their profitability hinges on failure and maintaining the emotional connection between “healthy,” “happy” and “slender”. Fad diet books have commandeered a vast proportion of our book stores and cover a whole host of slightly varying diet schedules for those individuals desperate to achieve the culturally defined “healthy” body size. In addition to the books and magazines came the mainstream introduction of special “diet” foods, which included but was not limited to: frozen meals, crackers, biscuits and cakes, meal replacement bars and drinks, bread, pasta, nuts, seeds and animal products etc. The only food group that remained largely untouched was fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables. In addition to these new supermarket features came the advent of weight loss clinics that were no longer reserved for the morbidly obese but now catered for anyone who, by way of nature, did not naturally embody a svelte and slender frame. Herbal weight loss products in the form of drinks, pills, supplements etc. began to feature in advertising campaigns as a means of achieving weight loss goals. A great selling tactic as they persuade consumers to repeatedly invest their resources in shedding pounds in new and innovative ways. In *Body Wars*, Margo Maine writes that: ‘After all of the elaborate planning,

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<sup>259</sup> Orbach 2009: 96

<sup>260</sup> Klein R (2001) Fat Beauty. In: Braziel J E, LeBesco K (eds.) *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*. London: University of California Press, 19-37 (36).

garnering of resources, and emotional investment in weight loss, dieting still rarely works. Of those who lose 25 or more pounds, 90% will regain those pounds within two years, and 98% will regain the weight within five years. In fact, many regain more weight than they lose'.<sup>261</sup> The diet industry in the UK is worth an estimated £2bn in 2014 and between 2013 and 2014 it was estimated that 55% of the Britons actively tried to lose weight whilst only 5% of women claimed to never think about the weight of their bodies. The former director of Weight Watchers, Richard Samber, admitted that central to the success of the company was the fact that 84% of customers cannot maintain their weight-loss and so continue to attend meetings and purchase merchandise. It was estimated that only 1 in 100 "slimmers" successfully manage to maintain their weight loss for more than a year.<sup>262</sup> For many people, the decision to diet results in increased credit card debt and the erosion of self-esteem.

Bubbling under the surface of all this is a painful truth. People rarely feel physically better the slimmer they are (except for cases when weight gain has resulted in physical limitations) or because they feel they are a better person. Often people feel better and happier because of the responses this weight loss necessitates from family, friends, colleagues and peers as losing weight seems to result in people treating you like a more admirable person when you are "thin" rather than "fat". As Campos writes 'many of us do not have the psychic strength to resist that insidious message... recognizing the injustice of something does not necessarily rob that thing of its power over oneself'.<sup>263</sup> As we have already explored anorexia can often begin with a decision to diet. Very quickly the young woman starts to take immense satisfaction from the psychological control she can exert over her flesh. Slowly the compulsion to shed weight and engage in gruelling exercise routines takes root within her psyche and a disembodied sustenance denying personality starts to take shape within her mind. The paralysing intensity of this socially valued denial of food related indulgence, reinforced by cultural disdain for anyone who can be remotely identified as "fat" reinforces this compulsion and feeds her fears. There is no evidence that this situation will change anytime soon.

Susan Bordo and the "Axes of Continuity"

Consumer culture 'thrives on our capacity for excess'<sup>264</sup> and has a significant part to play in discussions surrounding the development of anorexia within our society as we have explored. We

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<sup>261</sup> Maine M (2000) *Body Wars: Making Peace with Women's Bodies*. Carlsbad, CA: Gurze Books, 45.

<sup>262</sup> For more information see: Goldhill O (2014) *A nation of weight watchers: Is our obsession with thin making us fat?* Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-health/11003614/A-nation-of-weight-watchers-is-our-obsession-with-thin-making-us-fat.html> [15/10/2016]

<sup>263</sup> Campos 2004: 243

<sup>264</sup> Bordo 2003: xxiii

are encouraged to indulge in everything we desire- fat, sugar, sex, mindless entertainment whilst ‘burgeoning industries centred on diet, exercise, and body enhancement glamourize self-discipline and code fat as a symbol of laziness and lack of will-power’.<sup>265</sup> It is very difficult in this environment to find stability and moderation and it is very easy to find yourself slipping towards an eating disorder. These tensions of consumer culture and the “dangerous paradox” of slender models advertising high fat, calorie dense foods, layered with the contradictions of being a woman in our time, are for Bordo, ‘succinctly embodied in the slenderness ideal’.<sup>266</sup> She analyses eating disorders as a social formation as opposed to a personal psychopathology and argues that they represent a “crystallization” of various historical and contemporary currents within our society. She writes that:

Western philosophy and religion... have a long history of anxiety about the female body as a source of hungers, needs, and physical vulnerabilities always threatening to spin out of control. But maintaining some zone of comfort with the body’s needs is especially difficult in our own time.<sup>267</sup>

Whilst the lean body presents itself in contrast to the fifties ideal of reproductive womanhood and declares itself as a non-domestic, post-feminist identity, it also expresses the discomfort women feel in their skins and communicates our societies discomfort with women’s increasing presence and power. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the slender ideal and the subsequent development of anorexia is not just about beauty, it relays messages of transcendence, invulnerability and perceived ambivalence, it’s about existing in a world beyond rejection and reprisal where you are untouchable, safe and in complete control of your emotions and body.<sup>268</sup> Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism*, writes that ‘[e]very age develops its own peculiar forms of psychopathology’<sup>269</sup> and taking this one step further, Bordo writes that anorexia ‘appears... as a remarkably over determined *symptom* of some of the multifaceted and heterogeneous distresses of our age’.<sup>270</sup> In this, she locates anorexia within a cultural milieu and establishes her argument that it manifests as a consequence of a variety of ‘cultural currents or streams’<sup>271</sup> that find their ‘perfect, precise expression in it’.<sup>272</sup> She calls these “currents” or “streams” the “axes of continuity” (“axes” because

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<sup>265</sup> Bordo 2003: xxi

<sup>266</sup> Bordo 2003: xxi

<sup>267</sup> Bordo 2003: xxi

<sup>268</sup> Ironically, whilst maintaining an extremely strict diet requires lots of personal control, anorexia shows just how out of control the individual ultimately is and how she battles to reconcile herself with her environment. As touched upon in Chapter One we see that anorexia has shown itself to have commonalities with other mental illnesses, namely obsessive-compulsive behavior (OCD) and depression. Maintaining the tightrope balance of control is a common feature in each syndrome.

<sup>269</sup> Lasch C (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York: Warner Books, 88.

<sup>270</sup> Bordo 2003: 142

<sup>271</sup> Bordo 2003: 142

<sup>272</sup> Bordo 2003: 142

they unite in the anorexic syndrome and continuity because once the “streams” are united, we start to see the resemblance they have to other social phenomena). These axes demonstrate the synchronicity anorexia has with not only other modern cultural practices (such as body-building and jogging) but also the historical similarities (such as tight corseting and other forms of extreme manipulation of the female body). In so doing, she starts to analyse the cultural building blocks central to the foundation of the development of anorexia. The three axes she explores are: 1) dualist axis; 2) control axis; and, 3) gender/power axis. We will explore each of these now.

The body has often been expressed through disembodied and dualistic terminology but finds its extreme expression within the anorexic individual. For example, in her work analysing the dreams of anorexic women, Marion Woodman<sup>273</sup> found that themes of death and dying, of caged and injured animals, categorised their unconscious moments. This was particularly interesting when considering her larger research which looked at analysing dreams as access points for the psyche and using the unconscious thoughts of her patients to interpret conscious choices. As this provided a broader understanding of the underlying issues, it allowed for a more bespoke approach to therapy. This is an important strategy as anorexia becomes manifest in such multi-faceted and myriad ways. She also found that words commonly associated with their bodies were increasingly dualistic in nature as they referred to them in terms of “cages” and “prisons” and of their true nature trapped and struggling to escape. As we will explore further in Chapter Five, Western societies dualistic heritage (which finds its roots in the philosophies of ancient Greece) and the idea that our existence is split into two realms- the bodily and material and the mental or spiritual- has remained as a persistent and ever-present ideology which, whilst not new as a theory, it is finding new expressions within contemporary society. Val Plumwood refers to them as conceptual weapons ‘which can be mined, refined and redeployed for new uses. So old oppressions stored as dualisms facilitate and break the path for new ones’.<sup>274</sup> Whilst this philosophy originates from Greek and Cartesian dualisms,<sup>275</sup> we see the philosophy of it in the basic body image of the anorexic and in her response to her bodies need for nourishment. Her ultimate goal is to transcend the body, to kill off its desires and hungers and ultimately, to learn to live without it.<sup>276</sup> Anorexic individuals are as obsessed with

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<sup>273</sup> For more information see: Woodman 1982; and, Woodman M (1985) *The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation*. Canada: Inner City Books.

<sup>274</sup> Plumwood V (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, 43.

<sup>275</sup> We will explore Greek and Cartesian dualistic philosophy in more detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>276</sup> The dualistic undercurrent of the contemporary experience of anorexia is discussed by Bordo in her essay, *The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity*, in which she interprets the cultural messages that underpin our embodiment within a philosophical frame of reference. Specifically she identifies the influence classical Greek thought on the body and mind has had on female embodiment and feminist reflections on that embodiment. She writes that we need to move away from earlier (1960s-1970s) dualistic constructions of feminism based on oppositional forces; ‘oppressors and oppressed, villains and victims’. For more information see: Bordo S

hunger as they are with being slim and because of their determination not to eat, their constant appetite haunts them. Bruch found that her patients were so scared that consuming just one bite of food would act as a catalyst to break down their carefully constructed defences and leave them unable to stop that they shunned even the smallest morsel. These women 'experience hunger as an alien invader, marching to the tune of its own seemingly arbitrary whims, disconnected from any normal self-regulating mechanism'.<sup>277</sup> They do not own their bodily sensations and desires and the regulation of food intake becomes something outside of the self.<sup>278</sup> The language used to describe this battle commonly takes the form of the good and the bad, right and wrong, pure and evil. This is also characteristic of the "ghost" often described by the anorexic woman, the disembodied voice of the "dictator" in her head objecting to the consumption of food. This voice, as noted by Bruch, is usually male and represents the stereotypical attributes of control, higher intelligence, greater spirituality and strength of will over the female body. These two sides remain in constant war and it is this battle that is exposed within the anorexic syndrome. Laura Metcalfe described this voice as her 'new best friend... which told... [her] what... [she] could and couldn't eat and what to do'.<sup>279</sup> Bordo proposes there are two levels of meaning to these gender associations. The first one has to do with 'fear and distain for the traditional female roles and limitations'<sup>280</sup> whilst the other is associated with a 'deep fear of "the Female," with all its more nightmarish archetypal associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability'.<sup>281</sup> As noted earlier, the development of anorexia within adolescence (a common period for this syndrome to take root) often expresses a fear of developing sexuality, of growing up and having a womanly reproductive body. Bruch noted that a desire to be a boy featured prominently in her patient's dreams. In most cases, the girls and young women did not consciously recognise this desire. As we will explore in the following two chapters, the desire to escape the female body is often interpreted as an unconscious protest 'involving anger at the limitations of the traditional female role, rejection of values associated with it, and fierce rebellion against allowing their futures to develop in the same direction as their mothers' lives'<sup>282</sup> and as such, parallels can be drawn with diagnoses of agoraphobia and hysteria in the nineteenth century as we will discuss in Chapter Four.

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(1997) *The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity*. In: Conboy K, Medina N, Stanbury S (eds.) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 90-113.

<sup>277</sup> Bordo 2008: 147

<sup>278</sup> This approach is not just limited to food intake but it also mirrored in other aspects of bodily activity such as distinguishing between temperatures, recognizing and expressing different emotions and anxiety.

<sup>279</sup> Metcalfe 2006: 13

<sup>280</sup> Bordo 2003: 155

<sup>281</sup> Bordo 2003: 155

<sup>282</sup> Bordo 2003: 156

With the control axis we take a closer look at the discipline and control exerted on the body through anorexia and other, arguably less extreme bodily practices, such as bodybuilding and marathon running. Mastery and control of the body are central features of each of these activities and this may be for several reasons. Firstly, these practices provide reassurances that the individual can overcome physical obstacles and push their bodies to the extreme in order to reach their goals. Secondly they allow the individual to absolutely control the size, shape and contour of their bodies, to create a masterpiece, a work of art. In this, a purely mental concept comes to have complete dominance over the individual's body. For the anorexic woman, who has a distorted view of her body, this desire to dominate and reduce her frame can be dangerously damaging and sometimes even fatal as her desire to embody slender (and beauty) ideals is now almost unobtainable without surgical assistance (despite what the magazines might tell us!) and also because of their distorted body image, the figure of "perfection" she desires will always remain elusive. This is carried out for a sense of security derived from believing you have control and independence of at least one aspect of your life. This acts in juxtaposition to their reality as it's often felt that they have little or no control over their environments (families, jobs, parental, peer and society's expectations). The female anorexic body bears the brunt of this struggle for control and power. This 'fantasy of body mastery'<sup>283</sup> also reflects our fear of old age and our constant desperate search for eternal youth. It 'reflects our alliance with culture against all reminders of the inevitable decay and death of the body'.<sup>284</sup> Ironically, even though the anorexic individual puts her life in danger by refusing to consume food and engaging in excessive exercise regimes, the dominant experience throughout this period is of invulnerability and immortality. In contemporary society there is a plethora of technology that will help us reverse the signs of old age, which will help people "improve" the dexterity of the body, retain mobility and rejuvenate, tighten, plump and smooth "problem" areas and more and more women are electing for such procedures. For the anorexic woman, in a world of excess and consumption, the act of denying the body the sustenance it craves can be understood in terms of a moral rebellion. This is not just an act of changing the body, but one of transcending it. Only this is not the act of control and discipline she might believe it to be. It actually communicates just how lost she is and how fraught her fight is within the environment she struggles to survive.

Anorexia is far from gender neutral. As we reflected upon in Chapter One, figures estimated by B-eat in 2015 suggest that female diagnoses of anorexia are in the range of 89%; almost 9 in every 10 cases were women whilst male admissions made up a total of 11%. It is importance here to remember that although the male incidences are on the increase, this still remains a predominantly

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<sup>283</sup> Bordo 2003: 153

<sup>284</sup> Bordo 2003: 153

female disorder.<sup>285</sup> For men, ‘individual style, wit, the projection of intelligence, experience, and effectiveness still go a long way... even in our fitness-obsessed culture’.<sup>286</sup> Yet, even with the same traits, women are required to display a slender, well-kept and keenly disciplined body whilst maintaining a delicate prettiness as expected from the female sex in order to gain access to the same advantages as her male counterpart. Take, for example, bodybuilding where competitive success for a man is evaluated based on the following three criteria ‘muscular mass (size), definition (absence of fat) and symmetry (overall balance and proportion)’.<sup>287</sup> And the same is true for women, right? *Wrong!* A fourth criterion must be evidenced when it comes to judging the female competitors, ‘namely, femininity’.<sup>288</sup> As written by Paul Reid-Bowen, ‘the female physique athlete must appear feminine or be judged and scored down accordingly... muscularity must be limited for the female’.<sup>289</sup> This sort of double standard is not uncommon but is often overlooked and rationalised by men and women. Anorexia comes as an unconscious response to these double standards even though the pathology (like hysteria and agoraphobia)<sup>290</sup> ‘actually function as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produced them’.<sup>291</sup> Anorexic women are protesting against the traditional female domestic role (which is associated with weakness and mental lassitude) and also the archetypal image of the female as all-needing, all-wanting, voracious and hungering. It is with these images in mind that she experiences her hunger as out of control and insatiable and the reason why she wants to transcend her “needy” body. Taken together, these axes highlight some of the cultural tensions “embodied” in the anorexic female body.<sup>292</sup> As Bordo argues, the female body is ‘constituted by culture’<sup>293</sup> and the social manipulation of the female body is crucial to the maintenance of power relations between the sexes. As women have traditionally been associated with the body in ways that men have not<sup>294</sup> and in Western dualistic thought, the body

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<sup>285</sup> Although I recognise that one reason for a lower male diagnosis rate may be less to do with exhibiting symptoms but more the consequence of themselves, medical professionals or therapists believing anorexia to be limited to the female sex.

<sup>286</sup> Bordo 2003: 154

<sup>287</sup> Reid- Bowen P (2008) Why Women Need to be Ripped, Shredded and Sliced. In: Isherwood L, Althaus-Reid M (eds.) *Controversies In Body Theology*. London: SCM Press, 207-227 (214).

<sup>288</sup> Reid-Bowen 2008: 214

<sup>289</sup> Reid-Bowen 2008: 214

<sup>290</sup> The themes and commonalities of which we will explore in Chapter Four.

<sup>291</sup> Bordo 2003: 159

<sup>292</sup> There are many more “currents” we could look at, for example, we could also draw parallels between the elements of control and power exhibited within obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and also draw commonalities with marathon running and iron man competitions etc. where control, discipline and mastery over the body are central themes.

<sup>293</sup> Bordo 2003: 142

<sup>294</sup> As we shall explore in the following chapters, the body has commonly been understood as women’s sphere in mythology, family life, philosophical, scientific and religious ideology as we will continue to explore throughout this thesis.



has been understood as disruptive and base, it can be of no surprise that the anorexic woman, in escaping her body, is attempting to escape her female gender.

As we have seen, within research on eating disorders and the manifestation of anorexia, society is often cited as the underpinning ill that creates the ideology for discontent. Media imagery, the fashion and beauty industries, neurosexism, female stereotypes, the sexualisation of childhood and the objectification of women are all named as pervasive societal institutions that foster certain ideas regarding bodily practices and norms of beauty. I hope to have demonstrated the multifaceted nature of anorexia. It is not just the consequence of a particular action; its development is far more complex than that. As examined with Bordo's "axes of continuity" our dualistic heritage, the female body as a battleground for control and power and gender hierarchy alongside family life and expectations and issues surrounding the construction of identity (as we explored in the previous chapter) can all play a significant part in the aetiology of disordered eating and anorexia. It has been suggested that anorexia has been around for centuries 'and that our modern obsession and the meteoric rise in diagnoses arises less out of a growing trend and more out of our desire to label everything'.<sup>295</sup> However, this argument carries little weight when you consider the same could be said for diabetes and other illnesses. We need to crawl below the surface of the striking physical features of anorexia to uncover the real issues at the heart of this expression.

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<sup>295</sup> Lynn 2012: 3

### Chapter Three- The Female Body as a Politically Mediated Form

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one *man* in *his* time plays many parts.

William Shakespeare<sup>296</sup>

ONE is not born, but rather one becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Simone de Beauvoir<sup>297</sup>

The body politic refers to the people living in a politically organised society and is a term predominantly used in reference to the policies and practices implemented by the powers of society to regulate the human body; to control its movements and gestures. These disciplines include institutional power communicated through government and laws, disciplinary power exercised in consumption, and personal power negotiated in intimate relationships. Like all political processes, 'the social construction of women's bodies develops through battles between groups with competing political interests and with differential access to power and resources'<sup>298</sup> and can often serve as a 'powerful tool for controlling women's lives by fostering material changes in women's lives and bodies'.<sup>299</sup>

The following chapter examines how ideas about the female body affect women's lives and how these ideas develop within the psyche of women and manifest themselves in destructive ways, namely through the development of anorexia. In the previous section, I examined how ideas about women's bodies are socially constructed so now its time to look at how these social constructions can be used to control women's lives, and how women can resist these forces. I will do this through carrying out an examination of the "docile", watched body taken from the writings of Michael Foucault, gender as performative (and what I believe to be the slender performance) from Judith Butlers thesis, an examination of Marion Woodman's ritual of transformation and Naomi Goldenberg's conceptualisation of myth and fantasy as we search to find the lost goddess in both the female body and in society. Through an examination of these theories and discussions surrounding them I hope to show how society's stereotypes and idealisations have been questioned but not quite displaced.

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<sup>296</sup> Shakespeare W (1959, 2000) *As You Like It*. Middlesex: Penguin, 69. My emphasis.

<sup>297</sup> Beauvoir 1997: 1

<sup>298</sup> Weitz R (2003) *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, And Behaviour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, ix.

<sup>299</sup> Weitz 2003: ix

## Foucault and the Body Politic

In 1979 Foucault argued that the rise of 'parliamentary institutions and of new conceptions of political liberty was accompanied by a darker counter-movement, by the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body'.<sup>300</sup> Foucault described how the classical age discovered the body as a target of power that may be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved'.<sup>301</sup> He argued that across all societies, the body is in the grip of strict disciplinary powers, which impose constrictions, prohibitions and obligations on it. These forces culminated to create, what he described as the "docile body"; the product of the disciplined, subjected and practiced body. Three features were cited as creating this environment of disciplinary power; 1) the scale of control; 2) the object of control; and, 3) the modality of control. In these three features we see the body being insulated through segregation and isolation, treated coercively through control of its movements, gestures and attitudes and taught to monitor these behaviours through control of time throughout the life of the subject. Foucault argues that these disciplines became general formulas of domination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That they were 'meticulous, often minute, techniques, but they had their importance: because they defined a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body, a 'new micro-physics' of power... as if they tended to cover the entire social body'.<sup>302</sup> He believed that governments (through organizations such as schools, hospitals, prisons) organize people and create around them a mechanism of power that allows them to see the smallest event that occurs in the state. In so doing, the state was able to...

... establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using.<sup>303</sup>

He described these institutions in terms of living organisms and machines as he argued that this form of discipline is organic, genetic and cellular. Through fixing the individuals in space and time (a central element of Foucault's thesis) the institutions regulate the way in which people act and think and so the disciplined subject is controlled absolutely through power and technology. Of course, this is a very simplistic overview of Foucault's comprehensive thesis on the "docile body" but it does help

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<sup>300</sup> Bartky S L (2003) Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power. In: Weitz R (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, And Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 25- 45 (25).

<sup>301</sup> Foucault M (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books, 136.

<sup>302</sup> Foucault 1991: 139

<sup>303</sup> Foucault 1991: 143

emphasise the degree to which societies are able to regulate and police individuals. In reading Foucault's work, it's interesting to note that distinctions are not made between gendered bodies. Women, like men, are subjected to the same disciplinary forces described by Foucault but he appears to be blind to the disciplines that produce a type of embodiment that is specifically feminine. Sandra Lee Bartky argues that overlooking the forms of subjection that engender the female body 'is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed'<sup>304</sup> and therefore reproduce the sexism that is endemic throughout Western political theory. She identifies three categories of disciplinary practices that produce a body in which appearance and gesture are recognizably feminine; 1) the practices that aim to produce a body of a certain size; 2) those that encourage a specific range of gestures, postures and movements; and, 3) those that are directed towards displaying these ideals on an ornamented surface. She writes:

... the woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day... who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo... or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become... a self-policing subject, a self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance... a form of obedience to patriarchy.<sup>305</sup>

Bartky noted that the "docile bodies" of women are constructed through disciplinary practices which communicate a perpetual and exhaustive regulation of the body's size and shape, its appetite, gestures and postures and general bearing in space alongside the appearance of each of its visible parts.<sup>306</sup> This culminates in women being unable to begin re-visioning their bodies until they learn to read the cultural messages that are inscribed upon them daily and until they 'come to see that even when the mastery of the disciplines of femininity produces a triumphant result... [they] are still only women'.<sup>307</sup>

As styles of the female figure reflect cultural preoccupations and obsessions, they vary over time and across cultures. The introduction of Twiggy in the mid-1960s marked a shift towards a slender ideal that bordered on emaciation and caught women in a perpetual pre-adolescent state. Advertising campaigns, magazine and newspaper articles, medicine, etc. have all promoted this ideal and recommend dieting and exercise as a means of achieving it. Dieting disciplines the body's hungers as 'appetite must be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will'.<sup>308</sup> The body becomes an enemy, as food and nourishment are a basic human need promoting a dualistic approach to the body and mind. The difference between the approach men and women take when

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<sup>304</sup> Bartky 2003: 27

<sup>305</sup> Bartky 2003: 43-44

<sup>306</sup> Bartky 2003: 41

<sup>307</sup> Bartky 2003: 44

<sup>308</sup> Bartky 2003: 28

it comes to food is mirrored in other aspects of public and private life as captured by German photographer Marianne Wex in 1979. In a series of over five thousand photographs and media images Wex captured significant differences in male and female movements, gestures, and posture.<sup>309</sup> She found that women make themselves ‘small and narrow, harmless; they seem tense; they take up little space’<sup>310</sup> whilst men, assume what is referred to as a “proffering position”, as they expand into the available spaces, legs thrown wide, crotch visible, arms open, palms out. It was also found that a man’s stride is longer and has more spring and rhythm to it; ‘he walks with toes pointed outward, holds his arms at a greater distance from his body, and swings them further’.<sup>311</sup> In contrast, women were found to hold their arms closer to their bodies, palms to the side, walk guarded and with the additional constraint of high-heeled shoes, the ‘body is thrown forward and off balance’<sup>312</sup> resulting in a shorter stride as she attempts to walk under these difficult conditions. Finer disciplines are evident through women’s taught expressions of deference as under male scrutiny ‘women... avert their eyes or cast them downward; the female gaze is trained to abandon its claim to the sovereign status of seer’.<sup>313</sup> Women are also taught to smile more than men,<sup>314</sup> be gracious, exercise deference and be expected to have a readiness to serve, basic prerequisites for many women’s jobs.<sup>315</sup> Not only are women’s bodies expected to exhibit these restrictions but they are also expected to demonstrate grace and eroticism (albeit restrained by modesty). All this should be displayed in the right way and there is discipline involved in this process too. From the application of make-up and fashion to adhering to male desires that a woman’s body be soft, supple, hairless and smooth whilst betraying the years and appearing line-ness showing no signs of age, deep thought or the wisdom of experience. These practices reinforce Foucault’s position and can be understood in ‘light of the modernization of patriarchal domination, a modernization that unfolds historically’.<sup>316</sup>

The body as a “site” of “disciplinary power” was further developed by Post-Structuralism which contributed two additional elements. In drawing on the theories of Foucault, the movement

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<sup>309</sup> These pictures are a little dated now having been collected between 1974 and 1977 but nevertheless, her conclusions are very much valid and illuminating even when considered in the context of contemporary society. Alongside her examination of the sculptures of the last 3,000 to 4,000 years, Wex came to the conclusion that ideals of body language and body forms between the sexes are more different today (1979) than they have been at any other point in history. Wex M (1984) *Let’s Take Back Our Space: “Female” and “Male” Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures*. Germany: Frauenliteratur Verlag.

<sup>310</sup> Bartky 2003: 30

<sup>311</sup> Bartky 2003: 30

<sup>312</sup> Bartky 2003: 30

<sup>313</sup> Bartky 2003: 30

<sup>314</sup> In a smile elicitation study it was found that the rate of smile return by women was significantly higher than found with men. Women are also encouraged to stand with their stomachs pulled in, shoulders thrown back and chest out in order to display their breasts to the best advantage. For more information see: Henley N (1977) *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Non-Verbal Communication*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

<sup>315</sup> For more information see: Hochschild A R (2012) *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>316</sup> Bartky 2003: 27

encouraged recognition of the fact that configurations of power are never seamless, however comprehensive and far-reaching, there are always new opportunities for resistance. Post-Structuralism also encouraged us to acknowledge and recognize that the body is not only shaped by social norms and habitual practices of prescribed gender norms, but is also mediated by language: by metaphors, for instance, microbes as “invading”, and an egg as “waiting” for sperm, alongside the use of binary oppositions such as male/female and inner/outer which ultimately organize and animate our experience and perception. Therefore, we have ‘no direct, innocent, or unconstructed knowledge of our bodies; rather, we are always reading our bodies according to various interpretive schemes’.<sup>317</sup> These insights have informed and influenced the later writings on the politics of the body; a notable case of this is with the work of Judith Butler.

### Gender Performativity

Drawing on the work of Foucault and emerging from her readings of Derrida and Post-Structuralism, Butler asserted that feminism exhibits ‘juridical systems of power’<sup>318</sup> that ‘produce subjects they subsequently come to represent’.<sup>319</sup> She sought to demonstrate how the classification of women had been deployed in feminism in order to show how feminisms uses of that term ‘far from being neutral, are deeply implicated in power relations’.<sup>320</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Butler set out to critique and disrupt the categories of sex, gender, identity and desire and argued that femininity is ‘a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh’.<sup>321</sup> She sought, therefore, to challenge the way in which feminism attempted to represent women, both politically (in protecting their interests) and linguistically (to challenge and change the definitions of the terms in use). Butler argued that ‘far from feminist representations of women... being simple reflections of what women are... they are, in fact mechanisms of power through which women are themselves constructed as particular kinds of subject’.<sup>322</sup> She argued that feminism made a mistake in asserting that “women” shared common interests and characteristics, which created ‘an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations’<sup>323</sup> that reinforced a binary understanding of gender in which women and men were divided into two separate and distinct groups. Therefore, feminism limited the possibilities for women and men to choose and form their own individual identities. She

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<sup>317</sup> Bordo 2003: 298

<sup>318</sup> Butler J (1990, 2007) *Gender Troubles*. London: Routledge, 2.

<sup>319</sup> Butler 2007: 2. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>320</sup> Lloyd M (2007) *Judith Butler*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 26.

<sup>321</sup> Bartky 2003: 27. Quoted: Butler J (1985) Embodied Identity in De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, March 22, 1985.

<sup>322</sup> Lloyd 2007: 26

<sup>323</sup> Butler 2007: 8

wrote that whilst feminism dismissed the notion that our biology is our destiny, it created an understanding of culture that assumed that feminine and masculine genders would unavoidably be inscribed, by culture, upon “female” and “male” bodies. As a consequence, any other destiny was rendered inaccessible. She responds to this with her theorization of gender as performative and her support of a political practice based on ‘subverting compulsory heterosexuality, [and through offering]... a radical critique of sex as natural and innate, she... contests the viability of woman as a unitary category’.<sup>324</sup> In so doing, Butler had a considerable impact on feminist debate and significantly structured the early writings on Queer Theory.<sup>325</sup> However, it is within the heterosexual matrix and her notion of gender performativity that I am most interested.

The “heterosexual matrix” (a means of understanding sex, gender and desire that later became heterosexual hegemony in *Bodies That Matter*) was conceptualized by Butler as the mechanism that generates ideal relations between sex, gender and desire and which understands gender as resulting naturally from sex and desire (or sexuality) as understood to follow naturally from gender. The consequence of this conceptualization is that ultimately sex determines how we perform desire and sexuality and creates a right/wrong dichotomy that labels heterosexuality as the norm. Butler argued that in order to live a livable life (one that is recognized as having legitimacy and value); individuals must first be recognized as viable subjects (those that do not deviate from the norm). Therefore, she concluded that any regime of cultural intelligibility hinges on normative violence (violence created by the norms in the generation of livable lives). It is the concept of intelligible genders<sup>326</sup> that reinforces and maintains the matrix. If an individual deviates from these prescribed norms, they are considered to be unintelligible and therefore, not a viable subject. Thus, if according to heteronormativity, ‘to be human is to be heterosexual, then consequently anyone who is not... is not fully human’<sup>327</sup> and as such they forgo social, legal and political validity. A central element of gender politics is the act of exposing the regulatory and fictitious nature of compulsory heterosexuality whilst seeking legitimation for non-normative sexual minorities. Butler’s primary political aim therefore, was to broaden the parameters of heteronormativity and to make life possible for those who were considered unintelligible. It was from this that gender performativity was expanded upon.

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<sup>324</sup> Lloyd 2007: 25

<sup>325</sup> Queer Theory developed out of Butler’s book *Gender Troubles* and challenged the assumptions made by feminism that “male” and “female” binaries are fixed which both assumed and reinforced heterosexuality as the norm (this saw everything else as *Other* and therefore not viable). One of the key questions posed was why do some bodies matter more than others? It was intended to open up new possibilities for feminism but instead marked the start of a new discipline, that of Queer Theory.

<sup>326</sup> “Intelligible” genders are those that ‘institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire’. See Butler 2007: 23.

<sup>327</sup> Lloyd 2007: 35

The concept of gender performativity asserted that gender is the result of reiterated acting which produces a normal or static gender whilst masking the contradiction and volatile nature of any individuals gender act. This produces a “true gender”, a narrative sustained by the collective commitment to perform, sustain, and produce polar and discrete genders as a cultural fiction and punishments resulted from not “playing your part” and agreeing with these fictions. The drag performance was an example used by Butler as it offered a basic understanding of binarism in its emphasis on the performative nature of gender. The inference being that the subject<sup>328</sup> could do, at will, the gender they wish to embody at any given time but this was not what Butler intended. She wrote that drag should not be considered to be an honest expression of the performer’s intent but rather the performance can only be fully understood through reference to what is excluded from the subject within the domain of bodily reality. She argued that drag highlights the disjunction ‘between the body of the performer and the gender that is being performed... [and] effectively reveals the imitative nature of *all* gender identities’.<sup>329</sup> In other words, it exposes the artificial nature of our gender identity and reinforces her argument that gender is a series of repetitive acts, a “strategy” which has ‘cultural survival as its end... it is a repetition, a copy of a copy’.<sup>330</sup> However, the subject is not free to choose which gender he or she is going to enact. The “performance” is always determined within the limited regulatory framework and the subject is required to participate in this performance if s/he is to be considered viable and legitimate in our society. The performativity of gender is a repetition, often of painful and oppressive gender norms developed, informed and sustained by and throughout history. Thus, the performance is not a ‘freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in’.<sup>331</sup> When we perform our genders we do so by strictly adhering to our society’s idealizations of what it means to fully embody femininity (and masculinity) at any given time. The performance is not merely limited to our gestures and mannerisms but also is created through speech and language. For example, speech act theory is the belief that our words not only *represent* what we endeavor to communicate but in certain circumstances they actively *do* something. This is true when a vicar pronounces a couple husband and wife in the marriage ceremony; their status as a couple changes. Butler explains that ‘within speech act theory, a

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<sup>328</sup> Butler’s use of the term “subject” as opposed to “individual” or “person” draws upon the work of Jacques Lacan and refers to the underlying linguistic nature of our position within the “symbolic order”. She uses this term to stress her argument that our identity is an illusion which is retroactively created through our performances.

<sup>329</sup> Salih S (2007) On Judith Butler and Performativity. In: Lovaas K E, Jenkins M M (eds.) *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life*. California: Sage Publications, 55- 68 (57). Author’s emphasis.

<sup>330</sup> Salih 2007: 58

<sup>331</sup> Kotz L (1992) *The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler*. Artforum 31 (3): 82-89. Available at: <http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/KotzButler.pdf> [05/06/2014]



performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names'.<sup>332</sup> She takes this further by exploring the ways that language creates our reality through everyday speech acts. As, from the moment we gender a fetus we inscribe upon that unborn child a performance that from the moment of birth is enacted by that child as s/he learns what is and is not acceptable. Butler writes:

To the extent that the naming of the "girl" is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain "girling" is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a "girl", however, who is compelled to "cite" the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of choice, but the forcible citation of norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment.<sup>333</sup>

Butler argues that there is no sex that is not already gendered, that all bodies are gendered at the beginning of their social existence and there is no existence that is not social.<sup>334</sup> Ultimately this means that there is no "natural body" that exists prior to social inscription. She takes this concept further in her claim that there is no identity, no "I" that exists separately or prior to gender performativity; 'that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'.<sup>335</sup> It is here that a distinction between performance and performativity needs to be explained. Butler does not assert that gender is a performance; rather she argues that performance assumes a preexisting subject whilst performativity contests the notion of the subject.<sup>336</sup> She asserts that gender is performative to the extent that it creates the identity that it is claimed to be, for Butler there is no 'doer behind the deed, no volitional agent that knowingly "does" its gender, since the gendered body is inseparable from the acts that constitute it'.<sup>337</sup> She is clear in her assertion that our gender acts are the effect of discourse; that there is no pre-linguistic essence or inner core. It is within the very idea of performativity that Butler seeks liberation from this oppressive structure, through re-inscription (what she terms re-citation).

Central to Butler's conceptualization of re-citation is the concept of agency, the subject's compulsion to repeat acts and their ability to repeat these acts differently. It is here that re-citation has the possibility to become a subversive act through the use of "parodic styles" such as drag and acts 'that denaturalize what they are performing by demonstrating explicitly the ways in which the

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<sup>332</sup> Butler J (1993, 2011) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 13.

<sup>333</sup> Butler 2011: 232

<sup>334</sup> Salih 2007: 55

<sup>335</sup> Butler 2007: 34

<sup>336</sup> Salih 2007: 56

<sup>337</sup> Salih 2007: 56

natural is produced'.<sup>338</sup> For Butler, drag illuminates the fictitious nature of gender performativity and it is from this revealing that the subversive repetition of acts can take its form. A repetition can be subversive if 'it exposes what is taken to be natural or authentic to a particular sex, when it compels us to question what is real'.<sup>339</sup> In so doing, these norms cannot only be resisted but also re-worked. It's through this that we have a means of contesting the naturalisation of heteronormativity and thus, produce alternative domains of cultural intelligibility. Therefore, Butler's subversive gender politics can be broken down and summarised as follows: 1) the individual's ability to identify those potentially oppressive norms that need to be interrogated and challenged; 2) denaturalisation (to question what we consider to be natural); and, 3) agency (the subjects ability to repeat acts differently, to change the "rules" by which we live). However, before I explore the ways in which Butler conceives of her subversive politics I would like to take a step back and reflect upon the ways in which femininity is produced in society in light of the slender ideal, gender inequalities and female stereotypes.

#### The Slender Performance

We live in a food-and-body obsessed culture as we are encouraged to over consume by the marketing techniques of multi-million dollar corporations before being reprimanded by both governmental and medical establishments. Alongside these pressures we are bombarded with images in the media of computer enhanced size 0 models who are airbrushed to perfection, as it seems to have become an unspoken rule that you must adhere to if you are to be classified as beautiful, successful and desired. Appearance is being taken as a 'reflex of the self and the penalties of bodily neglect are a lowering of one's acceptability as a person, as well as an indication of laziness, low self-esteem and even moral failure'.<sup>340</sup> And so, the twentieth and twenty-first century has seen the thin woman become society's legitimate subject as she meets the damaging and debilitating standards of society; she has succeeded where the overweight woman has not. Furthermore, as the slim form becomes mandatory 'almost every conceivable consumer product is discovered to have slimming properties'<sup>341</sup> which is further drawn upon by Kim Chernin who writes:

When we see another calorie counter on the stand, or read of another miracle diet in a woman's magazine, or pick up another container of low-calorie cottage cheese, we must

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<sup>338</sup> Lloyd 2007: 54

<sup>339</sup> Lloyd 2007: 56

<sup>340</sup> Featherstone M (1996) *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 186.

<sup>341</sup> Featherstone M (2001) *The Body in Consumer Society*. In: Banks D, Purdy M (eds.) *The Sociology and Politics of Health: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 228- 237 (233).

begin to understand these trivial items symbolically and realize that what we are purchasing is the covert advice not to grow too large and too powerful for our culture.<sup>342</sup>

Naomi Wolf expands upon this cultural fixation with thinness and writes that it is not an obsession with female beauty but an obsession with female control and obedience. She argues that if our 'culture's fixation on female fatness or thinness were about sex, it would be a private issue between a woman and her lover; if it were about health, between a woman and herself'.<sup>343</sup> This led Wolf to conclude that the attention afforded to the size, weight and shape of women in our society is actually 'about how much social freedom women are going to get away with or concede'.<sup>344</sup> The media's analysis and attention towards female fat and the elimination of it is actually bulletins of the sex war: 'what women are gaining or losing in it, and how fast'.<sup>345</sup> The patriarchal family is a key player in this political positioning as it reinforces passivity and produces an environment where it is difficult for the girl or young woman to establish a clear personal identity. It creates a crisis of the self that is "resolved" by turning on the self. The fashion industry and media influences are also central to this development.<sup>346</sup>

We are taught to judge our bodies by the standards set on the front cover of magazines. These are created according to the "norms" and stereotypes taught, reinforced and sustained by society and emerges out of a history of control over the female body and as a consequence of living in a patriarchy and consumer culture which creates a problem and then sells us the solution, encouraging us to "let go", to feed our fantasies and desires that they have created. We have all seen those magazine pictures that chastise female celebrities for gaining weight or for the folds of flesh that escape tight clothing. The rhetoric underlying these comments is pervasive, far-reaching and never ending as perfection can never be fully realized. There are always new ways to alter and change the body, new fashions to keep women on their toes. Perfection for women so caught up in this discourse is never fully achievable. Images objectifying women and weight stereotyping displays dangerous and deeply destructive rhetoric for women of all shapes and sizes and sends the message

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<sup>342</sup> Chernin 1994: 96

<sup>343</sup> Wolf 1990: 186

<sup>344</sup> Wolf 1990: 187

<sup>345</sup> Wolf 1990: 187

<sup>346</sup> Studies have shown that exposure to ultra-thin models, in the media and advertising, leads to increased body dissatisfaction amongst a large proportion of women. For example, studies on the effect that thin media images have on body satisfaction (in women) have shown that body image is significantly more negative following the viewing of thin media images as opposed to viewing images of inanimate objects, plus size models or average sized models. Furthermore, the studies showed that the effect was stronger for those participants less than 19 years of age. For more information see: Groesz L M, Levine M P, Murnen S K (2002) The Effects of Experimental Presentation on Thin Media Images on Body Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 31 (1) 1-16.

that the only women who will “have it all” are those that can conform to these narrowly defined ideals.

Using Butler’s argument, if sex determines gender, desire and the effect of identity (acts, gestures, clothes, corporeality etc.), it also can be said to determine what aesthetic individuals in that society desire and therefore, what aesthetic they seek to project. The message projected to women in society is that to be successful, desired, to be part of the elite, they must exhibit all those desirable attributes which are considered to be exclusive to those individuals that conform most successfully to the slender ideal. Therefore, taking a step back from Butler’s thesis and when considered alongside what we know of the cultural situation of women today, I believe that a “slender performance” is taking place through the mannerisms, gestures, language, and actions of women in our society which is most evident in the extreme aestheticism of the anorexic individual. This performance is an extension of enacting our gender norms and adhering to societies female idealizations that inevitably take place within a framework of normative violence. As Marion Woodman notes:

Fat in our culture is taboo, so the neurosis hits where it hurts most – at the heart of the female ego. The fat girl is not one of her peers: she cannot eat the junk foods, she is not invited to the adolescent parties, she cannot wear jeans, she is not attractive sexually. In short, in our society she is not female, and no one knows it as well as she.<sup>347</sup>

In other words, the fat girl is not a viable or legitimate subject in our culture. She is relegated to the margins of society by her peers who fear her wholesome, powerful, womanly body and all that it is understood to represent by the men and women who have internalized masculine goals ‘that are in themselves a parody of what masculinity really is’.<sup>348</sup> I understand the “embodiment” of the slender ideal, along with gender identity, to be ‘a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo’.<sup>349</sup> The slender performance does not just refer to the slender ideal in our society but is a symptom of the general female stereotypes that inform the female standing in society; those stereotypes that value attributes of vulnerability, weakness and frailty as attractive and desirable. For me the slender performance, the extreme manifestation of which is anorexia, is a physical reflection of the situation of women today and embodies the search for wholeness, for substance and meaning in a consumer driven world in which material products have replaced spiritual fulfillment.<sup>350</sup> However, unlike Butler’s *gender performativity*, I believe there is a slender

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<sup>347</sup> Woodman 1982: 7

<sup>348</sup> Woodman 1982: 7

<sup>349</sup> Butler J (1990) *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. In: Case SE (ed.) *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 270-83 (271).

<sup>350</sup> A theme I will discuss in further detail in Chapter Six.

*performance* taking place. I draw this distinction because I am uncomfortable with Butler's assertion that there is no pre-discursive subject.

In distinguishing between performance and performativity, Butler has been accused of reducing agency to a 'doing without the doer'<sup>351</sup> and therefore putting an end to feminisms emancipatory politics and of causing the 'death of the subject'.<sup>352</sup> If we are no more than the sum total of the gender expressions we perform, do we have the authority to identify and change our own situation, of enacting the performance differently? There appears to be a problem with Butler's conceptualisation of agency and therefore with a subversive politics built solely upon the actions of a fully discursive subject. An obvious question to ask, for example, is how might a performative subject, one solely produced through doing certain acts, contest heteronormativity as everything known by the subject exists within this oppressive framework? Some readers of Butler's work regard her as proposing a voluntarist politics in which subversive identities can be fabricated and reshaped at will, where the subject can intentionally make "gender trouble". Others argue that performativity is a form of determinism where subjects are locked into oppressive relations of power that they are unable to change.<sup>353</sup> Allison Weir argues that 'feminist politics requires a subject with the ability to act deliberately and consciously to change its situation'<sup>354</sup> and states that Butler's account of agency fails to provide this. Instead she provides us with a performative subject fully determined who has no scope for autonomous action. Thus, Weir concludes that Butler's subversive politics lacks a meaningful concept of agency.

However, does the lack of an autonomous and reflective human have to put an end to Butler's subversive politics? Butler appears to argue that the practices that produce gendered subjects are the 'material of social transformation'<sup>355</sup> instead of activities that need to be overcome or eliminated. For her, subversion does not take place in a 'site or quality prior to or outside of discourse',<sup>356</sup> that the practices that produce gendered subjects can be identified and subverted from within the very discourses that bind us. In drawing upon Foucault and the idea that power relations not only limit but also enable possibilities for political action, that configurations of power are never seamless however comprehensive and far-reaching, Butler argues that whilst there may not be a pre-discursive subject, agency still exists. There are always new opportunities for resistance. Agency here is located within the subject's compulsion to repeat and subversion becomes possible through the

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<sup>351</sup> Benhabib S (1995) *Feminism and Post Modernism*. In: Benhabib S, Butler J, Cornell D, Fraser N (eds.) *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. London: Routledge, 17-35 (22).

<sup>352</sup> Flax J (1990) *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. Oxford: University of California Press Ltd, 32.

<sup>353</sup> Lloyd 2007: 57

<sup>354</sup> Lloyd 2007: 57

<sup>355</sup> Lloyd 2007: 60

<sup>356</sup> Lloyd 2007: 60

subjects ability to repeat acts differently. Agency is therefore not an innate quality of the subject, but simply an element of signification (the process through which we assign meaning or intelligibility) and repetition. However, as Moya Lloyd notes, the rest (at least in *Gender Trouble*) becomes unclear. Butler is vague on how the subject can navigate between norms and acts in order to subvert or transform heteronormativity. She doesn't actually provide an example of a parodic act that can challenge and re-work the norms that make up the subjects performance within the heterosexual matrix.<sup>357</sup>

For me, Butler's response to these criticisms, framed by a revised definition of agency, fails to adequately explain how the discursive subject is capable of changing their circumstance and instead I favor a model of agency that relies on a pre-discursive subject. I use the term *performance* as opposed to *performativity* as I understand there to be some aspect of the individual that escapes this cultural conditioning and it is from here that agency arises. This is the position from which we can change our circumstance and create incremental changes to ourselves that permeates and slowly changes the environments in which we live. Liberation or subversion of the slender performance is located in a "realm" that exists outside of culture that needs to be engaged with, a calling back to our matriarchal lineage, a theme that resonates throughout the work of Marion Woodman. If, as I have argued, slenderness is a performance based upon the repetition of societal norms and idealizations, then how is this to be broken down and re-imaged? What form would this reiteration or re-citation take? And what does our society look like once these boundaries are broken down? In order to examine these points I would like to turn to the work of Woodman and her use of ritual, specifically the creation of a ritual of transformation.

#### Ritual of Transformation

Central to Woodman's thesis is the suggestion that for centuries women have been living in a male-orientated culture that has kept them at a dis-ease with their bodies and their own feminine principles. In struggling to find their way in this environment they have unknowingly accepted male orientated values and goals, 'compulsive drivenness, and concrete bread which fails to nourish their feminine mystery'.<sup>358</sup> In other words, women with eating disorders, such as anorexia, are expressing a disconnection between their bodies and souls as a direct consequence of what Woodman perceives to be a trap between masculine and feminine aspects of the self. She writes that many women are 'caught between two conflicting points of view: the rational, goal-oriented and just,

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<sup>357</sup> Lloyd 2007: 61

<sup>358</sup> Woodman 1980: 9-10

versus the irrational, cyclic, relating'.<sup>359</sup> She writes that these girls and young women are disconnected from their own bodies, anxious and self-hating as a consequence of chasing after their "fathers dreams". By this she means that women engaged in this behaviour- in this striving to accomplish achievement after achievement, presenting fathers with good grades and school reports, whilst excelling in sports etc.- are seeking to earn love through perfection.<sup>360</sup> Reflecting on the work of Woodman, Courtney Martin writes that '[w]hen we dwell only in our "dad's mind," we become alienated from the irrational and fantastic cravings of our "mother's body"... [e]ven when we neglect one, try to starve it or bury it, both are always there'.<sup>361</sup> Writing about perfectionism and achievement, a central concern within her work is to deepen the understanding of the embodied soul and conscious feminine.<sup>362</sup> In such environments, where "authentic" female nourishment is replaced with masculine, goal oriented values, their unconscious femininity can rebel and manifest in a somatic form, in the development of anorexia or obesity (believed to be counter-poles of the same neurosis). She writes:

In the Western cultures threatened by these syndromes, the feminine has been devalued for centuries and is now profoundly distorted. In the individual suffering from these syndromes, the feminine is feared and rejected... Her... body epitomizes the present-day alienation from the feminine, and her obsession with her "daily bread" is only one manifestation of the desperate search for spiritual meaning.<sup>363</sup>

For me, anorexia and obesity are the extreme outcome of this somatic manifestation but its the slender performance that becomes, arguably, a more pervasive and damaging activity as it is far-reaching as an act that every woman becomes engaged in to a more or lesser extent, be it calorie counting, watching what you eat, moderate to excessive exercise that goes beyond the realms of "healthy". Woodman herself experienced a 'near-fatal battle with anorexia'<sup>364</sup> and her work draws upon powerful female symbols, such as a Great Mother archetype<sup>365</sup> within which to spark a

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<sup>359</sup> Woodman 1985: 51

<sup>360</sup> Woodman frames her discussion within the story of Athena- the Greek goddess of wisdom, efficiency, achievement, justice- 'If we look at the modern Athenas sprung from their father's foreheads, we do not necessarily see liberated women'. Athena here is framed as the perfect girl, marching on and making her dad proud with her good grades and wide range of achievements. Here the focus is entirely applied to meeting what she perceives to be her father's expectations. For more information see: Woodman 1982: 9.

<sup>361</sup> Martin C E (2007) *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body*. London: Piatkus Books Ltd, 77.

<sup>362</sup> A drive towards a feminine consciousness is a theme which features heavily throughout the remainder of Chapter Three and Chapter Six.

<sup>363</sup> Woodman 1980: 102

<sup>364</sup> Martin 2007: 77

<sup>365</sup> Woodman describes archetypes as eternal. She believes that each society, each generation, people of different ages, will develop individual metaphors for the same archetypal energy. For her, an archetype 'is an energy field, like that of a magnet, onto which we project images... The archetype is more than everyday human energy. It is energy that bursts through us from some sacred place... It bursts into flame from

reconnection between women and their feminine principles. She does not advocate the rejection of masculine values (as male energy is creative and good) but the development of methods within which we can better balance the tensions between masculine and feminine drives and motivations whilst recognising and displacing the aspects of masculinity that are destructive to female embodiment. She sees the loss of authentic rites of passage, to take us from one life phase to the next, as the reason why we develop somatic disorders such as anorexia. She argues that many of us are caught in a chrysalis like state that we struggle to transcend. No longer confident we are valued for who we are we seek to make improvements, to change into those attributes that are desired, those attributes that make up an intelligible subject to borrow Butler's terminology. Woodman writes that children are programmed to perform from birth and so 'rather than living from their own needs and feelings, they learn to assess situations in order to please others'.<sup>366</sup> What is lost in this cyclical process is a core of inner certainty and the resources to stand alone. Add to this peer group pressures and mass media influences and you have a generation of children developing with identities absorbed by collective stereotypes. She writes that rites of passage created opportunities for individuals to test their boundaries and provided meanings that transcended their survival. They enabled those in the community to move through life's stages without dread of old age or death as each phase was grounded within a meaningful appreciation of the life cycle in all its manifestations. The consequence of the imbalance between feminine and masculine qualities and the delusion that progress is synonymous with accomplishments, has led women to reject their bodies; it has cut them off from their souls. Woodman argues that women are lacking spiritual substance; that they are suffering from a genuine hunger and thirst. She writes that we are not truly resilient, partly because we have little faith. Women caught in this state are constantly waiting for evidence of their worth and are consequently being driven to addictions and empty desires because there is no collective container for their spiritual needs- 'their natural propensity for transcendent experience, for ritual, for connection to some energy greater than their own, is being distorted into addictive behavior'<sup>367</sup> (anorexia, bingeing, shopping, alcohol, gambling etc.). As this distance from spirituality and religion takes its form, objects and personal possessions are invested with sacred powers and bestowed with additional meanings. The individuals living within this society create their own rituals that are

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someplace within us, someplace that manifests imagery shared by human beings from many cultures and many eras... An archetypal image that does not change becomes a stereotype- dead energy'. Archetypes here are needed to make cultural shifts, like a shift towards female principles as we rebalance masculine and feminine attributes. The metaphor Woodman utilises for archetype within this work is that of the Great Mother. For more information see: Bly R, Woodman M (1998) *The Maiden King: The Reunion of Masculine and Feminine*. New York: Henry Holt and Company Inc, 150; and, Fox M (2009) *The Hidden Spirituality of Men: The Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine*. California: New World Library, xxiv.

<sup>366</sup> Woodman 1985: 16

<sup>367</sup> Woodman 1982: 29



facilitated by the gods of consumerism and mass capitalism; they are 'trapped by becoming what they worship'.<sup>368</sup> As Woodman writes:

They create their own rituals, but because they don't realize what they are doing they may invoke the wrong god, and be subject to that power whether they like it or not.<sup>369</sup>

In striving to become what they perceive as the perfect human being in terms of the size of their bodies, these women go to the gym religiously, strive to transcend the need for food and sculpt the body into the image of perfection they have become emotionally attached to. Martin writes: 'These empty substitute rituals, this misguided worship, intellectualization, addiction to moving fast has led my generation to a dark and lonely place... she must ask herself not *What is the size of my stomach?* but *What is the quality of my soul?... Is there something solid, like resilience, instead of something hollow, like perfection?*'<sup>370</sup> Women are spending so much time obsessing about their bodies that they have lost the concept of a deeper and richer connection. Woodman thus explores avenues for reigniting a connection between these conflicting aspects of life. She writes that within religion, ritual is recognized as a transformative practice and so our everyday rituals are located within a larger framework whereby the individual is part of a journey through society or from one level of awareness to another. No matter what the individual does within these movements, there is an archetypal force, a God or Goddess at the center that is invoked by the individual that sets a context for the lived life. Without those rituals to draw a distinction between the 'profane and the sacred, between what is us and what is not us, we tend to identify with archetypal patterns of being hero, father, mother'.<sup>371</sup> We become distanced from a sense of ourselves as human beings and instead identify with archetypes when we should remain detached from them. We attempt to emulate those figures that carry archetypal projections (political figures, celebrities, etc.) and turn life into a theatre, ourselves into actors on a stage. Whatever vice we turn to within this framework it becomes clear that the devaluation of the feminine in our society, coupled with our yearning for meaning, significance and value is tearing us apart.

There are several elements that appear to be integral to Woodman's transformative potential of ritual and perhaps, most importantly, a reconnection to a Great Mother archetype who can help women bridge the gap between herself and femininity. This is a process of enclosure, metamorphosis and emergence as women work towards transformation and self-knowledge as well as a reconnection to a repressed femininity which takes place around a central figure, an archetypal

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<sup>368</sup> Woodman 1982: 30-31

<sup>369</sup> Woodman 1982: 30

<sup>370</sup> Martin 2007: 251. Author's emphasis.

<sup>371</sup> Woodman 1985: 19

force of the Goddess. This ritual can be conceptualized as a symbolic death and rebirth, a breaking down, in this instance, of the slender performance that conceals the developing person within. Thus, resonating throughout her work is the desire to break down the mind/body dualisms that still permeate society as these rituals involve the unity of the mind and body of the participant and therefore, she argues, the mind and femininity (as the “chaotic” body has historically resided within the realm of the feminine). As the outer, symbolic actions involve and communicate to the unconscious, ceremony becomes a powerful agent for change and transformation. This transformative ritual marks a reconnection between the woman and her ancestral roots (as the biological reality of her ancestors is within her genetic code) whereby all aspects of her psyche are located within the symbolic action and the denied feminine principle can be welcomed (in all aspects of maiden, mother, crone). I see it as a challenge to the patriarchal value systems to which we belong but the ritual involved is not a static or singular act, it is a change in the underpinning of all rituals, on all levels. This ritual healing can be like sleep or rest, a search for insight, dreaming and dissociation as long as these elements take place within a larger system conceptualized by the individual woman, actions that are bestowed with additional meaning. They have direction and a powerful urgency that comes from knowing that those elements that make up your life are destructive and need to change. It is within this framework that the slender performance can be re-conceptualized and transformed into a creative outlet.

In order for women to reconnect with their female mystery, to recombine their spirit and their bodies, they must acknowledge the symptom for what it is and find their authentic and forgotten voice, the Goddess lost within her rejected body. This takes place on two levels, within the psyche of the individual woman and also in society as both must rediscover their feminine roots and find the lost Goddess. As a Jungian analyst, Woodman’s thesis is significantly influenced by the work of Carl Jung, which emphasizes the importance of dreams as an access point for the psyche. In the Association Experiment, Jung worked on the psychological responses of intense emotions in order to prove the existence of two systems in the individual, one voluntary and one autonomous. He eventually concluded that ‘the various bodily symptoms were messages from the psyche itself’<sup>372</sup> and that they could therefore be given a symbolic meaning. The key to these messages, he argued, lies within the individual’s dreams.<sup>373</sup> For Jung:

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<sup>372</sup> Woodman 1980: 60

<sup>373</sup> Woodman’s work emphasizes the importance that dreams have in understanding our subconscious desires and pains. She found that the unconscious world of her female patients were characterized by images of concentration camps and enclosed spaces where the anorexic women viewed themselves as caged and trapped victims -often in terrible pain. For more information see: Woodman 1982; and, Woodman 1985.

...the healing power resided in a conscious awareness of the symbolic nature of the dream, which provided the psychic meaning of those bodily symptoms by which the spirit struggled to communicate its condition and its needs. The body via the dream images was yoked to spirit. To become conscious of the body and its operations was to become conscious of the spirit.<sup>374</sup>

Tying in with Woodman's emphasis on a feminine reconnection in order to displace the dualisms at the heart of these somatic manifestations and the importance of dreams in their revealing of unconscious motivations and the potential of ritual to be transformative is the work of Goldenberg and her focus on the importance of myth and fantasy. Her earlier work in *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*<sup>375</sup> (as we will explore in more detail towards the end of this thesis) was heavily influenced by the work of Jung as she explored the influence our unconscious world has on our conscious decisions. A central theme in the work of Goldenberg is her passionate desire to put us in touch with our bodies and to do so she employs the use of myth, specifically a matriarchal myth as she draws upon the psychological benefit of a matriarchal prehistory or a divine women's myth for women today. She employs the use of psychoanalysis (in particular, object relations theory) to draw upon the unconscious as embodied in our daily actions. Goldenberg examines the Goddess movement (discourses on the Goddess and theology will be the subject of Chapter Six) from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory whilst addressing how analytic thought can be utilized in the analysis of discourses on the Goddess. In so doing she discusses four commonalities between the two models of thought. These identify the importance placed on exploring the past as a source of meaning for the present, deconstructing symbols of patriarchal power, the individual in the context of the community, and the importance of fantasy and myth for the individual psyche and "rational" thought. We will discuss these commonalities later in this thesis but as we shall see, she places a central importance on how our understanding of fantasy and myth shape our conceptualizations of self in the context of our environments.

A constant focus throughout Goldenberg's work is the idea that the most important feature of religion is its myth. Drawing on the work of Jung and his desire for psychoanalysis to take on the revivification of myth she writes: 'Jung suggested that psychoanalysis set itself up as a new sort of religion – that psychoanalysis teach people how to live by "myth." This was the only way... that psychoanalysis could effectively combat 2,000 years of Christianity'.<sup>376</sup> In the early seventies when her work was firmly grounded within the life and work of Jung she argued that psychoanalysis is capable of replacing or revitalising religion due to its belief in the influence of transcendent "archetypes" – immaterial forms wholly outside any human context that motivate human behaviour

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<sup>374</sup> Woodman 1980: 60

<sup>375</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 47

<sup>376</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 47

– in a person’s life and in the necessity of myth in providing meaning and divine connection for people. Despite later rejecting the work of Jung, not simply for the inherent sexism within his development of psychoanalysis, but for the importance placed on disembodied archetypes as directly influencing an individual’s psyche, she still maintains the importance of myth in religion and the necessity of the divine women’s myth. She argues that the ancient myth of the superiority of the Goddess in all forms of life is of paramount importance for women as it gives them a higher place within both societal and religious structures of power. Furthermore, the terminology of myth means much more than story or illusion. Jung employed the term to refer to the deepest form of experience in human life believing that mythic images and pictures ‘involve us both physiologically in our bodily reactions to them and spiritually in our higher thoughts about them’.<sup>377</sup> Here, when a person is conscious of the mythical underpinnings of their psychology they are living intensely and reflectively. These people experience life as meaningful (meaning here is understood as a subjective state). The divine woman’s myth within her work draws upon the idea of a matriarchal pre-history not as historic fact, but as a psychological beneficial framework for both subverting traditional patriarchal religious thought and ideologies and thus strengthening women’s conceptualisations of self.

Elaborating on meaningfulness, Goldenberg clarifies that “meaning” here can be understood as a feeling or sensation resulting from ‘a sense of reality or tangibility about the life one was leading’.<sup>378</sup> Meaning cannot be identified in any absolute way but can be seen as operating in people’s lives. The inference here is that a meaningless life is a life of disconnection and inauthenticity in which the individual is driven by subconscious acts that are not in some way correct or authentic for them. Here we touch upon the same themes that we see resonate throughout the work of Woodman. The idea of a meaningful or authentic life is also touched upon within the work of Christ who writes that women ‘live out inauthentic stories provided by a culture they did not create’.<sup>379</sup> A direct connection is made between inauthenticity and living within the constraints of patriarchy. Within the context of this thesis, I would suggest that the social discourses that lend themselves to the development of the anorexic expression are inauthentic and meaning-less in the sense that the discourses create a disjunction between the individuals mind and body, reinforcing the dualisms of our patriarchal past. To counter this, adjustments are needed to bridge the gap between the individual and their bodies. Goldenberg writes: ‘[m]yths function as the building materials of reality. They connect the mind and body, matter and spirit, people and their experience. This connection is vivid and palpable. The value of myth is judged by the quality of the interior feeling

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<sup>377</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 47

<sup>378</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 48

<sup>379</sup> Christ C P (1995) *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1.

it generates in individuals'.<sup>380</sup> Jung understood the main purpose of religion was to provide people with mythic structures to live their lives by. He said that this was becoming less and less of a reality in modern times and he saw psychology filling this developing void. For Jung and Goldenberg, true religion has to be alive. By this, Goldenberg writes that it has to be able to nurture a 'mythic understanding in its followers'.<sup>381</sup> She argued that some religions provide this but in diluted forms but as the focus in Abrahamic religions is a male divine construct (for example, Catholicism has the Jesus story, Muslims have the story of Mohammed to provide the structures for their lives) women are always at a disadvantage, as their embodiment will never fully approximate His life. For Jung, the individual needed to be able to depart from these myths and create their own which held meaning for their lives. Many religions make people feel guilty and sinful for departing from these myths. These people were understood as heretics. Reflecting on this, Goldenberg writes that religion as understood here leaves no room for heretics; no room for people to develop and live by their own myths. She writes that 'Catholicism is fine for obedient souls'.<sup>382</sup>

Many women have become aware of the sexism inherent to Christianity and wise to the mythic structures that revolve around the lives of men. These structures will never be sufficient to feed their souls.<sup>383</sup> In displacing collective androcentric myths we need alternative structures to support the development of individual female psychologies. Goldenberg argues that it is the process of discovering the myth that is most important for the individual. Thus, when we consider the religious mythic symbols created by disciples surrounding the life and experiences of Christ, Buddha, Mohammed and all other founders of traditions we understand that there are important elements of the original myth that only these beings could experience. Goldenberg elaborates with the following story:

A wise woman went into a cave to meditate. She stayed there for many years, drawing all sorts of diagrams on the walls to solve the mystery of life. Finally, she drew an elliptical shape with purple chalk and added a yellow triangle in the middle. "I have solved the mystery of life," she said and left the cave to resume her previous way of life. People from all parts of the district flocked to the cave. They saw the yellow triangle inside the purple ellipse and copied it down. "Now I have the answer to life," each one exclaimed. This, of course, was not true. In fact, the purple and yellow design had come to the old woman only after years of scrutiny of her own soul. It was the process that she had undergone to discover the figure that has made it the symbol of her solution. The purple ellipse was a myth of great power for the old woman. For her disciples, it was merely a purple ellipse.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 48

<sup>381</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 49

<sup>382</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 50

<sup>383</sup> Goldenberg found that these and other issues remained present in most religious structures. For more information see: Goldenberg 1979: 49-52.

<sup>384</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 52

Power is lost when people collectively create mythic systems based on the life of others. The uncompromising loyalty these leaders had to their visions- their myths- cannot be replicated in full by their disciplines. Jung understood that power and understanding comes from creating your own symbolic structures in the context of your life. Goldenberg writes that unless ‘the disciple discovered his or her own vision, pale imitation of the leader was all that was possible’.<sup>385</sup> She therefore urged us to understand that what binds us together is not the contents of our religious and psychic imagery but the process of producing and reflecting upon imagery. Through this she believed we could build communities around the sharing and observing of each other’s imaginal processes. The focus for Goldenberg was the creation of “living” religions, first for women (whose initial need was greatest) and then for men. Goldenberg cited Goddess feminism as a “living” religion. We will explore this in further detail later in Chapter Six.

Jung proposed psychology as the replacement to the religious myths that preceded it. He set out to develop a new strand of psychology that would function like a religion for anyone who had outgrown the religion they had previously ascribed to, for people who had sickness of the soul. He understood psychology as a means of filling greater spiritual needs than had previously been imagined. The central focus was reviving myth within people’s lives. If he could not re-establish a link between the individual and their native religion he tried to guide them to develop a religious process within the self. His goal, from the perspective of Goldenberg, was to cure religious alienation. This is important when understood from a feminist liberation theology position as it provides avenues for challenging the patriarchy at the heart of Judeo-Christian tradition. For Goldenberg, Jung’s work was pivotal as he encouraged people to look inwards to understand the forces at work in their lives. However, there are clearly issues here. The central one for me is the loss of community as psychoanalysis and therapy focuses on the relationship between the individual and the therapist. Myth here would be constructed on an individual level. Goldenberg raises this concern writing that ‘one of the valuable functions the great religious traditions serve is the unification of large groups of people around a given set of symbols’.<sup>386</sup> Myth unites people through ritual and acts that bring people together at set times to celebrate, meditate, share in joy and grief and this happens because the participants have a shared respect, belief and reverence for the same myths, symbols and images. Thus, in the movement away from collective myths, we would lose important community ties as once we displace them, we are also displacing the communities of people who ascribe to these belief systems, whose experiences and embodiment are underpinned by these mythic constructions. However, Goldenberg argues it is not important for us to share the same myth, images and symbols, what is important is that we share the process of creating those systems.

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<sup>385</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 52

<sup>386</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 53

What Goldenberg (utilising the work of Jung) is emphasising is the individual creation of myths specific to the individuals experiences and within a theological and thus female empowering framework. What we do not need is new collected stereotypes or restrictive myths and images that contribute to the limiting of human existence.<sup>387</sup> Here we are encouraged to find our own dignity and to pursue our own truth. Goldenberg demonstrates that the process of symbol creation can build a sense of community through sharing in the process of creating myth and symbols that relate directly to our experiences, to our lives. We could experience even closer community ties when incorporating this with the work of Starhawk on large group rituals. Collectively creating rituals she writes that the organisation of each event 'begin[s with discussion,] by going around the circle asking people what the time and season mean to them, and what they need or want from the ritual'.<sup>388</sup> It is from these answers and the common themes and images they inspire that a symbolic act is identified and focused upon eventually by the participants of the ritual. Individual and meaningful themes here come together to create a common symbolic thread that unites people, to strengthen community ties and create new community narratives. Thus, we see how Goldenberg (in her early work) utilises the work of Jung to construct an argument that focuses on a movement towards psychologically powerful myths which focus on female experience.

In recent years, Goldenberg has focused on the use of language and words to penetrate 'sufficiently deep- in both a psychological and collective sense- that they will sound intoxicating, transformative, crazy, scary and, above all, powerful'.<sup>389</sup> No doubt her work has been influenced by the pioneering work of Mary Daly and her attention to the power underlying the words we use daily, as we will explore later in this thesis. Goldenberg's purpose here was to reconnect women with their bodies, to work towards female embodiment and she saw this happening as a movement away from traditional patriarchal religions. This reconnection happens within the context of discourses on the Goddess and theology as, like Woodman, she believes that women need to be reconnected to a psychologically healing female past and powerfully symbolic female divine construct. She sees this as the means towards a "meaningful" and "authentic" life. Theology, and discourses on the Goddess, here are understood as providing women with reconnection to a repressed femininity, drawing on the same themes as Woodman. This reconnection is visualised within a "living" religion whereby the

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<sup>387</sup> Naomi Wolf writes about destructive and restrictive myths in *The Beauty Myth*. She argues that there exists an elusive and powerful quality called "beauty" which is imperative for female embodiment (but not for male). She writes that women seek to embody it whilst men seek to possess the women who embody it. Here she is drawing attention to the fact that women all over the world are "buying" into the belief that life success is contingent on meeting various beauty prerequisites. Discussions surrounding the "beauty myth" form the undercurrent which runs throughout this thesis. For more information on *The Beauty Myth* see: Wolf 1990; Wolf 1994; and, Weiss S I (2002) *Coping with the Beauty Myth: A Guide for Real Girls*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group.

<sup>388</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 159

<sup>389</sup> Goldenberg N (2004) Witches and Words. In: *Feminist Theology* 12, no. 2: 203-211 (205).

individual has access, and a growing appreciation, of the psychological and healing benefit of locating their existence within a broader network of connections. For both Woodman and Goldenberg, this reconnection to a deep-seated femininity happens within the context of the Goddess however, as we will explore in Chapter Six, Goldenberg takes a more provoking and retaliatory approach in her adoption of “witchy” words with teeth and claws to subvert patriarchal power.

Bringing together the work of Butler and her concept of recitation, with the work of Woodman and a change of consciousness to underpin daily rituals, alongside Goldenberg’s desire for us to develop mythic structures that hold meaning for our lives, we start to construct a framework for addressing some of the themes and motifs lying at the heart of both the anorexic expression and the slender performance. As we have explored, a central theme within the work of Goldenberg and Woodman is the idea that in utilising female symbols of the divine, located within a broader social context, and in light of a connection to a wealthy female heritage,<sup>390</sup> we are provided with a psychologically beneficial framework for women in the present. Taken alongside the work of Butler and the concept of recitation, we start to conceive of a framework for subversion of the slender ideal that currently traps- in the anorexic expression and the culture of dieting- so many women. This subversion takes its form from women collectively incorporating a female divine construct into their daily lives and daily rituals. The idea is that over time, this repetition of female empowering psychologies can change the way women experience their embodiment. Incorporating the work of Woodman and Goldenberg we see that central to any ritual is a connection to past experiences and a past history in order to re-conceptualize life in the present. There are stark differences between how psychoanalysis and theology conceptualize this change, as we will explore later in this thesis.

The anorexic woman needs a safe environment to reconnect and rediscover her own feminine core, to work herself free from the slenderness ideal that shackles<sup>391</sup> and politically sedates<sup>392</sup> her. For Woodman, any ritual of transformation is rooted within a search for the Great Mother buried within the individual’s body. She is found when we address the frozen places within ourselves- our ‘undigested pockets of pain- that need to be recognized and welcomed’.<sup>393</sup> As we fight to resist the emptiness and hide from our feelings, as we try and try ‘again to lose the same twenty, fifty, eighty pounds, we ignore what could utterly transform us... and when we welcome what we

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<sup>390</sup> Resonating throughout psychoanalysis and Goddess feminism is the idea that the present is a fiction of the past. Whilst the Goddess movement draws upon the notion of a collective prehistory, object relations theory and psychotherapy emphasizes the importance of the individual’s earliest experiences and how these influences actions and feelings in the present. These are themes that we explore in greater detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>391</sup> Vandereycken W (1994) *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Self-Starvation*. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>392</sup> For more information see: Wolf 1990; and, Wolf 1994.

<sup>393</sup> Roth 2010: 5



most want to avoid we evoke divinity'.<sup>394</sup> Developed from the work of Jung, Woodman advocates an approach towards healing and liberation that utilizes the individual's unconscious world as an access point to the psyche as it is here that we can interpret messages, understandings and motivations before integrating them into rituals and work towards transformation. Ricki Tanner writes that '[r]itual and ceremony serve to create a sacred environment for women to embody aspects of the archetypal Feminine in the multiple qualities of the ancient image of the Triple Goddess, the aspects of Maiden-Mother-Crone which assists women's understanding of the transformation phases and their experiences of change'.<sup>395</sup> These ritual performances lie in everyday practices that can be understood to hold symbolic meaning, and not always the kind of ritual that people may be familiar with in religious observance. These rituals are not limited to religious practice (an example provided is that of a rock concert and how these can be ritual performance spaces where transformation occurs). The path to physical and psychological integration comes from a willingness to value and interact with memory as those that repress it are doomed to repeat it over and over again. Ultimately, the ritual is to re-balance patriarchy with a matriarchal lineage where female principles are given space and freedom to develop and it is within these ritual performances that transformation occurs.

I see it as a connection to a powerful strong female symbol that provides the grounding for a new perspective/a new understanding of the underpinning of our acts. It is here that we can locate subversive resistance and rework those acts and behaviours that reinforce the performance. For some, this ritual can take place within a guided religious setting or through daily acts, as simply reflecting on everyday activities which, once bestowed with additional meaning can allow for the development of new subversive possibilities as subversive acts. These acts have the power to destabilize the slender performance and the individual utilization of the anorexic expression. In this sense, eating food is a powerful transformative ritual when located within a larger system of meaning which understands the beauty of its origins and how, through it, we are part of a larger cosmic order. Woodman discusses one of her experiences of eating pineapple in a similar way 'with laughter and thanksgiving we ate the sweet flesh of the... pineapple, and felt a new connection to the earth, to the Goddess, to the transpersonal in ourselves and each other'.<sup>396</sup>

In challenging the collective use of the term "woman" and identifying and re-working the ways in which gender binaries are sustained through a model of deconstruction and recitation, Butler

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<sup>394</sup> Roth 2010: 33

<sup>395</sup> Tanner R S (2007) *The Female Trickster: The Mask That Reveals, Post-Jungian and Postmodern Psychological Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Culture*. London: Routledge, 73.

<sup>396</sup> Woodman M (1987) From Concrete to Consciousness: The Emergence of the Feminine. In: Mahdi L C, Foster S, Little M (eds.) *Between and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*. Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 201- 223 (207).

provides us with a model in which to identify and break down the slender performance. As discussed, I see the liberation from an obsession or compulsion with maintaining the slender ideal as involving a reconnection to a repressed femininity and a reassurance that in allowing and trusting your body to talk we start to break down these oppressive “performances” and conceive of ways to liberate ourselves from such constrained environments. The task is to identify those acts that make up the slender performance and conceive of rituals that seek to disrupt and “trouble” these binaries. Here liberation and reconnection must be grounded within an individual’s search for her femininity but women must actively seek and choose to redefine these constraints.

I hope to have demonstrated how our bodies, desires and psychologies are inseparable from the influences of social power and norms and how these external acts destroy our capacity to act and decide independently of these norms. Since everything we know takes place within these frameworks that we have no power to evade, it is difficult and almost impossible to conceive of an alternative and therefore any form of social change or reform must take place within these boundaries that bind us. Having said that, our power to identify a means for change and to locate subversive resistance is found when we reconnect to something forgotten and thought to be lost. Its a calling back to our matriarchal lineage to connect again with the cosmos and find the lost voice of our bodies. I believe that many women in our society feel compelled to put on an act, to create a fiction that is inscribed, sustained and reinforced by and through the environments in which we live. A woman engaged in the slender performance, according the literature referred to above, is disconnected from her femininity, from her environment and a grounded connection to the interrelated world in which we live. For me, this highlights just how important it is for women to stop focusing on the weight of their bodies, to consider the consequences of allowing their bodies relax, to listen to their hungers and desires and not to fear the consequences. This ritual becomes an act that places critical agency back in our hands, something removed as we are shepherded by consumerism and mass-capitalism. If, as Butler says, our behaviour creates our reality then we must change our behaviour!

## Chapter Four- The Female Body as a Historically Mediated Form

We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth.

Naomi Wolf<sup>397</sup>

Okay, so I'm a feminist. I had to be. When I figured out that some of the smartest women I knew were also starving themselves, sticking their fingers down their throats, spending the majority of their time on a treadmill and the majority of their brainpower hating themselves, I had no choice.

Courtney E Martin<sup>398</sup>

Having examined the political discourses that inform our understandings of gender and power in contemporary society, let us now consider alternative approaches to starving the body throughout the years and the difference between these as forms of protest. From ethnic disorders and culture-bound syndromes to self-starvation and hunger strikes as a political tool, each of these brought with them a different understanding of the female body and of the society's in which they emerged. As such, this chapter will begin with a focus on the female body as a historically mediated form. I will examine theories which suggest that anorexia takes its place following hysteria and agoraphobia as a device aimed at keeping women at a dis-ease with both their bodies and their position within society. Following this I will focus on the broader political dimensions of anorexia and self-starvation as I examine the work of Naomi Wolf, Sarah Sceats, Lauren Slater, Paula Saukko and Helen Gremillion. The latter two add a therapeutic context to these discussions as we continue to develop an appreciation of the complexity of healing and therapy for women with anorexia.

The second half of this chapter will focus on the question of whether there is any psychological benefit or spirituality to result from the anorexic experience in the context of "cutting" and other self-harm practices. In this we look at human responses to pain alongside the religious emphasis on suffering for our sins and the attributes associated with aestheticism. I will also touch upon the understandings of pain as a medical "problem", something that necessitates a solution. As Ariel Glucklich writes in *Sacred Pain*: 'Pain is not a simple matter: There is an enormous difference between the unwanted pain of a cancer patient or victim of a car crash, and the voluntary and modulated self-hurting of a religious practitioner. Religious pain produces states of consciousness, and cognitive-emotional changes, that affect the identity of the individual subject and her state of belonging to a larger community or to a more fundamental state of being'.<sup>399</sup> I will consider the idea

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<sup>397</sup> Wolf 1990: 10

<sup>398</sup> Martin 2007: 54

<sup>399</sup> Glucklich A (2001) *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press: 6.

that anorexia can be considered within this religious sacred pain framework providing the same bonds with her community and the environment in which she lives.

#### Anorexia as a Culture-Bound Syndrome

In *Eating Disorders* by Richard Gordon, the concept of an ethnic disorder, also known as a culture-bound syndrome, is unpacked in reference to the development of anorexia within our culture. This concept arises from the work of George Devereux and is understood as an individual's protest against prevailing ideals and cultural expectations. Devereux suggested that demonstrations of such unusual behaviour may be secretly respected and revered as 'others within the culture secretly identify with the symptomatic person's dilemma'.<sup>400</sup> This is often because the types of conflicts that manifest in the development of a culture-bound syndrome are significantly more widespread 'than the actual number of individuals who manifest symptoms'.<sup>401</sup> Thus, the responses of peers are usually ambivalent with a mixture of admiration, hostility and sometimes fear. He argues that these syndromes are not usually consciously acknowledged and they reflect the efforts of individuals of a culturally defined inferior status- often defined by sex, age or colour- to escape from or protest against their oppression by the more powerful.<sup>402</sup> They reflected what Victor Turner called the "power of the weak".<sup>403</sup> Even though the behaviour is ultimately self-destructive, through this syndrome, the individual is able to gain some degree of control or to indirectly punish those who are more powerful. However, as such actions are unarticulated and indirect; they rarely result in a fundamental change but rather reinforce the status quo as explored in earlier chapters.

Self-starvation has a long history and was typically employed by women as a tool of control. Anorexia, of course, is a contemporary example of this. There are many accounts throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of self-starvation among women in Europe and the church later sanctified many of these as we will discuss in the following chapter when we explore the nature of female self-starvation in the Middle Ages (fifth to the fifteenth century) and Early Modern Period (fifteenth to the late eighteenth century). Rudolph Bell called these women "holy anorexics" and

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<sup>400</sup> Gordon 2000: 189

<sup>401</sup> Gordon 2000: 189

<sup>402</sup> For more information on the anthropological study of psychiatric disorders and society and psychiatry see: Lipsedge M, Littlewood R (1997) *Aliens and Alienists: Ethnic Minorities and Psychiatry*. London: Routledge.

<sup>403</sup> In his development of the concept of liminality (to be betwixt and between positions designated by society's laws, customs, conventions etc.) Turner conceptualized what he believed to be a place where the socially oppressed could reverse established social structures and express their cultural oppositions. This could be achieved through the ritual "power of the weak" (thought to be embodied by shamans, mediums, magicians, jesters and other marginal groups). Psychiatric disorders can be thought to exist in this same liminal space and thus serve as a medium for protest against society's norms and values. For more information on the concept of liminality and the ritual "power of the weak" see: Turner V (2008) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New Jersey: Aldine Transaction.

noted that in many ways these women 'resembled contemporary anorexics, despite the vast cultural divide between the medieval and the modern world'.<sup>404</sup> Like contemporary anorexics, many of these women began their fasting in adolescence and it was typically deployed to resolve a sense of unworthiness and acute self-doubt, as a solitary quest for a sense of moral and spiritual perfection and as a form of protest against the prevailing role for women. It was in reducing their bodies to a non-reproductive and asexual state that they were able to avoid arranged marriages or the conventional life of the period. Caroline Bynum suggested that this unconventional behaviour served as a reproach to their families, many of whom 'were part of a secular and materialistic mercantile class and were embarrassed by their daughters' fanatical asceticism and religiosity'.<sup>405</sup> Furthermore, she points out that fasting went far beyond conventional religious practices of the time that were limited to a philosophy of moderation. Self-starvation as a form of protest allowed many women to convey their dissatisfaction and unwillingness to accept the limitations of the female role; they aspired to something higher (themes we explored in Chapter One with the story of Ellen West). This took place in an environment in which the notion of spiritual authority or autonomy for women in the church was absolutely unacceptable. Whilst parallels can most certainly be drawn between the early instances of self-starvation and modern diagnoses of anorexia there are clear distinctions to be drawn between the two behaviours. Whilst these are unpacked in the following chapter,<sup>406</sup> one of the most striking differences is that contemporary anorexics starve themselves for a specific body shape which is driven by cultural expectations, norms and stereotypes and has very little to do, in most cases, with moral and spiritual ideals.

Hunger strikes<sup>407</sup> and fasting as modes of political protest were historically employed by the socially oppressed and were used as a means of humiliating those in control and obtaining concessions from them. Gender marked a significant difference in the ways these activities were perceived and understood. The hunger strike was a powerful symbolic tool that was typically implemented by men (a notable exception was the protests of the suffragettes). Whilst female

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<sup>404</sup> Gordon 2000: 192

<sup>405</sup> Gordon 2000: 192

<sup>406</sup> In Chapter Five I explore the aestheticism of what is often referred to as Holy Anorexia and the experiences of fasting Saints as I examine the commonalities between these expressions alongside self-starvation and anorexia in contemporary society.

<sup>407</sup> Hunger strikes can be understood as a method of non-violent resistance in which participants fast as an act of political protest with a goal of gaining political advantage or policy change. Usually participants consume liquids but not food. Within a feminist context, the most widely recognised hunger strikes were carried out by the suffragettes in the early twentieth century. Marion Wallace-Dunlop was the first suffragette to hunger strike and following her arrest in 1909 for militancy she refused to eat until her status as a political prisoner was recognised. She refused food for ninety-one hours. For more information on the political use of hunger strikes, including its utilisation by the suffragettes, see: Wilson L (2015) Starvation and Self-Mutilation in Religious Traditions. In: Juergensmeyer M, Kitts M, Jerryson M (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 242-250; and, Vernon J (2007) *Hunger: A Modern History*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

fasting, permissible predominantly in psychiatric or religious contexts, is a protest which remains veiled in a symptomatic and mystic language (anorexia, of course, falls into this category). The inference here is that even when they are downtrodden, 'it is more acceptable for males to engage in direct aggression- even when it takes a passive form'.<sup>408</sup> With the introduction of the hunger striker in the twentieth century and their public and political feats of asceticism, fasting became secularised in Europe and the United States and quickly became distanced from a moral or religious agenda. Their food refusal 'was a sheer act of will and self-control for its own sake, a public spectacle devoid of moral content'.<sup>409</sup> It was in this context that anorexia emerged as a recognised disease (however it would be years before a full understanding of this disease was developed and interrogated).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries increasing interest with hunger artists alongside the contemporary awareness of anorexia accompanied a developing societal appreciation of the increasing unease of people regarding the social stratum. Within the act of self-starvation, women and men were able to protest against the inequalities and fixed social roles that were so abhorrent to them even when the manifestations of these protests were unconsciously performed. As a political protest anorexia expresses a contest between the individual and other people in their environment over control of the individual's body; the statement she is making is political.

Reinforcing this, Philip Barker in: *Assessment in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing: In Search of the Whole Person*, draws upon the work of Thomas Szasz in 1974 and his assertion that starvation is not a psychiatric problem; its political. Barker writes that the very nature of psychology often assumes that individuals operate in a vacuum as opposed to being malleable subjects influenced by their environments. We act as if 'pathology always lies within the person, rather than within the person's relationships with his [or her] world'.<sup>410</sup> He draws upon Szasz's argument that "mental illness" and "psychiatric disorder" may be understood as little more than a reflection of a sense of oppression imposed by the environment that represents the "real" problem. We are not born with a starvation gene; people do not suddenly become mentally ill. Quoting Szasz, Barker writes: '[a]ddiction, obesity, starvation (anorexia nervosa) are political problems, not psychiatric: each condenses and expresses a contest between the individual and some other person or persons in his [sic] environment over the control of the individual's body'.<sup>411</sup> One of Barker's central concerns was in respect of therapy and his belief that treatments which failed to acknowledge the political and social undercurrents that contribute towards these psychological expressions would ultimately

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<sup>408</sup> Gordon 2000: 194

<sup>409</sup> Gordon 2000: 195

<sup>410</sup> Barker P J (2004) *Assessment in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing: In Search of the Whole Person*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd, 261.

<sup>411</sup> Barker 2004: 261

prove unsuccessful. He therefore encouraged those in the field to find the social and material resources within the environment to work towards genuine well-being. He advocates the examination of the environment- it's institutions, the family, etc. - to look at individual restrictions, influences and freedoms whilst measuring the potential for individual growth and development. Exploring the elements of our surroundings which contribute towards these destructive psychological maladies is central here. These themes are further drawn out when considering the relationship between hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia as responses to the environments in which they emerged. We will explore this relationship now.

### Hysteria, Agoraphobia and Anorexia

The commonalities between hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia indicative of the latter half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively<sup>412</sup> have been drawn upon within literature on the development of anorexia. We find an example of this within the writings of Bordo.<sup>413</sup> She argues that the central mechanism of these three social phenomena involve a transformation of meaning 'through which conditions that are objectively (and, on one level, experientially) constraining, enslaving, and even murderous, come to be experienced as liberating, transforming, and life giving'.<sup>414</sup> These make up a group of gender-related and historically localized disorders that have historically been understood as class and race based, occurring predominantly amongst white middle and upper middle class women. Bordo offers her analysis of hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia as an example of how 'various contemporary critical discourses may be joined to yield an understanding of the subtle and often unwitting role played by our bodies in the symbolization and reproduction of gender'.<sup>415</sup> These disorders display a disturbingly concrete construction of femininity that is an extremely literal and exaggerated interpretation of the ruling feminine mystique. Within this ideological construction of femininity we see the markings of homogenizing and normalizing principles at play as all racial, class and other differences are erased whilst one standardized and coercive model is marketed as the ideal, something that all women should aspire towards. Bordo writes:

The symptomatology of these disorders reveals itself textuality. Loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave the home, feeding others whilst starving oneself, taking up space,

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<sup>412</sup> That is not to say that hysterical symptoms do not occur in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries or that symptoms of anorexia were not experienced in the nineteenth century (they were typically recorded in relation to a diagnosis of hysteria).

<sup>413</sup> For more information see: Bordo 2003

<sup>414</sup> Bordo 2003: 168

<sup>415</sup> Bordo 2003: 168

and whittling down the space one's body takes up-all have symbolic meaning, all have *political* meaning under the varying rules governing the historical construction of gender. Working within this framework, we see that whether we look at hysteria, agoraphobia, or anorexia, we find the body of the sufferer deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period in question.<sup>416</sup>

The difference between these female disorders and "normal" female practices are thrown into sharp relief when unpacking these three maladies to which women have been particularly vulnerable throughout history as we will go on to explore now.

Hysteria embodies an exaggerated form of stereotypically female and feminine traits that included attributes of delicacy and vulnerability, dreaminess and sexual passivity and repression alongside capricious emotionality and a labile constitution. On the surface, the woman with hysteria becomes a male construction to compliment his attributes and designated role of protector, boss, controller and breadwinner. Drawing upon the work of Freud, Bordo writes that this construction was scientised and formalised by Freud (amongst others) who described "normal" femininity in these terms. The dissociations, the nervous tremors, faints and fogging of perception all associated with this condition were produced as a consequence of the prevailing construction of femininity but also goes so much deeper in describing the incapability of women whilst reinforcing the gender status quo. As Orbach discusses in *Hunger Strike*: '[t]he nineteenth century feminine ideal of frailty and romance which found such marked expression in the literature and the illnesses of Victorian women, rests on a view of women as the inherently inferior and weaker sex'.<sup>417</sup> However, a feminist reading of hysteria shows us that within this exaggeration of idealized womanliness and its caricature of femininity, hysteria contained an implicit indictment of female worthlessness within the environment in which it emerged. Gordon writes that hysteria 'represented a strategy of coming to grips with the socially prescribed dependency and passivity that was central to the nineteenth-century female sex role: through becoming hysterical, a woman both rebelled against, and yet exaggerated, this stereotype'.<sup>418</sup> This illness might have also served to represent an escape from her female obligations, using her body as a form of protest against the social order that kept her existence limited to the household, childcare and looking after her husband. Although, as with anorexia, any form of rebellion or challenge to this ideology is likely to have been unconscious. The term hysteria, was singularly associated with women, and is to this day. However, the subtleties of hysteria pale in comparison to the exaggerated literalism of agoraphobia and anorexia.

The rules of femininity are communicated through the culturally transmitted visual images. It is through these that we have been taught how to construct the appropriate surface for the

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<sup>416</sup> Bordo 2003: 168. Author's emphasis.

<sup>417</sup> Orbach 1993: 6

<sup>418</sup> Gordon 2000: 191



presentation of the self as we learn the rules through body discourse: 'through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behavior are required'.<sup>419</sup> Agoraphobia first began to escalate among women during the 1950s and early 1960s as there developed a resurgence in the female ideals of domesticity and dependency. It is commonly linked with the post-World War Two pressure on women to leave their employment (having entered into "male" working sphere throughout the war years) and again enter the safe confines of the family home embodying attributes of vulnerability, childlike passivity and neediness for male protection. The perfect personification of these ideals is the housebound agoraphobic who lives this female ideal to the letter through her literal living of the rules. This is a condition that involves 'a phobic avoidance of public spaces, public transportation, and crowds, can in many instances be seen as a metaphoric encapsulation of the situation of the dependent and unassertive wife'.<sup>420</sup> However, as Gordon suggests, this expression/behaviour could also be understood as a 'strategy by which a woman could effectively dominate her husband, by commanding his presence and aid, whilst simultaneously conforming to role expectations of dependency'.<sup>421</sup> Agoraphobia comes to represent the logical, if not extreme, extension of society's sex-role stereotype for women.

In the wake of hysteria and agoraphobia, anorexia can be understood as the most recent in a long tradition of stereotyped expressions of "female distress". It is arguably the most literal and caricatured personification of the cultural female idealization. The embodiment of this expression requires the interpretation of multiple readings, some of which are related to gender and these are the ones I shall focus on.<sup>422</sup> In anorexia we see a dangerously accurate inscription of the rules (symbolic and literal) underpinning the contemporary construction of femininity that need to be adhered to if she is to approximate the "norm". It requires that the woman feeds others whilst denying herself and to think of her own desires for self-nurturance and satiation as greedy. Any "indulgence" rendering her physically and morally weak and out-of-control. There is a great pressure for her to develop an 'other-oriented emotional economy'.<sup>423</sup> This construction of femininity yields a powerful message, 'that female hunger- for public power, for independence, for sexual gratification- be contained'.<sup>424</sup> Her space must be limited. These rules and pressures are deeply and dangerously etched on the female anorexic body. In addition to these feminine pressures we have seen in the twentieth century an introduction of women to "masculine" ideals and the requirement of women to embody both "feminine" and "masculine" attributes to survive personal, public and professional

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<sup>419</sup> Bordo 2003: 170

<sup>420</sup> Gordon 2000: 191

<sup>421</sup> Gordon 2000: 191

<sup>422</sup> Other readings cover economic, psychosocial, historical and racial considerations of the dimensions of anorexia as we have already explored.

<sup>423</sup> Bordo 2003: 171

<sup>424</sup> Bordo 2003: 171

spheres. It is at this intersection, between these contrasting attributes that the female anorexia body resides. She is in a double bind of a duel embodiment none of which was her making. Devoid of the depth required to create a new sustaining and empowering ethic or culture- a “new man” or a “new woman”- she instead creates a parody. A dangerous game as this image and consumer driven environment increasingly struggles to distinguish between parodies and possibilities of self. As Bordo writes ‘the “androgynous” ideal ultimately exposes its internal contradiction and becomes a war that tears the subject in two - a war explicitly thematised, by many anorexics, as a battle between male and female sides of the self’.<sup>425</sup> The expression embodies a desire to meet the female idealisations of society whilst meeting the prerequisites for success within patriarchal instructions. These are the undercurrents of the “superwoman” ideology which has become a symbol of contemporary womanhood.<sup>426</sup>

In hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia, the female body can be understood as a surface upon which conventional constructions of femininity are exposed in an extremely literal way. This should act as a warning of what is waiting just around the corner of feminine norms and beauty necessities. In the context of revealing the hidden and often dangerous nature of the construction of femininity, it is easy to see how the bodies of women embodying these maladies can be interpreted by feminist scholars as embodied protest despite them being ‘unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest[s] without an effective language, voice, or politics’<sup>427</sup> they are a protest nonetheless in the challenging of the mainstream female ideal. It is also clear to see how female embodiment is damaged by societal constructions of femininity and communicated through social institutions and through family, friends and peers whilst being visually reinforced by the media and advertising campaigns. An understanding of anorexia in the context of the maladies which preceded it demonstrates that anorexia takes its place as part of a milieu of psychological expressions within which we find political currents. Anorexia is about slenderness as a citadel of historical and contemporary meaning. By this I mean that to analyze the anorexic expression we need to examine the interpretation of slenderness as offering multiple readings on the body, some of which are gender related, some of which are not. My focus here, when considering the political undercurrents of such an expression, is a gendered reading. Hence my focus has been on the construction of femininity (symbolic and literal) which encourages the feeding of others (husband and children) before the self and which encourages feelings of guilt and distain (greedy and excessive) in relation

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<sup>425</sup> Bordo 2003: 174

<sup>426</sup> “Superwoman” ideology features heavily within the work of Wolf and is the idea that women could “have it all” at the same time. It is an unrealistic and idealistic feminine construction which served to further fracture female self-esteem by setting a damaging ideal as “norm”. For more information see: Wolf 1990; and, Wolf 1994.

<sup>427</sup> Bordo 2003: 175

to desires of self-feeding and self-nurturance as we have touched upon throughout this body of work. As has been documented at length by Bordo, Chernin and Orbach (to name a few) women are taught in myriad ways to control their bodies, space and sexuality. These restrictions are deeply etched on the anorexic body and take their place next to hysteria and agoraphobia as ideological constructions of femininity emblematic of the periods in which they developed. As Bordo writes of anorexia: 'The ideal of slenderness... and the diet and exercise regimens that have become inseparable from it, offer the illusion of meeting, through the body, the contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology of femininity'.<sup>428</sup> Touching upon the relationship between anorexia, hysteria and agoraphobia helps to demonstrate the nature of anorexia as being very much culturally situated. It reinforces the argument that anorexia is a form of political protest, on the part of women, to displace the social expectations rife in our society. Only, it fails to elicit any real change and instead ultimately proves to be a self-destructive expression of female struggle for reconciliation with these environments representing her dissatisfaction with gender limitations and the developing female role. This is all expressed through utilising contemporary beauty ideals which values the slender form. We will explore this construction alongside the political undercurrents of diet rhetoric now as we examine the work of Wolf.

#### The Politics of Female Self-Starvation

In 1994 Wolf wrote that 'women do not eat or starve within a public social order that has a material vested interest in their troubles with eating'.<sup>429</sup> Elaborating on this, she writes that it was between 1918 and 1925, the same time that Western women received the right to vote, that dieting and thinness became a female preoccupation. Before this 'women's natural amplitude was their beauty'<sup>430</sup> with representations of the female nude portraying lush fertility and sexual fat. The female form went through a transformation from this curvaceous, full and ripe figure to a new linear and streamlined aesthetic.<sup>431</sup> She writes that the movement of women into traditional male defined spheres marked a shift in the desired female aesthetic and introduced what she describes as the One Stone Solution. Wolf's premise is that 14 pounds (a UK stone) 'is roughly what stands between 50% of women who are not overweight but believe they are and their ideal selves'.<sup>432</sup> Once lost, that

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<sup>428</sup> Bordo 2003: 18

<sup>429</sup> Wolf 1994: 97

<sup>430</sup> Wolf 1994: 96

<sup>431</sup> Changing representations of women in the Western world is a subject discussed at length by Susan Bordo. In her book *Twilight Zones* she critically analyses contemporary cultural images for their often-unrealistic standards whilst providing a history of their development and political underpinnings. For more information see: Bordo 1999

<sup>432</sup> Wolf 1994: 96

stone is regained as the individual returns to pre-diet eating habits and the body restores itself to the weight that is natural to it, and so the cycle of weight loss and weight gain continues. This reductionist rhetoric redefined women's understandings regarding loss of control, bodily shame and low self-esteem and created a deep-seated anxiety about being "too fat" which culminated in generations of women who loathed their bodies and set in motion the mass conviction of female failure which was 'defined as implicit to womanhood itself'.<sup>433</sup> For Wolf, this desire for a slender aesthetic is political. This is evidenced by the guilt experienced by women when they eat "too much". She writes:

The great weight shift must be understood as one of the major historical developments of the century, a direct solution to the dangers posed by the women's movement and by economic and reproductive freedom. Women's advances had begun to give them high self-esteem, a sense of effectiveness, activity, courage, and clarity of mind. Prolonged and periodic caloric restriction is a means to take the teeth out of this revolution. The great weight shift... followed the birth of feminism so that women just reaching for power would become weak, preoccupied, and (as it evolved) mentally ill in useful ways and in astonishing proportions.<sup>434</sup>

Wolf argues that there is increasing evidence that dieting is one of the main causes of eating disorders such as anorexia<sup>435</sup> and that this desire to diet has been created by the thinness "ideal" which she sees as a political solution to women's increased presence and power within society. She argues that: '[t]he anorexic may begin her journey defiant, but from the point of view of a male-dominated society, she ends up as the perfect woman: she is weak, sexless, and voiceless, and can only with difficulty focus on the world beyond her plate'.<sup>436</sup> Many social commentators, Wolf included, argue that gender roles have doubled for this generation of women as the pressure to conform to the masculine atmosphere has created the expectation for them to look like "real women" whilst behaving like "real men".<sup>437</sup> Women must compete like men whilst retaining their

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<sup>433</sup> Wolf 1994: 97

<sup>434</sup> Wolf 1994: 97

<sup>435</sup> There are a number of scholars who believe that whilst dieting itself is not sufficient to cause anorexia, that the mind sets, attitudes, and behaviours associated with dieting may predispose individuals to develop these eating habits. For more information see: Wolf 1994; Dwyer J (1985) Nutritional Aspects of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia. In: Emmett S W (ed.) *Theory and Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia: Biomedical Sociocultural, and Psychological Perspectives*. New York: Brunner/Mazel Inc, 20-51 (29); and, Lawrence M (2008) *The Anorexic Mind*. London: Karnac Books, 19.

<sup>436</sup> Wolf 1994: 100

<sup>437</sup> Richard Gordon discusses anorexia in the context of relevant cultural factors such as conflicts in the contemporary female role. Focusing on changing social expectations for women he writes that women are increasingly expected to retain all aspects of femininity whilst progressing the feminist cause by gaining access to traditionally male defined working spheres. The contradictions of this dichotomy are cited as contributing to the anorexic expression within contemporary society. For more information see: Gordon 2000. The idea that women are expected to ascribe to certain beauty prerequisites when entering traditionally male domains (such as politics) is drawn upon by Shelia Jefferys in *Women and Misogyny* and also by Deborah Rhodes in *The*

femininity.<sup>438</sup> The anorexic woman causes no trouble, in the words of Wolf, she is politically castrated with just enough energy to finish her work neatly and jump back on the treadmill, she has no energy to get angry, to storm and shout and change her social position, nor does she want to because she has bought into the slender ideal like everyone else. She wants to radiate that rigorously disciplined and controlled “beauty” that is so desired and coveted by everyone around her.<sup>439</sup> Wolf argues that the beauty myth does not just neutralize the achievements of women- reminding the audience of graduations and future bosses that beauty and slenderness speaks of acceptance of the pre-requisites necessary to participate in male defined institutions reminding everyone that she knows how to play the game- but it also distracts women from re-defining the playing field and challenging the destructive rhetoric which seeks to reinforce the status quo. The Women’s Movement might have forced education systems and the workplace to accept women, but it was not successful in challenging the maleness of power itself. Where is the next generation of women activists to push the revolution forward? Wolf wrote in 1994 that one fifth of well-educated American young women are starving to death and may be too physically weak to do much more

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*Beauty Bias*. Jefferys writes that women are increasingly making their mark on traditionally male domains but they are required to ‘show deference to men in their appearance, with high heels, make-up and restrictive clothing’ which are inappropriate to the seriousness of their positions. She argues that women are required to self-objectify and enact harmful beauty practices if they are to avoid rebuke. This is further reinforced by Rhodes, a legal scholar who, when elected chair of the American Bar Association’s Commission on Women in the Profession, was pressured to adopt these beauty practices. For more information see: Jefferys S (2005, 2015) *Women and Misogyny: Harmful cultural practices in the West*. London: Routledge; and, Rhode D (2011) *The Beauty Bias: The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The idea that success is contingent on meeting certain beauty prerequisites is also touched upon by economist Daniel Hamermesh who argues that ugliness is no different from discrimination based on race or a disability. Hamermesh suggests that unattractive people need legal protection. Having investigated the financial benefits of beauty, Hamermesh found that the best looking workers earn, on average, ten-to-fifteen percent more per year. For more information see: Hamermesh D S (2011) *Beauty Pays: Why Attractive People Are More Successful*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

<sup>438</sup> This calls to mind the work of Joan Riviere and her conceptualization of *Womanliness As A Masquerade* back in 1929. The premise of her argument is that womanliness can be worn as a form of mask or performance enacted by women as they display intelligence. This performance is understood as a way of subconsciously reassuring men that they still possess the phallic power; that her intelligence is not a threat to their security. Thus, this masquerade results from an unconscious attempt to avoid the retribution feared from men in response to an appropriation of the masculine role by the female. This masquerade is not portrayed as a joyful or life affirming, embodied experience. Rather it comes across as an anxiety-ridden gesture that is uncomfortable, disturbing and psychologically damaging for the woman who performs according to what is desirable to the male gaze. Riviere J (1986) *Womanliness as a Masquerade*. In: Burgin V, Donald J, Kaplan C (eds.) *Formations of Fantasy*. London: Methuen.

<sup>439</sup> Kamille Gentles-Peart discusses American beauty discourses that instill the message that the ultimate beauty in the Euro-American beauty regime is the thin, white body. She challenges the dominant cultural discourses that appear to reinforce the message that ‘thinness as well as whiteness are the central components and prerequisites of beauty’. For more information see: Gentles-Peart K (2016) *Romance with Voluptuousness: Caribbean Women and Thick Bodies in the United States*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

than cope with immediate personal demands.<sup>440</sup> Fast forward twenty-two years and it is not uncommon to see daily and weekly newspaper, blog or magazine articles about university women in the UK struggling with some form of disordered eating.<sup>441</sup> It may not be a stretch to argue that many women, as a direct consequence of societies idealization of the slender female form, have expressed concerns about the weight they carry (despite their size) and spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what their bodies say about them and how they can change that perception. What is so distressing is there is no obvious villain to point a finger at. The work looks like it has been carried out by the young woman's own hands. It's her choice. It's her body. Yes? *No!* Being accepted, fitting-in and meeting external expectations are desires that are too strong to be ignored. The performance of the slender ideal secures certain advantages in school and later in the work place as it communicates attributes of strength, discipline and control. This is not just discipline and control over her own body but also about the discipline and control that can be exerted on her as this slender body is seen as something that can be more easily manipulated into conformity within the workplace. This is a body the institutions can work with. Wolf writes that until our culture tells girls and young women that they are valued for who they are- 'that women are valuable to it with or without the excuse of "beauty"'<sup>442</sup>- girls and women will continue to starve.

Sarah Sceats tells us that our relationship with food is of central importance to an understanding of human society. This is evident in psychoanalytic theory, which tells us that our formative feeding experiences are inscribed on our psyches and therefore, that food and eating play a crucial part in the development of our identity and our understanding of family, ethnicity and class. She argues that the prevalence of eating disorders in Western culture indicates 'an insecurity about

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<sup>440</sup> Whilst women are still negotiating the demands of "the beauty myth", many are still taking political stands to continue the fight for equality. For example, in the opening weeks of 2017 we have seen large (many female driven) protests against the inauguration of the Trump administration in the United States. Globally women and men have been coming together to protest against the presidency of Donald Trump as a consequence of his divisive policies, racist rhetoric and clear (and often jovially discussed) misogyny. For more information see: Anon (2017) Global protests on Donald Trump inauguration day. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-38699844> [24/01/2017]

<sup>441</sup> One example of this is found within a 2014 article by the *Independent* online newspaper. Drawing upon information provided by B-eat, it was claimed that out of 200 students surveyed, 32 percent were diagnosed as having an eating disorder whilst more than 50 percent believed there was not enough university support for those suffering from eating disordered behaviour. Whilst this was not subdivided by sex, the only voices quoted in the article were female (with one example where no gender was mentioned). The article did not mention the scope of this survey but suggested that this was indicative of UK universities in general. For more information see: O'Connor M (2014) *Eating Disorders Awareness week shows that student hunger for greater university support still exists*. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/student-life/eating-disorders-awareness-week-shows-that-student-hunger-for-greater-university-support-still-9160524.html> [22/10/2016]

<sup>442</sup> Wolf 1994: 104

embodiment, the nature of being and the boundaries between the self and the world'.<sup>443</sup> As is the case with sexuality, the significance of eating is socially, psychologically and politically constructed and customs, behaviours and symbolisms are indicators and the results of cultural conditioning. An obvious, and yet paradoxical example of this, is bingeing and self-starvation which develop within a context of consumerism in which consumerism is promoted as desirable yet overweight women are portrayed as joke figures and stigmatised as sexually promiscuous, stupid or coarse.

In a memoir reflecting her experiences working as a therapist, Lauren Slater comments on her own and others women's history as victims of 'cultures fear of the feminine, unable to lay down our system of weapons and spread our legs open to life because we learned that in this posture we would be shamed, not invigorated'.<sup>444</sup> She comments that a culture that fosters within us a fear of fat, floppy, soft, dimpled flesh, is a culture that kills us. In examining similar themes, Kim Chernin discusses our cultures lost notion that the body holds meaning. She argues that this loss reflects significantly on our society that is 'seriously divided within itself, splitting itself off from nature, dividing the mind from the body, dividing thought from feeling, dividing one race against another, dividing the supposed nature of woman from the supposed nature of man'.<sup>445</sup> As part of this process of self-division we have been taught to ascribe worth and serious regard only to things that concern the soul and the spirit, the mind and its creations. However, when we probe below the surface and examine our obsession with size and weight, we begin to realize that 'a woman obsessed with her body is also obsessed with the limitations of her emotional life... she is expressing a serious concern about the state of her soul'.<sup>446</sup> In a series of books about women and their bodies,<sup>447</sup> Chernin writes about women's 'veiled and often disguised'<sup>448</sup> obsession with their right to grow, develop and ultimately to be accepted by a culture that ceases to damage them. A woman obsessed with the size and weight of her body is expressing the fact that she feels uncomfortable being female in this culture. In examining the relationship between women and their bodies and the control to placate hungers and urges she demonstrates women's alienation from a 'natural source of female power'<sup>449</sup> and as such women's inability to 'develop a reverential feeling for her body'.<sup>450</sup> Using this framework can often lead to an assumption that the women suffering from anorexia are helpless and vulnerable

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<sup>443</sup> Sceats S (2005) *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1.

<sup>444</sup> Slater L (1997) *Welcome to my Country*. London: Penguin Books, 50.

<sup>445</sup> Chernin 1994: 2

<sup>446</sup> Chernin 1994: 2

<sup>447</sup> Chernin 1994; Chernin 1985; and, Chernin K (1987) *Reinventing Eve: Modern Woman in Search of Herself*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

<sup>448</sup> Chernin 1994: 2

<sup>449</sup> Chernin 1994: 3

<sup>450</sup> Chernin 1994: 3

victims of the discourses at work in their environment and this is something that Paula Saukko wants to move away from.

Saukko calls for a more diverse feminist engagement with the political issues surrounding the effects mass culture plays in the development of anorexia. She argues that feminist literature tends to focus on critically analyzing normative discourses on the female body that are thought to create an environment for the development of anorexic symptoms.<sup>451</sup> In contrast to the feminist literature which places almost sole responsibility for the development of anorexia on the media and fashion industry influences -and thus, she argues, painting women as victims- she aims to broaden the discussion by critically analyzing the implications of normative discourses on the female self. In so doing, she questions what kinds of selves and femininities are defined as “healthy” or “disordered”, what kinds of political regimes and institutions these psychological ideals support and how these ideals are lived by women as she searches for alternative ways of understanding anorexia that do not reinforce gendered, normative notions of being.

One of the themes central to her work is the concern that through scholarship and analysis we lose women’s authentic voice, that every word spoken becomes an example of how far they have descended into the disorder and are interpreted ‘to testify for the ills of a variety of social and political developments’.<sup>452</sup> With this in mind she places the experience and voices of women as central components in the examination and dissemination of discourses that inform this form of disordered eating. In this she aimed to create an account of anorexia that invited anorexic women to carry out the research with her. Whilst Saukko admits that society’s female body ideals and issues surrounding autonomy and independence may, in many cases, have a significant influence on women’s starving, she argues that if you hear with a different ear ‘there are other stories being told and other voices to be heard about eating disorders’.<sup>453</sup> Her research demonstrated that the anorexic women she interviewed actively criticized research that inferred they were victims of these social discourses. Through an approach which valued the experiences and voices of the anorexic women, and examining the anorexic experience (not just analyzing the social discourses that inform the condition), she sought to promote a more self-reflective and less judgmental framework for working with anorexic women.

Within this framework the concept of “victim” is broken down and the use of “woman” is reestablished, as she becomes the reliable witness to her own experiences. The symptoms are no longer reserved simply for the analysis and deciphering of medical experts, psychologists or feminist

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<sup>451</sup> Saukko P (2008) *The Anorexic Self: A Personal, Political Analysis of Diagnostic Discourse*. New York: State of New York Press, 2.

<sup>452</sup> Saukko 2008: 78

<sup>453</sup> Saukko 2008: 78



scholars but her understanding of the underlying issues and her utilization of this particular expression is unpacked. She can start to learn and develop a working consideration of the powers at play. From inactive and powerless she becomes an active participant in the recovery process. In her work, Saukko calls for the scholars, medical experts, psychologists and women with anorexia themselves to continue to interrogate all discourses that suggest 'what we should be or what the world should be'<sup>454</sup> leading to a 'positive, productive ability to see that our personal lives and politics are more complex than they seem and therefore require more complex therapeutic and political strategies'.<sup>455</sup> In this, the young woman with anorexia plays a central role in the process of healing. This is something also discussed by Helen Gremillion in the context of narrative based therapy.

In her work looking at the benefits of narrative based therapy, Gremillion in *Feeding Anorexia* draws upon similar themes. She writes that treatment centre therapies can often unwittingly participate in culturally dominant norms and ideals surrounding gender, physical fitness, individualism and family life that do not aid in helping women to find a way out of the disordered eating patterns. Whilst participating and unknowingly reinforcing social norms and ideals, these influences also structure the nature of the therapy provided as practitioners and therapists focus on combating social focuses whilst neglecting the individual's life experiences that contribute to the development of anorexic tendencies in their particular case.<sup>456</sup> Remembering that anorexia is multifaceted and that many "streams" converge in the development of this expression, consideration throughout therapy must be given to all the strands that make up the anorexic web so we can fully untangle the participant. In focusing on narrative based therapies which places analysis of the anorexic experience (and thus some level of control) into both the individuals hands as well as the therapists, she argues we can erode dangerous assumptions about the underlying causes and triggers and work towards a mutual based relational therapy which does not reinforce normative notions of being. She writes that 'therapeutic practices are never culturally neutral, because they help reconfigure persons' lives and relationships in particular social contexts'<sup>457</sup> but through narrative therapy which works to 'identify and decenter the truth claims of psychiatric objectivity and the dominant cultural discourses that support these claims'<sup>458</sup> therapists can participate in reconfiguring dominant social forms and therefore dismantle some of the identified underlying

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<sup>454</sup> Saukko 2008: 113

<sup>455</sup> Saukko 2008: 113

<sup>456</sup> There are scholars who argue that there is an element of healing or something sacred to be found within certain self-harm contexts. I refer here to the work of Ariel Glucklich in *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* and Elizabeth Baxter's article *Cutting Edge*. In the final section of this chapter I draw upon these texts and address the question of whether there is any spirituality to be gleaned from the anorexic experience.

<sup>457</sup> Gremillion H (2003) *Feeding Anorexia: Gender and Power at a Treatment Centre*. London: Duke University Press, 193.

<sup>458</sup> Gremillion 2003: 194

triggers and risk factors. Gremillion's research led her to conclude that '[y]oung women and girls who struggle with anorexia both appropriate powerful social norms about feminine autonomy and self-control and challenge these norms by enacting them through illness'.<sup>459</sup> As such, therapy needs to both displace the social norms and create new opportunities. She writes that narrative therapies<sup>460</sup> work with clients 'collaboratively to construct (or "coauthor") new stories about the self, the body, and relationships by drawing on aspects of patients' experiences that do not fit neatly into a given problem story'.<sup>461</sup>

The work referred to above reinforces the argument that anorexia is far from a unique and individual construction created by girls and women to deal with internal conflicts. Its influences are far more varied and far-reaching than that. According to the above academics, anorexia is at the same time a response to the inequality of the sexes, the normative construction of the feminine, a coping mechanism for surviving these demands, and a clever strategy aimed at keeping women preoccupied with female prerequisites before they can challenge the gender status quo and re-level the working sphere. We have discussed the political aspects surrounding the development of anorexia and how we might start to construct a response to the underlying pressures utilizing the voices of women and the collaboration of narrative based therapies.<sup>462</sup> This approach also opens up the path for developing understandings of the underpinning pressures which lead to the development of anorexia. Following the reading of Saukko and Gremillion, whilst there may be other stories being told and often more forces outside the social at play, my conceptualization of anorexia for the majority of sufferers, is as a consequence of the normative construction of femininity in contemporary society and how these ideals are communicated to the female sex.

Is there any Spirituality to be gleaned from the Anorexic Experience?

Having considered some of the finer details of anorexia as a disorder, an illness to be eradicated, what I have not touched upon is the idea that there is any benefit to be gleaned from this expression. Therefore, the second half of this chapter is dedicated to the question of whether there can be any positive outcome to the experience of anorexia for women within contemporary society.

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<sup>459</sup> Gremillion 2003: 194-5

<sup>460</sup> Narrative based therapy is also touched upon by Richard and Ann Treadgold who used an approach which externalized and ultimately isolated the anorexic personality from Diana, their daughter. In blaming the anorexic identity, they were able to discuss the issues at play without isolating their daughter further. Overtime, Diana took the same approach and by externalizing these destructive behaviours, she slowly recovered from her obsession with starving her body. For more information see: Treadgold R, Treadgold A, Treadgold D (2009) Rediscovering a Daughter. In: H. Malson, M. Burns (eds.) *Critical Feminist Approaches To Eating Disorders*. London: Routledge, 233-245.

<sup>461</sup> Gremillion 2003: 195

<sup>462</sup> Discussed in more detail in Chapter Six and the thesis conclusion.

In this context I will take a look at the work of Ariel Glucklich on Sacred Pain followed by Elizabeth Baxter's analysis of "cutting" as a healing rite of passage.

In *Sacred Pain*, Ariel Glucklich discusses different types of religious pain and suffering and the difference between the perspective of the participant and the onlooker. Glucklich writes: '[a]mong the oldest form of the religious life around the world are rituals of self-hurting and even a theological glorification of suffering that seems entirely inconsistent with common sense'.<sup>463</sup> The premise of the book is to find the causes of religious self-hurting and explore the often hidden rationality behind the depiction of pain as a good and positive experience. Ultimately Glucklich demonstrates that a ritually controlled regiment of pain can have a transformative effect on the participant's consciousness in which personal identity gives way to a broader identification with God, truth or other spiritual ideals. He argues that the idea of pain as good and transforming for the individual was negated by modern medicines development of anesthesia and the concept of pain as a bad thing, something to be avoided. This advancement undermined the idea that pain can be good. What was particularly interesting for the context of my study was the idea of the transformative nature of collective painful rites of passage. Glucklich discusses rituals of possession and exorcism, tortures of the inquisition and rites of passage from around the globe. Although he discusses pain rituals in a religious context, for me this line of enquiry opens up the question of whether there exists a transformative spiritual element to the individual's experience of anorexic behaviours.

The self-proclaimed central task of *Sacred Pain* is to 'transform destructive or disintegrated suffering into a positive religious-psychological mechanism for reintegration within a more deeply valued level of reality than individual experience'.<sup>464</sup> To me this speaks of transcending the body and the attainment of a higher level of existence. In his book, Glucklich quotes Fakir Mufasar who documents his experiences of various body modification practices in the journal *Body Play*. One of the experiences shared with the reader is Mufasar's experience of the O-KEE-PA ritual which is traditionally practiced by Mandan tribes on the banks of the Missouri River. Hanging himself on hooks inserted into his chest, Mufasar writes: 'spirit and body co-exist now. Aware of each other but separate. It's an ecstasy state where no matter what happens in the body, no matter how much more intense the physical sensation become, I feel no more. Sensations just "are"'.<sup>465</sup> This experience is referred to as a healing pain, one of two fundamental pain types. Glucklich writes that

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<sup>463</sup> Glucklich 2001: 3

<sup>464</sup> Glucklich 2001: 6

<sup>465</sup> Fakir Mufasar quoted in Glucklich 2001: 31

the various models of pain<sup>466</sup> boil down to two fundamental types, disintegrative and integrative pain. The former is likely to be identified as punitive or as an enemy. In relation to the Biblical story of Job, he writes: '[t]he pain Job experienced was disintegrative: It entirely disrupted his life, isolated him from the world, devastated his sense of well-being, his very desire to live'.<sup>467</sup> In contrast, the latter integrative pain is exemplified as similar to the woman's experience of childbirth as an experience that strengthens 'the woman's sense of identity'<sup>468</sup> and allows her to 'situate herself within nature and within her social and spiritual world'.<sup>469</sup> This pain is more commonly described as healing or personally transforming as opposed to punitive. The difference here is not the intensity of the pain and suffering, but the end result and potential for liberation.

The identification and classification of these two types helps Glucklich to demonstrate the difference between damaging and liberating experiences of pain. Clearly, for example, there is a massive difference between the experience of a victim of a car crash or a cancer patient and the voluntary and modulated self-hurting of a religious practitioner. In the latter understanding, the individual is described as undergoing different states of consciousness and cognitive-emotional changes that affect them whilst strengthening their state of belonging to a larger community and to a more fundamental state of being. The pain strengthens the individuals bond with a higher being and with others within the broader community. Pain is also context sensitive; the same pain in different contexts can be either punitive or transforming and can shift between the two; disintegrative pain can be transformed into integrative pain and vice versa. The two pain types 'are two ways of talking about pain from the (shifting) perspective of the ego in pain'.<sup>470</sup>

The question for me is whether anorexia should be included in the former or latter understanding and you can see how it might fall into both categories. As a religious experience by way of spiritual transformation, female mystics and women (later identified as "fasting saints" as we will explore in Chapter Five) employed fasting as a means of attaining spiritual perfection and a closer relationship with the divine. This certainly has the trademarks of Glucklich's description of integrative pain but what about the contemporary experience of women with anorexia? If the end goal of the self-starving of fasting saints was a religious transformation and deeper relationship with the divine and the end goal of contemporary anorexia is the slender feminine ideal for social acceptance and legitimacy, in which box are we to neatly store the contemporary anorexic

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<sup>466</sup> In turn, Glucklich takes the reader through several models of pain in order to demonstrate the varied nature of the pain experience. These models include juridical, medical, military, athletic, magical, psychotropic, and ecstatic.

<sup>467</sup> Glucklich 2001: 33

<sup>468</sup> Glucklich 2001: 33

<sup>469</sup> Glucklich 2001: 33

<sup>470</sup> Ego here should be understood as 'the conscious "steering mechanism" of the human organism' or the end goal of the individual. Glucklich 2001: 33-4

experience? Can anorexia be seen as a rite of passage at all? Before answering these points I would like to take a look at the work of Elizabeth Baxter.

Baxter discusses “cutting” rituals as healing rites of passage that young people might enact following an earlier trauma. For Baxter, the ritual and ritualization of self-harming itself can take place within a healing framework that allows the individual woman<sup>471</sup> to establish her own personal identity separate from her earlier abuse or trauma. In her discussions, the witnessing of “cutting” and seeing the young woman’s pain and wounds can play an important part in the healing process. For the “cutter”, this dramatic ritual is her way of proving she is the survivor of her past; she is reclaiming and re-being. As Baxter writes: ‘[t]he *I am not* creates a loss of sacrality, a loss of real presence, a dis-membling. For effective re-membling, the community is required to be real and safe enough to hold and witness the pain and to heal the brokenhearted, by re-establishing real presence, the *I am*’.<sup>472</sup>

Commonalties exist throughout her description of the self-harming process and the ritualization of the anorexic. However, as discussed earlier in this thesis, anorexia is more commonly connected to the contemporary construction of the feminine as opposed to the experience of abuse or earlier childhood trauma. For Baxter, cutting can be a carefully set-out, ordered, obsessively prepared and disciplined ritual which allows the individual to connect with some sort of fractured upbringing to express her pain and terror and find some release from these pressures. In this she creates her own initiation rites that get jumbled up alongside ‘Western society’s initiation structures, such as legal ages for behavior, confirmation and senior school’.<sup>473</sup> Ritualized cutting as a rite of passage provides the young woman with both a temporary relief from anxiety, desperation and depersonalization whilst also touching upon human experiences of salvation, orderliness and healing. In this physical storytelling- carved into her very skin- we see her struggle to reconcile past experiences with her environment. In performing this act she reminds herself that she is an alive and active agent. Other elements at play include purification, as the “sickness” is bled from her body (in a similar way the anorexic woman might avoid “dirty” food and revel in the purity and lightness of emaciation) and control, taking back her body that has been denigrated and manipulated by different pressures. Again, these themes are common across these two expressions.

When constructing a liberation framework to contextualize these rites of passage, Baxter locates healing within community practices and more precisely, a witnessing ritual that she has

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<sup>471</sup> Baxter points out that girls are ‘four times more likely to self-harm than boys’ and that on the whole ‘woman and girls act out self-harm interiorly through eating or cutting behaviours’ whilst boys in many cases may gravitate towards physical fighting with peers or family members in order to work out internal conflicts. Baxter E (2000) *Cutting Edge: Witnessing Rites of Passage in a Therapeutic Community*. In: Isherwood L, Althaus-Reid M (eds.) *Controversies in Body Theology*. London: SCM Press, 48-70 (50-51).

<sup>472</sup> Baxter 2000: 60. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>473</sup> Baxter 2000: 51

drawn upon herself to help young women heal within her therapeutic community in Yorkshire. Self-harming in the form of cutting here takes place within a healing framework as it provides the opportunity for the individual to 'parade her innerwear as outerwear'<sup>474</sup> and to take control of her pain whilst re-defining, re-creating and re-being. Witnessing this expression by the community (represented by the presence of a therapist or friend) becomes part of this process of healing and re-creation. Through witnessing and 'gently bathing the wounds together'<sup>475</sup> or simply staying to witness the pain and hurt, the witness can transform the "cutting" ritual into a healing rite of passage that can, over time, develop into an act of liberation from her earlier trauma. Listening is essential, 'for in mid-journey a self-harmer cannot hear our words of comfort, she needs to be heard through our witness of her actions'.<sup>476</sup> In most therapeutic work, Baxter has found that slowly the individual overcomes her feelings of being out of control which is replaced with her taking control of her process and life and a role reversal takes place as the witness becomes part of the pain through witnessing the rite of passage. It is this witnessing which, over time, results in the completion of the rite and hopefully, in liberation from the trauma that emotionally hinders her development. Within her Christian Religious framework Baxter concludes that:

witnessing to the compassionate love of Christ/Christa, and acting it out in and through community, helps towards the healing of those who fear their 'demons', those abusive powers projected onto them by others, making them feel as if those powers completely possess their body and soul.<sup>477</sup>

Many parallels can be drawn between the experience of the "cutter" and the anorexic (a struggle for control, issues surrounding identity and understanding personal boundaries and the creation of new and constructive ways of being within their environments) but there are clear differences (the link between "cutting" and previous physical or emotional trauma and the anorexic's reaction to the pressures and contradictions of contemporary society). There are a couple of themes that have presented themselves following my reading of Baxter and Glucklich in regards to this developing understanding of anorexia; 1) the idea of self-harming as a healing rite of passage; and, 2) whether anorexia can be understood in the same frame of reference and if so, what part is played by the witness and community in the healing process?

#### Anorexia as a Healing Rite of Passage

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<sup>474</sup> Baxter 2000: 57

<sup>475</sup> Baxter 2000: 61

<sup>476</sup> Baxter 2000: 62

<sup>477</sup> Baxter 2000: 64

The idea that anorexia can be a healing expression is a troubling one for me. As we start to explore anorexia within the integrative/disintegrative framework of Glucklich and the healing ritual of Baxter, it is worth reminding ourselves that anorexia is a multifaceted expression that becomes manifest for manifold reasons. As Catherine Garrett writes in *Beyond Anorexia* about the construction of the false body image the woman with anorexia has about herself and her use of this addiction or compulsion as a mask to cover underlying issues of identity, control and power. This approach indicates that anorexia is a front and that the true self is waiting to be discovered. As a common theme throughout literature on anorexia, healing might then involve the identification and destroying of the layers of damaging discourses that overlay the life of a woman with anorexic symptoms. There are several reasons why this might be the case as elaborated by Garrett. Firstly, and as we discussed in the earlier chapters, 'anorexia may be described as a watershed in the development of identity: since it has most often (though not invariably) manifested itself in adolescence; it is often interpreted as part of the individuals struggle for autonomy from parents'<sup>478</sup> (historically the mother as the primary caregiver). Secondly, this might arise when a 'child's earliest needs are not appropriately met by the caregiver'<sup>479</sup> which subsequently gives way to the child's construction of an alternative internal world in which the caregiver becomes both a "bad object" (the rejecting object) and also the "good object" (the object of desire). Within this alternative and dichotomous space the individual withdraws into a fantasy life that subsequently gives way to the creation of a false self. This is a self 'without needs (since these cannot be met) and who attempts to meet the projections of others... The 'real self' is thereby split off and rejected'.<sup>480</sup> These two reasons for the development of anorexia fall into Object Relations Theory. For Susie Orbach the false body created through anorexia- a malleable and controlled body- is her defense mechanism against the unacceptable real body that becomes the "bad object" because it represents the negative aspects of the mother as caregiver (and her struggle to emotionally distance herself from her mother) whilst visually representing her failure to meet the cultural slender idealizations. Orbach writes:

[w]e can begin to see, then, that the cause she has taken on is a precious one: the creation of a safe place in the world. She is trying to legitimate herself, to eke out a space, to bring dignity where dismissal and indignity were rife. Her cause is no less imperative than that of an overtly political hunger striker. The resolve of her commitment is equally intense. The political prisoner who embarks upon a hunger strike does so to draw attention to the injustice of her or his incarceration and the righteousness of her or his cause. The anorexic woman on hunger strike echoes these themes. Her self-denial is in effect a protest against

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<sup>478</sup> Garrett 1998: 54

<sup>479</sup> Garrett 1998: 54

<sup>480</sup> Garrett 1998: 54

the rules that circumscribe a woman's life, a demand that she has an absolute right to exist.<sup>481</sup>

In an internal balancing act, the anorexic woman attempts to turn unacceptability into acceptability through the use of internal judges who she tries to placate (as Glucklich may conceptualize it; disintegrative into integrative pain). The woman might feel 'empty inside, void of feelings, fearful of initiating, and lacking an internal sense of continuity and security'.<sup>482</sup> Anorexic behaviour is the process of simultaneously protecting and denying that aspect of her psyche. This might suggest that anorexia is the woman's coping mechanism for internal feelings that she struggles to reconcile. Here, we see that the experience is not just about thinness but reinforces the diversity and political nature of the expression reinforcing notions of control and managing developmental challenges. However, even within this framework, slenderness and society's ideals still play a major role. It is the slender body that gets praised for its control, discipline, purity and transcendence. Achieving 'slenderness is an important factor. It is a visible proof of the woman's success'.<sup>483</sup> The success is a fantastic achievement for her psychologically in the context of experiencing herself as unsuccessful. This helps to placate the internal judges that police her actions.

Another advocate of the object relations theory is Catherine Steiner-Adair<sup>484</sup> who argues that anorexia results from a failure to acknowledge the importance of relationships in the development of a feminine identity. She treats herself as an island, invulnerable, removed and transcendent. Therefore, the goal for the woman expressing anorexic tendencies is to reconnect with her body and environment (and thereby reconnect to the broader community) and to remember how to live beyond the compulsion to control her body. Her work highlights the 'importance of human connection in recovery'<sup>485</sup> and thus, the broader role of the witness to see, understand and aid in the transformation process. The transition to a state beyond anorexia is the desired outcome. In this the symbolic self is consciously integrated into the self that is experienced as "real", "whole" and "autonomous". This is often referred to as a sense of 'inner connection'.<sup>486</sup> In order to work towards recovery, 'the self must be understood as made up of many interconnected parts and recovery must be conceptualized as transcendence, not of the self, but of ego'.<sup>487</sup> This is an ongoing process of transformation, of becoming whole in an environment where our relationship

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<sup>481</sup> Orbach 1993: 88

<sup>482</sup> Orbach 1993: 90

<sup>483</sup> Orbach 1993: 91

<sup>484</sup> Steiner-Adair C (1990) *New Maps of Development, New Models of Therapy: The Psychology of Women and the Treatment of Eating Disorders*. In: Johnson C (ed.) *Psychodynamic Treatment of Anorexic Nervosa and Bulimia*. New York: Guilford Press, 225-245.

<sup>485</sup> Garrett 1998: 53

<sup>486</sup> Garrett 1998: 53

<sup>487</sup> Garrett 1998: 53



with our contemporary bodies is dualistic, helped no doubt by the diet rhetoric reinforced at every turn. This is more extremely displayed on the body of the anorexic and its the woman with anorexia that has to deal with this dualism head on by way of her mortality as the anorexic symptoms threaten her life. This begs the questions of whether the experience and survival of anorexia would create in the young woman a deep-seated connection to her body that is uncommon in today's society, thus opening up more possibilities for life outside such dualistic demands.

Reflecting on the work of Garrett and the creation of the false self and fantasy life, anorexia may present (through making the unconscious conscious) the opportunity, which might not otherwise present itself, to identify the damaging and destructive social discourses that contribute to the development of anorexia and conceive of ways to break them down through changing the female performance. Put another way, are we only now discussing the damaging slender ideal because of the development of anorexia and the lives it claims year-on-year? Through the existence of anorexia, could we transform the construction of the feminine altogether and create an inclusive space away from normative ideals? In this space, the fantasy and false self are destroyed, allowing for the denied and denigrated aspects of her personality full expression and a safe space to flourish. Maybe the role of the witness here is to help the unconscious become conscious. To see in the witnesses' reflection her-own entrapment and to become aware of the social discourses that contribute towards this manifestation, the anorexic individual can take her first step in a long journey towards recovery.

In terms of Glucklich and distinguishing between integrative and disintegrative pain, Garrett writes that contemporary anorexia is likely to be about '*individual* redemption from guilt and salvation through self-preservation'.<sup>488</sup> Maybe this is a misguided act implemented by the young woman and aimed at helping her reconcile these internal struggles. For her, this may be an integrative ritual that she utilizes as a means of reconciling herself with these feelings of guilt (of not being perfect enough) and tries to reach a level of purity and perfection that would be impossible, to her, through another medium. This however would a misguided endeavor, as there is little to be gained from starving the body so aggressively. This brings us back to the central questions of this examination and analysis: Can self-harm be understood in an integrative pain framework? Can anorexia be understood as a self-harm practice and if so, in the same way as Baxter uses the "cutting" and "witnessing" ritual as a model of therapeutic healing, can anorexia be understood as a healing ritual or rite of passage? Ultimately is there anything positive to result from the anorexic experience- could anorexia be conceptualized as subversive?

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<sup>488</sup> Garrett 1998: 122. Author's emphasis.

Baxter clearly argues that self-harm behaviours such as “cutting” within the right environment and in the presence of a witness can be part of an integrative pain type. Within her Christian framework, the process of cutting is understood as the individuals coping mechanism and communication of her pain and betrayal. Through this exposure, over time and in conjunction with the right therapeutic setting, this can become an act of liberation and healing a previous trauma. I do not believe we can reach the same conclusions when discussing anorexia. First of all, I believe the distinction of anorexia as a self-harming practice is correct when considering the following definition: ‘self-injurious behavior (SIB) is defined as those behaviors that involve the deliberate infliction of direct physical harm to one’s own body without the intent to die as a result of the behavior itself’.<sup>489</sup> This definition is further divided into three classification types. Briefly speaking these are: major self-mutilation (understood as severe acts such as castration or eye enucleation-acts typically associated with psychotic disorders), stereotypical self-mutilation (for example, repeated acts such as head-banging or self-biting) and moderate/superficial self-mutilation (this includes acts such as cutting, hair pulling, scratching, picking or burning, and other similar forms of superficial self-injury). I would include anorexia and other eating disorders within the third category as a behaviour which harms the body through a severe restriction of nutrition leading to a host of physical and psychological dangerous ramifications (as discussed in Chapter One). The clinical phenomenology of eating disorders and self-injurious behaviour share important overlaps in that they both take place predominantly within females at the onset of adolescence. Moderate and superficial self-injurious behaviours can be impulsive or compulsive. The compulsive subtype can be understood as habitual, repetitive and “automatic”, there is not usually any conscious intent and involves a build-up of pressure and mounting anxiety prior to the act followed by relief after the behaviour has been performed. The impulsive subtype on the other hand is defined as ‘usually episodic, involves little conscious resistance, and provides some form of gratification beyond reduction of tension or anxiety’.<sup>490</sup> Reports from the individuals engaging in such activities usually state that the behaviour helps them to deal with negative emotions such as loneliness, depression and depersonalization. This behaviour also satisfies the individual’s need for ‘self-punishment and the manipulation of others’.<sup>491</sup> This classification of impulsive behaviours overlaps with what we know of the anorexic experience. Both behaviour patterns can be linked with ‘body dissatisfaction, asceticism, or a pervading sense of ineffectiveness which often implies an element of self-

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<sup>489</sup> Favaro A, Ferrara S, Santonastaso P (2004) Impulsive and Compulsive Self-Injurious Behaviour and Eating Disorders: An Epidemiological Study. In: Levitt J L, Sansone R A, Cohn L (eds.) *Self-Harm Behaviour and Eating Disorders: Dynamics, Assessment, and Treatment*. New York: Brunner-Routledge, 31-45 (31).

<sup>490</sup> Favaro, Ferrara, Santonastaso 2004: 32

<sup>491</sup> Favaro, Ferrara, Santonastaso 2004: 32

punishment (e.g., self-starvation, other body mortification practices such as self-flagellation)'.<sup>492</sup> They are also ways for the individual to take possession and control of their body. Many women with anorexia identify their behaviour as self-injurious<sup>493</sup> but as a focused activity aimed at cultural acceptability (as this is the framework we are working in), a coping mechanism to deal with feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, depression and depersonalization and a struggle for control and power over ownership of the female body, I do not see how anorexia can legitimately be understood within an integrative pain framework or as a healing ritual. The reason for this is unpacked further in the answer to the remaining question: Can anorexia be considered a subversive act?

In the same way that Butler drew on the drag performance as a parody of our gender acts and therefore an opportunity for awareness (in demonstrating the exaggerated nature of our gender performance) and resistance (an opportunity to change the performance), can anorexia be understood as a pathway to liberation from these slender constraints in its revealing of our cultures demands for the self-eradication and arguably (according to some of the academics above), the disempowerment of women? This might be problematic for a few reasons.

For example, for many scholars, as demonstrated through this work, anorexia as a political protest is rarely acknowledged as such by the women under its spell whilst the drag performance is consciously enacted by the performer. Although the anorexic body presents itself as a caricature of the contemporary hyper slender ideal, it is using the body, an area traditionally assigned to women, to express her displeasure and disdain. Despite being unaware of the political statement, as Bordo notes, 'employing the language of femininity to protest the conditions of the female world... will always involve ambiguities'.<sup>494</sup> Even as she becomes aware of the political protest she is making, she ends up being the perfect woman, weak, sexless, vulnerable and delicate, distracted from anything beyond the boundaries of her regimented plate. Coupled with her extreme pain and distress, those who maintain the lithe, slender body with such apparent ease, models and the small percentage that embody a figure naturally endowed with this wafer frame, keep the slender wish alive for so many young women. In this, any political statement she is consciously or subconsciously making is lost. As such, I cannot help but disagree with the idea that anorexia is an unconscious opportunity to subvert and deconstruct the culturally idealized female body. I do not see how anorexia can be understood as an affront to patriarchy, as an expression of liberation from its social constraints and as a rejection of the social manipulation of the female body. For me, anorexia is not an effective means of challenging or undermining contemporary society's female idealizations and norms.

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<sup>492</sup> Favaro, Ferrara, Santonastaso 2004: 32

<sup>493</sup> Favaro, Ferrara, Santonastaso 2004: 32

<sup>494</sup> Bordo 1997: 99

I do however agree with Bordo when she argues that eating disorders begin as sane and mentally healthy responses to these insane cultural pressures, that it is not a sign of mental health to try and fight for the control of your own body amongst these narrowly and powerfully defined social expectations. For some, eating disorders seem like the only escape, the only way to get “out of the game” but eating disorders will never be a forceful enough statement to oppose these powerful ideals. Using thinness as a weapon to expose the ludicrousness of the thinness paradigm will always present a paradox of patriarchal influence and liberation from those constraints. Maybe, instead of discussing the perceived conformity or rebellious nature of anorexia, we should be discussing the naturalized gender role that is in need of deconstruction. If Wolf’s argument that women may gravitate towards eating disorders as a distorted effort to escape the confines of femininity and take back some control of their bodies, we surely need to address the link between gender ideals and anorexia and explore new creative ways of resisting these constraints. Attention needs to be spent on gender inequalities and creating a “gender-neutral” or “gender-fluid” space as we work to break down the social barriers between male and female genders and create an inclusive environment for both sexes and thus, undoing this dangerous and disembodied ideology. In turn, this might be enough to deconstruct the damaging ideology underpinning the slender ideal and disable the need for such a dangerous expression for women to reclaim control of their bodies.

As I wrote earlier, the idea that anorexia can be a healing expression is a troubling one for me. I do not think that contemporary anorexia as a consequence of the constructions of femininity (as we explored when we discussed the relationship between hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia) and the social pressures which teach us that cultural acceptability is contingent on certain beauty prerequisites, can be understood within an integrative pain framework. Fundamentally anorexia is not a form of religious self-hurting and the aim is not a broader identification with divinity. I feel that any transformative element is limited to its revealing of the dangerous nature of the contemporary construction of femininity and beauty necessities in its extreme embodiment of these ideals and normalizing discourses. I also think that anorexia, as we have been discussing it, is far removed from the rites of passage as discussed within the context of “cutting” and other self-harm practices discussed by Baxter. Self-harm and “cutting” practices here are a response to earlier trauma and are implemented by the individual as a means of communicating their pain, the end goal being reconciliation, healing and release.

In this chapter we have examined the female body as a historically mediated form, the commonalities between hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia as reactions to the construction of the feminine indicative of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the political dimensions of female self-starvation and we started to examine pathways from these damaging expressions

through narrative therapy. The second half of this chapter focused on whether there is any psychological benefit or spirituality to result from the anorexic experience in the context of “cutting” and other self-harm practices/self-injurious behaviour. An obvious conclusion arising from these discussions surrounding the political dimensions of anorexia in the context of hysteria and agoraphobia is that the social construction of the feminine and beauty necessities that loiter over the lives of women are dangerous. Subversive resistance comes from challenging this construction and the gender inequalities that determine our roles, responsibilities, appearance and value in society. Whilst this is a theme I will develop more fully in Chapter Six, narrative based therapies are beneficial in that they help the therapist or psychologist to collaborate with the anorexic women so they can both understand the underlying construction that stems from these social pressures and construct a response together as the young woman takes the first tentative steps into the healing process. Before we move onto discussions surrounding the deconstruction of societies damaging body rhetoric in the context of theology and discourses on the Goddess we need to unpack and critically explore the worldview that underpins the sexism and gender double standards that have contributed towards the anorexic construction. For this we turn our attention towards our Judeo-Christian heritage as we discuss the female body as a religiously mediated form.

## Chapter Five- The Female Body as a Religiously Mediated Form

The Judaic-Christian tradition has served to legitimate sexually imbalanced patriarchal society. Thus, for example, the image of the father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male dominated.

Mary Daly<sup>495</sup>

Patriarchal religion (and indirectly the study of religion) has held women down on a Procrustean bed of self-sacrificial motherhood or lethal sexual magic. Women have not been, and by and large are still not, the subjects of their own religious experience. Patriarchal Western religion has owned women’s bodies but disowned the sacrality of those bodies.

Melissa Raphael<sup>496</sup>

History shows us that the female body has had a checkered past within the Christian tradition and as such, the central purpose of this chapter is to unpack the female body as a religiously mediated form. There has been a history of disdain and distrust regarding the female body that finds its foundation within the Genesis narratives. We need look no further than the story of Adam and Eve to see this. In one of the opening narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures we come across the creation story of Adam and Eve where we are taught that Adam was formed to “rule” whilst Eve was created from his flesh as “other”. It is from this biblical narrative<sup>497</sup> that we start to see the construction of a gender hierarchy and theological agenda that still presides over society and the values we hold dear today. This agenda established a hierarchy that saw God and spirit preside over all other beings of flesh; which located women and nature the furthest from spiritual perfection and purity- embodied by male symbolism. The rib became “other” as the holy trinity is man and women dwell outside of

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<sup>495</sup> Daly M (1979) *After the Death of God the Father: Women’s Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness*. In: Christ C P, Plaskow J (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, 53- 62 (54).

<sup>496</sup> Raphael 1996: 20

<sup>497</sup> There are other stories to be told within these biblical narratives. For example, there are two creation stories in Genesis, each offering different accounts and theological perspectives. The story of Adam and Eve is the second of these narratives and is Yahwistic (Gen. 2:4b-3:25). The first creation narrative (Gen.1:1-2:4a) paints a more egalitarian picture as we see in Genesis 1:26: ‘God created the human being in his own image, male and female created he them’. Passages such as these have been drawn upon by scripture scholars to explore whether there is a female dimension of deity to be found within the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Elizabeth Cady Stanton saw Genesis 1:26-28 as establishing an essential equality of women and men in the image of God with domination of the earth given to each jointly. Stanton believed that this text proved the androgyny of God. For more information see: Stanton E C (1993) *The Woman’s Bible: Part I*. Boston: Northeastern University Press; Stanton E C (1993) *The Woman’s Bible: Part II*. Boston: Northeastern University Press; and, Ruether R R (2011) *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 142. However, my focus here is on the heritage of sexism within these traditions and how these elements have contributed towards the contemporary dis-ease between women and their embodiment as I address the elements that contribute towards the anorexic expression.

this. As Mary Daly wrote in *Beyond God the Father* 'if God is male, then the male is God'.<sup>498</sup> These ideologies have been repeated so much over the centuries that they have all but disappeared from public view and become incorporated into the construction of the "norm". As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, it is the job of liberation theologians to unpack the discourses and ideology that underpin our actions, questioning who they serve and whether they are conducive to the humanity and equality of all. As such, at the heart of this chapter is an examination of the West's religio-cultural mediation of the bodies of women and feminist theologies criticism of the sexism inherent within Judeo-Christian tradition. As part of this, I will critically examine our dualistic heritage and explore the history of sexism within the Judeo-Christian tradition touching upon the work of some of the founding feminist theologians. In this I will demonstrate that the traditional theology of the Judeo-Christian tradition does not have the means of providing the most beneficial symbols, myth and meaningful framework for the human condition within contemporary society. With this in mind I will start with an examination of the history of sexism within the Judeo-Christian tradition, our dualistic heritage and how that division between mind and body was succinctly embodied within the aestheticism of "Holy Anorexics" (as identified by Rudolph Bell) in the Middle Ages (fifth to the fifteenth century) and Early Modern Period (fifteenth to the late eighteenth century). This will be followed by an exploration of contemporary religious diet practices such as the Slim for Him and Weight Down programs. I will make and substantiate the argument that these are the extreme manifestations of our society's construction of femininity that demonstrates the religious roots of these idealizations.

### The Judeo-Christian Tradition's Dualistic Heritage

Most widely used to denote the conviction that there exists in the world two sorts of things: the physical and the non-physical, dualism is the philosophy most commonly attributed to the work of Rene Descartes- but also prominent in the writings of Plato and Aristotle- used to denote a binary opposition between the mind and matter; the soul and body. The two philosophies I refer to within this work are Greek<sup>499</sup> and Cartesian<sup>500</sup> dualisms due to the damage their imagining of the separation

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<sup>498</sup> Daly 1992: 19

<sup>499</sup> Greek dualistic thought finds its location within the philosophy of ancient Greece and operates under the premise that the mind and matter are two ontologically separate categories. This is commonly attributed to the work of Plato (428-348 BCE) who (very successfully) separated ideas from the rest of human existence by stressing the ideal over empirical reality and encouraged the use of the mind. His philosophy took many forms and heavily influenced early Christian theologies. In Greek thought women were associated with the body whilst men were associated with the mind. This can be drawn out from within the writings of Aristotle who wrote that the ruling-class Greek males exemplified the mind (spirit) whilst women, slaves and barbarians represent the "body" in their need to be controlled by the ruling elite. Thus, a hierarchy was established based

between the mind and the body has caused to contemporary experiences of embodiment. The Christian assertion that God is a transcendent spirit and that there exists a “spiritual” and “heavenly” dimension led to a devaluing of the material world and thus, subsequently located Christianity within this dualistic framework. In this context, the immaterial mind (which was linked to consciousness and self-awareness) was distanced from the material body. It was thought that the mind could exist without the material body. This understanding saw the creation of a hierarchy in which pursuits of the mind overrode pursuits of the body, which in turn significantly influenced Christian teachings on sexuality, food and the body. The Christian tradition has historically taught its adherents that the flesh does not matter, to be wary of its ability to mislead and deceive us; that women, as the “fleshiest”, are the most deceptive and misleading of all creations.<sup>501</sup> Thus, women have been associated with the body in ways men have not. This has contributed to their subjugation within the Christian tradition. As written by Tertullian, an early Christian author, writing in AD 160-220: ‘You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of Divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man’.<sup>502</sup>

Feminist theologians have written extensively against this dualistic worldview because they have observed the damage this philosophy has had on our embodiment and on our relationship with the natural world. As Isherwood writes:

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on a male elitist system of values. For more information on how this dualistic heritage has been addressed from a feminist liberation theological perspective, see: Isherwood L, McEwan D (2001) *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 78. For a definition of Platonism see: McKim D K (2014) *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 238.

<sup>500</sup> French thinker Rene Descartes (1596-1650) not only distinguished between the mind and body as different forms in the creation of Cartesian dualistic philosophy, but he elevated the mind and “rational” thought as superior to the physical aspects of human existence. Within his philosophy, the mind belonged within the realm of the spirit. He encouraged the belief that human value resided in our thinking ability whilst our physical nature was conceptualised in animal and base terminology. This further perpetuated the pre-Christian Greek division of the world into polarities of black and white, good and bad, body and mind. The way of dealing with this dualism was to transcend the body by striving to be a disembodied being. For information on Cartesian philosophy see: McKim 2014: 43, 57, 165; and, Martin F (2011) *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in Light of Christian Tradition*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

<sup>501</sup> We see this evidenced in the work of Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* in her descriptions of the European Witchburnings during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries throughout Western Europe. Daly details how the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches) established a framework for male justified massacre of women informing the reader ‘that women are more credulous, that they are naturally more impressionable [it is implied by the devil], have slippery tongues, are feebler both in mind and body, are more carnal than men (!) to the extent of having insatiable lust, have weak memories, are liars by nature’. Here, the link between female wanton sexuality and the postulated demise of men is evident. For more information see: Daly M (1991) *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. London: The Women’s Press, 189. Naomi Goldenberg also sights the Witchburning trials as ‘the most literal expression of the misogyny which smolders within the Christian tradition’. For more information see: Goldenberg 1979: 90.

<sup>502</sup> Tertullian quoted in: Holland J (2006) *A Brief History of Misogyny: The World’s Oldest Prejudice*. London: Constable and Robinson, 2.



[Dualistic philosophy] is deeply embedded in our tradition, and like Japanese knot weed it is very difficult to find its end and its beginning and almost impossible to root it out, but also like knot weed dualistic thinking strangles any self-worth we may dare or any blossoming we may feel compelled to venture. Why? Well, because dualism is a device lurking in the midst of an incarnational religion that has objectified us and made us aliens in our own skin. It has weighed heavy on women, men and the planet since it acts as a deadener, a delayer, a tricky device to make us believe in the sanctity of the absent, the corruption of the present, the promise of tomorrow and the inadequacy/incompleteness of today.<sup>503</sup>

Dualistic tendencies allow us to separate ourselves from everything we feel uncomfortable about whilst creating the systems that oppress and marginalize “others”. All social ills are assigned to these “others” who become the scapegoat for a number of sins. A divine hierarchy is thus established by Christian dualistic thinking of ‘God, angels/saints, man, woman, planet and in addition the dualisms of black/white, straight/gay, and so on’.<sup>504</sup> Within this system of divisions, men assigned themselves with attributes of strength, rationality, spirit and culture whilst associating emotionality, flesh and nature with the female body. As such, this dualism found its symbolism in the alienation of the feminine and masculine as bodylines, sensuality and subjugation were identified with the feminine and psychic attributes of autonomous will, transcendent spirit and intellectuality were identified with the masculine. By way of their anatomy and physical proximity to divinity, men secured a position at the top of the hierarchy whilst obtaining and safeguarding the right to ultimate control, power and domination over everything residing below them in this hierarchical system. This included women, animals and land. In this the culture creating males laid the roots for female oppression as they identified ‘the positive sides of the dualism with themselves... [and] the negative sides with women over whom they claimed the right to rule’.<sup>505</sup> We see these values hold true within religious doctrine and cultural practices.<sup>506</sup> As Isherwood writes:

‘[t]he problem has been that Christian history has been read through dualistic lenses and so our beginnings, rooted in Eden, which should declare to us the story of an adventurous, in-tune and divinely-curious woman gives us instead Eve who in one simple action brought

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<sup>503</sup> Isherwood L (2004) The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology. In: Clack B (ed.) *Embodying Feminist Liberation Theologies*. London: Continuum Publishing Ltd, 140-156 (141).

<sup>504</sup> Isherwood 2004: 141

<sup>505</sup> Christ C P, Plaskow J (1979a) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, 5.

<sup>506</sup> As noted at length by Jack Holland in *A Brief History of Misogyny* in our culture, misogyny (the hatred of women), has thrived on many levels. From the Greek philosophical writers who helped frame how Western society views the world, to nineteenth century London and the highways of Los Angeles ‘where serial killers have left in their wake a trail of tortured and mutilated corpses of women’. We see in the Christian aesthetics of the third century AD, in the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, and in the twenty-first centuries femicide in Honduras, how misogynist practices, many of which find their roots within the Abrahamic traditions, have directed rage at women and worked to suppress female sexuality. For more information on the history of misogyny see: Holland 2006.

down the downfall of man which resulted in the necessary death of the son of God to make amends'.<sup>507</sup>

This has led to a history of theological reflections on women as guilty and shameful as they come to 'represent all that humanity needs to be saved from- flesh and nature'.<sup>508</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether also locates gender inequality as the consequence of this dualistic split writing that 'the sexism of the Christian tradition is integrally related to the dualistic and hierarchal mentality that Christianity inherited from the classical world'.<sup>509</sup> She writes that Christianity became the heir to classical Neo-Platonism and apocalyptic Judaism which successfully combined the image of a warrior male God with the elevation of the intellect over the body. In this we saw the transcendent God, as the heavenly messianic king, put forth a world-negating set of dualisms that profoundly influenced the developing worldview. She writes:

All the basic dualities-the alienation of the mind from the body; the alienation of the subjective self from the objective world; the subjective retreat of the individual, alienated from the social community; the domination or rejection of nature by spirit- these all have roots in the apocalyptic-platonic religious heritage of classical Christianity.<sup>510</sup>

At that time (estimated by Ruether to be around the first millennium BCE) this dualistic thinking created a disruption of the holistic perspective and a breakdown of tribal culture of the time as 'women and men, nature and culture, body and spirit, Goddess and God, once bound together in a total vision of world renewal, became split off from each other and ordered hierarchically'.<sup>511</sup> Male language, symbolism and ritual were forged, as theology became the product of male experience which goes some way to explaining the history of sexism within the Christian tradition. This mindset has slowly permeated all aspects of life throughout the centuries and as a consequence, society has profoundly conditioned men and women to play out their lives according to this basic antithesis. We see this reflected in contemporary gender inequalities (discussed in greater length in Chapter's One and Two) which includes double standards of behaviour for women and men, the artificial images of feminine beauty held up as an example of the female ideal and more broadly speaking, in general gender inequalities such as the persistent pay gap between women and their male counterparts

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<sup>507</sup> Isherwood 2004: 141

<sup>508</sup> Isherwood 2004: 142

<sup>509</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 4

<sup>510</sup> Ruether R R (1979) *Motherearch and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic and Ecological Perspective*. In: Christ C P, Plaskow J (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. San Francisco, 43-62 (44).

<sup>511</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 21

etc.<sup>512</sup> We also see this dualism embedded in dominant social discourses such as ideals of thinness and food restriction which appear plausible because they are so deeply rooted in these discourses. In this context, dualism can be understood as ‘the (over)valuing of control and the equation of control with thinness’<sup>513</sup> which cannot be fully understood in terms of individual psychology. The anorexic and dieting body is produced within a discourse of dualistic philosophy which creates the concept of control in a specifically idealized way. This is further evident in popular cultural narratives as evidenced in the films we watch (*Flashdance, Rocky, Million Dollar Baby, Save the Last Dance*) and government guidelines regarding health and exercise (government discourses which valorize health, fitness and controlled eating regimes- 5 a day fruit and vegetables, the 50%/25%/25% plate regimes<sup>514</sup>- which increasingly focus on creating black and white polarities in which food is anthropomorphized as virtuous, pure and good on the one hand and condemned as lazy, sluggish and bad on the other). These discourses understand human existence as essentially spiritual (or mental) and physical in which the body becomes alien and something to be controlled and mastered. Success here is measured by the individual’s ability to produce the socially acceptable body as we explored in the opening chapters of this thesis.

Writing on the mind/body split Catherine Garrett locates these dualisms at the centre of the anorexic experience. She writes that the dualistic divide between the body and emotions, sexuality and the mind, spirit and self often pervades the thoughts and feelings of the women and girls with anorexia. In sessions discussing their anorexic experiences they often drew upon dualistic themes to describe the day-to-day treatment of their bodies. This is evident in the following comments made during Garrett’s therapy sessions with anorexic women:

Margaret (recovering) spoke of her body as ‘a separate thing from my brain... my mind is in charge of my body. They are very much separate’...

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<sup>512</sup> Natasha Walter writes that between 2007 and 2008 the pay gap widened and that senior manager positions that were once held 40% by women had, in 2002, declined to 22%. She puts this down to a resurgence of old sexism in new guises. For more information see: Walter 2010: 10-11

<sup>513</sup> Malson 1998: 123

<sup>514</sup> Here I refer to the health guidance “rule-of-thumb” that refers to food proportions in terms of a plate percentage. The health recommendation is 50% vegetables (as many different varieties as possible) 25% protein and 25% carbohydrate. The literature infers that a good parent is one whom meets these guidelines, providing their children with the correct proportions of food and maximising the nutritional content. Something that is increasingly expensive to do. The bad parent does not meet these guidelines and the punishments can be severe. As increasing focus is applied to the food we put into our mouths, if a parent is seen to be “neglecting” their children by not providing the appropriate balance, social services can step in to rectify the situation. For more information on government guidelines see: Public Health England (2016) *Eating: How Healthy is Your Food?* Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/eating#G0E04gs0B4psAZWH.97> [02/04/16]. For more information on child protection and obesity see: Boseley S (2010) *Parents of obese children may be guilty of neglect*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jul/16/parents-obese-children-neglect> [02/04/16].

Sheena (also recovering) still feels ‘fragmented’ into sexual and emotional sides that ‘got cut off and never expressed’ during anorexia. She continues to perpetuate the split in the idea that there actually are ‘pieces’ to be identified and glued together, rather than interweaving processes to be lived...

Meredith [recovered] ... ‘I’m much more attuned to my body now, to know when it’s hungry and when it isn’t and what it wants. It will actually tell me it needs a banana.’<sup>515</sup>

Garrett has found that even those who have “recovered” from anorexia (Meredith falls into this category) still describe this “split” by labeling themselves as “I” and their bodies as “it”. Dualisms such as these imply an element of domination and submission, that they are “masters” of their bodies. For Garrett, breaking down these dualisms is something that needs to be relearned: ‘To recover, you’ve got to start seeing your body as part of you. We’ve split it off for so long. And punished it. This is what I think recovery is: that the whole, all of me, is worth looking after. That’s the big change, actually’.<sup>516</sup> This dualistic gender divide is exemplified by the dictator male voice that compels her to continue her plight, adding to the restrictive behaviour and reducing the calorie consumption. She often recognizes this dualistic logic as embodying gender tensions in her identification of the disembodied voice as male that compels her to continue her quest for self-erasure, as we explored earlier in this thesis. Within this framework, the body is understood as a malleable object, something to be shaped and manipulated at will. Thus, we see how dualistic philosophy produces bodies as alien to the true self. The body as “other” is overlaid with all the negative aspects of human existence which threaten to overwhelm the “true-self” and to displace personal integrity; it produces the need for control over the body. The anorexic body is constructed as a proof of discipline, power and integrity as it symbolizes absolute and total control over one’s body and life by extension. Here, as reinforced by Garrett, our dualistic heritage is epitomized by Rene Descartes infamous comment ‘I think, therefore I am’<sup>517</sup> and earlier than that, to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Plato believed that the authentic soul is incarnated as male, and it is only when it succumbs to the body that it is reincarnated into the body of a female ‘and then into the body of some beast resembling the evil character into which it has fallen’.<sup>518</sup> It is here that the (male) intellect ‘is seen as an alien, lonely species that originates in a purely spiritual realm beyond time, space and matter, and has been dropped, either as into a testing place or, through some fault, into this lower material realm’.<sup>519</sup> In-keeping with this philosophy, Christian literature focuses upon the body as a straightjacket, confining and dragging down the mind/soul from its spiritual perfection

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<sup>515</sup> Garrett 1998: 148

<sup>516</sup> Garrett 1998: 148

<sup>517</sup> Rene Descartes quoted in McKim 2014: 57

<sup>518</sup> Ruether 1979: 48

<sup>519</sup> Ruether 1979: 48

and debasing its moral integrity. Liberation here is referred to as an escape from these confines to the heavenly plains. In this anti-body, anti-feminine and anti-matter perspective, Christianity is often cited as the originator of the debased view of nature and as the endorsement for the technological exploitation of the earth.

Following from Garrett's work on the dualistic undercurrents of the anorexic experience, Michelle Mary Lelwica in *Starving for Salvation* highlights the overlaps between aestheticism and common female reflections on their anorexic tendencies. Lelwica writes that some anorexic and bulimic women 'use the language of Christianity, most notably asceticism, to articulate their search for an otherworldly order of existence'.<sup>520</sup> She cites accounts of anorexic women who dualistically claim: 'I believed the mind should control the body completely... I was very aesthetic'<sup>521</sup> and as another woman commented: 'if I have to suffer pain... I should be able with my mind to disconnect this pain from my mind's activity'.<sup>522</sup> Another female patient said: 'the corporeal didn't really matter'<sup>523</sup> and another: '[m]y soul was free. My soul sort of flew. It was tied down by this big bag of rocks that was my body'.<sup>524</sup> Lelwica's aim in providing these examples is to demonstrate how the contemporary anorexic experience is underscored by dualistic logic which in turn is underpinned by the 'patriarchal tactics of traditional religion'.<sup>525</sup> The anorexic body within her writings embodies the radical separation of dualistic logic as manifested within Christian doctrine. She writes about how the writings of Christian authors prior to Descartes have been historically misperceived and misinterpreted. She argues that the body and soul were implicitly understood as interdependent, an idea that was later lost as understandings of the soul and body as radically separated took root within the Christian tradition. Lelwica notes that one of the main difficulties facing her patients in therapy is interrogating this dualistic mindset to establish where the "psyche" ends and the "body" begins. She argues that the medical professionals, therapists and individuals caught up in this dualistic thinking need to interrogate the dualistic logic and challenge the language and symbols lying at its foundation. Talking about the mind/body split that does not actually exist allows for a breaking down of this mindset and removes them from utilizing this strategy as a means of giving their imaginative world meaning and escaping the daily challenges that they struggle to face as a unified body.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Lelwica M M (1999) *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women*. New York: Oxford University Press, 114.

<sup>521</sup> Lelwica 1999: 114

<sup>522</sup> Lelwica 1999: 115

<sup>523</sup> Lelwica 1999: 115

<sup>524</sup> Lelwica 1999: 115

<sup>525</sup> Lelwica 1999: 115

<sup>526</sup> For more information see: Lelwica 1999: 113-7.

Thus, we can see how our dualistic heritage, embedding in a complex web of Judeo-Christian teachings and broader cultural values, has directly influenced female embodiment in the twenty-first century. This dualistic heritage is deeply entrenched within the Hebrew narratives which have been used throughout history to underscore female subjugation and the development of body denying, disembodied praxis. It is this sexism that we will explore in the following pages.

### Judeo-Christian History of Sexism

We are aware of the damage dominant patriarchal readings can do to any known text and to the integrity of the belief systems they come to represent. These readings serve the interests of the self-proclaimed elite whilst hiding and demonizing the individuals in the texts that they have little or no interest in fully including or understanding. Within the context of the dominant patriarchal readings of biblical narratives, women have been undermined, beaten, raped, demonized and named as the source of male sin as we shall see in the following pages. Whilst we will take a look at the creation narrative as analyzed within the work of Mary Condren in a moment, arguably the most well-known of all biblical narratives, there is a plethora of negative and damaging references to women within the pages of the Hebrew Bible. This becomes evident when reading the work of Asphodel Long, particularly in relation to the treatment of Lilith, the first woman to be hidden and demonized within its pages. Drawing upon the Book of Isaiah (34: 8-14) Long writes:

The land shall become burning pitch. Thorns shall grow over its strongholds. It shall be the haunt of jackals yea there shall the night hag alight and find for herself a resting place<sup>527</sup>

The “night hag” here is a direct reference to Lilith.<sup>528</sup> In the context of the Book of Isaiah, the verse describes a state of desolation due to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. In this text, God is angry at both the destruction wrought on the place and the exile of the people from their homes. The verse is intended to show how this destruction was created as a by-product of their worship of other deities. Long writes that it is known that ‘this part of the Bible was written by the scribes in exile at the time and put together later, as an object lesson in what happens to those people who did not adhere to the patriarchal monotheism that was the religion of the ruling classes’.<sup>529</sup> The patriarchal world ‘turned Lilith into a monster, strangling new born babies and

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<sup>527</sup> Isherwood L (2007b) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*. London: Equinox Publishing, xii.

<sup>528</sup> In Hebrew, the translation of “night hag” is Lilith. Other editions such as the King James Bible (Authorized Version) translate Lilith into “screech owl” whilst the New English Bible (NEB) refers to the “night-jar” and the Revised Version (RV) of 1881 favors “night monster”. In all editions Lilith is not once referred to by name. For more information see: Isherwood 2007b.

<sup>529</sup> Isherwood 2007b: xii

sucking their blood; a demoness howling in the desert and in the night, making men impotent, causing cattle to die and generally being the personification of evil'.<sup>530</sup> Elaborating on the various sources that refer to Lilith, Long examines information taken from the ancient Near East pictures and archeological records, Jewish rabbinical and medieval literature in addition to Kabalistic writings, Arabic legends and Christian church references predominantly in connection with the persecution of the witches.

Following a broader investigation of Judaism and a stripping of patriarchal hermeneutics she develops an understanding of Lilith as the 'breath of life'<sup>531</sup> which understands her as directly connected to the creation of life in the Genesis narratives. Within Jewish legend we read of Lilith as the first wife of Adam. The legend details the creation of Lilith and Adam from the same and equal dust. In this account Lilith, making a stand against patriarchal domination, refuses the submission of the missionary position and escapes from the domination of Adam through uttering the magic name of God (legend suggests that this is unknown to Adam) and fleeing into the desert where she is free. Sending three angels, God tries to bring her back unsuccessfully (even God cannot compel her). Thus, her place is filled by Eve. God, avoiding making the same "mistake" twice, created Eve from Adam's rib as a subordinate.

In this telling of the legend, Lilith appears to be more God's equal than Adam's. Long refers to her as the 'Lady of the Air, of the living breath, that gives life to us all'<sup>532</sup> and it is suggested that she is the original Wisdom Goddess whom was with God from the beginning (Proverbs 8:22).<sup>533</sup> Here, for feminist liberation theologians, Lilith comes to represent the powerful personification of the embodiment of all women and marks a transformation from the patriarchal discourses of power, domination and control into a striking symbol of liberation and female strength. Within this reading she transcends the demonization wrought on her by dominant patriarchal readings and is recreated as a woman who defies male control.

In the same spirit, in her book *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions* Asphodel long writes about her search for female images of the divine within the Hebrew Bible to find the hidden and overlooked female divine. She examines the position of the Virgin Mary and also the hidden Shekinah (the divine female presence of God in Judaism) amongst discussions surrounding the divine female found in nature, the female personification of divine wisdom, Hochmah in Hebrew and Sophia in Greek. She

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<sup>530</sup> Isherwood 2007b: xiii

<sup>531</sup> Lilith is connected with Layil, Hebrew for night, and the Sumerian (c. 3000 BCE) Lil translated as wind or breath. Over the years, opinions have varied but contemporary scholarship focuses on Lil from Sumerian understandings of breath and spirit reflecting on her in the context of Genesis 2:7 in which God breathes the breath of life into the human being formed from dust. This breath had the power to turn inanimate into animate, the power to bring beings into existence. For more information see: Isherwood 2007b: xiv

<sup>532</sup> Isherwood 2007b: xiv

<sup>533</sup> For more information see: Isherwood 2007b: xv-xvi

writes that in 're-evaluating the bible, it seems that we find Wisdom to be our friend, and as we uncover the pieces that tell us our female heritage, we also come to see how she came to be so obscured... in our understanding of female Wisdom, we start to be healed'.<sup>534</sup>

Reflecting on the Hebrew Bible's creation narratives, Condren returns to the (so-called) transgression of Eve in the Garden of Eden. She writes that the "curse of Eve" has become entrenched within the human psyche as something that women cannot escape from and the reason why men can never be sure of their salvation. Arguably the creation story of Adam and Eve has had the most influence on Western thought despite various other creation stories detailed within the broader biblical narratives. The premise of this story takes the following structure: 'Adam and Eve, having taken the forbidden fruit at the suggestion of the Serpent, were punished simply for their disobedience'.<sup>535</sup> Both Adam and Eve were subsequently expelled from paradise, were made shameful of their nakedness alongside the individual punishments that for Eve consisted of increased pain in childbirth whilst Adam's punishments centered on his working conditions and agricultural difficulties.<sup>536</sup> Despite various contradictions- such as how did the serpent get into this paradise in the first place and why God would choose to punish them for acquiring knowledge as through this acquisition, Adam and Eve would be closer to God's divinity and fully equipped with divine wisdom and knowledge to progress His divine plan - this story set forth a theological agenda that saw the divinization of man and the demonization of woman.<sup>537</sup> Reflecting on the narrative now, equipped with decades of feminist theology's critical engagement in the creation narratives, the only image this story successfully promotes is that of a pernicious and bitter God, a tyrant who picks and chooses what they can eat and do based on His arbitrary will. Despite the various contradictions and inconsistencies, this story has had widespread implications that powerfully

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<sup>534</sup> Long A P (1992) *In a Chariot Drawn By Lions: The Search for the Female in Deity*. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 195-6.

<sup>535</sup> Condren M (2002) *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland*. Dublin: New Island Books, 4.

<sup>536</sup> These punishments are shockingly disproportionate considering the nature of the narrative: having been told by God that they must not eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, Eve is persuaded by the serpent (with promises of the knowledge of good and evil) to consume the fruit and consequently offers some to Adam. Here we read that the woman sought knowledge and ate the fruit whilst Adam gratified his hunger before shifting the responsibility onto his wife. Thus, Adam takes the position of blaming the entire transgression on Eve. For more information see: Condren 2002: 4-6.

<sup>537</sup> Another reading of this story, as discussed by Condren, comes from psychology and understands the serpent as a phallic symbol; here the eating from the tree of knowledge is understood as an act of sexual transgression. However, this too makes little sense in the context of God's opening comments to Adam and Eve that directed them to '[b]e fruitful, and multiply' (Genesis 1:28) and also in light of the punishment to Eve's sexuality which is unbalanced considered alongside Adam's agricultural punishment. There is no consistency with the punishments and so if this were sexual, would they not have been punished equally? However, despite these considerations 'Adam has gone down in history as the poor, misguided and unfortunate man, a warning to all men not to listen to women. And Eve has gone down in history as the greatest Temptress of all time, the model for the seductive nature of the whole of the female sex'. For more information see: Condren 2002: 5.



affected the treatment of women in society throughout history. As discussed throughout the duration of this thesis, we see these themes resonate within contemporary society.<sup>538</sup> Women, having been associated with Eve, were offered sanctity through identification with the Virgin Mary (full approximation was impossible as she was born without sin and- despite bearing a child- remained a virgin) through denying her sexuality. Within Christian teachings sex and spirituality have traditionally been separated for women. The story of Eve's original sin has been used time and time again to reinforce the subjugation of women. In her book Condren asks how this strong narrative (so biased towards the male sex) came into existence. She asks if it is the consequence of the author's prejudices, or more broadly connected to the changes taking place in the infrastructure of Hebrew society at the time the text was written, a query similarly posed by Phyllis Bird in 1974.

Arguing that the Hebrew Bible is a patriarchal construct in which women are referred to, in the most part, as adjuncts to men in the context of male activities, Bird details how the Old Testament portrays a man's world and describes the situation of women within ancient Israel as simply a class of property.<sup>539</sup> She argues that the Old Testament needs to be considered within an understanding of the society in which it emerged and alongside the influence that themes, motifs, images and languages derived from earlier periods and cultures might have had on the authors at the time of composition.<sup>540</sup> She writes: '[t]hat millennium saw enormous changes in the social, economic, political and religious life of Israel... the texts reflect social patterns and images of seminomadic tribal society and of settled peasant agriculturalists'.<sup>541</sup> With these political shifts taking place new understandings of men, women and God took hold whilst new social and religious organizations were established and some of the male and female representations within biblical passages must be attributed to these social changes. The net result was a society where full membership was reserved exclusively for men whilst women and children, alongside animals and property, became the responsibility and dependents of men. Bird's conclusion focused on the inherent sexism within ancient Israel society writing that the system enforced and perpetuated the dependence of women on men reinforced by the idea that females were naturally inferior to men. This was illustrated in the laws of the time that dealt with inheritance, divorce, sexual

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<sup>538</sup> As we have examined when discussing the development of anorexia and will explore later in this chapter whilst reflecting upon the Christian diet industry which emerged out of conservative protestant body values in the Southern States of America.

<sup>539</sup> Freedom, power, respect and in some cases reverence are bestowed upon women in certain circumstances but this is predominantly in the context of the family home in her role as wife and mother. It was here that a woman could improve her situation but here only. Bird P (1974) *Images of Women in the Old Testament*. In: Ruether R R (ed.) *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 41-88 (41).

<sup>540</sup> Bird writes to locate the creation story within the context of the larger Old Testament testimony, the writings of which span from the twelfth to the third century BC.

<sup>541</sup> Bird 1974: 47

transgressions, religious vows, ritual purity and cultic observations. Despite these clear imbalances and subsequent damage to the position of women within Israel society, Bird reminds the reader that freedom, power, respect and reverence were sometimes bestowed on women in the context of the family home in her role as wife and mother; that 'Israel's best statements about women recognize her as an equal with man, and with him jointly responsible to God and cohumanity'.<sup>542</sup>

In the account of Lilith which opened this section, we read of a woman who insisted on full equality with her male counterpart and when this wasn't granted, she fled to the desert for freedom from male domination only reappearing later in the Garden of Eden as the Serpent<sup>543</sup> to free Eve with the knowledge of good and evil. For feminist theologians she transforms into a symbol of female liberation, strength and empowerment as she defies the control of Adam and God. Eve on the other hand is not so lucky. Remembered predominately for her eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, she fades into history as a symbol of female oppression in which salvation is only possible through the acquisition of the Virgin Mary's virginity, purity and sexual passivity. We see here the foundations of our sexuality denying Judeo-Christian heritage. We know the damage this has wrought on women throughout our history, however as Isherwood argues, if you look hard enough, employing an open hermeneutic, there are slivers of light in the darkness of female oppression that hint at a broader embodiment available for women within these texts. Here I refer to her interpretation of the Songs of Songs as a passionate text of female sensuality and the ownership of desire as opposed to the common interpretation of church fathers that utilizes the narrative as a core monastic text.<sup>544</sup> Isherwood also draws upon feminist theologies critical engagement with the Jesus narratives looking for ways to break down our sexist and dualistic heritage. She writes that '[f]eminist theologians who engage with bodies celebrate the fact that our stories portray Jesus as a very earthy man sharing touch, engaging with nature, making strong political statements through the symbolic use of food; both during the 'last supper' and in the feedings of thousands Jesus enacted shared power and the interconnected nature of flourishing'.<sup>545</sup> As powerful political statements these biblical narratives demonstrate that Jesus's theology was located in the lived reality of his time. He 'used fluid from his body to heal and so truly understood

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<sup>542</sup> Bird 1974: 50

<sup>543</sup> Long and Isherwood offer an alternative reading of the Serpent as Lilith, understood in their work as the original Wisdom Goddess who was with God at the beginning (Proverbs 8:22). Writing '[s]he is the serpent of Wisdom who offers her sister Eve her own knowledge'. In the end, both women are punished by patriarchy for challenging the prescribed gender hierarchy and the patriarchal domination that ensues; they just do it in different ways. Isherwood 2007b: xvi

<sup>544</sup> For more information see: Isherwood L (2007c) 'EAT, FRIENDS, DRINK. BE DRUNK WITH LOVE' [SONG OF SONGS 5:2]- A REFLECTION. In: Isherwood L (ed.) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*. London: Equinox Publishing, 149- 157 (149).

<sup>545</sup> Isherwood 2004: 146-7

the importance of engaging the body in the struggle for liberation'.<sup>546</sup> This, alongside Carter Heyward's concept of *dunamis* and mutuality through which we experience the presence and power of God as incarnate and Rita Brock's work on the transformative power of touch and sensuality developed in the context of the Jesus story, we see how feminist liberation theologians have attempted to transform the biblical narratives into an alternative truth, one located in the fleshy reality of our bodies.<sup>547</sup> However, despite these open readings of certain biblical narratives, it remains the case that the core rhetoric, which transcended the confines of the biblical narratives to take root in the very environments in which we live today, is that within a patriarchy men will always hierarchically reside in a superior position to women and female embodiment will suffer as a consequence. As written by Ruether: 'religion has been not only a contributing factor; it is undoubtedly the single most important shaper and enforcer of the image and role of women in culture and society today. It has been religion that has been the ideological reflection of this sexual domination and subjugation. And it has been religion, as a social institution, that has been its cultural sanctioner'.<sup>548</sup> As such, Patricia Martin Doyle wrote that '[t]he debate on women and religion is the single most important and radical question for our time and the foreseeable future precisely because it concerns religion and because it affects all possible people and peoples'.<sup>549</sup> The first step in rectifying this damaging influence is to identify and breakdown the negative discourses that underpin and reinforce this gender hierarchy and denial of female sexuality and hungers.

#### Feminist Theologies Critique on the History of Sexism

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<sup>546</sup> For more information see: Isherwood 2004: 147

<sup>547</sup> Carter Heyward developed the concept of *dunamis* and erotic connection that is our divine birthright of raw energy that is fully expressed in our mutuality and vulnerability communicated with others. Arguing that it is through our mutuality that we experience the presence and power of God she writes that '[f]rom a place of mutual relation, each party is empowered to be more fully who they are at their best'. For more information see: Heyward C (2010) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1; and, Heyward C (1989) *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. New York: HarperCollins. Similarly, Rita Brook writes that we can transform the world through touch and sensuality. She says that we are broken-hearted healers who desperately crave the power of touch to heal our environments and ourselves. In her work she utilizes the sensuality and earthiness of the Jesus story to reinforce the power of touch and embodiment as part of our redemptive praxis. Healing here becomes a political statement, as it is about power shared and not power exhorted on one by another. For more information on Brooks works see: Brock R (1988) *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*. New York: Crossroad.

<sup>548</sup> Ruether 1974: 9

<sup>549</sup> Whilst Doyle wrote this in 1974 I believe it remains wholly relevant for contemporary society and contemporary life. We must remain engaged in challenging the patriarchal discourses that underpin acts of sexual inequality. Doyle P M (1974) *Women and Religion: Psychological and Cultural Implications*. In: Ruether R R (ed.) *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 15-40 (15).

Feminist critique on the sexism inherent in the Judeo Christian tradition started (by-and-large) with the publication of *Religion and Sexism*, a book of essays edited by Ruether in 1974 and *Women and Religion* by Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson in 1977. Only a few feminist pieces predated these books, namely the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1895 with *The Women's Bible*, Valerie Saiving's paper titled *The Human Situation: A Feminine View* in 1960 and Mary Daly with *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1968. Each of these were published before the area had acquired any legitimacy despite them being relatively recent in our history.

Saiving's paper titled *The Human Situation: A Feminine View* was focused on her work on the human experience of the theological doctrines of sin and love. She argued that the human theological doctrines of love had been constructed from the perspective of masculine experience and as a consequence, the human situation has been constructed from a male standpoint. This, she writes, has led to the modern era of the masculine 'in the sense that it emphasized, encouraged, and set free precisely those aspects of human nature which are... significant to men'.<sup>550</sup> Placing the highest value on external achievement and the creation of structures of control (which we touched upon when we discussed the work of Foucault in Chapter Three) and on the separation of man from nature. She argues that the "modern era" did this by creating a gulf between aspects of public and private life; between families, businesses and politics which increased people's natural sense of insecurity and anxiety. As we have already seen, the outcome was to devalue the functions and contributions of women, children and nature which provoked restlessness in women in its challenging of their equality and worth. The place and role of man at the top of the hierarchy, or as close to the top he could get without sitting on the lap of divinity, was assured by 'one aspect of the universal human situation'.<sup>551</sup> Clearly inadequate as this theology is, as is exemplified by the contemporary situation and growing demands of women who call for recognition as full human beings with all the advantages and opportunities of men, there is a traitorous and dangerous battleground to negotiate before the tradition of male supremacy can be fully displaced. Saiving's goal was to:

... awaken theologians to the fact that the situation of woman, however similar it may appear... to the situation of man... is, at bottom, quite different- that the specifically feminine dilemma is, in fact, precisely the opposite of the masculine. Today, when for the first time in human history it really seems possible that those endless housewifely tasks- which, along with the bearing and rearing of children, have always been enough to fill the whole of each day for the average woman- may virtually be eliminated; today, when at last women might seem to be in a position to begin to be both feminine and fully developed, creative human beings; today, these same women are being subjected to pressures from

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<sup>550</sup> Saiving V (1979) *The Human Situation: A Feminine View*. In: Christ C P, Plaskow J (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. New York: Harper & Row, 25- 42 (35).

<sup>551</sup> Saiving 1979: 36

many sides to return to the traditional feminine niche and to devote themselves wholly to the tasks of nurture, support, and service of their families.<sup>552</sup>

That is most certainly true of 1960 and I believe it still rings true for the contemporary situation of women as I have argued throughout this body of work. It is the role and responsibility of theologians to recognize these feminine pressures and to support and encourage women with desires beyond this female ideal. However, like other masculine institutions, the church reiterates through its teachings that 'she has no right to ask for anything for herself but must submit without qualification to the strictly feminine role'.<sup>553</sup> Throughout her work Saiving argues that a theology based solely on masculine experience will become irrelevant as society changes and women broaden their opportunities. If theology is to remain relevant, it needs to rethink its assumptions of the human condition and pave the way for a broader feminine identity.

In *The Church and the Second Sex* Daly writes that '[t]he imbalance in Christian ideology resulting from sexual hierarchy is manifested not only in the doctrine of God but also in the notion of Jesus as the unique God-man'.<sup>554</sup> As such, it is not uncommon- at the time of publication and in present times- for priests and ministers, congregations and even people who consider themselves not affiliated with a religion, to assert the argument that God became incarnate as male which in turn justifies and reinforces the male supremacy which is endemic to contemporary life. She argues that the transformation of society by the women's movement and the development of feminist theologies will slowly erode male supremacy and domination and as such, the liberation of women will challenge such gendered assumptions lying at the heart of Christian doctrine. The underlying and explicit assumption of theologians that divinity could not have stooped to become incarnate within a female body as the "inferior sex" reinforces the belief in the male supremacy from which life stems. As such, for the development of female equality, male symbols for the ideal of "incarnation" will not do. Daly argues that it is not by attacking traditional theism that we will accomplish the movement away from masculine rituals and symbolisms. Instead the shift will come from leaving it behind altogether. Whilst she recognizes the importance of symbolism for the divine in human form she writes that it is unlikely that women and men will continue to find the symbolism of the virgin kneeling in adoration before her son plausible. Instead she suggests replacing this symbolism with bisexual imagery that is non-hierarchical. In this she is calling us to acknowledge the poverty of current symbols and to turn 'to our own resources for bringing about the radically new in our own lives'.<sup>555</sup> For Daly, the awaking of women to their human potential through creative action

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<sup>552</sup> Saiving 1979: 39

<sup>553</sup> Saiving 1979: 39

<sup>554</sup> Daly 1979: 58

<sup>555</sup> Daly 1979: 59

as they assume equal partnership with men 'can bring about a manifestation of God in themselves which will be the Second Coming of God incarnate, fulfilling the latent promise in the original revelation that men and women are made in the image of God'.<sup>556</sup> The consequence of which is the experience of wholeness of personality by both men and women as divinity takes on a truly immanent form. The concept of a fully immanent divine construct is discussed further in Chapter Six.

Two positions can be said to arise out of the feminist theological literature regarding the sexism inherent within the Judeo-Christian tradition. These are the reformist and revolutionary positions as discussed by Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow in the opening pages of *Womanspirit Rising*.<sup>557</sup> These positions developed following the popular belief within feminist literature that society had outgrown its need for religion that was largely based on the belief that Judaism and Christianity are sexist religions that have legitimated the superiority of men whilst denigrating and demonizing women and feminine attributes. The argument followed that religions keep women psychologically and emotionally dependent on religion and kept them distanced from pursuing personal goals and aspirations inconsistent with the religions values prescribed, taught and reinforced within their Christian and Jewish communities. For these religions and feminists operating within these traditional frameworks, this understanding presented a problem. For these feminists, religion is profoundly important and the idea that it is so deeply sexist was- and still is- experienced as a great betrayal of their deeply felt spiritual and ritual experiences. Despite this history of sexism in Western religion, it does not invalidate the human need for ritual, symbol and myth. As Christ and Plaskow write:

it is only when the crucial importance of religion, myth, and symbol in human life are understood that feminists can begin to understand how deeply traditional religions have betrayed women. If religion, myth, and symbol have outlived their usefulness, then one should be no more irritated at the quaint archaism of traditional religious sexism. But, once one recognizes the importance of religion, then an enormous sense of injustice must follow the discovery that religions are sexist and that they continue to exert a powerful influence on society.<sup>558</sup>

Women needed these human desires in an embodied and legitimating framework but how to develop this was conceptualized in two very different ways. Some feminist liberation theologians- emboldened by the women's movement- focused their efforts on using the existing Judeo-Christian structure and worked to examine sexist narratives and highlight and create positive female experiences and contributions that challenged the sexist discourses. This is the reformist position and, broadly speaking, the argument was that 'we are inevitably rooted in our past and that the

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<sup>556</sup> Daly 1979: 60

<sup>557</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a

<sup>558</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 3

attempt to transcend history proposed by some feminists is fraught with danger. It is more sensible... to reform the past than to ignore it, because those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it'.<sup>559</sup> Feminists who adhere to this position believe that they are calling the synagogue and church back to an essential core of the Jewish and Christian faith; that they are cleaning the historical deviations from this truth. They worked to graft onto the inherent sexism teachings that did not deny their personhood and insisted on their right to positions in the highest positions of the churches. This encouraged an academy wide analysis of the discourses that underpinned the subordination of women. One of the first reformist feminists was Stanton with *The Women's Bible*, a reconstruction of biblical passages relating to women and women's role within its tradition. This was the product of her conviction that the political and economic subordination of women has deep ideological and religious roots. In her view, the emancipation of women was impossible unless everyone within the Christian community understood the Bible from a feminist perspective.

Other feminists, falling into the revolutionary framework, believe the essential core is so irredeemably sexist that the religious tradition cannot be changed. Boiled down, this statement hinges on the argument that the gendering of God as male sparked the sex based hierarchical system that served to produce and reinforce male supremacy. The inequality that spirals from this starting point, revolutionary feminists argue, will only be eroded when we collectively reject all loyalty to them. This revolutionary position is associated with many feminists who identify themselves as '*post-Christian, post-Jewish, pagan, witch, Goddess Worshipper* or simply as part of the *Womanspirit Movement*'<sup>560</sup> but it must be noted that none of these terms is accurate for the whole group. Some proponents of this argument believe that there is a pre-biblical tradition that they are part of which is more "traditional" than followers of the biblical faith. Here such writers as Merlin Stone,<sup>561</sup> Carol Christ,<sup>562</sup> Starhawk<sup>563</sup> and Zsuzsanna Budapest<sup>564</sup> draw upon a pre-biblical

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<sup>559</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 10

<sup>560</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 10. Author's emphasis.

<sup>561</sup> For more information see: Stone M (1976) *When God Was a Woman: The landmark exploration of the ancient worship of the Great Goddess and the eventual suppression of women's Rites*. London: Harcourt Inc.

<sup>562</sup> Christ played a large role in the development of a specifically feminist Goddess religion with her collection of publications on feminist Goddess worship and feminist witchcraft. Her contribution has influenced contemporary feminist spirituality considerably. Whilst working on her dissertation on the story of Elie Wiesel and the Nazi holocaust, in 1973-74, Christ describes her own transformative experience that arose from questioning how God could have allowed such atrocities to occur. She writes: 'You, God, with the aid of your patriarchs and prophets, destroyed the powerful Goddesses of the ancient Near East as you continue to destroy us. By your very existence as male, you legitimize the patriarchal order in which I cannot fully exist'. Christ C (2012) *Why Women, Men and Other Living Things Still Need the Goddess: Remembering and Reflecting 35 Years Later*. In: *Feminist Theology* 20, no. 3: 242-255 (245). I will discuss the work of Christ more fully in Chapter Six.

<sup>563</sup> North American high priestess Starhawk's work formed part of this movement with the publication of *The Spiral Dance* which popularised feminist Witchcraft in 1999. For more information see: Starhawk (1989) *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers.

matriarchal lineage as a foundation upon which they can construct contemporary feminist spiritual visions. While rejecting the biblical past ‘they find the history of Goddess worship inspirational for feminist theology and spirituality’.<sup>565</sup> They argue that the symbol of the Goddess, central to the ancient Goddess religions, can liberate modern women by providing a powerful female image that can counteract (and for some override) the symbolism of God as male. There are obvious drawbacks to this position, namely that revolutionaries with pre-biblical features have been criticized for not breaking with the past or distorting the past through romanticizing it.<sup>566</sup>

Both these positions, reformist and revolutionary, understand female experience to be of central importance for their religious vision going forward and they are both engaged in the creation of a post-patriarchal religious future despite utilizing different paths to get there. Whilst reform feminists tend to call for equality in religious rituals, symbols and language, revolutionary feminist theologians focus on the creation of new symbols, rituals and imagery located within a female divine framework. There are differing opinions amongst revolutionist feminists about the direction and end result of the vision of the feminist movement as a whole. Some revolutionary feminists feel that there needs to be a temporary elevation of Goddess symbolism and ritual whilst others favour ‘permanent ascendancy of women and the female principle’<sup>567</sup> as a strategy for achieving eventual equality. Whilst a commitment to ending male domination and gaining full gender equality is a common goal for feminists, there is different opinion on how it will be reached. For example, Budapest calls for the permanent ascendancy of the female principle in a female only worship environment whilst Daly expresses a preference of sex-transcendent and androgynous imagery, a view shared by Rita Gross who opts for the use of “God-He” and “God-She”.<sup>568</sup>

At first glance it is difficult to know which of the theories (reformist or revolutionary) has the greatest transformative potential but as patriarchy is multi-faceted we need all the tactics at our command. It is worth noting that a lot of the texts I draw upon here were written from the beginning of the 1980s to the present day and I can say with some confidence that in 2017, whilst the situation has undoubtedly changed (women in the West have almost the same access to education, work

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<sup>564</sup> Zsuzsanna Budapest is credited with the inception of Dianic Witchcraft (also known as Dianic Wicca) in the 1970s. Dianic Wicca a form of female-centred goddess worship that forms part of Neo-Paganism. There are many different variations of Dianic Witchcraft but consistent to all groups is the sole worship of divinity in a female form. Dianic Wicca is strictly for female members and female worship only. For more information see: Budapest Z (1998) *Summoning the Fates: A Woman’s Guide to Destiny*. New York: Harmony Books; Quarrie D (2008) *From the Branch: A Primer in Dianic Witchcraft*. New York: The Apple Branch; and, Coleman K (2010) *Re-riting Woman: Dianic Wicca and the Feminine Divine*. New York: AltaMira Press.

<sup>565</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 10

<sup>566</sup> I will elaborate on these in Chapter Six when I examine theology and Goddess feminism in greater detail.

<sup>567</sup> Christ, Plaskow 1979a: 13

<sup>568</sup> Gross argues that ‘for every assertion one wishes to make of God, one must be willing to say that it characterizes God-She as well as God-He’. For more information see: Gross R (2009) *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration*. London: University of California Press, 183.



within the traditional male sphere and increasingly equal rights within politics) there is still a long way to go. The construction of femininity, the romanticism of motherhood, of being a wife and the domestic goddess still preside over the lives of women. The danger is that the progress made by the women's movement and by reform and revolutionary feminists has stagnated; the message is that women are equal and the problem of equality is a problem of the past. But as we have already explored, this is certainly not the case.

Before we move on to explore how fasting saints and holy anorexics fit into these discussions surrounding dualism, the sexism of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the transformative potential of feminist liberation theologies, there are a few points that warrant clarification. Whilst I have attempted to demonstrate that even in the most destructive of biblical texts there are moments where we can take strength and solitude from liberative female figures, to get here we must invoke a very open hermeneutic which involves ignoring decades of patriarchal denigration of women. Despite the positive readings of the Song of Songs and the re-interpretation of Lilith from Jewish legend I feel that it is impossible to redeem the overwhelming sexism inherent within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Ultimately, the answer to the question of whether Judaism and Christianity can ever provide the basis for liberation praxis to undo the damage of years of patriarchal domination is, for me, no. Judaism and Christianity in their elevation of an exclusively male, patriarchal God, who solely (without female consort) became the ruler of the heavens and the earth set in motion the complete repression of feminine divine imagery and female worth (outside of the home and childcare). As Daly argues: '[i]t is important to recognise that, even when very abstract conceptualisations of God are formulated in the mind, images have a way of surviving in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus, one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine "him" as belonging to the male sex'.<sup>569</sup> Thus, I argue, as many women and men have, that the location of divinity in a male body set in motion the gender inequalities that we experience in society today. As we shall explore in the next chapter, it is only in locating divinity in a female body, that women will start to rebalance the gender scales in favour of female empowerment and female embodiment. In the next section on fasting saints and holy anorexics I will demonstrate how gender inequalities have, and continue to, make their mark on the female body.

#### Fasting Saints and Holy Anorexics

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<sup>569</sup> Daly 1979: 56

Whilst food symbolised many things for medieval Christians, the most important food practices were fasting and the Eucharist.<sup>570</sup> It is in the early church that we see the roots of medieval food asceticism. Through the renouncing of food, male and female Christians paid tribute to God's power and acknowledged their own sinfulness. As detailed by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* the language of asceticism dates all the way back to Augustine of Hippo (430) and Hilary of Poitiers (367) who said that we are 'all present in the sacrifice and Resurrection of the cross, that Christ, in dying, digests and assimilates us, making us new flesh in his flesh'.<sup>571</sup> Alan of Lille (1203) wrote that the faster should consume small amounts of food so that it can be shared with his neighbor and Thomas Aquinas (1274) laid out the argument 'that humankind fell from paradise through the sin of gluttony'.<sup>572</sup> Throughout the centuries, fasting and eating have been complex symbols and acts for Christians and it was between the early church and the later Middle Ages that the religious significance of fasting and eating changed quite considerably. Bynum writes that the feasts central to the early Christian community, which brought together the whole of the congregation, became separated from consecration as devotion pivoted not to the ingestion of the host but around the process of transubstantiation, the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. To fast was to embrace hunger and to understand the famine that threatened all living things. This was carried out to keep God, the provider, happy and thus ensure continued gifts of fertile land and salvation. It was understood that in fasting Christ was literally fed as the food denied to the self, was given to Christ's body, the church. Thus, fasting did not just provide a connection between people and their community, but it emphasized the relationship between humanity and nature and the cyclic fecundity of the land. In these pre-industrial societies, men and women needed a closer relationship with the land to understand when resources would be limited and subsequently respond to the rhythm of plenty and scarcity, harvest and famine. In working with the land, they knew when to self-impose fasting and when it was appropriate to feast. Other medieval reasons cited for fasting included religious preparation, purification or exorcism of

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<sup>570</sup> Whilst my primary focus is on the history of fasting and aestheticism, there are many examples of feasting and the consumption of food as a celebration of life and the fecundity of the land. For example, Norman Wirzba develops a theology of food writing that '[f]ood is a gift of God given to all creatures for the purpose of life's nurturance, sharing and celebration. Quoting Psalm 34.8 ('taste and see that the Lord is good') he writes that when eating is done in the name of God, it is the 'earthly realisation of God's eternal communion-building love'. He chastises advanced industrial societies reduction of food to a 'product of our own hands' or its use as a commodity for 'purposes of power or profit' as the most valued characteristics can be summed up as speed, convenience and cheap prices. For more information see: Wirzba N (2011) *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. New York: Cambridge University Press, xiii-xiv. Drawing upon the Eucharist, Angle F Mendez-Montoya writes that 'feasting is a celebration of God's presence among us given as bread'. It is a call to incorporate the whole of the community in a 'collective expression of gratitude for this superabundant divine edible gift'. For more information see: Mendes-Montoya A F (2012) *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 154.

<sup>571</sup> Bynum 1987: 31

<sup>572</sup> Bynum 1987: 32

evil spirits, mourning, an expression of grief and repentance, a plea for deliverance, a sign of confidence in God's mercy and a means of controlling the body (as a way of managing its vulnerability) that can lead to aesthetic impulses. In the late third and early fourth centuries, fasting was considered an important religious behaviour that signaled the individual's purity of heart before God. As we begin to see, fasting was well regarded within the Christian community. Bynum writes that by fasting 'the Christian joined with Christ, who, in the garden and on the cross, kept the rule of abstinence that Adam had violated in paradise and became himself sacrificial food, propitiating God and saving sinners'.<sup>573</sup> Fasting was also closely related to the issue of control especially for women. Food related behaviour, in general, was central to women socially and religiously as a resource they controlled (food and cooking was considered a woman's responsibility) but also because it was through food that a woman could control herself and her world. As Bynum details: '[b]odily functions, sensations, fertility, and sexuality; husbands, mothers, fathers, and children; religious superiors and confessors; God in his majesty and the boundaries of one's own "self" - all could be manipulated by abstaining from and bestowing food'.<sup>574</sup> Women's close relationship with food (coupled with their social situation as we will go on to discuss) led some women to utilize extreme fasting to progress their own spiritual/religious agenda. It was in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that there developed a theological interest in the phenomenon of young women who claimed to live without consuming food, foreshadowed only in the eighteenth century by Pope Benedict XIV (1758) who commissioned an appendix to consider whether the extreme fasting of Catholic women could be natural. It is in this context that we next take a look at the work of Rudolph Bell and female fasting in medieval Christendom.

The self-proclaimed task of Bell in *Holy Anorexia* is to persuade the reader that a 'significant group of women exhibited an anorexic behavior pattern in response to the patriarchal social structures in which they were trapped'.<sup>575</sup> Focusing on Italian saints (and therefore excluding the likes of Mary of Oignies, Joan of Arc and Teresa of Avila to name a few), Bell outlines his argument that anorexia is not a new disease, that it was actually present in medieval times within the aesthetic practices of Holy Anorexic's even if it did not exactly meet the classification of anorexia by today's clinical classification systems. Nevertheless, he makes the argument that these cases are relevant because these women presented with exactly the same physical symptoms, the only marked difference was the motivation behind the self-starvation. In the case of medieval fasting, the motivation was spiritual, seeking closer union with Christ whilst the motivation for contemporary anorexia is thinness. As we will see, both of these instances of self-starvation take root as a

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<sup>573</sup> Bynum 1987: 35

<sup>574</sup> Bynum 1987: 193-4

<sup>575</sup> Bell R M (1987) *Holy Anorexia*. London: The University of Chicago Press, xii.

consequence of the patriarchal structures in which women live. Bell writes that 'in earlier times so many women were married off by their fathers at such a young age that the usual adolescent contests over identity and autonomy were short-circuited, only to appear years later upon the occasion of widowhood or some other worldly crisis'.<sup>576</sup> He cites the repressed infantile rage and the development of identity as a further connection between medieval and contemporary anorexic women. Bell writes:

The holy anorexic never gives in... She rejects the passive, dependent Catholic religion of mediation through priests and intercession by saints... Usually she is a happy and obedient child of well-to-do, perhaps even noble parents. In various ways she is a special child, sometimes the last and most precious, other times the only survivor, always beloved. Precocious signs of extraordinary holiness may be part of her earlier *vita*, but even the most fanciful of these do not suggest the bitter struggle that will follow. At first her devout parents encourage her spiritual impulses; she prays for their souls as well. Quickly, however, the conventional nature of their religiosity becomes apparent and they turn against a daughter who rejects not only their worldliness but also the accepted path of an established convent.<sup>577</sup>

The holy anorexic may also score her face, cut off her hair and wear coarse clothes in order to become more beautiful in God's eyes and to be more mindful of the Passion, Bell writes that she might walk with sharp stones in her shoes or drive small silver nails into her breasts. She may also stand throughout the night, her arms outstretched in prayer and refrain from eating, taking nourishment from the host only. The holy anorexic is uncomplaining and docile. Bell describes her spiritual accomplishments as magnificent, and in her relationship with Christianity she becomes 'Christ's bride, not His handmaiden but His bride, and regularly communicates with Him, with Mary, and with the heavenly host'.<sup>578</sup> Possessing supernatural grace, she is a servant of God but of no man, she is willing to tell people and kings what to do and how to do it. Her ultimate aim is to 'obliterate every feeling of pain, fatigue, sexual desire, and hunger'.<sup>579</sup> Utilizing dualistic logic, she aims to completely master herself and this is very much the case for Catherine of Siena (1347-1380).

Catherine Benincasa (most commonly known as saint Catherine of Siena) acted in every way as dictated by her bridegroom Jesus Christ. It was widely known that she ate hardly anything, which led some of her contemporaries to believe she was possessed by the devil. Through the years of her self-starvation she was advised by friends, family, clergy and various other onlookers to eat. Occasionally she would obey but Bell writes that even the smallest amount of food caused her to vomit and after a while she simply refused food altogether. When warned that starvation would kill

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<sup>576</sup> Bell 1987: xii

<sup>577</sup> Bell 1987: 19. Author's emphasis.

<sup>578</sup> Bell 1987: 20

<sup>579</sup> Bell 1987: 20

her, she replied that the consumption of food would also kill her and that she would rather die of self-starvation. Apart from her writings, the most important source of information pertaining to her life came from her bibliography written after her death by Raymond of Capua who became her spiritual guide and confessor in 1374. This followed her formal summons to Florence before a church commission to give an account of herself where she managed to persuade most of the inquisitors of her truth. Whilst remaining slightly skeptical, they appointed Raymond to watch her. Working closely together, the relationship between Catherine and Raymond became intense until her death six years later. His accounts describe a lady who fasted rigorously in her youth, becoming extreme 'at the time of her conversion to radical holiness, beginning when she was not yet sixteen, she restricted her diet to bread, uncooked vegetables, and water'.<sup>580</sup> Following her father's death and subsequent visions (in which Christ advised her to abandon her solitary life and to re-enter society) five years later she lost her appetite and cut bread out of her diet. From the age of twenty-five, the accounts of Raymond claim that she ate nothing. The writings suggest that her stomach had transformed and could no longer process food. This meant that her diet was limited to cold water and chewing on bitter herbs, the residue of which was thrown away. This was met by much controversy as detractors argued that the whole 'self-starvation routine was a fiction she perpetuated to aggrandize her reputation and that secretly she are very well indeed'.<sup>581</sup> Others criticized her for going against Jesus's command to his disciples advising them to eat and drink what they were given, explicitly mentioned in the passages of Luke. They argued that 'a truly holy person ought to seek never to be singled out for attention and therefore in all matters follow common customs'.<sup>582</sup> Drawing commonalities between the fourteenth century saint and the twentieth century patient, Bell writes that both say they cannot eat whilst denying that they are being stubborn or asserting their will. For Catherine, what began as religiously inspired fasting escalated and fully escaped her conscious control. As with present-day anorexic girls and young women, Catherine could be very active physically (hyperactive), sleep very little and claimed that she would eat but that she had no appetite. As you would expect, these similarities overlap in regards to the physical symptoms whilst the motivations remain different. It becomes clear in the writings of Bell that he believes Catherine's aestheticism developed 'out of a personality forged in a familial context that Catherine never abandoned'.<sup>583</sup>

As subsequent examination of her life shows, the periods when Catherine lost her appetite and conquered her bodily desires closely parallels the turning points in her family life (which creates

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<sup>580</sup> Bell 1987: 24

<sup>581</sup> Bell 1987: 26

<sup>582</sup> Bell 1987: 26

<sup>583</sup> Bell 1987: 52

another link between medieval and contemporary experiences of self-starvation as we will explore towards the end of this section). For example, her diet reductions to bread, water and raw vegetables took root when her sister died. Following the death of her father, and the visions she experienced, she had a surge of confidence in her rapport with God believing she experienced mystical union and received a bridal ring from Jesus and Mary. At the same time she claimed to fully lose her appetite (a stretch of the truth as testimonies claim that she was hungry but overcame it through extreme will-power whilst meditating on the host) and stopped eating bread and sleeping. Following this she travelled to Rome and selected disciples to help her reform the church and when '[e]xhausted by her austerities and broken emotionally by her failure to reform the church, Catherine's will to live gave way to an active readiness for death'.<sup>584</sup> Contributing to this outcome, she stopped drinking water and subsequently died.

Drawing on the accounts and aetiology of holy and contemporary understandings of anorexia (as discussed in the first chapters of this thesis) Bell implements the use of the term "holy anorexia" as a means of drawing attention to the similarities between fasting saints of the Middle Ages and contemporary anorexia. He argues that the moderator is key; 'whether anorexia is holy or nervous depends on the culture in which a young woman strives to gain control of her life'.<sup>585</sup> In both instances, we see the girl or young woman clasp onto highly valued social goals (whether it is bodily health, self-control, thinness or fitness in the twentieth and twenty-first century or spiritual health, fasting and self-denial indicative of medieval Christendom). Her peers and parents pursue the same goal with marginal success but in contrast, she emerges as a victor of bodily/spiritual perfection. Her behaviour is reinforced by the initial praise received by those surrounding her which causes her to deepen her pattern of self-denial until it becomes her only sense of self. Anorexic tendencies take over her identity and the pattern of self-starvation progresses past the point of her control. The manifestation of which, within accounts of anorexia, is an insecurity which gives way to absolute certainty, as she literally sees herself (in the mirror) as being heavier and wider than she is (commonly referred to as body dysmorphia syndrome) or for the medieval faster, metaphorically seeing herself as not suffering or hurting enough and very literally seeks a closer and more intimate relationship with Christ through her aestheticism. She feels fine and arguably, accomplishes considerable feats of physical endurance. The holy anorexic sees herself as the bride of Christ and a place for herself in heaven. She very really feels the love of Christ and energetically lives on the host alone. Each of these behaviours were/are culturally approved for the various periods (even if they were/are fanatical and compulsive). Eventually both of these behaviours require family, friends and professionals to step in and help disable the self-destructive and life-threatening behaviour and, in

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<sup>584</sup> Bell 1987: 52

<sup>585</sup> Bell 1987: 20

both instances, helping the individual to overcome this destructive behaviour is a troublesome endeavor. Whilst modern methods rely on approaches that utilize a mixture of therapy, dietary assistance and medication, medieval approaches centered more on trying to determine if the condition was the work of God or the devil. Thus, it was Christendom's patriarchal elite who determined the girl's anorexia as demonic or saintly (sometimes fasting was understood as a form of witchcraft and tried accordingly but in rare instances, the girl succeeded in persuading her family and church officials that her behaviour was inspired by God as we see in the biography of Catherine of Siena).

In regards to the question of whether holy anorexia can be considered the same as contemporary anorexia- William David says that it cannot. In the epilogue to *Holy Anorexia* he writes that 'in one very important way it appears that the holy women described by Bell did not suffer from the eating disorder known today as anorexia nervosa'.<sup>586</sup> There is no doubt that the physical symptoms that accompany malnutrition remained the same. This included self-starvation, a loss of at least 25% of their normal body weight, purgation, malnutrition of varying severities and strong resistance to external efforts to get them to eat. However, missing from the accounts is a 'dread of fatness, and a self-conscious, unremitting pursuit of thinness'<sup>587</sup> which are hallmarks of contemporary anorexia and key diagnostic criteria. In both cases the girl/young woman/woman is unwilling to eat. As David writes: '[t]he point is that anorexics in the fourteenth century and those in the twentieth century do not want to eat because they abhor the consequences... whether in the service of holiness or thinness, they determinedly relish the effects of starvation'.<sup>588</sup> The difference here is that holiness is interchangeable with thinness; fear of fat with a fear of loss of spirituality. Nonetheless overlaps in diagnosis include: being hyperactive, exhibiting perfectionist tendencies and never being satisfied by the results of their efforts to be holy or thin. Also included in the similarities are: watchfulness, self-critical, to pursue their aims obsessively, uninterested in ordinary human relationships, self-sufficient, reluctant to receive care, resisting bodily desires, aspirations of purity and an understanding of the avoidance of food as the means of achieving their goals. Also, as Bell is keen to reiterate, both instances embody a gender conflict. He emphasizes the saintly anorexic's ongoing battle with the Catholic male clergy in order to 'attain their desired state of holiness'.<sup>589</sup> The saints need to 'resist tradition and to conquer or overcome patriarchal authority'.<sup>590</sup> However, the fasting saint or holy anorexic, whilst struggling to free themselves from male authority, end up

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<sup>586</sup> Bell 1987: 181

<sup>587</sup> Bell 1987: 181

<sup>588</sup> Bell 1987: 181

<sup>589</sup> Bell 1987: 182

<sup>590</sup> Bell 1987: 183

unwittingly colluding with the forces they are attempting to bypass in the same way as the contemporary anorexic.

As we have already explored, whilst contemporary anorexia may embody an attempt of the individual to protest against the cultural forces that seek to construct her femininity according to the “male” identified virtues of control, discipline, competency and action, through utilizing self-starvation, she becomes the pejorative definition of femininity and consequently further reinforces the status quo. Similarly the fasting saint, in her quest for ultimate control of the dangerous and potentially sinful female body that is kept in check and controlled within this subservient position, is quietly celebrated by the church fathers who would have found her religiosity something to be celebrated as they ‘did not have to enforce their domination via suspicions of demonic possession or complicated formulas for beautification’<sup>591</sup> as the saints/holy women themselves were ‘knowingly supporting their cultural values by equating bodily purity with essential holiness’.<sup>592</sup>

A further problem with identifying whether medieval fasting can be categorized according to contemporary classification systems is the lack of information pertaining to their family life. Bynum writes that our information about their lives and behaviours is too fragmented to allow us to diagnose, with any certainty, from behaviour to cause. That it is ‘impossible... to know to what exactly one should attribute their odd sense of bodily functions, their food craving and vomiting’.<sup>593</sup> A vaguely detailed life cannot explain why depression or guilt expresses itself in symbols such as “hunger” or “blood” or ‘why a particular theological notion, such as the idea of service through suffering, emerges as a solution’<sup>594</sup> without a mixture of information about their lives and the broader environments in which they lived. Firm conclusions are difficult to draw but what we do know is that ‘dieting was not... a medieval practice, nor thinness a medieval value’.<sup>595</sup>

Whilst overlaps exist between medieval fasting and contemporary anorexia, they remain distinct expressions, as the motivations underpinning the restrictive behaviour were different. Furthermore, whilst reflection on the presentation of self-starvation within medieval fasting can do very little to help us shed light on the contemporary anorexic experience (in the first few pages Bell identifies a central drive in this project was to utilize an understanding of medieval fasting to create new treatment models for contemporary anorexia) what we can see is the parallels in gender conflicts and the attempt time and time again of women to fight against the oppression of men. That gender inequalities have been, and continue, to make their mark on the bodies of women remains consistent throughout history. I would also like to touch upon the idea that anorexia embodies a

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<sup>591</sup> Bell 1987: 185

<sup>592</sup> Bell 1987: 185

<sup>593</sup> Bynum 1987: 204

<sup>594</sup> Bynum 1987: 206

<sup>595</sup> Bynum 1987: 201



deeper spiritual yearning or hunger. The medieval fasting woman sought a closer relationship with divinity and it was through her aestheticism that she (especially in the case of Catherine of Siena) literally became the Bride of Christ. Whilst in Chapter Four we discussed whether there was any psychological benefit to arise from the anorexic expression and concluded that given the cultural drives underpinning its manifestation, there can not be any healing or psychological benefit, I do believe that anorexia embodies a yearning for something not yet named. That our society lacks in the authentic rituals, myth, symbolism and rites of passage that we need to feed our souls. These elements have been stripped by the advanced capitalist agenda that now presides over our lives. This is something we touched upon when we discussed the work of Woodman in Chapter Three. As we will see the final chapter of this thesis, I argue that anorexia embodies a hunger for a connection that has been displaced in contemporary society. Discussions surrounding female fasting in aid of a closer relationship with Christ would be incomplete without an examination of the Christian diet programs, lucrative businesses which merge contemporary dualistic dieting within a strong Christian narrative.

#### Contemporary Christian Diet Rhetoric

Drawing on the idea that dieting behaviours embody a hunger for a deep spiritual connection to contextualise our lives and supply an additional layer of meaning and authenticity than is offered within contemporary cultural structures, an interesting development has been taking root within the Southern States of America, in its current form, for the last twenty years. I refer here to the development of a Christian diet industry that has expanded out of particular protestant values. These values have been moulded and shaped into the growth of an evolving fixation on bodily health and perfection that understands the fulfilment of a slender body as a means of attaining eternal glory alongside Christ in heaven. This rhetoric is absorbed into the collective consciousness of these congregations and a full range of meanings start to underlie how they experience their embodiment. This religious rhetoric, alongside society's anti-fat agenda, has contributed to hundreds and thousands of Christian women feeling that they have to please Christ, their families and friends through obedient self-discipline. It is with this in mind that I will discuss the Weight Down Diet (arguably the most successful of its type) and similar diets, as a means of further contextualising contemporary religious contributions to dieting behaviours and eating disorder logic.<sup>596</sup> Having examined the female body in Judeo-Christian religious discourse and the

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<sup>596</sup> It is unclear if any of these women have developed anorexia as a consequence of these Christian diet programs.

consequence for women within religious life and the limitation of the female role, I would like to turn to the work of R. Marie Griffin on Christian diet culture.

Whilst existing in many guises throughout our Christian history (as we reviewed at the beginning of this chapter) the relationship between a specific form of Christianity<sup>597</sup> and our dualistic diet logic was brought to mass-media attention in 2000 with the diet movement of Gwen Shamblin which focused, with increasing rapture, on producing stringent guidelines for the “proper” Christian body size. The core argument is that the high American obesity levels are the consequence of a spiritual crisis, that overweight people are mistakenly consuming increasing amounts of food in a bid to fill a void caused by spiritual malnourishment.<sup>598</sup> Utilising Christian faith, aestheticism and the fulfilment of spiritual longing, Shamblin developed a Weight Down Workshop (following her book *The Weight Down Diet*<sup>599</sup>) which was marketed as a spiritual route to guaranteed weight loss in which restricted eating became a divine command. This philosophy was embedded in an expensive package which was sold as twelve-week seminars, conferences and through books, videos and audiotapes which, in truly dualistic thinking maintains that the ‘body is a hazard to the soul, able to demolish the hardest won spiritual gains merely through ingesting the wrong material’.<sup>600</sup> Thus, at the centre of this philosophy is the idea that religious practitioners should disregard all the impure, processed, sugar and fat based foods that contribute to the gaining of weight which in turn, makes women feel fat and ugly and more seriously, condemns the individual to a lifetime of eternal condemnation and exclusion from divine favour. The participants (predominantly women<sup>601</sup>) should “eat thin” and be aesthetically beautiful for their handsome, rich, loving and charming God in this divine romantic drama.

Again we see the female body being subject to levels of control and discipline that are not considered necessary for the male (and taking place within a heterosexual framework). Marking this religious diet culture as devotional is the belief that the human body’s state of fitness affects the individual’s relationship with sacred figures such as God and Jesus in direct and indirect ways.

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<sup>597</sup> Within this context Christianity refers to a specific strand of protestant thinking which is associated only with white, middle class protestant groups from different regions within the United States.

<sup>598</sup> Isherwood translates the “spiritual hunger” into a “hunger for justice and equality” in the context of our heritage of gender inequality, women’s association with out-of-control, dangerous bodies and the cultural distrust of female flesh. For more information see: Isherwood 2007a.

<sup>599</sup> Shamblin G (1997) *The Weight Down Diet: Inspirational Way to Lose Weight, Stay Slim and Find a New You*. New York: Doubleday.

<sup>600</sup> Griffin R M (2004) *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*. London: University of California Press, 2.

<sup>601</sup> Most, if not all, participants were women declaring themselves ‘to be weak foodaholics’ whilst proclaiming the strengths of their husbands and expressing gratitude that their menfolk reprimand them when they consume too much. For more information see: Isherwood 2007a: 76

Shamblin's philosophy, based on picking and grazing on food, positively encourages wastage<sup>602</sup> citing Exodus (God's turning of food into maggots), amongst other biblical passages to underpin her rhetoric. It is in distinguishing between the Christian tradition and the specific Protestant logic underpinning this world-view that Griffith makes sense of how this philosophy has taken root. She writes that Protestantism in this context should be understood as an 'influential source of a syncretic matrix of practices that have shaped and continuously reshaped absorption with the body in definite, clearly discernible ways'.<sup>603</sup> Arguing that even the fundamentalist churches did not strongly enough promote the philosophy, Shamblin developed her own church, The Remnant Fellowship.

Reinforcing this move, she cited staggered divine communication, through which Christ bestowed on her the spirituality to underpin her secular diet regime that became the Weight Down Diet. This might read as absurd. You may be questioning the success of this programme in the face of such clear nonsense or chuckling at its absurdity but 30,000 groups throughout the USA adopted Shamblin's twelve-week diet. The consequence of which was a substantial pay cheque for the founder. Extending beyond this food based philosophy; Shamblin even claimed that the programme can be used to 'overcome other forms of ungodly behaviour apart from eating, such as alcohol abuse, drug abuse, homosexuality and claims of wives to be on an equal footing with their husbands'.<sup>604</sup> According to Shamblin, these are all ways that we distract ourselves from changing our bodies and our lives whilst reinforcing the message that God is our salvation for all of life's sins. Thus, a requirement of this program is for the participant to acknowledge that they are suffering from a spiritual hunger instead of a physical hunger and to demonstrate their will to purity and control through sustained improvement throughout the duration of this diet. As we have seen, this is not just dieting for Jesus, it establishes strong links with capitalism and contemporary diet practices in its emphasis on consumerism (to buy-graze-disregard-repeat), slenderness as a beauty necessity and the desire towards beguiling a rich, handsome patriarch for her to adorn and reflect. Embedded within Shamblin's diet rhetoric she recounts how she shops with God, how she buys the designer clothes that please God whom also wears these designer brands: 'He is fabulous, wonderfully good-looking. He is so powerful, so rich, so famous. He has got on designer clothes'.<sup>605</sup>

There are many issues at play here. We are seeing the reinforcement of a very singular model of existence that defines acceptability and legitimacy as limited to those slender, beautiful, wealthy (often white) women which is marketed as the only model for success within the Western

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<sup>602</sup> In so doing, she demonstrates her lack of concern for anyone outside her narrow world. In this we see that her program operates, at its core, within a truly consumer anti-Christian religious framework despite her proclamations.

<sup>603</sup> Griffin 2004: 4

<sup>604</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 83

<sup>605</sup> Shamblin quoted in Isherwood 2007a: 85

world. I draw attention to this Christian diet practice because it is indicative of a larger trend that has been around in several guises for decades. Arguably really taking route in 1957 with Charlie Shedd's *Pray Your Weight Away*<sup>606</sup> which claimed that 'fatties are people who literally can weigh their sin'<sup>607</sup> and that fat 'prohibits the Holy Spirit from penetrating one's heart- it can not get through the layers of fat'<sup>608</sup> and even today, a quick Google search for "Christian Diet Programs" turns up many diet options. The Weight Down Diet is situated amongst The Eden Diet, The Makers Diet, The Hallelujah Diet, Faith and Fat Loss, Weight Loss God's Way, Take Back Your Temple<sup>609</sup> and my personal favourite for witty titles, Bod4God.<sup>610</sup> All superficially seem to play on the same message of utilising a closer connection with God through prayer to shed the pounds and fill that previously undiagnosed spiritual hunger.

Bod4God<sup>611</sup> was founded by Steve Reynold in 2007, the head pastor at the Capital Baptist Church in Annandale, Virginia with a focus on transforming the traditional symbols of prayer (kneeling and sitting) into a competitive game! With a joint focus on healthy eating and exercise, congregations are separated into teams for a twelve-week competition. Reynold argues that many Christians may be 'unwittingly valuing food over their faith'.<sup>612</sup> I can only imagine that worship at this church takes the form of an aerobics class instead of the traditional preaching that many Christians look forward to on a Sunday morning. Spirituality here becomes an additional motivation to shed the weight. Admission to this diet comes at a hefty price as, consistent with many other Christian diets such as the Weight Down Diet, Bod4God sells the usual range of books, t-shirts, DVD's, group "kits" and even a fridge magnet! With pithy titles such as: "Get Off The Couch" and "Start Losing... Start Living" everyone with some money to spare (and who doesn't when it comes to eternal salvation!) has access to this spiritual awakening with merchandises ranging from \$1 to \$118.99 (worldwide shipment available from most websites).

Alternatively, the Hallelujah Diet,<sup>613</sup> quoting Genesis 1:29, appears to be an extreme vegan diet established by Reverend George Malkmus and his wife Rhonda which encourages the consumption of fruits, vegetables and supplements. Their core premise is that all physical problems, other than those associated with accidents, are related to SAD eating (Standard American Diets).

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<sup>606</sup> Shedd C (1957) *Pray Your Weight Away*. Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott & Co.

<sup>607</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 71

<sup>608</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 71

<sup>609</sup> Rhonda (2014) *Christian Weight Loss Programs Reviewed*. Available at: <http://www.holyandhealthyliving.com/christian-weight-loss-programs-reviewed/> [02/05/2016]

<sup>610</sup> HellaWella (2015) *Five religious Weight Loss plans*. Available at: <http://www.thedailymeal.com/5-religious-weight-loss-plans> [02/05/2016]

<sup>611</sup> Bod4God (2016) *Losing to Live*. Available at: <http://www.bod4god.org/> [02/05/2016]

<sup>612</sup> HellaWella (2015) *Five religious Weight Loss plans*. Available at: <http://www.thedailymeal.com/5-religious-weight-loss-plans> [02/05/2016]

<sup>613</sup> Hallelujah Diet (2016) *Hallelujah Diet: Fall in Love With Food Again*. Available at: <http://www.myhdiet.com/what-is-the-hallelujah-diet/> [02/05/2016]

Preaching the benefits of plant-based food and supplements (which appears to extend itself to all manner of house products such as soaps, house cleaners etc.) that are proven to nourish, cleanse and strengthen your immune system, to name a few applications. The interference being if you are the least bit imperfect (as defined by their standards) it is wholly the consequence of your gluttony and out-of-control behaviours. All these groups play into the same anti-fat agenda in which success and failure in life (and death) is determined by the numbers displayed on the publically presented scales, a simple extension of the philosophy we see in anorexia and eating disorders today in which the slender body becomes an indicator of individual character, ethics, morals and value. Whilst by no means a positive, I get the impression that this Christian diet industry is no longer focusing all its energy on punishing the female sex for having flesh. With men and women, almost equally, advertised on the opening pages of the websites, they have clearly learnt that money can be made from disembodiment both the female and male sex. The culture of Christian based fitness practices is as secure as ever and there are still millions to be made from the “promise land of fitness”.

Isherwood tackles the underlying anti-fat rhetoric as a means of breaking down the foundations of these diet movements looking for alternative models of embodiment that do not rely on a singular slender archetype. Writing in *The Fat Jesus* she comments on the lack of an opulent Christ despite the plethora of new images for Christ as developed by feminist liberation theologians over the years. For feminist liberation theology, gone are the days of the singular image of Christ as a young white man dressed in white with partial facial hair and bare feet, we are now reading about ‘Asian Christs, Latin American Christs both male and female, queer Christs and gay and lesbian Christs, Christ Sophia and disabled Christs’<sup>614</sup> allowing for more opportunities for individual association and inclusion within the Christian faith for those who subscribe to this developing kaleidoscopic personification of Christ.

Seeking to broaden these parameters further, Isherwood develops a theological argument for the radical incarnation of the Fat Jesus. Isherwood writes that the ‘Fat Jesus wants us to hunger and indeed shares that hunger with us, but this is not a desperate search for satisfaction- it is rather a continued commitment to expanding the edges through sharing and creative engagement with each other and the resources of the planet’.<sup>615</sup> Through critically examining the difficult relationship Christianity has historically had with issues such as sexuality and embodiment (especially for women) Isherwood critically examines the promoted ideals of restraint and aestheticism and through the radical incarnation of an opulent Christ, puts forward a liberative framework for embodied praxis. The Fat Jesus becomes a symbol which represents a demand for equal distribution

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<sup>614</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 1

<sup>615</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 134

of food world-wide, the production of better quality food, fairer production policies and taking full enjoyment and embodied pleasure over eating.

This is far removed from the ethos underlying the Christian Diet Industry as we have seen. As Isherwood writes: 'The Fat Jesus does not wish us to control our desire for food but rather to passionately engage with a desire for the world to eat and to celebrate the life that is enhanced through abundance'.<sup>616</sup> The celebration of eating for women would be revolutionary considering the cultural and psychic baggage they have been saddled with over the years. For Isherwood, this is an act of radical praxis unlike we have seen for women before within which they can start to know their power and connect with their desires. In a similar (but less radical) way, Shannon Jung<sup>617</sup> tells us that food and eating are expressions of the divine/human relationship through which we express our deepest values reminding us of who we really are. This extends beyond the boundaries of our bodies to the world economy and food ethics. Within this framework we see the real consequences of a fragmented relationship with food and eating as two world views take root, the holistic relationship based on sharing and equity and business oriented consumption as controlled, used and managed. Whilst not fully representative of all the literature surrounding the relationship between women and food throughout Christian history (as this would be far beyond the scope of this particular thesis) this does contribute towards the broadening understandings of the tensions that underscore the relationship between women and their embodiment at this time in history.

It is easy to see that the themes overlaying medieval fasting, Christian diet practices, secular dieting fads and anorexia are similar. Themes of control, fear of rejection, the desire for spiritual purification for health, wealth, success, admiration from peers and parents, transcendence and approximating a higher good are all common themes to have reared their heads throughout this chapter. Gender inequalities and female subjugation have promoted a rage that has been directed against the female body by men and women for various reasons. For patriarchy, controlling the female body speaks of controlling society, policing its edges and dominating its citizens. For women it can be understood as a protest against female oppression, for acceptance into the male sphere (be it religious or secular) or escapism from insurmountable pressure to be everything, all at once, without delay. Dualistic logic underpins all of this as the originator of a philosophy that pitted the mental against the physical, the mind and matter, the subject and object. The deep-seated need for approval, acceptance and intimacy propel these body practices that have taken many different forms throughout time and throughout the Western world.

Whilst I think it is inaccurate to assert that medieval fasting is synonymous with the contemporary anorexic experience (since it is a culture bound concept driving thinness ideals) I

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<sup>616</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 134

<sup>617</sup> Jung S L (2004) *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

agree with Bell's contention that both result as a consequence of the patriarchal society's in which they emerged. As Isherwood writes, there are "moods and motivations' that pass through the generations and these simply pick up contemporary reasoning to justify their actions'.<sup>618</sup> In both instances individual autonomy for women is granted through reducing the limits of her body through an identity in which control and discipline are central. Sitting on the periphery of medieval fasting and contemporary anorexia we have the Christian Diet Industry. Distinct from the anorexic expression as diet practices which utilise a deeper spiritual connection and in many cases, a fear of divine failure as a motivation for weight loss, the Christian diet industry by-passes the quest for equality, the plight of the "holy anorexic", to replace it with the thinness drive which motivates many secular women's lives. Developed within a context of contemporary beauty ideals, the message is clear: fit bodies reflect fit souls. Whilst I could partially agree with Shamblin's core message that a spiritual hunger is being misdirected into a hunger for physical nourishment, filling this void within a patriarchal framework which draws its values from stringent readings of the biblical narratives does not provide the means towards embodiment especially when Shamblin's framework operates on fear of eternal damnation and reinforces slenderness as a beauty necessity.

Throughout this chapter we have reflected on the dualism at the heart of the Christian tradition, the sexism that spirals from this starting point, and feminist liberation theologies critical engagement with our religious (and therefore cultural) patriarchal heritage which has created many problems for the embodiment of women. The idea that women are somehow worth less than men is embedded within the development of "holy anorexia", the Christian Diet Industry and anorexia. As we saw in the opening chapters of this thesis, the intimate hopes and desires of women extend beyond this religious framework as dieters, across society, concentrate on improving connections with family members, lovers and friends by being the "right" size or "beautiful" enough. As Griffin reinforces, devotional dieters deeply care about the food they ingest and their physical health as they associate restrained bodily desires with successful, loving relationships and a strong connection with the powers controlling the world. Again we see strong themes of controlling flesh as a means of having a more fulfilling life. We see the foundational philosophy that underpins the constant devaluation of female embodiment and feminine principles in society and how this is embodied within the anorexic experience. Demonstrating the links between the dualistic logic endemic to the Christian tradition and how this logic has, over time, permeated the embodiment of contemporary women to detrimental effect. The consequence of this divisive logic has been to create an environment of control and domination in which women feel the increasing need to subject the

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<sup>618</sup> Isherwood 2007a: 52

body to punishing behaviours for it to fit the normalising discourses which dictate their legitimacy within contemporary society.

From the very start of this chapter it has been my contention that the Judeo-Christian tradition does not have a meaningful framework for the human condition, in particular, female embodiment within contemporary society. We yearn for new and grounded symbols, myth and ritual located within a spiritual framework as identified by the women's movement that at its best provides new opportunities for the embodiment of men and women. This will be the point of discussion in the following chapter as we start to explore theology and Goddess feminism which I suggest is the only appropriate way forward if we are to move away from the current patriarchal structures. What we are discussing here is a global awakening of women from these patriarchal structures on a scale that has not happened before and its the contention of theologians and Goddess feminists that this global gender-neutral emergence will act as a catalyst for the transformation of our culture as a whole. Daly writes that the biggest single challenge to Christianity will be remaining relevant once the woman's revolution begins to have its effect upon the fabric of society 'transforming it from patriarchy into something that never existed before'.<sup>619</sup> It is the biggest challenge but also the biggest hope for the survival of religious consciousness. As Daly writes 'change does occur in our society, and ideologies die, though they die hard'.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Daly 1979: 54-5

<sup>620</sup> Daly 1979: 54



## Chapter Six- The Female Body as a Theologically Mediated Form

I have taken my stance among the masses and listened with the common woman's ear to that which patriarchal religious institutions must begin to accept responsibility for. No longer can they hide behind: 'But the intention is...'; "In the original language it says..."; "The real truth is..." when the world is hearing something else again as it continues to bow hopelessly under poverty, threat of nuclear war, and discrimination. Not accepting responsibility for how what one says is heard is only a step from the refusal to care about and accept responsibility for the world.

Nelle Morton<sup>621</sup>

As we begin to articulate a theology of the Goddess, we must find new ways of thinking. The binary oppositions of traditional theology, including transcendence-immanence, theism-pantheism, and monotheism-polytheism, do not accurately describe the meaning of the Goddess.

Carol Christ<sup>622</sup>

All the work on society's contemporary construction of femininity and the inevitable rise of anorexia has led us here, to discussions surrounding theology and Goddess feminism. As such, within the following pages I will examine literature surrounding the development of theology and theorize on the idea that it is through theology and Goddess feminism that women can reconnect with their bodies and experience a greater sense of embodiment as women.

Taking on a broader meaning, I will demonstrate that theology has wider implications for contemporary society in its challenging of a singular male God, the sole creator of society as we know it today which, as we have seen, has (and continues to) legitimate the superiority of men and all things masculine. This has caused a fracture between women and their embodiment, the consequence of which, I argue, we see within the anorexic expression today.

Understood as a body of thought derived from women's experience and a broader history of emancipatory ideas and feminist reflections on the femaleness of divinity and the divinity of femaleness, theology can be broadly defined as 'discourse about the Goddess (or the logos of thea)'.<sup>623</sup> Theology exists in many guises for women and men and as such, the use of "the Goddess" has a multitude of meanings. For some "the Goddess" is more simply and abstractedly "Goddess", for others "the Goddess" or "Goddess" is too monotheistic and the polytheistic term "Goddesses" is favoured. For some she is a self-originating divinity, whilst others understand her as a 'liberating archetype whose power is psychological and political rather than external to and transcendent of the individual or movement'.<sup>624</sup> It is this element of the movement- the political and psychological

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<sup>621</sup> Morton 1985: xxii

<sup>622</sup> Christ 1997: 101

<sup>623</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 6

<sup>624</sup> Raphael 1999: 13

aspects of Goddess feminism- that I am most interested in exploring considering the nature of this project. These motivations are most academically articulated within the discourse of theology, Goddess feminism and spiritual feminism (terms often used interchangeably). Existing on the margins of these discourses is Wicca, the witchcraft movement and those who identify as “witches”. Broadly speaking, the Wicca and witchcraft movement ‘sees itself as continuing the tradition of historical wise women down the ages who, in all societies, were healers and repositories of natural and spiritual wisdom’.<sup>625</sup> The Witchcraft movement focuses on the creation and performance of sacred rituals that work towards shaping and transforming energy and events into acts that benefit individuals and society. Emphasis here is placed on the female spiritual principle, into developing an intuitive wisdom and the reinforcement of the sacredness of nature and our environments. Whilst we will touch upon Wicca and the witchcraft movement later as we explore the work of Naomi Goldenberg and her conceptualization of powerful “witchy words”, focus is on the discourse of theology and Goddess feminism as I fear the radical nature of Wicca does not allow for comfortable dissemination in society (and valuing the subversive nature of this movement, Goldenberg questions whether it should). I will argue that the broader concept of a female divinity as a political, challenging and thus subversive, myth has the potential to provide powerful psychological symbols for women that will more readily lend themselves to societal sharing.

The title of this chapter is something of a misnomer. As theology exists without parameters, a theologically mediated body is quite simply a body that exists (and co-exists) alongside the rest of creation without a false sense of entitlement, without “power-over” but instead reveling in our interconnectedness and interdependence which in turn helps us to dismantle our dualistic heritage. My premise is that a society that legitimates a female divinity, in place of or alongside the male, will start to weave an alternative model of embodiment for the benefit of women within its boundaries.<sup>626</sup> In this chapter I will examine discussions surrounding theology and Goddess feminism as providing symbols, myths, traditions and rituals that invigorate and empower women. I will explore and contextualize contemporary studies and writings from a variety of sources and consider the idea that if the concepts central to Goddess feminism were incorporated into society even in small part, that women started to see their bodies as divine and valued in and of themselves, their experience of embodiment would change radically for the better. With that end in mind, drawing everything together, I break the following chapter into two sections. First, I examine the Goddess socially as I explore what She means to those who have incorporated theological discourses into

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<sup>625</sup> Slee N (2002) The Holy Spirit and Spirituality. In: Parsons S F (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 171-190 (178).

<sup>626</sup> Here I refer to the stories of women throughout this chapter whose experience of the Goddess or of a female divine construct has positively and powerfully affected reflections on their embodiment.

their lives. Secondly, I will focus upon the Goddess as a powerful psychological symbol for women today as I make the argument that Her presence in society would displace the foundational features of anorexia whilst providing us with a framework for addressing the utilization of the anorexic expression by so many women today.

### Theology and Discourses on the Goddess

Emerging from liberation theologies and challenging what we already know of the poor position afforded to women within the Judeo-Christian tradition was theology, also known as Goddess feminism, which offered religious and spiritual women an opportunity to pursue alternative theologies and alternative religions. The central purpose of theology is the study of a female divinity. If the change of prefix *thea* (Goddess) for *theo* (God) is recognized, it is often assumed to be a mere political move by radical feminists in an attempt to draw attention to (and change) the androcentric nature of religious language and symbolism in favour of female sacrality. Melissa Raphael writes that 'Goddess feminism came into being by differentiating itself from the secular women's movement; theology came into being by distinguishing itself from feminist theology's attempt to reconfigure the God of Western theism in the light of women's experience and feminist theory'.<sup>627</sup> A central belief of Goddess feminism is the 'full humanity of women and the absolute value of all living things'.<sup>628</sup> Theology and Goddess feminism are, on the whole, made up of those individuals whom identify and oppose 'patriarchal structures of religious and social power and whose religious practice is not only centred on the Goddess but also supports all women's right and access to the sacred and to autonomous religious self-expression and organization'.<sup>629</sup> The political dynamic of Goddess feminism marks it out from other parts of the Goddess movement as Goddess feminists strive towards the reinstatement of the Goddess as an affirmation and sign of the political and spiritual power of women so whilst Goddess feminism is part of the Goddess movement 'it's political dynamic marks it out from other elements within the movement'.<sup>630</sup> In this spirit, drawing on the work of Raphael, theology is a 'historically and intrinsically feminist discourse and project- a prophetic attempt to name and reclaim female divinity and to use the power generated by that reclamation to the ends of the single process of personal/spiritual/political transformation'.<sup>631</sup> Politically, the movement is a challenge to patriarchal religious structures that support the control and subordination of women and as such, the term "female sacrality" has a close relationship with

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<sup>627</sup> Raphael 1999: 28

<sup>628</sup> Raphael 1996: 42

<sup>629</sup> Raphael 1999: 22

<sup>630</sup> Raphael 1999: 22

<sup>631</sup> Raphael 1999: 22

theological discourse and Goddess feminism in its understanding of the female body 'as a locus and medium of the sacred that informs the theology and practice of spiritual feminism'.<sup>632</sup>

Female sacrality and the Goddess are not fixed concepts owned by any one religion. They can be reflected upon within any religious framework<sup>633</sup> but consideration must be given to the patriarchal structures that contribute to supporting the gendered status quo and reinforcing the inequalities of power, domination, ecological devastation and the marginalization of women both inside and outside of religion. Goddess feminism is not just about reading, studying and memorizing facts and ancient stories but is located in our very experiences of the world in which we live. It respects not only written sources, but also 'oral, local, plural, particular, changing, imaginal ways of knowing that have more often been characterized as 'female''.<sup>634</sup> It may be experienced as monotheistic, pantheistic and polytheistic. Practice can take place on an individual level, as part of a community of like-minded practitioners in a variety of locations, at home, outside in the natural environment and/or at organized group events. Adherents to the Goddess Movement are unlikely to have a sanctified place of worship and instead favour non-constructed worship spaces making the Goddess assessable to all, allowing for flexibility and malleability as She can be incorporated into any number of settings to the benefit of those who subscribe to her symbolism. On an individual level, Goddess feminists can create their own personal altar or shrine reflecting their interpretation of divinity and the celebration of the divine elements they hold most dear. Alternatively, they can assess elements of the Goddess as a group, participating in the organisation and enactment of ritual, as I will elaborate on in a few moments. Here women can cater for their own spiritual needs and structure their own spiritual development:

[t]he Goddess is immanent in the natural environment and in women's own bodies; she does not need to be invoked and mediated in specifically sanctified places. In Goddess feminism, the female body is sacred; it incarnates the Goddess to such a degree that sacred space is simply that which the body's being there sacralizes. There is, therefore, no need of a formal boundary of brick or stone to separate the sacred from the profane.<sup>635</sup>

A question this raises is one of community. How do you have a community of people helping and participating in each other's lives- a support network- in what has been criticized as being an individualistic, apolitical and essentialist spirituality/religion?<sup>636</sup> It is also without a single founder

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<sup>632</sup> Raphael 1996: 22

<sup>633</sup> For example, Raphael writes about women who incorporate Goddess rituals, symbols and language into their existing religious traditions such as Judaism and Christianity. For more information see: Raphael 1996.

<sup>634</sup> Raphael 1996: 13

<sup>635</sup> Raphael 1999: 18

<sup>636</sup> Criticisms we will explore later in this chapter and the thesis conclusions.

revered for the movement's conception, a charismatic leadership hierarchy or notions of obedient authority (elements that may be lost if it is incorporated into other belief systems).<sup>637</sup>

As Raphael identifies above, immanentism is central to many Goddess feminist reflections on the Goddess. There are many ways that theologians and Goddess feminists when reflecting on discourses on the Goddess have visualized immanence. For example, focusing on the psychology of religion and spirituality, Goldenberg<sup>638</sup> proposes that we engage with our inner Goddess and mythologies and focus on the creation of personalised spiritualities whilst Starhawk<sup>639</sup> draws upon this immanence to reinforce our interconnectedness with our environments through which we are all divinely linked. These visions further challenge the mind/body dualisms so prominent within traditional Judeo-Christian theologies for they suggest that we are connected to divinity through the body and nature whilst also challenging traditional conceptions of transcendence which are typically associated with monotheism.<sup>640</sup> Transcendence is commonly criticised throughout theological texts due to its link with mind/body dualisms and its reinforcement of male superiority and the establishing of a divine hierarchy. It is thus suggested that an immanent earth-and-body-centred direction would be beneficial to human life on earth and would foster an interconnected reflection on nature and the life cycles that is at best overlooked by traditional theologies. However, the concept of immanentism has not been without its own criticisms. Josephine Robinson, for instance, writes that the removal of *theos* leaves a vacuum through the omission of God, the creator and instead creates a void which is filled by the study of self. Thus, Goddess feminists come to

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<sup>637</sup> That is not to say that Goddess feminism cannot be pursued on a more formal basis. The Women's Theological Institute offers formal training for those who are interested in ordination and receiving ministerial credentials through offering a number of categories of study: the Cella Program, the Crone Program and the Guardian Program that enable women to celebrate the Goddess in distinct and diverse ways. Although it is not clear from the institute website how academically credible this is. For more information see: Women's Theological Institute (2009-2015) *WTI Study*. Available at: <http://www.rcgi.org/study> [02/07/2016]

<sup>638</sup> Goldenberg 2004

<sup>639</sup> Starhawk 1989: 10-11

<sup>640</sup> As we have already explored, androcentric perspectives have affected the language and images we use to name and understand the sacred and our underlying conceptualizations of God. Not only do we reflect upon God and divinity as male but we conceptualize Him as separate and distinct from life on earth. He is transcendent and more perfect than humanity and nature. As humanity was created in the image of God, it is assumed that humans are more "godlier" than the rest of nature. This is the mind-set that helped to establish the divine hierarchy that permeates society today. God's transcendence is expressed mythically through heaven symbolism in which his ruling on earth is understood in terms of a King ruling his people, He created the heavens and earth from nothing, He is jury, judge and destroyer. Philosophically His transcendence paints Him as a spirit, unencumbered and uncorrupted by a physical body. The body of a man- as the most in control and powerful- is the masculine symbol ascribed to Him when deemed necessary essential for Christian moral teachings. In contrast to the masculine transcendent divine, and as we saw in the previous chapter, 'woman is often viewed as the source of sin who through her sexuality leads man away from God, binding him to his animal passions'. Women are associated with the body which serves to reinforce their distance from male divinity. Transcendence here means "beyond", "supreme" and "surpassing" as opposed to immanence meaning, "existing within". Quotation from: Christ C P, Plaskow J (1989b) Naming the Sacred. In: Plaskow J, Christ C P (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. London: Harper & Row, 95.

understand religious beliefs as metaphors of personal fulfilment, often with ethical overtones. In her work she seems to hint at proponents of theology being egotistic, self-involved and inward looking above all else: 'most use the language of belief to reflect their pre-eminent concern with self'.<sup>641</sup> Robinson writes that to worship a fully immanent deity is to ultimately worship the "self" and "inner Goddess" where the "inner Goddess" becomes the personification of the imperial self. However, for many women, an immanent divinity, participating in their lives is a radical statement that reinforces our interdependence and interconnection with all of humanity and the earth. As Starhawk writes:

The Goddess is immanent, but She needs human help to realize Her fullest beauty. The harmonious balance of plant/animal/human/divine awareness is not automatic; it must constantly be renewed, and this is the true function of Craft rituals. Inner work, spiritual work, is most effective when it proceeds hand in hand with outer work.<sup>642</sup>

The important future purpose of theology and spiritual feminism is to 'generate new social and political realities'.<sup>643</sup> For many women and men, theology is a way of life grounded within the individual's experiences and relationships. These individuals might associate more with an imminent divinity than the transcendence of traditional theology. However, for many it is not a case of either/or. In the quest for dismantling mind/body dualisms, theologians such as Christ understand the Goddess as immanent and transcendent writing: 'If there is no unchanging source or principle or God with which the mind or soul can ally itself, then there is no "transcendence" in the classical sense. This does not mean that there is only pure immediacy. There is still room for awareness of and reflection on self and world'.<sup>644</sup> She writes that mystical experiences happen within the finite and changing world when we are aware that we are part of a larger community, history and natural world which is more ineffable than ourselves and subject to change. For Christ the image of the Goddess is the 'catalyst that enables women to clear away the false consciousness of self-hatred, dependence, and dualistic thinking created by patriarchal religion'<sup>645</sup> and once this has been achieved 'the image of the Goddess is no longer necessary'.<sup>646</sup> Nelle Morton also challenges the polarity between transcendence and immanence writing:

When I speak of the Goddess as metaphoric image I am in no way referring to an entity "out there" who appears miraculously as a fairy godmother and turns the pumpkin into a carriage... In the sense that I am woman I see the Goddess in myself, but I need something

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<sup>641</sup> Robinson J (1998) *The Inner Goddess: Feminist Theology in the Light of Catholic Teaching*. Herefordshire: Fowler Wright Books, 157.

<sup>642</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 55

<sup>643</sup> Raphael 1996: 25

<sup>644</sup> Christ 1995: xiv

<sup>645</sup> Christ 1997: 103

<sup>646</sup> Christ 1997: 103

tangible, a concrete image or a concrete event to capture my full attention and draw me into the metaphoric process'.<sup>647</sup>

For Morton the Goddess is a transitional figure that ushers in immanence. Here the 'Goddess works herself out of the picture'<sup>648</sup> and in so doing we have the opportunity to find our own path and way of life that connects us to our bodies, minds and spirits. She calls upon the connection between divinity and nature writing that the Goddess as metaphoric image profoundly influenced her perspective on life and was necessary to sever her relationship with a masculine God within an androcentric religion. Working to displace patriarchal dualisms and reconcile the disjunction between our mind and bodies she writes that the Goddess 'ushered in a reality that reflects the sacredness of my existence, that gives me self-esteem so I can perceive the universe and its people through my woman-self and not depend on the perception conditioned by patriarchal culture and patriarchal religion'.<sup>649</sup> For her the God of patriarchal religion is a dead metaphor after centuries of male "power-over" and status quo imagery. The Goddess instilled within her a new responsibility in the world, to work against oppression, discrimination, poverty and war whilst introducing her into a profound sense of community with other women dispelling the 'patriarchal fog'.<sup>650</sup> Drawing upon these themes Starhawk suggests that understanding divinity as immanent and thus embodied means that we live our spirituality through the world; that we are all manifestations of the sacred. This reinforces the idea that we are all interconnected and thus necessitates the development of a deep-seated ecological respect as we are drawn to 'take action to preserve the life of the earth, to live with integrity and responsibility'.<sup>651</sup> Goddess religion as lived in community demonstrates that the focus of this spirituality is not individual salvation or enlightenment but the growth and transformation that result as a consequence of intimate relationships and common struggles. Community here includes the earth, our friends and family in addition to global humanity.

These themes are also explored within the work of Susan Griffin and Alice Walker who experience the divine through passionate connection within sexuality and nature. Griffin weaves together her love for women with her love for nature referring to the earth as "she" and "my sister" in which the "she" being loved is understood simultaneously as mother, daughter, lover and earth. She calls for the breaking down of hierarchy as she urges us to remember our love for each other and the earth in this interconnected world. She writes: 'This earth is my sister; I love her daily grace, her silent daring and how loved I am how we admire this strength in each other, all that we have

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<sup>647</sup> Morton N (1989) The Goddess as Metaphoric Image. In: Christ C P, Plaskow J (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. London: Harper & Row, 111-119 (111).

<sup>648</sup> Morton 1989: 116

<sup>649</sup> Morton 1989: 115

<sup>650</sup> Morton 1989: 115

<sup>651</sup> Starhawk 1989: 10

lost, all that we have suffered, all that we know: we are stunned by this beauty, and I do not forget: what she is to me what I am to her'.<sup>652</sup> In this work she evokes a deep connection between women and nature as she draws heavily upon the idea that life begins and ends in nature and that we are dependent upon this relationship throughout life. Walker, speaking through her character Shug, challenges the image of God as an old white man and instead refers to God as "It" and refers to this "It" as being fully immanent and connected, 'inside you and inside everyone else... I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed'.<sup>653</sup> Her relationship with divinity is located in love, compassion and connection.

In her extensive work on the Goddess, Christ distinguishes between three elements of the Goddess movement as follows: the Goddess as divine female existing in multiple cultural manifestations who can be invoked through prayer and ritual; the Goddess as a symbol of the cyclical nature of life representing life, death and rebirth as energy in culture and nature; and, the Goddess as an affirmation of 'the legitimacy and beauty of female power'.<sup>654</sup> The latter two points understand the Goddess as symbol as opposed to metaphysical reality. Understandings of divinity as embodied in a female form offers women a framework for self-discovery, affirmation and a connection to the divine which may be lacking for many women within Western religious traditions and is therefore helpful as we explore empowering symbols for women. As Christ elaborates:

For me and for many others, finding the Goddess has felt like coming home to a vision of life that we had always known deeply within ourselves: that we are part of nature and that our destiny is to participate fully in the cycles of birth, death, and renewal that characterize life on this earth. We find in the Goddess a compelling image of female power, a vision of the deep connection of all beings in the web of life, and a call to create peace on earth.<sup>655</sup>

The Goddess for Christ is a powerful symbol of strength and unity. This conceptualisation of the Goddess not only challenges the hierarchical philosophy of the Judeo-Christian tradition but provides women with a clear symbol of the sacredness of the female which reinforces its goodness, beauty and power whilst legitimating female power as independent and beneficent. She does not claim that female power is always good but reinforces the argument that 'independent female power is not always bad'.<sup>656</sup> The symbol of the Goddess means that female power does not need to

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<sup>652</sup> Griffin S (1989) This Earth Is My Sister. In: Plaskow J, Christ C P (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. London: Harper & Row, 105-110 (105).

<sup>653</sup> Walker A (1989) God Is Inside You And Everybody Else. In: Plaskow J, Christ C P (eds.) *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. London: Harper & Row, 101-104 (103).

<sup>654</sup> Christ C P (1982) Why Women Need the Goddess. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*. New York: Anchor, 71-86 (76).

<sup>655</sup> Christ 1997: xiii

<sup>656</sup> Christ 2012: 247



be 'controlled or reined in by male power'.<sup>657</sup> She draws on the Goddess as a symbol that empowers women on personal and psychological levels to transform the institutions of culture. She writes that 'psychologically, it [the symbol of the Goddess] means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous'.<sup>658</sup> Dispelling notions of the female body as a source of sin,<sup>659</sup> Christ calls us to see in the Goddess a symbol of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth and to reformulate our preconceptions of sexuality, birthing and menstruation as the central sources of this sin.<sup>660</sup> This image is invoked to counteract hostilities and religious taboos which have traditionally presided over the lives of women. Contextualised within current cultural misogynist trends Christ states that the Goddess: 'calls us to transform the pornographic images of women so readily available on the internet and the advertising images of female bodies that lead women to attempt to redefine their bodies through anorexia, bulimia, and cosmetic surgery'.<sup>661</sup> She reinforces the message that a woman's will should be valued as much as any man's and that the bonds between mother and daughter, which have traditionally been less celebrated than that of the bond between father and son, should be celebrated and revered, that women no longer need to teach their daughters to accept subordination to men. The Goddess is raw and fierce and through Her symbolism we have the power to change the world. Reflecting on our dualistic heritage Christ notes that it would be very tempting to turn the mind/body dualism on its head and move from devaluing women, the body, the earth and nature to devaluing the male, the spirit, rationality and the mind but for her this would be an inadequate solution. She writes that it is clear that men are just as much a part of nature as women are. That their bodies are subject to the same life cycles of birth and death as women, they are also central to the process of procreation. Thus, what we need is not a reversal of dualist values but rather a transformation of the way we think about them and the way we think about divinity, humanity and nature. In this, Christ is not just reflecting upon the

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<sup>657</sup> Christ 2012: 248

<sup>658</sup> Christ C P (1979b) Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections. In: Christ C P, Plaskow J (eds.) *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. London: Harper & Row, 273-286 (278).

<sup>659</sup> As this symbolism of the Goddess stands in sharp contrast to the female figures offered by our patriarchal heritage- Lilith, Eve and Pandora- women who have traditionally symbolised the dangerous and unrestrained female power that unleashes sin, pain and destruction on the world as we explored in Chapter Five.

<sup>660</sup> In her book *Theology and Embodiment* Melissa Raphael writes extensively on the de-sacralisation of the female body by patriarchal structures. One of her central focuses is on the profane/sacred distinction between patriarchy and Goddess feminism in respect of menstruation and postpartum bleeding. She writes that Goddess feminism understands the female body as being particularly close to the source of life. Thus, it seeks to reverse patriarchal denigration and subjugation of female power. For example, where patriarchy might refer to menstrual or post-partum bleeding as unclean, dirty and sometimes even dangerous, Goddess feminists refer to these bodily processes as sacred. She writes that: 'most cultures have regarded menstrual blood as profane and have accordingly subjected women to varying degrees of segregation from the sacred. But religious feminists (both Jewish and neo-pagan) now choose to experience their menstruation as a time to recharge themselves through the beneficent power of their blood'. For more information see: Raphael 1996.

<sup>661</sup> Christ 2012: 248

affirmation of femaleness and independent female power but she is addressing more abstract theological questions about the nature of divine power.

Whilst the Goddess has had a profound effect on the lives of many women as a personal divinity, for some the value of the Goddess is as a psychologically meaningful mythology. This is the case for Goldenberg who writes that whilst she cannot be a witch in the orthodox sense she does find the Goddess psychologically interesting. It appears to be in its discursive and deviant nature that theology and spiritual feminism can, for Goldenberg, challenge the patriarchal order for all that it occludes, namely the female. The time she spent with contemporary witches led to her belief that they use religion and ritual as psychological tools to build individual strengths in their practice of a religion that places 'divinity or supernatural power within the person'.<sup>662</sup> She writes: 'in a very practical sense they have turned religion into psychology'.<sup>663</sup> Goldenberg writes that witchcraft is the only Western religion that recognised female divinity in her own right arguing that the only remnant of a Goddess within the Christian tradition is Mary (as we explored in Chapter Five) and she is solely recognised because of her son. She draws extensively on Jungian psychology in her work as she focuses on the psychological benefit of Wicca and female symbols of divinity (as we explored in Chapter Three). Within the work of Goldenberg, the Goddesses value for women is as a psychologically powerful symbol for female empowerment today as we will explore in detail throughout the second half of this chapter.

Tension surrounding the incorporation of Goddess constructs into developing spiritualities surrounds issues of appropriation (Cynthia Eller refers to this as "cultural borrowing") and whether we are ethically bound to develop stories and mythologies from the cultures within which we were born or currently reside. The question posed is whether we can develop authentic stories when mining from such a broad range of traditions outside of their cultural settings. Here I refer to the incorporation of cultural and religious traditions from other continents, such as those found within Eastern, ancient Greek, Native American, and African religions into Western Goddess feminists developing personal spiritualities. Unpacking this further, Eller writes that the 'joy of feminist religions syncretism is marred somewhat by the fact that when one borrows religiously, one is borrowing from someone (or some culture), and often without their permission'.<sup>664</sup> Linked with postcolonialism this is the idea that one should not or cannot incorporate or translate elements of religious traditions from formally colonized people into their own spiritual frameworks, to think with

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<sup>662</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 89

<sup>663</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 89

<sup>664</sup> Eller C (1993, 1995) *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 74.

or be inspired by. Whilst this has troubled spiritual feminists it has not prevented the absorption of the myths, rituals and symbols of other continents into their personal spiritualities.

One of the most popular sources for feminist borrowing is the ancient traditions such as ancient African religions (for notions such as “spiritual kinship” and voodoo), Native American spirituality (“medicine woman” and “shaman”), Eastern religions (religion found east of Europe and South of Russia which includes, for example, Hinduism and Buddhism) and ancient Greek Goddess figures.<sup>665</sup> These ancient cultures, despite the patriarchy at their core, have provided a wealth of symbols, myths and rituals that have been incorporated into developing spiritual feminism in the West with the intention of transforming androcentric roots into avenues for female empowerment. For many women, elements of these religions and spirituality’s are synonymous with growth, awareness, integration (of mind, body, nature and environment) which encourages the individual to pursue spiritual growth and development. It is predominantly the goddesses that receive the most attention from Goddess feminists despite the broad traditions these women are mining from. Eller writes: ‘in Eastern religions spiritual feminists discover the living remnants of what they believe was once a worldwide phenomenon of goddess worship’<sup>666</sup>; that the East has retained the Goddess imagery that has been eroded by Western religion. Christ further extrapolates upon the relationship between spiritual feminists and ancient goddess symbols writing that whilst the ancient Goddess symbols from around the world are nourishing for women constructing their spiritualities, that ‘women’s imagination is by no means subject to the authority of the past’.<sup>667</sup> Instead, many women select the elements of these traditions that most comfortably fit within their developing spiritualities. Even women who have no natural inclination towards the East have taken up an interest in its Goddess traditions.<sup>668</sup> However, as elements of these traditions are taken out of their geological locations and relocated into different cultures, there is a risk here that the histories and societies that cultivated these Goddess figures will be lost and thus that these goddesses will lose their history, their context and symbolic power. On the other hand, in their dissemination into other cultures we have the power to overwrite the power dynamics that framed the development of the goddesses in these cultures. Here I refer to the misogynist heritage of many of these religions and

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<sup>665</sup> These traditions are usually encountered in the context of their presence within the emergent religious traditions in the West and occasionally through individual pilgrimage. Eastern religions with their emphasis on meditation and chanting rituals (Hinduism and Buddhism for example), alternative forms of healing (acupuncture) and movement traditions such as Hatha Yoga, Taiji, Sufi dancing and traditional Indian dance provide, for some women, a refreshing and embodied alternative to Western religions.

<sup>666</sup> Eller 1995: 68

<sup>667</sup> Christ 1987: 154

<sup>668</sup> Christ reminds us that many symbols of the Goddess have come from patriarchal cultures. It is important for women undertaking research in these areas to assess these Goddess constructions utilising a feminist hermeneutic and irk out the elements that legitimise the power of men. Not all goddesses serve female empowerment; we need look no further than India and the goddesses of Hinduism to see that. For more information on the tensions surrounding appropriation within the work of Christ see: Christ 1987: 154.

spiritualities. This has been an area fraught with tension as we see within the work of Monica Sjo and Barbara Mor who write in *The Great Cosmic Mother*: 'The sexual misery and misogynists of Buddhism, practicing a secret and self-indulgence in the form of spiritual nihilism, leading to institutionalized sadism, neglect, and hatred of their fellow creatures, are very similar to the patriarchal monastic Christian world of the European Middle Ages'.<sup>669</sup> Here recognition is given to the patriarchal frameworks existing within these traditions from which the goddesses were created and to noting the uncomfortable discrepancy between the powerful goddess images of these cultures and their treatment of women. Very little escapes the overlay of patriarchal discourse. In the process of "cultural borrowing" themes are lovingly reproduced and retold as part of ritual, are avidly researched and artistic representations of female statues are widely available. These Goddess images (particularly European and Middle Eastern) play an important role in the reconstruction of Western history for women within their developing feminist spiritualities. Consideration however must be given to the ethics of this appropriation and whether it is ethical to pick and choose elements for our pleasure. For example, do spiritual outsiders have the right to incorporate the religious symbols and traditions indigenous to another group into their developing spiritualities without converting to the whole religion? Does selecting some elements whilst rejecting others violate the traditions these women are mining from?

For those whose spirituality is developed within an understanding of Jungian psychology, the appearance of goddesses from other cultures in their dreams or visions is as much owned by them as by those born within that particular continent.<sup>670</sup> Others may feel like they are reclaiming a female divine framework that has been eroded in the West by patriarchy.<sup>671</sup> From this perspective they are reclaiming their heritage as opposed to appropriating another cultures traditions. Alternatively they could be seen as drawing upon elements of other traditions to argue the universality of existence and the drawing together of life. For other Western women these traditions may speak to them too powerfully to be ignored. As Rita Gross writes: 'as someone who has spent

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<sup>669</sup> Sjo M, Mor B (1991) *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 221.

<sup>670</sup> Such a case is exemplified within the work of Christine Downing who was led to the Goddess through a dream. Within this dream she drove alone into the desert, driven by a desire to search for something not yet named. Her car developed a puncture so she began to walk until she found herself at the entrance of a small cave. She enters the cave and prepares herself for sleep 'as though to fall asleep were part of my way to Her'. For Downing the Goddess became her anchor, leading her through dreams with a view towards aiding in reflections on her life. For more information see: Downing C (1981) *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*. New York: Crossroad, 3.

<sup>671</sup> This is the case for London based Jungian analyst Ann Shearer who draws upon Athena's female, gynocentric traits, understanding her as the archetypal image of ancient female power, rather than an instrument of Zeus or patriarchy. For more information see: Shearer A (1998) *Athene: Image and Energy*. London: Penguin Books. Christine Downing also draws upon a "relationship" with Athena to inform reflections on her life and career. Her evolving understanding of the Goddess helped her to deal with the tensions of working within a male-dominated world. For more information see: Downing 1981.

more years as a practicing Buddhist than following any Western ideology or religion'<sup>672</sup> the idea that it may be improper to incorporate elements into '[my practices] is a very strange claim indeed'.<sup>673</sup>

She strongly argues that:

One might as well claim that Africans, Chinese, or Indians should not adopt anything from Christianity or convert to Christianity because it is the religion of their former colonizers. In my own experience, I have usually observed this judgement coming from Westerners, not Asians, from people who know little about Asian religions, and from a certain kind of politically correct liberal who is trying to score political-academic capital against other scholars.<sup>674</sup>

Others (in respect of Native American traditions) may argue that residence in the continent permits their practice of these traditions despite not being born into them. It may be felt that as long as historical accuracy is respected, and rituals and contributions sympathetic to authentic representations are practiced, that participation of the global community is not only accepted but also encouraged. For example, Hallie Austen in *The Heart of the Goddess* writes that if you 'experience Spider Grandmother guiding you, work for Native Americans' rights to regain and keep their lands'.<sup>675</sup> Eller writes that in the most part 'spiritual feminists advise respect not in consideration to those they are borrowing from, but in a concern for the integrity of their own spiritual practice... that one may accidently invoke energies or powers that can't be readily controlled by the uninitiated'.<sup>676</sup> She also describes how a number of spiritual feminists seek to avoid the issue altogether by staying with the tradition that they feel is properly theirs whilst arguing that religions need to develop organically if they are to have authenticity, power and meaning. Zsuzsanna Budapest is a proponent of this perspective as she advocates the exploration of the rich traditions close to home writing: 'We know more about Native American shamanism than our own. We have honorable spiritual roots, so let's reclaim them!'<sup>677</sup> It is clearly an area fraught with tensions with no right or wrong answer. It is not just the issue of appropriation that causes fractures amongst Goddess feminists but questions surrounding a matriarchal prehistory. There are many Goddess adherents who believe that once patriarchal rule comes to its "end" (as is the cyclical nature of things), when the Goddess is celebrated once more, that in addition to the production of new values and new biophilic and egalitarian social order, that women's status will rise as female ecological generative energies will be liberated and once again celebrated. Reflecting on the Hebrew

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<sup>672</sup> Gross 2009: 196

<sup>673</sup> Gross 2009: 196

<sup>674</sup> Gross 2009: 196

<sup>675</sup> Austen H I (1990) *The Heart of the Goddess: Art, Myth, and Meditations of the World's Sacred Feminine*. Berkeley: Wingbow Press, xxiii.

<sup>676</sup> Eller 1995: 78

<sup>677</sup> Budapest Z (1997) *Holy Book of Women's Mysteries*. Essex: New Leaf Distribution Company, 239.

Scriptures, many Goddess feminists have maintained and reinforced the argument that Yahweh grew to power as a jealous God whose followers violently dismantled existing religious structures that focused on the worship of female divinities and their connection to nature.<sup>678</sup> Gradually, the annual holidays marking the seasonal cycles of “mother earth” were redefined in the context of male triumphs. Goldenberg writes that the ‘Exodus story obscured tales of the goddesses and their festivals of spring. The winter solstice became identified with a military victory instead of with the birth of the child of the Goddess’.<sup>679</sup> As Christian symbolism became popular, Jesus replaced the sons and lovers of the Goddess and the complete female submission to male authority became the norm for women. Deities that once represented different facets of the Goddess were replaced with the Virgin Mary.<sup>680</sup> Goldenberg (as have many women within the Goddess movement) proposes that ‘sexual politics have formed the traditional myths of Western culture’.<sup>681</sup>

For many Goddess feminists, Goddess worship is humanity’s common religious heritage.<sup>682</sup> The supposition is that matrifocal or matristic (a term used to denote a non-authoritarian

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<sup>678</sup> There are many mythologies that can attest to the patriarchal denigration of female creativity and life giving forces and one such account can be found within the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish* (668-626 BCE) which was later recognised as being related to the early creation narratives in Genesis. As Christ writes, the creators of patriarchal mythologies aimed to ‘dethrone the Goddess and to legitimate the new culture of the patriarchal warriors’. In the Babylonian creation myth Tiamat, the Goddess of the Salty Sea, is slain by the God Marduk. The Goddess murder is justified by vilifying Her. As Reid-Bowen writes: ‘the myth provides the first textually accessible account of how universal order is established by the conquest/murder of a primordial Mother Goddess’. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford write ‘[t]he *Enuma Elish* is the first story of the replacing of a mother goddess who generates creation as part of herself by a god who “makes” creation as something separate from himself’. In order of quotation see: Christ 1997: 62; Reid-Bowen 2007: 86; and, Baring A, Cashford J (1991) *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. London: Viking Arkana, 273.

<sup>679</sup> Goldenberg N (1995) *The Return of the Goddess: Psychoanalytic Reflections on the Shift from Theology to Theology*. In: King U (ed.) *Religion and Gender*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 145-165 (150).

<sup>680</sup> Stephen Benko in *The Virgin Goddess, Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* argues that devotion to Mary stems from, and is the result of, pagan Goddess worship. He writes that ‘veneration of the motherhood of Mary, is much more indebted to pagan belief and practice than many scholars are willing to admit... the conclusion seems inevitable that Mary eventually fulfilled the same role and filled the same need in Christian theology and piety’. Baring and Cashford write that ‘Mary is the unrecognised Mother Goddess of the Christian tradition’ as they demonstrate all the traditional roles she has assumed over time. These include the Great Mother Goddess, the Goddess of the Heavens, the Nature Goddess, to name a few. In order of quotation see: Benko S (2003) *The Virgin Goddess, Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology*. Danvers, MA: Brill, 81; and, Baring, Cashford 1991: 548.

<sup>681</sup> Goldenberg 1995: 150

<sup>682</sup> Whilst it is not central to this work, as I operate from a non-realist position, due to the contentious nature of discussions surrounding a matriarchal pre-history, a short synopsis may be helpful at this juncture. One of the most well-known proponents of the past existence of a matrifocal society was Marija Gimbutas whose work catalogues the evidence (radiocarbon dating and spiritual feminist archaeological data) for believing that society would have been made up of small theocratic kingdoms presided over by a queen-priestess and a male family member to oversee agriculture and trade movements arguing that there is absolutely no indication that society at that time was patrilinear or patriarchal. In her work she wrote that these cultures were peaceful, egalitarian, agrarian, art-loving and primarily worshipped lunar, earth and sea deities until Indo-European horsemen and warrior tribes began their two thousand year onslaught (from approximately 2,000 BCE) of the matrifocal civilisations of Europe and India. Her research (taken from figurines, temples, artefacts and shrines for example) showed that grave goods were equally distributed between the sexes and that the number of

community that celebrates “female” characteristics and values) Goddess-worshipping cultures can be dated back to 30,000 BCE and various evidences indicate that this society understood divinity as a ‘qualitatively different, pacific, egalitarian, spiritual power whose dynamics are always in harmony with those of nature’.<sup>683</sup> Proponents of this argument (Marija Gimbutas and Merlin Stone to name two) argue that ‘in prehistoric and early historic periods of human development, religions existed in which people revered their supreme creator as female’.<sup>684</sup> Stone argued that historical evidence shows that Goddess worship and early Christianity existed simultaneously for thousands of years but female religion ‘far from naturally fading away, was the victim of centuries of continual persecution and suppression by the advocates of the newer religions which held male deities as supreme’.<sup>685</sup> At this time, the creation myth of Adam and Eve took root within our collective consciousness and the divine hierarchy was established.

Debate surrounding the existence of a matriarchal heritage has historically been a highly contested area of debate fraught with tensions and controversy not only with non-feminists but also within feminist thought and scholarship.<sup>686</sup> However discussions on the historical accuracy of a matriarchal prehistory is largely superfluous to my work here. The importance of a matriarchal prehistory myth is my focus as a mechanism for displacing social stereotypes and female damaging idealisations within the lives of women today. As Goldenberg argues, rather than focusing on a historical basis for contemporary Goddess traditions, we should be focusing on the power women are claiming today.<sup>687</sup> Drawing upon the work of Starhawk, Goldenberg writes:

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objects/wealth accompanying the bodies was synonymous with age rather than sex, that children’s lineage was traced through the mother and that ownership and inheritance of property was equal to both genders (to name three examples). For her, the evidence showed that females occupied pivotal roles such as carrying out ritual preparation alongside the supervision and leading of ritual proceedings and that the male god was an adjunct of the female Goddess embodying the role of Her consort or son. Gimbutas identified two primary representations of the Goddess: 1) “she who is the giver of all” as the provider of life, water, food and happiness alongside the image of the Goddess as the “taker of all” representing death and thus representing the cyclical nature of existence; and, 2) representations of the Goddess as linked with the periodic awakening of nature; ‘she is springtime, the new moon, rebirth, regeneration, and metamorphosis’. For more information see: Gimbutas M (1982) *Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe*. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement*. New York: Anchor Books, 22-32. Quotation from page 28. This hypothesis is also written about extensively by Merlin Stone. For more information see: Stone: 1976.

<sup>683</sup> Raphael 1999: 78

<sup>684</sup> Stone 1976: xii

<sup>685</sup> Stone 1976: xiii

<sup>686</sup> Cynthia Eller argues that evidence for this prehistory is slim and should therefore not provide the inspirational basis for personal and social change based on studying of female figures and forms depicted in ancient artefacts and architecture. For more information see: Eller C (2001) *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won’t Give Women and Future*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. For a well-conceived rebuttal of Eller’s argument see: Goldenberg 2004: 207-208.

<sup>687</sup> Goldenberg 1995: 150-155

... while the past may serve us with models and myths, we need not look to it to justify the re-emergence of the feminine principle. Whether or not women ever ruled in matriarchies, women are taking power today. Whether or not contemporary Witchcraft has its roots in the Stone Age, its branches reach into the future.<sup>688</sup>

For Starhawk, the importance of the past is how it is utilised in the present. She knows that her religion is based around hopes for power, influence, control and justice, as is the case for other religions. Knowing this, the power lies not only in the true fact of previous events but also in their power as myth's or fictions to provide layers of additional meaning for life in the present and in the future. For Goldenberg, the importance lies not in the historical accuracy (as any matriarchal prehistory cannot be conclusively proven) but in its use in women's imagination as a drive towards fuelling political goals in the present.<sup>689</sup> Here we focus on the power of this matriarchal myth to heal. This is the belief that the *idea* of a matrifocal past can take women (and theology) a long way as we call upon conceptualisations of the past to improve the situation of women in the present<sup>690</sup> arguing that utilising a matriarchal prehistory in the form of an ancient myth of the superiority of the Goddess provides women with a higher place within social and religious structures of power. This provides new avenues for strengthening women's conceptualisations of self. Extrapolating on this Goldenberg suggests that the image of the Goddess when merged with elements of psychoanalysis and object relations theory can provide empowering psychological frameworks for women today as we will return to in a few moments.

For many Goddess feminists and those participating in the various Goddess movements, the symbol of a female divinity holds multiple meanings and opportunities for embodied living due to the diverse, informal and open nature. My purpose here was to provide an overview of how the Goddess has been incorporated into the lives of women, to demonstrate how She has been drawn upon to empower women in society today. Not only does Goddess feminism provide the framework for dismantling the destructive discourses underpinning female disempowerment but the concept of immanence locates divinity within the female body, promoting positive reflections on embodiment whilst its fluidity provides opportunities for multidisciplinary dialogue. At its heart, Goddess feminism is a malleable theology that allows for its central principles to operate in different shapes

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<sup>688</sup> Starhawk (1982b) *Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion*. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement*. New York: Anchor Books, 415-422 (415-6).

<sup>689</sup> Addressing the contentious nature of a matriarchal prehistory, Goldenberg advises feminist matriarchalists to 'portray themselves more explicitly as poets and visionaries and less as empiricists' arguing that '[a]ll religions interpret history to serve their aspirations. Feminist theology could demonstrate a high level of honesty and sophistication by freely admitting the speculative nature and inspirational objectives of its historical reconstructions'. For more information see: Goldenberg 2004: 208.

<sup>690</sup> This draws upon the work of Chapter Three and the idea that the most important feature of religion is its myth and that power and understanding comes from creating your own symbolic structures in the context of your life.



to form the most inclusive and adaptive space which is important as we explore new opportunities and new healing frameworks for female embodiment today.

### Language and the Construction of Reality

Not only has religion played a central role in our conceptualisations of self, but the power of language and the influence it has on our reflections on embodiment and construction of identity, is highly significant. Language, culture and the human body are interconnected and the history of language as tied up in patriarchal power relations has been contentious for many women and men writing within feminist theory and thought.<sup>691</sup> It has been said that language ‘partakes in the white-male-is-norm ideology and is used predominantly as a vehicle to circulate established power relations’.<sup>692</sup> As a consequence many feminist critiques argue that ‘[l]anguage, for women, is not good enough’.<sup>693</sup> As a pervasive and deeply damaging model of communication for women and men, we are called upon to change it, to make it fitter for our use through challenging patriarchal hierarchies of power. Nowhere is this more evident than when reflecting on the revolutionary work of Mary Daly. From the very first pages of Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* we are transported into a world of spiralling Hags on intergalactic voyages, the challenging of patriarchal female constructs through “reversing the reversals” of words such as *Crone*, *Harpy*, *Fury*, *Glamour* (originally used to denote a spell cast by a woman<sup>694</sup> and now most commonly associated with Glamour magazines and female beauty idealisations) and redefining *Spinster* as a woman whose occupation is to spin (spinning here is used to denote the spinning of an alternative realm of existence that is as outward looking as it is inward looking). Part of this process of spinning is identifying and banishing the “ghostly gages” that have taken root in our psyches. Declaring her ‘true course was and is Outercourse- moving beyond the imprisoning mental, physical, emotional, spiritual walls of the state of possession’<sup>695</sup> she writes that “God”, “androgyny” and “homosexuality” are false words, that there is no way to remove male and masculine imagery from God which presented a problem for any woman within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, she writes that ‘when writing/speaking “anthropomorphically” of ultimate reality, of the divine spark of be-ing, I now choose to write/speak gynomorphically. I do so because *God* represents the necrophilia of patriarchy, whereas *Goddess* affirms the life loving be-ing of

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<sup>691</sup> For more information on feminist writers engaged in critically analysing the patriarchal nature of language see: Mills S, Mullany L (2011) *Language, Gender and Feminism: Theory, Methodology and Practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>692</sup> Salvaggio R (1999) *The Sounds of Feminist Theory*. New York: State University of New York Press, 45.

<sup>693</sup> Cameron D (1998) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2.

<sup>694</sup> Daly 1991: 188

<sup>695</sup> Daly 1991: xxiv

women and nature'.<sup>696</sup> Whilst remaining conscious that the term "Goddess" can be used to merely substitute the term "God" she gravitates towards the term as a woman-identified gendered shift away from masculine language (and divinity) and as an alternative to androgyny. Celebrating cerebral spinning Daly describes her work as anti-academic (repelled by patriarchal institutions) but not anti-intellectual. Her redefining of language forces us to look again at the constraints and damage of language writing: 'deception is embedded in the very texture of the worlds we use, and here is where our exorcism can begin'.<sup>697</sup> She calls for us to become our own exorcists and expel the internalised Godhead from ourselves and our lives in His various manifestations. Daly's approach to patriarchal texts is best described as idiosyncratic as she subverts androcentric language and challenges existing beliefs about society and morality through utilizing symbols such as slashes and hyphens to draw attention to women's issues. Her textual web-spinning catches androcentric words and recreates the imagery they invoke as she re-reads, re-words and reverses the demonization of female sacrality. She writes:

I unravelled reversals, finding the Archaic Origins of myths and symbols that had been stolen and twisted to serve the masters' purposes.<sup>698</sup>

In order to reverse the reversals completely we must deal with the fact that patriarchal myths contain stolen mythic powers. They are something like distorting lenses through which we *can* see into the Background. But it is necessary to break their codes in order to use them as viewers; that is, we must see their lie in order to see their truth.<sup>699</sup>

Her writing demonstrates how patriarchal constructions of female otherness have laid the groundwork for attributing certain stereotypes (irrationality and capricious emotionality) based on naturalistic justifications that have maintained the gender status quo. In light of this, Daly writes that the first step in reclaiming is Spiralling and Sparkling (the lighting of women's fire as a 'source and symbol of energy, of gynergy'<sup>700</sup>) as she urges us to start the voyage by examining all the various manifestations of 'Goddess murder on this patriarchal planet'<sup>701</sup> and the 'deep and universal intent to destroy the divine spark in women'.<sup>702</sup> She argues that we have to understand the deadly intent in order to start the process of exorcism. This is followed by the creation of a new place for women within space and time, the development of a new woman-identified environment through deep listening and speaking through experience. Here we start to move beyond the patriarchal mind-set

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<sup>696</sup> Daly 1991: xlvii

<sup>697</sup> Daly 1991: 3

<sup>698</sup> Daly M (1993) *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage*. London: The Women's Press, 221.

<sup>699</sup> Daly 1991: 47

<sup>700</sup> Daly 1991: 319

<sup>701</sup> Daly 1991: 315

<sup>702</sup> Daly 1991: 315

in recalling, reclaiming and remembering our witch's magical powers to bewitch and transform. This involves the weaving and crafting of new language and definitions as we are called to co-construct an alternative reality. This is not always about reversing everything valued in a patriarchal system but searching anthropological data and the history of religions in search of female supernatural power, the power that has been alienated from women and turned sour by patriarchal discourse. This is a way of deconstructing the patriarchal construct of pseudo-feminism formulated at the inception of the Women's Movement, of welcoming back the 'real rebels/renegeades [that] have been driven away from positions of patriarchally defined power, replaced by reformist and roboticised tokens'.<sup>703</sup> Her subversive uses of words dismantle the gendered boundaries that we have internalised whilst opening up opportunities for women and men to co-create and co-exist.<sup>704</sup> The Goddess within this framework is an enabling expression for reflecting on the sacred. Once the reader acclimatises to her writing, Daly's work is wholly liberating in its open boundaries, recreations and playful regenerations and restorations.

Employing the same subversive elements as Daly, Goldenberg draws on words such as "witch" and "Goddess" to demonstrate their power in challenging patriarchy by bringing to mind images and symbols that patriarchy has tried to eradicate. In *Witches and Words* she writes that witchy language challenges the 'performance of patriarchal grandiosity'.<sup>705</sup> Magically conjuring images of female carnality, deep emotion, vulnerability and the cyclical nature of the natural world she writes that they have the power to touch us deeply. Goldenberg is concerned that these benefits may be lost if the radical edge is softened by mass dissemination writing that in its marginality 'witchy words have teeth and claws'<sup>706</sup> making them orally aggressive whilst suggesting 'a determined hunger and a ravenous desire for survival'.<sup>707</sup> For her, this marks this movement as powerfully empowering for women. On the contrary Christ, whilst agreeing on the powerful and transforming benefit of the Goddess for women, writes that '[a]s long as 'Goddess' and 'God-She,' like the word 'feminist' are controversial, we still have a long way to go before we as a culture can fully accept female power as a beneficent and independent power'.<sup>708</sup> Through illustrating the importance between narrative, knowledge and power, she argued that the symbols and language used by religions and spiritualities have an enormous potency even for the individuals who are not

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<sup>703</sup> Daly 1991: li

<sup>704</sup> This is more clearly seen in her co-created book *Websters' first new intergalactic wickedy of the English language* which highlighted the playful and empowering potential of non-sexist language. For more information see: Daly M, Caputi J (1994) *Websters' first new intergalactic wickedy of the English language*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>705</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 205

<sup>706</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 210

<sup>707</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 210

<sup>708</sup> Christ 2012: 242

directly affiliated with those belief systems. The consequence of this assertion is that until we have religions and spiritualities that use gender-neutral or humanity empowering symbols and language to reflect upon divinity we will not experience full gender equality or develop a platform for the equal treatment of individuals regardless of race, sexual orientation, size, shape, etc. She used the term “Goddess-talk” which refers to an explicitly female construction in order to express the sacred within her theology. This is a view shared by Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow who argues that we must learn to use the term “Goddess” instead of “God” when referring to divinity. She writes: ‘The deep resistance called forth by her naming indicates that the needs she answered are still with us’.<sup>709</sup> However much Christian and Jewish practitioners and theologians reinforce that their God has no body, no gender, no age and no race, that God is neither female nor male, the argument is shattered as soon as the terms “Goddess” and “God the Mother” is proposed. Unconscious androcentrism runs deep throughout these traditional narratives. Christ refers to the “deformation of language” as a model of deconstruction when using terms from mystical traditions. She examines the creation of traditional language within a different context, one allowing for the subversion of the patriarchal social structures of consciousness that have kept women in subordinate positions. For example, in discussing the “nothingness” of women’s experience, as discussed within Goddess mystical traditions, she calls attention to the ‘powerful experience of finitude or limitation in which social structures and structures of consciousness which had provided meaning in a person’s life are called into question and recognised as less than absolute’.<sup>710</sup> She argued that these experiences provide women with an opportunity to challenge and subvert patriarchal structures of power. This calls to mind the work of Judith Butler in Chapter Three and the concept of re-citation as a platform for subverting gender narratives. Christ argues that we must continue to de-form language, deliberately changing its meaning and its context but this is an exercise fraught with tensions and danger. This new use of language could cause misunderstandings by those who are not versed in the new contexts and are instead soldered to old meanings. Despite this Christ argues that we must broaden these understandings if we are to broaden the nature of language. Christ recognises Morton as one of the central influences of her work on the reconfiguration of the symbols and language invoked to reflect on the nature of divinity.

Morton is commonly referred to as one of the fore-sisters of theology and Goddess feminism alongside Goldenberg and Christ (whilst Daly’s work is of central importance to discourses on the Goddess in general, in her challenging of patriarchal structures of power, she is more of a spiritual feminist as she moves away from the Goddess and towards androcentric and gender

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<sup>709</sup> Plaskow J (1983) The Right Question is Theological. In: Heschel S (ed.) *On Being a Jewish Feminist*. New York: Schocken Books, 230.

<sup>710</sup> Christ 1995: xiii-xiv

neutral terminologies). Arguably, she is most well known for her challenging of God language and the inception of Goddess-talk. Following her rejection of exclusively male imagery of divinity she developed a deep-seated distrust of divinity as a transcendent male. For her, God is a redundant and dead symbol which has lost its redemptive power as a metaphor. Instead she turned towards language and symbolism of the Goddess as she explored the 'exorcizing and regenerative possibilities of Goddess-talk as metaphoric process, moving beyond any attempt to reify the divine'.<sup>711</sup> Morton understood Goddess-talk as a means of moving towards a meta-physical spirituality.<sup>712</sup> She saw the Goddess as setting in motion a metaphoric movement in which the Goddesses role was to 'make herself dispensable'.<sup>713</sup> She ultimately argued that Goddess religion would only result in a sex change of the head of the hierarchical structure if this metaphoric element was not recognised. In Goddess-talk we find a divine metaphor that is freeing and healing for women. It challenges God-talk and its refusal to use anything but male and masculine metaphors for divinity seeking to broaden the parameters for inclusive gender narratives. In her chapter on *The Goddess as Metaphoric Image* she writes that understanding the Goddess as metaphoric image opens women up to women's spirituality in ways which were never conceivable or possible when working within the confines of "God the Father". It is through this that we can 'claim our bodies as ours and as ourselves and our minds as our own and ourselves'.<sup>714</sup> Recognising the contentious nature of language Marion Woodman prefers the use of music and dance as they transport her to a 'non personal dimension, a world that speaks directly to her heart, instead of her head, a world where she can experience wholeness and harmony'.<sup>715</sup> She writes that language can be dangerous for women because they tend to encase them in a realm of masculine ideas. She suggests that the medium of creative dance and music are more conducive to the creation of transformative rituals to bring 'consciousness into the forgotten muscles'.<sup>716</sup> We will explore this in more detail later in this chapter whilst exploring the use of ritual.

The ineffability of divinity will always present language difficulties but these difficulties increase exponentially as '[w]omen are experiencing... in the area of spirituality that which the patriarchal language has no words to describe'.<sup>717</sup> Further complications overlaying the movement towards Goddess-talk and the use of female language to communicate the nature of divinity concern "Otherness" and the tensions of creating exclusions. For example, Christ has been criticised by

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<sup>711</sup> Mantin R (2007) 'Dealing with a Jealous God': Letting go of Monotheism and 'Doing' Sacrality. In: Isherwood L (ed.) *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*. London: Equinox, 37-49 (41).

<sup>712</sup> Morton 1985: 170

<sup>713</sup> Morton 1985: 143

<sup>714</sup> Morton 1985: 166

<sup>715</sup> Woodman 1980: 112-113

<sup>716</sup> Woodman 1980: 113

<sup>717</sup> Morton 1985: 173

Kathleen Sands for presenting a singular notion or ideal construct that refers to a singular experience. For her this fails to encapsulate the diverse experiences of women. Sands writes that Christ 'still dreams of the oneness that has entranced Western rationalism'.<sup>718</sup> She is criticised for her lack of offering alternative models for divinity that can be invoked by individuals from different walks of life. Specifically she has been criticised for excluding male images of God from her theology and thus simply reversing the status quo in favour of women. In so doing she avoids acknowledging the fact that male images of God need to be liberated too. She is still offering a singular image of divinity constructed by-and-large to cater for her individual needs. This would not be a problem if she was not offering a systematic theology within an academic context for Goddess studies. Having self-identified these criticisms too, Christ clarifies that she is directly addressing the subordination of women in her work. Her work is concerned with affirming female power in the context of this patriarchal starting point and it must be recognised that she can only comment on the Goddess in relation to her own experiences and developments which she identifies as such throughout her writing.

Another criticism of language as employed throughout literature on the Goddess surrounds the often-employed terminology of the Goddess in Trinitarian terms, the Goddess as maiden, mother, crone. Specifically it is the notion of motherhood as intrinsic to female-hood that I argue is in need of deconstruction. For me this is the most controversial construct of the Goddess due to its potentially oppressive associations and limiting of the experiences of women alongside the clear exclusion of men. As described by Reid-Bowen, the Mother Goddess is: 'patterned upon biological and female capacities relating to pregnancy, birthing and breast feeding, behavioural norms associated with motherhood, such as care, nurture and support, and broader naturalistic forces or principles, such as fertility, generativity and growth'.<sup>719</sup> Theologically this model emphasizes that creation is contingent upon the female body and its presence and support in early life and as such, the model of the Goddess as mother 'is one that is felt by most Goddess feminists to present a better account of the acts and processes of creation and creativity than the patriarchal alternatives'.<sup>720</sup> Aside from the philosophical and metaphysical considerations (birthing of the world, universe, solar and planetary systems, tension between immanence and transcendence) there are broader consequences for the lives of women that may isolate rather than empower. The point I am addressing here is the implication that female-hood and motherhood are some how mutually exclusive or synonymous. Despite the renewed emphasis within Goddess literature on the symbolic

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<sup>718</sup> Sands K (1994) *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 115.

<sup>719</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 63

<sup>720</sup> Reid-Bowen 2007: 64

nature of the term (bodily realities of motherhood or childbirth<sup>721</sup>) it will always bring to mind associations surrounding procreation, the bringing new life into the world. In so doing, it may obscure alternative sexual practices (such as lesbianism) and the reality of single women. It also renders motherhood the “norm” and thus excludes those women who are, by biology, unable to procreate, or who simply do not wish to have children. Pregnancy and birth are not the only forms of creativity available to women. Theology and Goddess feminism should remain fluid and understood in terms that make it relatable for changing audiences. For me, deconstructing this vision of the Goddess would be a step towards making Her more inclusive. I do not propose an exchange of terms, as transgressing these boundaries, on this broad scale, is a problematic task. I propose that for now we leave the Goddess of maiden, mother, crone behind us and take up Goldenberg’s calling to create our own symbolisms that relate to our lived experiences.<sup>722</sup>

Language also presents difficulties when it comes to discussions surrounding the term “Goddess”. As we touched upon in the chapter’s introduction, Goddess feminists employ a varying range of terms such as “the Goddess”, “Goddess”, “Goddesses” or even “female/feminine divine” or “sacred feminine” unless the decision is made to opt for androgynous or monistic understandings of divine representations in lieu of anthropomorphic approaches to divinity as female or male. Contention also surrounds the classification of Goddess feminism as “spirituality” or “religion” as the movement towards a female divinity caused academics and practitioners to question the nature of the language used to describe their growing discord with the androcentric nature of the term “religion”. Thus, for some adherents and writers of Goddess feminism (such as Goldenberg) “spirituality” is preferred as it is understood as an ecological, gynocentric and “radical” term in comparison to “religion” which indicates a reformation of patriarchal religions as opposed to the re-creations, re-births and matriarchal restorations that many Goddess feminists envision. Goldenberg argued that the creation of feminist spiritualities would spark the end of transcendent and patriarchal religion either by eroding them completely or by transforming them until they are unrecognisable.<sup>723</sup> This rings true for Daly who felt that movement away from the term “religion” reflected a movement from the Judeo-Christian tradition that is understood as irredeemably patriarchal, that “religion” is a highly ‘ambivalent term connoting all the dogmatic, expansionist and authoritarian characteristics of institutionalized patriarchal religion’.<sup>724</sup> However, to some adherents, Goddess feminism is the only form of authentic religion and they would seek to distance themselves

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<sup>721</sup> Starhawk writes that the Goddess has no genitalia and that Goddess as Mother is intended to refer to the creative and empowering possibilities or female-hood as opposed to biological realities or the decision to procreate and may also be used to refer to the fact that all humans had/have a mother. For more information see: Starhawk 1989: 244.

<sup>722</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>723</sup> Goldenberg 1979

<sup>724</sup> Raphael 1999: 16

from the classification of the Goddess movement solely as spirituality. This is the case for Starhawk and Z. Budapest who both write about their Goddess traditions in the context of a religion although spirituality plays a central part in their religious visions. Extrapolating on Goddess and spiritual feminism as a religion, Raphael writes that whilst they are non-centralised, non-dogmatic and have no recognised and formal canon of sacred texts they have most of the other ingredients necessary to use the term religion. For example, even in the informal and non-authoritarian form Goddess feminism has a sacred history, cosmology, ontology, theology, ethics, priestesses, favoured texts and rituals. Together, these elements become a means by which women can collectively re-call elements of their embodiment that have become distanced thought-out life within patriarchal institutions. As mentioned earlier in my thesis, I am wary of the term religion because of its patriarchal heritage. I favour the term spirituality<sup>725</sup> within which to encase my developing work although I appreciate that this is also fraught with tensions.<sup>726</sup>

For Goddess feminism, challenging our patriarchal heritage has been central. A point made clear in our discussions surrounding God and Goddess talk within this section of the chapter. The language used to discuss the nature of divinity will always be a contentious issue. Whether we work with Daly to “reverse the reversals”, invoke Goldenberg’s “witchy words” to challenge and subvert patriarchal structures of power, employing Christ’s focus on dispelling damaging and destructive stereotypical notions of the Goddess in order to allow for mainstream application or utilising Morton’s Goddess symbolism as metaphorical, language will always present us with difficulties and limitations. I engage in discussions surrounding the nature of language to demonstrate the scope of patriarchal power and to draw attention to activities that draw upon alternative expressions as we work towards embodied reflections.

Up to this point we have examined what may be described as some foundational features of Goddess feminism as we explored the Goddess as immanent, how the Goddess has been incorporated into individual theologies, issues surrounding appropriation, the use of a pre-historic

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<sup>725</sup> Spirituality within this work can be broadly defined as a search for a greater meaning within which we can locate our individual experiences. This sparks a connection to a divinity that draws us into the totality of existence, symbolising interdependence and interconnection as we are bound to a broader network of life. I employ feminist spirituality as ‘an expression of the creative transformations envisioned by feminist approaches to the study and practice of religion’. Carrette, King 2005: 1

<sup>726</sup> Despite my employment of the term spirituality I am wary of its disembodied heritage and the implication that some things are profane and some things sacred, that we are still employing judgemental hierarchical notions of which experiences are worth having and which are not. Goldenberg writes that feminist thought about religion often goes further and deeper than the concept of spirituality allows and so the term spirituality might limit our conceptions of what we are doing through the mystification of the direction of theories on embodiment and female power. Despite these reservations, and the progress made by academics working within the area of critical religion, the examination of religion from a positive critical position (as mentioned in the methodology), I continue to work with the term spirituality as a model within which to explore healing stories for addressing female maladies, such as anorexia, today.



matriarchal myth to heal and the problematic nature of the language we use daily. My purpose in plotting these features is to demonstrate how the qualities central to this movement have the potential, when endowed with enough power, to disrupt the disembodiment at the heart of the anorexic expression and by extension, the slender performance. Here we are starting to establish the parameters of a theologically mediated body whilst addressing the subjective nature of these terms and how they are shaped by personal interpretation, moods, motivations and desires. How this plays out alongside what we know of the anorexic expression and the construction of transformative ritual will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### The Goddess as a Symbol of Psychological Strength

As we explored in Chapter Three, a central theme in the work of Goldenberg is her passionate desire to put us in touch with our bodies. To do so she employs the use of psychoanalysis, which she defines as ‘talk that works through the body’.<sup>727</sup> She writes: ‘I realised that what psychoanalysis was offering me was a connection with emotions and personal history’.<sup>728</sup> In examining the Goddess movement from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory she considers how analytic thought can be used to understand the Goddess and it is here that we see the commonalities between discourses on the Goddess and psychoanalysis. In drawing upon her work on the harmonies between these two areas of thought I will demonstrate the psychological benefit of the symbolism inherent to Goddess feminism and how this can be applied to the anorexic expression within contemporary society through ritual. My emphasis on the importance of ritual will be explored in the next section of this chapter. I employ the use of ritual as a new and developing consciousness that underpins daily activities which, when informed by a female empowering divine construct becomes transformative. In the remainder of this chapter there are three features of this transformative practice that I will flesh out. At the heart to this developing consciousness is active (as anorexia has shown itself to be a passive expression in its compulsive regurgitation of the discourses underpinning its construction) reflections on embodiment, a questioning of the patriarchal discourses that underpin anorexia’s manifestation, and an engagement in the creation of ritual and individually meaningful myth to inspire healing and liberation from these constraints. Before addressing these features further, an examination of the commonalities between Goddess feminism and psychoanalysis is valuable.

Goldenberg identifies four key commonalities between the Goddess movement and psychoanalytic theory in the form of objects relations theory. These are as follows: they both focus on the past as an important source of meaning; they both work towards the deconstruction of the

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<sup>727</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 1

<sup>728</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 1

central images of patriarchal authority; importance is placed on describing the individual as formed within the context of a community; and, they both recognise fantasy as a key structure of “rational” thought. Drawing upon object relations theory<sup>729</sup> and the importance it places on the reflection of past experiences (infancy and early childhood) Goldenberg writes that central to both philosophies and the individuals participating in the activity is ‘a sense of connection to the past [which] is cultivated for the purpose of heightening involvement in the present’.<sup>730</sup> She writes that object relations theory arguably places an even greater value on the redemptive value of connection to the past than does Goddess feminism, writing that ‘[a]ll analytic theory aims at learning to see more about the past in the psychological structures of the present’.<sup>731</sup> That no event is ever seen as fully determined by present circumstances or by motives for a future end ‘[i]n analysis, the present is largely a *fiction* of the past. The present is a formation or a construction of the past in the sense of the Latin root of the word “fiction” (*fingere*), meaning “to form”’.<sup>732</sup> Focusing on reflection on the individuals personal past, where emphasis is placed on the early relationship between the infant and mother and how presence and absence structures the infant’s development, object relations theory departs from classical analytic theory by replacing the father figure with the mother and thus places a woman at the centre of the universe whilst championing a shift from a focus on male symbols to a focus on female ones (a movement away from the sexism inherent within the work of Jung and Freud’s keen interest on the father and symbol of the phallus). Turning our attention to Goddess feminism, as we have just explored, a connection to the past has been employed to legitimise contemporary women’s experience in the form of a matriarchal prehistory. This may be referred to as Goddess mythology or the divine women’s myth and relates to the idea that at some point in history women played a central role in the religious and social organisation of human environments. Goldenberg writes that this myth can ‘provide women with a compendium of female passions and sensibilities... [as they] are used to call attention to the complexity of female experience and to

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<sup>729</sup> Goldenberg writes that object relations theory stresses the interconnectedness of people. Within this framework, we are always seeking relationships with “objects” (in this case people) and defining ourselves, our identities, against these relationships. Everyone is conceptualized as being part of a larger whole. What affects me, affects you, and so on. One of the central concepts of object relations theory is the idea that our earliest experiences have a significant impact on our development of character and behaviour in later years. Thus, object relations theorists stress the developmental significance of infancy and the early years of childhood and therapy focuses on reaching back to childhood in order to understand how the here and now came to be. Here we see many commonalities between the therapeutic approach of object relations theory and the drive of Goddess feminism in identifying a strong connection to the past in order to benefit the present and foster individual growth for the future. For more information on Goldenberg’s work with object relations theory see: Goldenberg 1993: 190-210.

<sup>730</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 193

<sup>731</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 194

<sup>732</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 194

dignify that experience by revealing it's ancient roots'.<sup>733</sup> They can therefore be understood as sources of information that confer meaning on the present by drawing on ancient stories relating to the inception of culture. Here we are drawing upon a repressed female heritage that celebrated female virtues. As we explored earlier in this chapter, Goldenberg draws upon this matriarchal prehistory, not to labour any historical accuracy but as a psychologically and politically beneficial tool for women in the present and future advocating that we focus on the benefit this image has on our psyche instead of matriarchal prehistory as historic fact. For example, rituals marking the progression of time (in celebrating seasonal changes and astrological movements) alongside the use of stories and Goddess symbolism connect the present with the past and thus acquaint women with a deep background to underpin psychological development and locate their embodiment providing levels of meaning (I am drawing upon meaning and meaningful as laid out in Chapter Three) that I have argued are absent for many women in contemporary society. This disconnection of women from a source of female wisdom was also a reoccurring theme within the work of Woodman in Chapter Three. As we explored earlier, she argues that living in a patriarchy strips from women a deep-seated female divine connection and thus, an inner core of certainty and a deep source of meaning, the manifestation of which is the development of somatic maladies such as anorexia and obesity (the latter is the focus of her work). The female in this environment is devalued in favour of masculine attributes and as a consequence women struggle to emulate a socially acceptable model of existence whilst fostering and maintaining female empowering roots. This discomfort, even when it is not consciously acknowledged, expresses itself somatically through the body. Elaborating further on the second and third commonality, both Goddess feminism and object relations theory focus on the symbolism of the mother as a tool for displacing images of patriarchal authority and as a means of drawing people together.<sup>734</sup> Goldenberg argues that as every single human life begins in the body of a woman; our earliest experiences are of connectedness and interdependence writing:

I suggest that the mutual concern of psychoanalysis and theology with articulating the context of human life arises because both philosophies centre around the image of a powerful women in the past. Since every human life begins in the body of a woman, the image of women, whether thought of as mother or as Goddess, always points to an early history of connectedness. Mother-*mater*-matter-matrix.<sup>735</sup>

Object relations theory however limits its application of the female role to the mother and the mother-infant relationship whilst Goddess feminism extends the image to divinity and the planet as

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<sup>733</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 193

<sup>734</sup> As we have already addressed, drawing upon the association of women with symbolism of the mother is not without its complications.

<sup>735</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 202

a whole.<sup>736</sup> In so doing it broadens the psychological potential for a healing paradigm of female symbolism whilst working towards the erosion of male authoritarianism in Western culture. Taking these together we have a Goddess feminist framework whereby the individual woman would have access to a deep-seated female imagination that would contribute towards the subversion of patriarchal rhetoric. Taking this deconstruction of male symbols out into the world we challenge the patriarchal power relations that underpin the anorexic construction and engage in the co-creation of embodied and contextualised Western thought.

Taking this further I argue that this needs to be incorporated into society. This is where I depart from the work of Goldenberg as she resists the translation of this challenging on a mass scale through the fear that Goddess feminism would lose its radical edge in mass adoption. Framing her subversive psychology within what she understands to be most subversive form of theological thinking- that of witchcraft- she employs the terminology of “witches” and “wicca” for their deviance and power as deconstructive tools. She is drawn towards discourses on the Goddess, and in particular the application of witchcraft, because ‘it is rife with magical discourse that encourages us to play with fire’.<sup>737</sup> For her, one of the central features of witchcraft has been its use in deconstructing traditional religious thought through the celebration of women and nature. It is through this that the mainstream religious monopoly on life has been challenged and tested. However, she is reserved about the development of academic theological discourse that may contribute towards the domestication of the Goddess and the witch worrying that the subversive nature would be lost through universal application. Whilst her work focuses on the radical nature of the symbolism of the witch and the subversive and challenging nature of “witchy words” I argue it is within the symbol of the Goddess that we really make advancements to challenge the patriarchal social structures within which we live. I am referring to societal dissemination through normalising the Goddess symbol in society. Once we take Her image for granted, once referring to Her no longer raises eyebrows, shocks or surprises people, then I believe we will be closer to really disrupting the patriarchal discourses that underpin the anorexic expression. As Christ argues, as long as the “Goddess” and “God-She” are controversial, we still have a long way to go before society can accept

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<sup>736</sup> For example, Melanie Klein, a female theorist in the area of psychoanalysis, writes that the male fear of castration is actually derived from earlier anxieties about feeding and the disappearance of the mother’s breast. Klein suggests that the child perceives the breast as part of their body, a part that sometimes disappears creating anxiety and discomfort. For more information see: Klein M (1975) *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963*. New York: Delacorte Press; and, Klein M (1975) *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945*. New York: Delacorte Press. Luce Irigaray takes this even further in her theory that this castration fear backdates to the severing of the umbilical cord and the lost physical connection with the mother. For more information see: Irigaray L (1985) *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>737</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 205

female power as divine.<sup>738</sup> I take heed of Goldenberg's worries that attending to the Goddess will result in 'another of the same'<sup>739</sup> as a 'variant of standard theological ideologies regarding an exalted deity'.<sup>740</sup> However, based on my readings on the Goddess as reflected upon within the work of this chapter I do not think this is likely. The core foundation of theological thought is profoundly different from the worldview and social structures that contributed to female disembodiment at the hands of the Judeo-Christian traditions as we have already explored. For example, theology and Goddess feminism sees life as a process rather than a system of various hierarchies whilst placing female experience central to its vision of life. I remain fervently with the Goddess as it is within Her symbolism and theology that I see more potential for societal dissemination. For me this is of central importance as we address the anorexic expression and theorise on alternative subversive strategies. Through exploring the commonalities between psychoanalysis and Goddess feminism we have seen the joint respect for the female condition in society. This is clearly evident within the discourse of theology as the central focus is on female experience and a female divinity. A questioning of patriarchal power is endemic to theological explorations. Goldenberg writes that both 'the facts and the fantasies of the Goddess movement function to crack the edifice of patriarchy by encouraging the emergence of suppressed patterns of language, visions, dreams, and theories'.<sup>741</sup> Through raising suspicion that male institutions are not all they seem, they are not infallible, Goddess ideology loosens the grip masculine symbols have on their contemporary audiences. Up to now we have addressed commonality points one and two whilst shining some light on how this literature is located alongside what we know of the construction of anorexia. Turning our attention to the third commonality, the individual as formed in the context of community we see the importance that both object relations theory and Goddess feminism places on connection and interdependence as individualism and self-determination are set aside.

Both models of thought teach that people are created in large part by their relationships. For object relations theory focus is on the reliance a baby or young child has for at least one adult. A baby cannot survive as a solitary being. This state translates to adulthood as humans rely upon relations with people past and present as Joan Riviere writes:

There is no such thing as a single human being, pure and simple, unmixed with other human beings. Each personality is a world in himself, a company of many. That self, that life of one's own... is a composite structure which has been and is being formed and built up since the

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<sup>738</sup> Christ 2012: 242

<sup>739</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 207

<sup>740</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 207

<sup>741</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 197

day of our birth out of countless never-ending influences and exchanges between ourselves and others<sup>742</sup>

Whilst emphasis is placed on the adult human in the context of community, focus is usually applied to the infant's immediate human environment. Feminist theory is more concerned with the larger social conditions that inform human living as we have touched upon throughout this body of work. In a similar fashion, Goddess theory is concerned with expanding awareness of conditions that underpin life in society. The idea that we are all part of a larger web-of-life, which includes the whole of nature, is central to the Goddess imagination and finds its origins within ancient pagan perceptions. Human life is reflected upon in the context of the elements of the world in which we live. Importance is placed on the state of the water, air and soil that surrounds us and maintains our life. The earth is conceptualised as part of the Goddess and is thus sacred. Everything is spiritual and nothing is profane. The mutual concern of both theories with articulating the context of human life, as drawn upon throughout this work, arises from female imagery. The whole earth is conceptualised as the body of the Goddess and is thus sacred. This fosters respect and reverence for life in all its forms. Neither promises a utopian and radically different future (although, as we have seen, Goddess feminism has been criticised for romanticising the Goddess and a prehistoric matriarchal past). For both discourses there is 'no redemption expected to come in the form of a saviour, or as a promise land, or from the benefits of scientific progress. For both theology and psychoanalysis, there is only the rather modest hope of improving life through reflection on the past'.<sup>743</sup> A common goal is to make the world a better place through displacing the father figure from dominance in the symbolic order.

As we turn our attention to the fourth commonality, fantasy as a key structure of "rational" thought, we return again to the contents of Chapter Three and discussion surrounding the creation of myth and fantasy as I draw on the elements that will contribute towards the dismantling the anorexic expression. Addressing discussions surrounding fantasy as central to "rational" thought, one aspect of the human context upon which many Goddess feminists and object relations analysts agree is fantasy. Namely, the recognition that fantasy, or wish constitutes the 'primary matrix for all mental processes'.<sup>744</sup> Fantasy or the act of wishing within witchcraft pervades almost every practice because 'it teaches women to use spells and rituals to express their hopes, ambitions, and desires'.<sup>745</sup> I would extend that beyond the boundaries of witchcraft as wishful thinking and the

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<sup>742</sup> Riviere J (1955) The Unconscious Phantasy of an Inner World Reflected in Examples from Literature. In: Klein M (ed) *New Directions in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books, 358-359. Quoted in Goldenberg 1993: 200.

<sup>743</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 195

<sup>744</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 203

<sup>745</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 203

concept of sending positive, creative and loving energy into the world permeates much literature on Goddess feminism and therefore, makes it relevant for discussions within this body of work. Fantasy here is valuable in its ability to focus the mind and to mobilise willpower. The basic premise is that a goal that can be visualised in detail is more likely to be realised. They therefore concentrate on representing these goals or wishes symbolically in the form of physical objects (such as talismans or amulets) or in the movement, meditation or incantations of ritual work. Here, the idea of a matriarchal prehistory is put forward as a wish about history, expressing the desire for it to be realised in the present and the future. Quoting Monique Wittig from *Les Guerilleres*, Goldenberg writes: 'There was a time when you were not a slave, remember. Try hard to remember. Or, failing that, invent'.<sup>746</sup> The recognition of a matriarchal heritage is a concept that empowers the situation of women in the present especially as more and more women engage with its fantasies. Research into a matriarchal past is motivated by the desire to improve life today as we have already explored. In this quotation Wittig demonstrates that an invented past can substitute a remembered one, and why not? After all, as Goldenberg reminds us, 'faith is simply a very strong wish'.<sup>747</sup> A reoccurring theme within theological literature is the idea that the importance of the past lies in how it informs the present as we explored earlier in discussions surrounding matriarchal prehistory. Object relations theorists share the conviction that fantasy and wish are central to human creativity and form the foundation of all thinking. What is felt to be real in the fantasy and "inner" life is understood to inform and influence actions in the "outer" or external world. The exploration of the individual's unconscious fantasy is used to explore character structure, creativity and ambition as life is based around these internal features. Whilst both object relations theory, as understood within the context of Goldenberg's work, and Goddess feminism understand the external human world as the consequence of internal fantasy, there is disagreement surrounding our ability to change these projections through willpower. Goldenberg writes that to an object relations analyst, the structure of an individual's fantasy life is established during infancy and early childhood. That a person's attitude, "inner" life and fantasies are greatly influenced by their early environment and by the caregivers who shaped that environment. Thus, a small change to the expression of fantasy is only possible if something, like analysis, effects a change in psychic dynamics as it is too much the consequence of personal history to be changed by willpower, the use of spells and ritual alone.

Goldenberg writes that as important fictions, religion creates the framework for our lives. Thus, a connection to a deep past, in the form of an individual connection to this divine women's myth, whilst critically analysing and engaging with early experiences and the effect they had on the individuals present conceptualisation of self, I argue, can help women trapped by the anorexic

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<sup>746</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 204

<sup>747</sup> Goldenberg 1993: 204

expression to construct a meaningful framework for what appears to be an empty and fraught present circumstance based on an empty model of embodiment. This is where we can co-construct myth, fantasy (as psychological frameworks) and rituals (as we will go on to discuss in the next pages) to connect us to different parts of our physical and developmental history that are grounded within a connection to a female divine construct. Thus, in the identification of ties between the past and the present, we can take part in the creation of layers of additional meaning for life today. Within this understanding of object relations theory, the past is never surmounted, just lived out in different ways in the present. Understanding this, whilst utilising it to draw upon a matriarchal myth, may aid in the creation of new, female empowering models of therapeutic healing. For example, in the context of the female utilisation of the anorexic expression, a female empowering matriarchal myth, regardless of the culture that inspired its creation, may be employed to disable the patriarchal currents underpinning the anorexic expression and illuminate the path towards embodying reflections of the myriad manifestations of the female form. I argue that mass reflection on the Goddess would permeate society and slowly erode the disembodiment at the heart of the development of anorexia in its providing of a psychologically healing framework for women today and challenging of patriarchal discourse. Here we are discussing a female deep past to act as a foundation for a developing consciousness located outside the boundaries of patriarchal society or at least providing a forum for pushing against these boundaries.

Goldenberg's aim in offering an analysis between psychoanalysis and Goddess feminism is to provide new avenues for female embodiment and power through labouring the importance of a divine female heritage through myth, within which we are all connected in the web-of-life. The foundation of which is political as she seeks to disrupt patriarchal power and challenge male supremacy. My focus in this work, for the deconstruction of the anorexic expression, is to call upon the psychological benefit of a matriarchal prehistory. The benefit I see here for the anorexic expression lies in the ties it creates between women and a powerful female heritage as we locate female embodiment as part of a female celebrating and positive past. Here we invoke the Goddess as a relatable and powerfully embodied female symbol within a conceptualisation of the connectedness of life. I draw upon the work of Goldenberg and the four commonalities between these two models of thought to demonstrate the potential of Goddess feminism within a therapeutic context for dismantling the anorexic expression today. This is all put into practice through the use of ritual and its potential to address the compulsive behaviours at the heart of this expression as we will explore now.



## Ritual

As anorexic behaviour is ritualistic and formulaic in nature,<sup>748</sup> displacing its enactment through creative engagement in alternative ritual construction is central to displacing the power it holds over the individual. Here we will explore the construction of life enhancing ritual practices and how they have been incorporated into the developing spiritualities of many women today.

Broadly speaking ritual, within a Goddess feminist context, can be understood as ‘a patterned movement of energy to accomplish purpose’.<sup>749</sup> Rituals are part of every culture. They bind a community together, creating a heart, a center for people. Rituals invoke the “deep self” of a group as, through participation in ritual, participants are familiar with each other’s presences and joined in a common goal. Starhawk writes that the pattern of the movement of energy in a Craft ritual takes place within a very simple structure that usually has a pre-defined beginning, middle and end. Beginning with grounding and connecting to the earth (through meditation), followed by a cleansing (symbolically or physically through the use of water) with a focus on releasing pain and tensions through movement and/or sound. Following these acts (and sometimes before) is the “casting” of the circle, an act of ‘separating the ritual space and time from ordinary space and time, as we invoke four elements [earth, air, fire and water]. We invoke the Goddess and the God, and whatever other powers or presences we wish to greet’.<sup>750</sup> Power and energy is raised through group breathing, chanting, meditation and dancing whilst reflecting on individual or group images, actions or symbols. This trance like state adds an “otherworldly” element to the ritual whilst establishing energy boundaries and protecting the individuals in the creation of this safe space. Here female power and healing energy is focused on addressing group and world concerns.<sup>751</sup> The flexibility of rituals allow for myriad applications. Rituals can be carried out at home, in nature or a place of special importance as determined by the individual or group/groups participating. They can take place at an established time and in a structured format or as a consciousness underpinning everyday activities.<sup>752</sup> Even when participants do not identify as witches, Goddess feminists subscribe to forms

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<sup>748</sup> For more information on the ritual dimensions of anorexia see: Garrett 1998: 103-105; and, Orbach 1993: 82.

<sup>749</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 155

<sup>750</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 155

<sup>751</sup> Starhawk writes that Covens (her own Coven is based on the Faery Tradition) create their own rituals drawing influences from many traditions as they collaboratively create ways to worship the various manifestations of the Goddess. She writes that ‘some covens follow practices that have been handed down in an unbroken line since before the Burning Times. Others derive their rituals from leaders of modern revivals of the Craft... feminist covens are probably the fastest growing arm of the craft’. For more information see: Starhawk (1982c) *Witchcraft as Goddess Religion*. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement*. London: Anchor Books, 49-57 (53).

<sup>752</sup> This was expanded upon in Chapter Three within discussions surrounding displacing the slender performance.

of magical thinking and make no absolute distinction between elements of transformation and renewal created by ritual and political action. Emphasis on the interdependence of life on earth is a common theme within ritual as employed by Goddess feminism, as Goldenberg writes: 'observing major and minor sabbaths tied to the four seasons and to the two solstices and equinoxes keeps alive a sense of connection to nature's recurring pattern of change'<sup>753</sup> whilst attention to the phases of the moon links us as humanity, to the monthly cycle of repetition that takes place around us on a planetary level.<sup>754</sup> In so doing the participants are explicitly linked to the timelessness of seasonal and astrological movements, a powerful symbolic to underpin our actions in contemporary life. Ritual can be an act of reconnection and healing which demands the participants to consciously engage in concepts of empowerment and embodiment in the raising of energy through chanting, music and body movements.

For example, in *Daughters of the Goddess* Ruth Barrett writes about the transformative potential of ritual writing that women who participate in the larger gatherings experience more concentrated feelings using words such as "life-enhancing" and "transforming" to describe their experiences. This may result as a consequence of the ritual organization as facilitators engage in 'careful, purposeful development of the ritual',<sup>755</sup> as a consequence of the mindfulness and mixing energies of a larger number of participants (the energy raised is greater than the numerical number of participants)<sup>756</sup> or the expectation attendants hold of being emotionally or physically moved. Barrett writes that the structure of the ritual can vary significantly depending on its focus allowing for optimum creativity. She works with groups to help identify the themes and purpose they want to embed within their ritual development.<sup>757</sup> In this context ritual is embodied creation of energy focused on the participants' purification, self-blessing and consecration as working towards altering 'everyday consciousness and access[ing] the magical mind'.<sup>758</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Goldenberg 1995: 148

<sup>754</sup> Mystical aspects of the Goddess are accessed especially when engaging with the Goddess's outer manifestations in the natural world through annual community Sabbats or rituals. Eight Sabbats occur annually based on the lunar calendar. As groups of people engage in-group ritual practices in which the self becomes connected to the earth and the Goddess in all her manifestations, the seasonal, creative, communal, celestial and the personal meet in communal ceremony. Ritual might be carried out for a number of purposes, for meditation, healing, trance or prayer but each of these relies heavily on an overriding divine dependency that is often understood as the true path towards creativity, freedom and embodied confidence. This may create an environment of belonging whilst providing a forum for engaging with the past for life in the present. It reinforces the cyclical nature of existence and locates the individual in a community of transformations. Ritual practices may find their focus in overcoming obstacles and promoting the flow of relational energy that fosters human and planetary health. Group rituals bond women together as sisters. Some rituals invoke assistance from the Goddess and others do not.

<sup>755</sup> Barrett R R (2013) The Power of Ritual. In: Griffin W (ed.) *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 185-201 (191).

<sup>756</sup> Raphael 1999: 121

<sup>757</sup> Barrett 2013: 191

<sup>758</sup> Barrett 2013: 196

Ritual practices can be enacted and reflected upon by women and men at joint or same sex gatherings and within any religious or spiritual tradition. Jan Berry, for example, writes about her use of ritual at times of personal distress such as her resignation from the Baptist ministry due to The Baptist Union's condemnation of gay sexuality. This ritual was 'an attempt to mark an important transition in [her]... life; to resist the sense of vulnerability and oppression, and to claim [her]... own freedom and choice in leaving'.<sup>759</sup> Although this was enacted in a Christian context, it demonstrates the nature of a rituals application. Rituals can be used to mark the ending of a job, to bless a relationship, to bless a house, and the closure of a difficult or damaging period in the individual's life. They can also celebrate the seasonal cycles or themes such as loss, remembrance, desire, death and rebirth. Due to the broad application, the creation and participation can be as diverse and as broad as the individual's imagination. Berry writes that ritual 'provides a framework in which powerful emotions can be confronted and expressed'<sup>760</sup> allowing the individual to 'enter a space beyond words, where symbols, bodily movement, and symbolic action are the vehicles of meaning'.<sup>761</sup> This is where I would like to introduce ritual as an approach for deconstructing both the anorexic expression and, by extension, the slender performance. For me, as we work towards a Spirituality of Anorexia as a spiritual quest towards consciousness and reconnection, it is clear to see how ritual, in collaboration with the work of Goldenberg on the creation of myth (from Chapter Three) and the use of the commonalities between Goddess feminism and object relations theory, can provide powerful resources for the deconstruction of the damaging undercurrents of the anorexic expression, and by extension, the slender performance.

There is much ritualization surrounding the life of women living out the anorexic expression and the most obvious example of this can be found within the individual's treatment of food. As we have already explored, the anorexic woman's relationship with food is fraught with tensions. Her mind is endlessly engaged in food related thoughts. She is constantly occupied in measuring and weighing-up what she can and cannot have as she increasingly revises down the quantities and types of food she is "allowed" to consume. She is engaged in a constant obsession about the calorie contents of various foods, recipes and cooking. Some of her involvement with food is channeled into the preparation of meals for family and friends as she takes time shopping, researching recipes, cooking and discussing with them food options, dinner party menus and new restaurants despite significantly restricting her own consumption. There is a striking dichotomy here as she publically exhibits a keen- bordering on obsessive- interest in food whilst privately and meticulously planning, down to the last calorie, what she is permitted to consume. In feeding family and friends her desire

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<sup>759</sup> Berry J (2009) *Ritual Making Women: Shaping Rites for Changing Lives*. New York: Routledge, 1-2.

<sup>760</sup> Berry 2009: 2

<sup>761</sup> Berry 2009: 2

for food is projected onto others as she provides for them what she actually craves for herself. At first, the food she denies and the rituals she creates are based on conventional nutritional information for the reduction of weight. This might be expressed through engaging in the latest diets or starting to cut out known “bad” foods. Slowly she introduces new rules and regulations into this ritualized behaviour as she sets herself a series of tasks that need to be undertaken prior to, during and following the process of food consumption. A clear example of this ritualized behaviour can be found within the autobiography of Portia de Rossi in this candid reflection:

It’s time to face last night. It was yogurt night, when I get my yogurt ready for the week. It’s a dangerous night because there’s always a chance of disaster when I allow myself to handle a lot of food at one time. But I had no indication that I was going to be in danger. I had eaten my 60-calorie portion of tuna normally, using chopsticks and allowing each bite of canned fish to be only the height and width of the tips of the chopsticks themselves. After dinner, I smoked cigarettes to allow myself the time I needed to digest the tuna properly and to feel the satisfaction of fullness. I went to the kitchen feeling no anxiety as I took out the tools I needed to perform the weekly operation: the kitchen scale, eight small plastic containers, one blue mixing bowl, Splenda, my measuring spoon, and my fork. I took the plain yogurt out of the fridge and, using the kitchen scale, divided it among the plastic containers adding one half teaspoon of Splenda to each portion... hid the containers in the... freezer... I knew that the thirty minutes it takes for the yogurt to reach the perfect consistency... wasn’t up, and that checking on it was an abnormality, but that’s exactly what I did.<sup>762</sup>

This excerpt demonstrates some of the weekly and daily rituals constructed by the individual for the purpose of controlling the process of food consumption. Rossi describes the inner turmoil that proceeded the above weekly portioning of the yogurt. She sat, smoking four cigarettes, facing the freezer- ‘[s]taring at the door was the only way I could be certain that I wasn’t opening it’<sup>763</sup> trying to take away the urge for the ‘icy-cold sweetness’.<sup>764</sup> Deviation from the routine is dangerous: it ‘created an opening that invited in the thoughts I’m most afraid of- thoughts created by an evil force disguising it-self as logic, poised to manipulate me with common sense. *Reward yourself. You ate nothing at lunch... It’s only yogurt. Do it. You deserve it.*<sup>765</sup> Breaking the crust of each icy serving, she consumed the entire weeks’ worth of yogurt portions. She writes about being in a trancelike state as her fingers traveled back and forth from the container to her mouth, the repetition of which ‘lulled the relentless chatter into quiet meditation’.<sup>766</sup> The following part of her book meticulously details the next morning’s grueling exercise regime. This is representative of many memoirs reflecting on

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<sup>762</sup> Rossi P de (2010) *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*. New York: Atria Books, 5. It is worth noting that de Rossi is a Hollywood actress and therefore under increased body and aesthetic scrutiny. Being on “display” in such a visual way contributed to her disordered eating behaviour.

<sup>763</sup> Rossi 2010: 6

<sup>764</sup> Rossi 2010: 6

<sup>765</sup> Rossi 2010: 6. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>766</sup> Rossi 2010: 7

the experience of anorexia and the ritualization of eating. The rituals and regulations that come to circumscribe her food intake increase in number until it becomes impossible for her to envision eating in a spontaneous way. She is engaged in a labyrinth of restrictive practices that prevent her from consuming the food her body so desperately needs. Eventually her will power slips, as is evidenced within the work of Rossi above, and punishments, self-loathing and depression set in. The use of ritual in deconstructing the anorexic expression must address the compulsive ritualization as expressed here. We will explore this in practice in a few moments.

The use of ritual within therapeutic settings is common especially for addressing the mental health of patients but focus is rarely placed on the symbolism of the Goddess to structure its enactment. Named Goddess/Great Mother/divine female focused ritual is less commonly employed in psychotherapeutic settings but has been used by Woodman in her work on dream analysis<sup>767</sup> and Roth in relation to compulsive eating<sup>768</sup> to name two examples. The utilization of ritual within a Goddess feminist framework, picking up on the qualities and themes of interconnection, community, freedom from patriarchal constraints through the use of bodily movements (here I refer to the limitations of patriarchal language, as we discussed earlier in this chapter), reflection through meditation and music has the power to locate the individual in a different time and space. This is a movement outside the realms of control and discipline where women can focus on the creation of healing and connected life-affirming energies. Ritual within a Goddess feminist context addresses the emotional and spiritual needs of women in a non-masculine context. If patriarchal religions are understood as damaging for female embodiment and more generally dis-spiriting to the whole web-of-life then Goddess feminism, within the context we have employed throughout this thesis, can be conceptualized as a soothing and healing discourse. As Raphael writes 'to be healed is to be made whole/holy, and therefore (re)charged with a spiritual and physical power'.<sup>769</sup> Ritual, as understood within a political framework, allows me to explore its employment as a psychological mechanism for dismantling the patriarchal power presiding over the construction of the feminine within contemporary society. Relating to the ritualization of food as a direct consequence of patriarchal values (control and discipline over the body) a method of dismantlement may result as a consequence of ritual development where the individual woman is engaging and reflecting upon the assumptions underpinning her utilization of the anorexic expression. Here she could reflect on the task she has taken on by defining her embodiment through anorexia, namely to deny her needs and

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<sup>767</sup> Woodman 1985

<sup>768</sup> Roth 2010

<sup>769</sup> Raphael 1999: 121

escalating struggle in the pursuit of the creation of a new person and a search for self-esteem<sup>770</sup> as she seeks to meet societies demanding idealizations surrounding the female form. In Goddess feminist ritual creation she can address this denial head-on, identifying the daily and hourly obligations she has instigated. Here she can address the central questions surrounding how it started? Why the rules and regulations are in place? Why they are increasing? And, what would be the real consequence of stopping their enactment? Preoccupation with the performance of these rules and regulations through compulsive enactment distracts her from engaging with these issues. Goddess feminist ritual must allow the time and space for women struggling with anorexia to face these issues, to question and probe. Here all forms of healing (private, collective, environmental trauma etc.) contribute- through the regeneration of women's energies- to political and personal change. This is the case for Starhawk (an active member of the American anti-war movement) who draws upon a Goddess feminist framework to inform her rituals on reversing the desecration of sites due to patriarchal destruction. She writes:

If magic is 'the art of causing change in accordance with will', then political acts, acts of protest and resistance, acts that speak truth to power, that push for change, are acts of magic... I once defined a spell as 'a symbolic act done in a deepened state of consciousness'. When political actions move into the realm of symbols, it becomes magical. If we apply the principles of magic to politics, we can understand political actions better and make them more effective.<sup>771</sup>

Within this context, Starhawk suggests the healing energies created through group activities, that 'their chanting, web-weaving and other non-violent direct actions magically name and will an Other, non-patriarchal, reality and infuse the profaned site with purifying, biophilic, sacred female energy'.<sup>772</sup> It is clear from the work of Starhawk that she understands ritual as intrinsically linked to human divine nature and her emphasis on interconnection and interdependence. In participating in these rituals, the individual does not just connect with divinity but with all her living creatures and the four elements. However, for many Goddess feminists, Starhawk included, ritual practices alone are not enough. These practitioners advocate the strength of ritual integrated with social action. For example, Riane Eisler writes that isolated rituals would amount to little more than 'dancing in the woods. Goddess rituals do change our consciousness and help us to bond, but if we stop there, it is

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<sup>770</sup> Within the anorexic expression it is through the creation of rules and regulations in relation to food, exercise, habits of work and study that she creates for herself a self-image to counteract her feelings of worthlessness and meaningless she feels herself to be. This provides her with a false and fleeting sense of comfort and security. For more information see: Orbach 1993; and, Bordo 2003.

<sup>771</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 169

<sup>772</sup> Raphael 1999: 121-2

like fireworks, which quickly dissipate'.<sup>773</sup> Mary Grey in *Introducing Feminist Images of God* writes about the "excesses" of Goddess practice as 'self-indulgent rituals affirming female sexuality'.<sup>774</sup> She argues that contemporary Goddess religion will ultimately fail because there is no 'adequate role for men'<sup>775</sup> and criticizes what she perceives, on the whole, as an inactive attitude towards addressing the need for 'structural justice'.<sup>776</sup> Criticisms such as these are not uncommon.<sup>777</sup> Addressing the charge that rituals affirming female sexuality are indulgent and the criticism that contemporary Goddess religion takes an inactive attitude towards the global need for structural justice we need look no further than the work of Christ to see that theological academic consideration is given to these issues. In her book, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, Christ discusses the structural nature on injustice in offering Nine Touchstones of Goddess ethics. She writes: 'Nurture life. Walk in love and beauty. Trust the knowledge that comes through the body. Speak the truth about conflict, pain, and suffering. Take only what you need. Think about the consequences of your actions for seven generations. Approach the taking of life with great restraint. Practice great generosity. Repair the web'.<sup>778</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are Goddess feminists and members of various Goddess movements who utilize the energy and awareness raised in ritual for direct action. For example, the work of Starhawk and her protests against the nuclear industry and globalization<sup>779</sup> and Charlene Spretnak's involvement with the Green Party in California.<sup>780</sup> Of course,

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<sup>773</sup> Eisler R (1995) Envisioning a Partnership Future. In: *Woman of Power* 24: 20-27.

<sup>774</sup> Grey M (2001) *Introducing Feminist Images of God*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 32. Both Raphael and Christ have addressed the charge that rituals affirming female sexuality are indulgent; I will address these charges in the chapter conclusion.

<sup>775</sup> Grey 2001: 33

<sup>776</sup> Grey 2001: 33

<sup>777</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether is well-known for her criticisms of Goddess religions. In *Gaia and God* she writes that religions need both God and Gaia. Religions without Gaia 'run the risk of sacrificing the world to the (alleged) judgement of God, while religions of Gaia alone lack the principle of prophetic judgement which (Ruether believes) is the ground of ethics'. Responding to these criticisms Christ argues that participants of contemporary Goddess religion have strong ethical concerns rooted in 'reverence and love for life and the web of life' as opposed to rooting it in 'a transcendent or prophetic principle of judgement' (Christ quoting and subsequently responding to Ruether's critique). Extrapolating she writes that '[r]ecognising that ethics do not have to be rooted in a transcendent principle of justice uncovers the fallacy (or phallacy?) of theories that assume that earth-based, Goddess, or 'Gaian' religions are unethical'. For more information see: Ruether R R (1992) *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 24; and, Christ C P (2005) Musings on the Goddess and Her Cultural Despisers, Provoked by Naomi Goldenberg. In: *Feminist Theology* 13.2, 143-149 (145-6).

<sup>778</sup> Christ 1997: 167

<sup>779</sup> Christ asks if it is still 'self-indulgent narcissistic navel-gazing when Starhawk and members of Reclaiming [an activist branch of modern Pagan religion] are arrested in the direct action movement against globalization in the name of the Goddess'. See: Christ 2005: 147. For more information on Starhawk see: Starhawk 1982a; Starhawk 1982b; Starhawk 1982c; Starhawk (1982d) Consciousness, Politics and Magic. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement*. London: Anchor Books, 172-184; and, Starhawk (2002) *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New York Society Publishers. For more information on Reclaiming see: Anon (2015) *Reclaiming*. Available at: <http://www.reclaiming.org/> [22/08/2016]; and, Starhawk (2016) *Regenerative Culture, Earth-based Spirituality, and Permaculture*. Available at: <http://starhawk.org/> [22/08/2016].

not all who are interested in the Goddess are social activists but the same can be true of any religious denomination but because of the core principles inherent to Goddess feminism, it might be the case that there is more awareness of issues of social and structural justice than within other religious traditions.

Goddess focused ritual is a tool that can be used for any number of psychological maladies but my focus here is on the deconstructive possibilities for addressing the anorexic expression. Central elements of the ritual creating process include grounding and connecting the circle to the earth, symbolically and physically cleaning the body, and the creation of energy for the purpose of relieving pain and tensions through meditation and reflection, body movement and music with the purpose of addressing elements of the anorexic expression directly. Reflecting on the compulsive ritualization of food consumption and preparation as exemplified within the account of Rossi, the creation of a safe space for reflection, engaging the mind and body creatively, whilst consciously connecting to her surrounding environments, all of which informed by a positive female symbolic (within this work, located within Goddess mythology), for me, demonstrate the opportunities for challenging the disembodied anorexic rhetoric. Ritual creation and enactment requires the whole of the mind and body in an act of unification as both are creatively engaged in healing.

Pulling the work of Goldenberg on the creation of individually meaningful myth, the commonalities between Goddess feminism and psychoanalysis in the form of object relations theory together, I focus on active engagement through ritual.<sup>781</sup> Namely, the underpinning of everyday rituals by a developing Goddess feminist consciousness as informed by the three steps I touched upon earlier in this chapter of active reflection on embodiment, a questioning of the patriarchal discourses that underpin the construction of anorexia and an engagement in the creation of ritual and individually meaningful myth to inspire healing and liberation. As we explored throughout this thesis, the anorexic expression develops as an unconscious protest towards displacing female stereotypes and idealizations which comes to represent her dissatisfaction with the limitations of the female role. It is within this understanding that treatment and the possibility of healing can take place. The anorexic woman needs a safe space to reconnect and rediscover her own feminine core and this can take place within ritual as a safe space that takes its form outside of patriarchal power relations as women engage in reflections (psychological and physical), challenging disembodied

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<sup>780</sup> For more information on the work of Spretnak with the Green Party see: Spretnak C (1982) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*. In: Spretnak C (ed.) *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays by Founding Mothers of the Movement*. London: Anchor Books, 393-399; and, Capra F, Spretnak C (1984) *Green Politics*. New York: Dutton.

<sup>781</sup> My work on the commonalities between psychoanalysis and discourses on the Goddess provided an overview of object relations theory as identified by Goldenberg but is far from a comprehensive study of the use of object relations theory. In the context of my work this demonstrates the positive potential of Goddess feminism within therapeutic settings for addressing the anorexic expression.



rhetoric and the contemplation of symbolic structures located in the context of their lives. A reconnection takes place here within the context of Goddess mythology in its contextualizing and informing of female embodiment for women's lives today. Subversion of the anorexic expression and the slender performance takes its form when women collectively incorporate a female divine construct into their daily lives and daily rituals. Over time, this repetition of female empowering psychologies can change the way women experience their embodiment. Ritual and ceremony create a sacred space for women to embody aspects of the feminine in new performances and it is through this repetition that we can slowly disable the disembodiment at the heart of this expression. These ritual performances lie in everyday practices that can be understood to hold symbolic meaning. As we discussed in Chapter Three, these rituals are not limited to religious practice. The path to physical and psychological integration comes from a willingness to value and interact with memory as those that repress it are doomed to repeat it over and over again. Ultimately, the ritual is to re-balance patriarchy with a matriarchal lineage where female principles are given space and freedom to develop and it is within these ritual performances that transformation occurs. For some, this ritual can take place within a guided religious setting or through daily acts, as simply reflecting on everyday activities which, once bestowed with additional meaning can allow for the development of new creative possibilities. These acts have the power to destabilize the anorexic expression and the slender performance. As Woodman writes: '[e]ach new situation is filled with new energies, new demands... and that... goes with us into the daisies we are arranging, the omelette we are cooking, the new prospectus we are preparing'.<sup>782</sup> The female body as theologically mediated is actively engaged in challenging the gender status quo whilst creatively working with the core principles of Goddess feminism with a view towards broadening female embodiment and empowerment within society today.

As we have already explored, I draw upon ritual as a means of subverting and displacing societies female beauty and slender idealizations that I have argued lead to the development of eating disorders such as anorexia. Ritual here is located within a political framework through which we can start to weave an alternative model for embodiment within society today. If we understand anorexia as an attempt to protest against and at the same time escape from the continued subordination of women represented by way of the powerfully promoted slender ideal, we can see how the reimagining of female identity and embodiment can provide an attractive forum for women. Within theology and Goddess feminism we find not only a rich heritage of female empowerment and embodiment but we find flexible and translatable creative energies that can be taken into many walks of life.

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<sup>782</sup> Woodman 1982: 189-190

## Conclusion:

### The Spirituality of Anorexia: Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman

The Goddess can be seen as the symbol, the normative image of immanence. She represents the divine embodied in nature, in human beings, in flesh. ... She includes the male in her aspects ... Yet the femaleness of the Goddess is primary not to denigrate the male, but because it represents bringing life into the world, valuing the world.

Starhawk<sup>783</sup>

To me, all religions are important fictions, a word derived from the Latin verb *facere*, to make. We make religions and we live and die within their narratives and designated behaviours. This makes the study of religions inseparable from the study of culture.

Naomi Goldenberg<sup>784</sup>

*The Spirituality of Anorexia: Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman* marks a pursuit towards female embodied consciousness that utilises some of the core features of Goddess feminism within a political framework. As mentioned at the inception of the body of work, this thesis marks the start of a broader research project concerned with developing alternative therapeutic responses to anorexia within theological frameworks with an aim towards providing women with access to empowering and embodied symbols of the feminine.

At the centre of this thesis is the argument that anorexia within Western society results as a direct consequence of our environments which have been significantly influenced by the patriarchy at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In framing religion as fictitious, drawing upon the work on myth and reality within the work of Goldenberg,<sup>785</sup> we have the power to create new fictions, new realities and new embodied opportunities for women. Direct application to the anorexic expression provides us with a mechanism for displacing the disembodied rhetoric. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore the aspects of theological discourse which can be employed to (co)construct an alternative reality for girls and women utilising the anorexic expression within society today.

My argument is that some of the central tenets of Goddess feminism directly address the female experience of anorexia and lend themselves to a reconnection of feminine nature in our culture. For directly addressing the anorexic expression in this study I identified several key features. Firstly, in and of itself, Goddess feminism provides us with the resources for subverting the

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<sup>783</sup> Starhawk 1982a: 9

<sup>784</sup> Goldenberg 2004: 205. The same word *ingere* is also drawn upon in Chapter Six as we draw upon the Latin root of the word meaning "to form"/"to make".

<sup>785</sup> Here I am picking up on the influence work of Chapter Three on myth creation, and Chapter Six on the psychological benefit of new realities, have on healing this disembodied reflection on embodiment.

damaging patriarchal agenda that has presided over the lives of women. In its focus on female experiences, the immanency of the Goddess and the female body as divine alongside the political dimensions which focus on challenging androcentrism and male supremacy, we have a strong tool for addressing the disembodied rhetoric which underpins the anorexic expression. Secondly, if we agree that the creation of individually meaningful myths are central to healing psychological development, the experiential nature of Goddess feminism (and the culture of shared experiences it has fostered) is endowed with additional meaning as women come together to give serious consideration to their own mythic development as they actively engage in work towards displacing the damaging discourses at play in their lives. Thirdly, I draw upon a broadly defined, but Goddess located, ritual practice to somatically address this mythic development and developing consciousness in daily life and as a safe space for reflections and creative engagement in this process of healing. Through the use of ritual within a Goddess framework, communication can take place outside of the limitations of patriarchal language as women employ the use of movement, meditation and music to engage with their bodies. A physical interaction between the mind and body is played out here. Within this framework, daily rituals, when underpinned by a Goddess feminist philosophy take on new levels of meaning as embodied consciousness starts to permeate all aspects of life. Here, we have the power to challenge and subvert the anorexic expression- and by extension, the slender performance- through the individual creation of myth and healing stories as women address the various strands of their own disembodiment.

My aim in drawing upon the commonalities between Goddess feminism and object relations theory was to demonstrate the potential for Goddess feminism within a therapeutic setting through drawing on certain key features such as the past as an important source of meaning, deconstructing images of patriarchal authority, the individual as interconnected in the web-of-life and the potential of fantasy and myth creation as both a deconstructive and healing tool. Unpacking these elements, we know that un-relatedness feeds the anorexic expression and so importance lies in the universal inclusion of conceptualisations of interdependence and interconnection into healing frameworks. Here a developing understanding of the connectedness of the web-of-life nourishes the individual's perspective and reflections on their existence. Additionally, reflections on the myth of matriarchal prehistory provide us with a rich heritage to contextualise female consciousness in contemporary society which, when informed by a wish within fantasy, can tease out opportunities for positive reflections on change and growth. Here we are drawing on the belief in Goddess feminism of fantasy as valuable in its ability to focus the mind and mobilise willpower as we work towards positive and creative change. Alongside what we know about the anorexic expression and the negativity that permeates thoughts on life, an engagement in positive and life affirming thinking whilst engaging in

the isolation of anorexia through displacing the patriarchy at its heart, we can address the specific strands of the anorexic identity.

My use of ritual to dismantle the rigidity, strictness and the compulsive nature of the anorexic expression (and the slender performance) was discussed in Chapter's Three and Six. Here we understood ritual as a transformative practice, locating our everyday rituals within a larger framework where the individual is engaged in a conscious development from one level of awareness to another. This process was later underpinned by a developing Goddess feminist consciousness as ritual was employed to identify empowering associations from disempowering rhetoric through taking a closer look at how we might disable the anorexic expression and the slender performance. Discussions here surrounded reconnection to a female empowering embodied construct as a vehicle towards addressing the disembodiment at the heart of this expression. Understanding the strands of their own disembodiment is central to the process of healing. Picking up on themes of reconnection and female embodiment we explored the work of Goldenberg on myth creation. Her purpose was to reconnect women with their bodies, to work towards female embodiment and she saw this happening as a movement away from traditional patriarchal religions and towards female empowering psychological frameworks located within the process of myth development. For her it is the process of discovering myth that is most important for the individual. For Goldenberg, the value of psychoanalysis (within this framework) lay in the importance it placed on the necessity of myth in providing meaning and divine connection for people. This significantly influenced her argument for the creation of individually meaningful myths. This work on the development of myth was directly related to discourses on the Goddess as "living" and dynamic movements which encourage people to look inwards to understand the forces at work in their lives. Locating this alongside the anorexic expression, the process of myth development becomes a resource for the process of co-creating healing models of embodiment as women address the mythic structures that inform the story of their lives and explore avenues for creating alternative narratives. Picking up on these themes, in Chapter Six we explored the psychological benefit of matriarchal prehistory as myth. Here the idea of a matriarchal past can inform reflections on embodiment today as we call upon conceptualisations of the past to improve our situation in the present. Utilising a matriarchal prehistory in the form of an ancient myth of the superiority of the Goddess provides women with a higher place within social and religious structures of power. This provides new avenues for strengthening women's conceptualisations of self today. Goddess feminism here is understood as providing women with reconnection to a repressed femininity within a "living" religion whereby the individual has access, and a growing appreciation, of the psychological and healing benefit of locating their existence within a broader network of connections. The anorexic woman needs a safe

space to reconnect and rediscover her own feminine core and this can take place within ritual as a safe environment that takes its form outside of patriarchal power relations as women engage in reflections (psychological and physical), challenging disembodied rhetoric and the contemplation of symbolic structures located in the context of their lives. A reconnection takes place within the context of Goddess mythology in its contextualizing and informing of female embodiment for women's lives today. In this context ritual can be utilized as the safe space that allows the anorexic individual to explore her embodiment outside of patriarchal discourse. Here we have a framework for dismantling the fragmented anorexic identity and the ritualistic and regulated compulsion that underpins the anorexic women's disembodiment. Drawing on this work, there are three features central to this framework and these are as follows: active reflection on embodiment, a questioning of the patriarchal discourses that underpin the construction of anorexia, and an engagement in the creation of ritual and individually meaningful myth to inspire healing and liberation.

Extending beyond this, I argue that thealogy has the potential to positively affect the lives of many women within society, the women tightrope walking from one diet to another, the women who spend hundreds and thousands of pounds and time on narrowing the boundaries of their bodies not for the purpose of health but for social acceptance and legitimacy. There are several central features to this process as women utilising the anorexic expression must play an active role in healing their inner wounds, in addressing the underlying features which became manifest in this somatic expression. As the roots are manifold, constructing a standardised theory on the form the Spirituality of Anorexia would take is a problematic task. There is a need for bespoke therapeutic approaches to address the myriad underlying features that develop as a consequence of the individual's experiences. As discussed, Goddess feminism will need to be employed to inform the use of existing therapeutic approaches, such as narrative therapy, as the individual and therapist engage in the underlying features. The individual will be called to creatively address contributing factors such as family, peer, fashion and media influences, the sexism that underpins her experience of contemporary life, obsessions surrounding personal fitness and the compulsion to exercise and issues surrounding nutrition and perceived beauty pressures to name a number of contributing factors. Women utilising the anorexic expression will also need to address underlying assumptions about happiness, love, acceptance and legitimacy as they redefine what these concepts really mean to them. In turn this will lead to the dismantling of unconsciously absorbed patriarchal rhetoric that underpins reflections on their disembodiment.

My conceptualisation of the Spirituality of Anorexia as a pursuit towards female embodied consciousness will be unable to reflect the infinite diversity of female experience in a culture that permits a variety of styles of life and thought but should provide a malleable framework for women

to work towards empowered change. The symbols, motifs, stories and myths will change as we develop, as our perspectives shift and our embodied living evolves. Any therapeutic response needs to take this fluidity into consideration and is an additional strength of working with Goddess feminism given its flexible and adaptive nature. This is a living process located within a living and body/experience loving spiritual framework. There is no universal spiritual quest for all women; rather there is meaning in the unique experiences of women. The women utilising the anorexic expression need to seek new stories outside the boundaries of patriarchal discourse. This is the calling of the Spirituality of Anorexia; the individual must create new female empowering stories and myths that hold meaning for their lives. As Goldenberg writes: 'witches know that their physical lives are changed by their images of the Goddess. A woman's feeling's about her body undergo joyous transformation if she imagines herself to be in some sense divine'.<sup>786</sup> Even though I have shied away from the radicalness of the witchcraft movement there are elements which, when diluted, are helpful for my reflections here. For example Goldenberg writes that '[t]hose who cast spells and work hexes know that thought has effects on the world- that thought *certainly* influences the one who casts the spells and works the hexes and that thought *seems* to operate on other things as well'.<sup>787</sup> Thoughts, feelings and words have embodied consequences. We must realise this power in all forms of life and incorporate this knowledge into working therapies if we are to truly transform the landscape of embodiment.

An example of one way this is played out can be found within the work of Goldenberg and her use of dreams to inform her spiritual development. In a dream about travelling to a new and previously untraveled destination she finds herself overwhelmed with anxiety, nervousness and excitement. This anxiety is compounded by the restriction of having to stay in a certain area for a specified period of time. On her journey to buy provisions for this period she sees a 'far-off figure'<sup>788</sup> walking about a mile away from the car. This person, a man, came to the foreground in subsequent dream analysis whilst participating in group work. Becoming this figure and absorbing the feelings she had projected onto him she felt a 'wonderful sensation of peace... he was a brave, clear-sighted person who was pioneering alone in Australia'.<sup>789</sup> She felt the strength and independence of his character and her fear and anxiety slipped away, she felt calm and at peace with her environment. Taking this into her conscious living Goldenberg writes: '[t]he Australian Pioneer is a psychic figure to whom I have access whenever I feel fearful of the directions that my research, my writing or any

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<sup>786</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 126

<sup>787</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 126. Author's emphasis.

<sup>788</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 139

<sup>789</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 139

other part of my life are taking'.<sup>790</sup> Becoming this pioneer she sees with clarity and experiences her environment as being charged with mystical significance. Subsequent work encouraged her to transform this male pioneer into a woman inspiring her to undertake her own pioneering work. She uses this example to reinforce the message that people do not need an enforced standardised set of religious images to feel a sense of community, that instead 'a common ground may be developed around the activity of image-making itself... [where] the psychic creativity of individuals can be encouraged within the company of a supportive social group'.<sup>791</sup> This is also exemplified in her story of the wise woman and the purple ellipse as we discussed in Chapter Three where she argued that power is lost when people collectively create mythic systems based on the life of others. Power comes from the creation of your own symbolic structures for your own lives and this is of central importance when focusing on creative avenues of healing for anorexia as healing must address the features that culminated in its manifestation. Drawing upon the spiritual development of Goldenberg through utilising dream analysis in a group setting we could reflect upon the work of Woodman in Chapter Three and her reflection on the dreams of anorexic women often focusing on feelings of entrapment, enclosure, pain and death. Here we may be able to develop creative avenues through subsequent reflection by drawing on elements outside the immediate environment of the dream which, when endowed with additional meaning, can be transformed into embodied reflection on the nature of empowerment and embodiment in present life circumstances.

For example, recalling the work of Woodman as discussed earlier in this thesis and her dream analysis work which led to her assertion that the dreams of anorexic patients are often filled with themes of being trapped, caged, hurt or dying, there may be opportunities through analysis to focus on alternative features. Maybe, whilst reflecting on the cage that traps her, she can examine her surroundings and discover elements that when focused upon, provide opportunities for Goddess feminist reflection. I do not want to labour the importance of dreams here but I do want to highlight the myriad opportunities for challenging the underlying features of the anorexic expression and exploring alternative avenues for reflection. Employing the use of fantasy and wishful thinking here, if a woman experiences herself as trapped and hurt in a nightmare, maybe there are opportunities on reflection to build in new elements to open up creative possibilities for healing. In this dream there could be a small window beyond which an owl sits. The owl here could symbolise the Goddess as the window is representative of a disconnection from nature. Healing may involve earth and nature focused ritual as the woman learns to reconnect with nature and her surrounding environment. This could take place as a broader group ritual with other women or just walking outside in nature, barefoot in the grass whilst reflecting on the reasons for this perceived isolation.

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<sup>790</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 140

<sup>791</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 127

Placing herself within the owl, there may be creative avenues for experiencing the immanentism of the Goddess and in flight the owl may provide an opportunity for the anorexic women to address feelings surrounding her embodiment. This is just an example of how we might creatively address anorexic symptoms whilst drawing on some of the central features of Goddess feminism. Whilst professional guidance will be undoubtedly necessary for women who have become absorbed by the anorexic expression, this spiritual development should not be limited to therapy. This is a project to take place outside of these spaces and into the individuals daily life to challenge and reform daily reflections with friends and family; the Spirituality of Anorexia must be a fully transferable and approachable mechanism for change.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the aetiology of anorexia can be found within reflections on society, the politics of the female body and the influence religion has had on these body ideals. The purpose of all this is twofold, first and foremost this work has been concerned with displacing the damaging rhetoric which underpins the development of anorexia within contemporary society but I have also explored the broader slender ideal and the pressure on women to reduce their boundaries to meet increasing oppressive body standards. For me the Goddess is a symbol of hope, love, compassion and acceptance and a strongly immanent divinity participating in and through our bodies and our lives. She embodies a breaking down of the dualisms that would see us destroy our bodies and our environments through self-hate, hierarchy, etc. As Morton and Christ reinforce, she is not “out there” or “back there” but “in here” the Goddess ‘has taken root in our bodies and become part of the fabric of our lives’.<sup>792</sup> Thus, we focus on an immanent divinity as we construct a challenge and alternative spiritual framework for those individuals for whom a male divinity and patriarchal agenda does not satisfy. Theology in the context of this work is a political framework towards reclaiming the female body and identifying with our own immanent and powerfully embodied divinity in all her manifestations. It is not just about a Goddess or goddesses but it is more broadly concerned with ‘imagining the divine with qualities traditionally or biologically associated with being female’.<sup>793</sup> In terms of how this affects the embodiment of women in contemporary society Goldenberg writes that the Goddess, when understood as a psychological tool to build individual strengths, helps women to learn to ‘visualize and bring [themselves] to birth in the world’.<sup>794</sup> Here each part of the life cycle is respected as a valued aspect of the individual’s existence. These models provide powerful positive images that may psychologically help the individual grow and develop throughout life as opposed to desperately clinging onto a particular stage in one’s development (i.e., fighting to retain a youthful aesthetic in a society that celebrates

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<sup>792</sup> Christ 2012: 253

<sup>793</sup> Raphael 1996: 15

<sup>794</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 97



one ideal regardless of age, experience or profession). For Goldenberg the Goddess is central to this process of development as a 'concept to give women positive self-images in all stages of life'.<sup>795</sup> These are life affirming and powerful models for many women within the Goddess movement as female divinity is valued throughout life; it is not a member's only club for a select few who most successfully meet the prerequisites (here I refer to the increasing propensity within society to worship beauty as divine). It is not just the idea of a female divinity and the celebration of life in all its stages that draws a lot of women (and men) towards the various Goddess movements but the emphasis on experience. The experiential nature of theology and Goddess feminism is one of its fundamental strengths. It is through listening to the voices and stories of women, accounts that have traditionally been omitted from Judeo-Christian religious discourse, that we start to conceive of an alternative model of embodiment and broaden the parameters (if not disable them completely) of normative notions of being. Beverley Clack writes that academic study requires us to 'detach the individual and their academic concerns the one from the other, creating the idea of 'the intellectual' as something like a brain on a stick whose situation, interests and experiences are irrelevant to the kind of arguments they forge'.<sup>796</sup> In using experience as a starting point for academic analysis 'women have been able to challenge the dominant discourse developed by patriarchy over a millennium and perhaps it is only by maintaining the importance of the personal that we will be able to affect the political'.<sup>797</sup>

For me personally, having always struggled with my weight and a compulsion to narrow my boundaries, research into the Goddess has been transforming. The features that most resonate with me are the political elements of Goddess feminism in its challenging of patriarchal power, the calling for women to actively engage in the creation of their own embodied stories, alongside the appreciation of our interdependence and the Goddess as immanent in ourselves and the world that surrounds us. Feeling this connection to our environments helps to develop new ways of reflecting on embodiment as we open ourselves up to understanding that our health, physical and mental, is contingent on the health and wellbeing of the world that surrounds us and equally, the health of the environment is contingent on our actions and thoughts. To send love, living energy and creative vitality out into the world, to work for change in whatever way we can. To expand knowledge, both in ourselves and for others who would like to grow and develop within this spiritual framework and to work, not for financial gain or personal profit, but for the health and wellbeing of all. In this respect, with the development of my psychotherapy work, the next part of this developing and

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<sup>795</sup> Goldenberg 1979: 97

<sup>796</sup> Clack B (2012) The Future is Female: Revisioning Feminism For/With the Next Generation. In: *Feminist Theology* 20, no. 3: 256-261 (256).

<sup>797</sup> Clack 2012: 256

fluctuating project is to embed what I have learnt into a therapeutic setting the aim of which is to offer group and individual sessions for women struggling with food and body related anxieties. Here Goddess feminism finds its location in society as we incorporate the Goddess into creative healing strategies. Transformation happens when we broaden our conceptualisations on embodiment, when we see through Her eyes, developing new models for embodied praxis and new avenues for empowered living. Thus over time, we become more and more distanced from the patriarchal power dynamics endemic to contemporary living. The change does not take place over night. This process of dismantling the elements of life that constrain and limit our development takes time and dedication. The women with anorexia engaging with these themes and motifs will be starting a life-long journey.

As I draw this theological examination towards its end having discussed at length the female body in contemporary society, the political dimensions of such extreme self-starvation behaviours, the patriarchal rhetoric underpinning these expressions and finally, discourses on the Goddess as a forum for displacing patriarchal female constructions, I reflect upon what this Spirituality of Anorexia may feel like for the individuals engaged in this activity. The goal I had imagined for myself in this work has been to unpack the destructive rhetoric at the heart of the anorexic expression and to work within a theological framework, utilising the symbolism of the Goddess, to explore methods of deconstruction and embodied re-creations with a contribution towards disrupting the gender status-quo and challenging slender and reductionist rhetoric that so many women are caged by. As I demonstrated whilst reflecting on the work of Goldenberg and her application of myth and fantasy, reflecting on theology as a framework within which women can participate in the co-creation of healing psychologies, which reflect upon the Goddess, we have a potential avenue for eradicating the foundational principles of the anorexic expression. I have demonstrated how reflections on the Goddess, as conceptualised as a powerful female construct can provide an empowering and liberating symbolic for women, particularly for women utilising the anorexic expression, but also for all those women and girls chasing the slender ideal. Beyond this application, I suggested that the mass adoption of this framework by society would provide fertile ground for the development of gender equality as our patriarchal society is rebalanced with an equally powerful female principle. However, there are Goddess constructs that I argued are in need of deconstruction (such as the conceptualisation of the Goddess as maiden-mother-crone). Here we have the potential to understand each new situation as filled with new energies, new demands. Positive and creative energy is interacting with healing energy and transformation happens because we recognize each other and in that recognition is the love that encourages the full humanity of all. We see with new eyes. This transformation permeates life as healing love and vitality flows into our daily activities. It

becomes part of our response to the whole world. In living through this embodiment, through embodied praxis, we disrupt the power this reductionist and sexist rhetoric has on us as we consciously acknowledge our connection with life affirming and meaningful lived realities. This is a pursuit towards female consciousness which embodies an awakening from the patriarchal discourses that would otherwise see many young women fade away. In this we have a *The Spirituality of Anorexia: Towards Healing and Liberation of the Goddess in Every Woman*.

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