



(RE) IMAGING THE BREAST:  
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF A  
CULTURAL OBSESSION

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores any possible relationship between historical images of the female breast, and the development of positive or negative self-imaging for modern women. Using historical images of the breast from pre-Christian times to the present, I explore the many uses to which breast imaging has been put, usually not by women. Breasts as depicted in areas such as Sacred, Domestic, Political, Commercial, Fashion and Medicine are explored and presented with my narrative as I proceed through my work. The images and narrative are interlaced with feminist literature and the voices of women. Research participants have a voice, and their experiences and opinions are detailed. There are two surveys that were given to either a general female population, or to mammographic technologists. Professional women in the area of medical imaging often combine the information received on the job with their personal viewpoints. These opinions are varied and provide an interesting examination of the ambiguity inherent in women's perception of their breasts and the breasts of other women. The ability to review our past, to recognize the appropriation of our body for political or erotic reasons helps us to discard what we have 'learned' to perceive as 'normal' or 'beautiful' and to redefine our breast reality as we experience it. The words of John Berger are instrumental in helping us to recognize the act of 'seeing' from the act of 'being seen'. Upsetting the dichotomy of female as passive object/male as aggressive owner or spectator, is the means for a new 'way of seeing.' Medical imaging is included in this work to demonstrate the fragmentation inherent in the medical process. The emerging body of female generated work speaks to these concerns. When women can recognize and refuse false images of their body, a (re) imaging of the breast will take place.

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Edna D. Rushton-Skerry

## INTRODUCTION

Beata cujus umbera  
Summo replete munere  
Terris alebant unicum  
Terrae polique gloriam ...<sup>1</sup>

Since the Venerable Bede (A.D. > 673-735) penned these words, many more have been used to imagine the female breast. Poems, prose, sculpture, paintings, religious theory and even national laws have all contributed to the message sent to women in regard to our breasts. The intent of this thesis is to examine breast images throughout the ages and to explore the possibility that these images have forced a fragmented and destructive self-image upon modern women. This aim will be accomplished by examining many diverse sources of breast representations to determine any possible relationship between them and the breast self-perception of contemporary women in my survey. An analysis of historical images of the breast reveals the creative actions that have been employed by women to resist cultural ideals imposed on them.

Women have often accepted the imposed usage and terminology related to their breasts throughout time; however, we need to reclaim the pride of reality as well as to celebrate the differences of breasts. Appreciation of their bodily realities and differences in structure is essential for women and will defuse the impossible standards as presently being defined by the media. We need to recognize the construction of this false body image in order to identify the racist, elitist and sexist overtones inherent within them. The deconstruction of breast imagery will bring truth, reality and empowerment to the owners of breasts. Liberation will create "new ways of seeing."<sup>2</sup>

My identification of the need for this type of research came from two sources. During my professional practice as a hospital-based diagnostic mammographer, I noticed quite a variety of reactions by women to this examination. Their words and body language conveyed feelings

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<sup>1</sup>"Thou whose blessed breasts, filled with a gift from on high, fed for all lands the unique glory of earth and heaven..." Marina Warner, *Alone of all Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). 197

ranging from dislike and hatred of their breasts to total denial of their presence and importance in their lives. Shame, excessive modesty, homophobia and apologies for self-perceived inadequacies were a few of these reactions. Pride and enjoyment of breasts were very rare. Women also exhibited different levels of comfort when being handled in such an intimate manner during mammography by another woman.

These observations connected with the knowledge acquired while receiving my own mammographic training and later while teaching student mammographers. I learned that some technologists never feel comfortable performing this examination and choose not to work in this specialized area. It seems to be difficult for some technologists to overcome the social taboo against handling the breasts of other women. I wondered what caused these differences in perception, and do these perceptions change over a lifetime? How do mammographers overcome the initial distaste for the intimacy of this work? What influence does the medical gaze exert? What changes in self-perception have been caused by the increased incidence of breast cancer?

The second impetus to examine this topic arose from my study of feminist theory and the deconstructive analysis of our image-laden culture. The body and bared breast of the human female have been used throughout history to represent fertility, domesticity and eroticism and to promote nationalistic fervor.

During the 20th century, images of breasts were appropriated for commercial usage, which has contributed heavily to the fragmented and objectified self-image of modern women. Advertisements using appropriated images of breasts for products ranging from automobiles to toothpaste promise the purchaser the hope of becoming either the perfect man/woman or the possibility of possessing the perfect person depicted in the image. Media-generated images, with the assistance of the airbrush and computer, have fostered a false ideal of the human female.

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<sup>2</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penquin Books, 1976)

Childlike waifs dominate the world stage and create an impossible ideal for females over the age of twelve.

As a result of these media images adult females now question their natural body and engage in a life long struggle for control of their seemingly inadequate bodies. Our society feels this effect by watching our loved ones suffering from bulimia or anorexia. This struggle extends into the area of fashion as an analysis of corsets and other 'corrective' garments will show in chapter four. Since breasts do not respond to aerobic exercise and diet and refuse to be controlled or manipulated, I will also be introducing the role of the plastic surgeon in creating the molded or sculptured body in the same chapter. As I will argue, since plastic surgery is not available to all women, due to the high cost of plastic surgery, we must consider a class perspective on perfection.

Racism and sexism combine in the story of Saartje Baartman, also known as the 'Hottentot Venus'. She was exhibited as a side show freak in early nineteenth century Europe. Excessively large nipples and protuberant buttocks demonstrated her 'otherness' and overt animalistic sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The dominant culture of Anglo-Saxon beauty recoils from bodily excess, which racial and cultural ideals attribute to women of color. Full lips are now accepted as sexy, but assimilation dictates no large breasts, thighs or legs, no differences in noses or eyes and as white a skin as possible. This association with size and racism is seen clearly in this statement: "The distribution of weight in our bodies made us low, closer to earth; this baseness was akin to sexual excess (while not being sexy at all) and decidedly not feminine."<sup>4</sup> False images not only promote the destruction of a female self-image, but also, sexism, racism and the stereotypical classification of women.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>4</sup> Susan Bordo, *Twilight Zones The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 135

Feminists have long decried the words of Freud who declared that "anatomy is destiny."<sup>5</sup> The slogan "The personal is political"<sup>6</sup> was adopted as a more accurate reflection of social significance. Although the fragmentation of the body has been identified, no specific discourse on breasts has been initiated. We anguish in private, opt for 'corrective' surgery when possible and often hate an innocent part of our anatomy. Feminist scholars need to begin this discourse and all women need access to this information. Feminist research has the potential to be participatory, when women raise their own voices valuable information is disseminated to the academy and the community.

### THEORETICAL DEBTS

My plan is to place breast imaging in historical perspective, discuss the ways of seeing and being seen, examine the medical gaze with reference to any positive or negative effects reported on surveys and interviews conducted. My goal is to document the attitudes and perceptions of real women, analyze feminist literature, then combine both to propose a new way of seeing that will truly liberate us in the area of the body. This in turn may liberate men from their false notions of the body and will allow for a more balanced perspective of the human body.

To examine these issues requires definite tools. Feminist analysis and the postmodern tools of deconstruction have guided my research methods. I use the words of Catherine Stimpson, Linda Alcoff, and Susan Bordo to support my position. In general, postmodernists situate themselves after the modern period (1840-1930)<sup>7</sup> and see a plurality and fluidity of knowledge as being preferable to Jean Francois Lyotard's "metanarratives."<sup>8</sup> (Metanarratives are sweeping statements about medicine, history or science that claim to be the final and total word on the subject.) This ability to see more than one meaning for existing images and literature and

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<sup>5</sup> MacMillian. *Dictionary of Quotations*. (New York: Bloomsbury 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Rosalie Maggio. *Beacon Book of Quotations by Women*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Jencks. *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Group, 1996) 8

<sup>8</sup> Donna Landry, and Gerald MacLean. *Materialist Feminisms*. (Cambridge; Blackwell Publishers. 1993) 7.

to critically analyze them for gender bias has become a tool for feminism called "deconstruction".

Coined by Jacques Derrida,<sup>9</sup> deconstruction has provoked opposing arguments in academic feminist theory. On one hand, some feminists have shown that our view of women is a cultural construct. The fragmentation of the category 'woman' created by the fluidity and more open postmodern critiques of gender may be acceptable in order to reject any totalizing claims about women or their essence. Catherine Stimpson supports this position,<sup>10</sup> while Linda Alcoff fears that feminism may be lost as a movement for the equality of women, if the category of women and therefore their oppression, is lost to relativism."<sup>11</sup>

Susan Bordo points to the necessity of an embodiment in the light of the post-modern claim of "the new imagination of disembodiment: a dream of being everywhere."<sup>12</sup> I am in agreement with her belief that the body and its experiences, especially the visual, must be built into the appreciation of feminine experience and construction of identity. My argument depends on the notion of woman as embodied, and the assumption that the female body has been culturally constructed in an ideal form. Ideal images, especially of breasts, are not related to reality but rather to ideals generated by a patriarchal culture for particular objectives throughout time. This review, using historical images of breasts will compare patriarchal images to matriarchial visions

Pam Carter addresses the reality of different and particular social and economic cultures specific to the life of an individual woman. Addressing these differences prohibits the use of one single category 'woman', and introduces notions of power, control, resistance and individuality. Carter also quotes Michael Foucault as being the developer of the concept of power as being connected to discourse, and the possibility for resistance within that structure.<sup>13</sup> Discourses can be located in specific bodies of knowledge, such as medicine or art, which are reflected in accompanying social practices; discourses determine social and cultural responses. Spaces

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Held. *Feminist Morality Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 28.



between the multiplicity of discourses allow for the rebellious expression of resistance.<sup>14</sup> Resistance takes place on the margins of a hegemonic culture, and the different discourses allow room for subversive resistance and the formation of new discourses based on feminine perceptions.

As each of the different areas of breast imaging is introduced, examination of women's resistance can be identified by careful readings of women's self-imaging in art and literature. This resistance to control and the patriarchal power structure inherent in our societies is sometimes subtle and hard to determine. Modern resistance seems more overt, especially in photography, although the pressure to conform and 'behave ourselves' has never been more open. Advertisements equate weight loss with control; nevertheless make-up and plastic surgery are read by some feminists as 'taking control' of our lives and bodies. However, I contend that following a false, media-generated ideal of normal is not being in control; it is pure transference of power to an external source. Women have internalized the external dictates, and subsequently police themselves.

Criticism and degradation of the principles of the Women's movement are evident in the dismissive statement 'feminism is dead' or the new distaste for any public association with the term 'feminism'. The fear of feminism is seen in the media. Using feminist goals in advertising and programing sends the message that feminism has done it's work, and can now be discarded. Feminist research and analysis must ask the questions: Who has the power? Whose reality is distorted or controlled by this power? Lastly, resistance must be identified, shared and encouraged. Knowledge, when shared, empowers and supports us. It also inspires new creativity and the usage of formal methods of resistance, such as political lobbying and pressure tactics. We need to be involved in the definition of femininity and to consider the effect such definitions have on our sexuality.

The term 'culture' appears in my title and since it reflects the implications of gender in society, it cannot be separated from the term society. To quote cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz; "culture denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols; a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 28.

system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [human beings] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."<sup>15</sup> This definition expressly refers to methods of communication, which has frequently meant images, and connects the development of a false body image to women's exposure both historically and in modern images of the 'perfect breast'. Culture includes the production of images, art and ways of knowing. Changing culture by challenging the existing hegemonic epistemology is essential for the hope of a post patriarchal society.

Images are historic products of culture and as such are defined by John Berger as being 'man made'.

An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved-for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. . . Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented: it then showed how something or somebody had once looked- and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. . . No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature.<sup>16</sup>

Berger explains that the image represented is dependent on the gaze of the creator. The gaze of the viewer shares this interpretation. I will argue that the images presented since the early Christian era have been (and still are) constructed by a patriarchal society. Women need to challenge this male/female dichotomy as well as the surveyed/surveyor accepted notion of image production and viewing. A feminist perspective of deconstruction encourages such new understandings, which transforms existing social arrangements and promotes resistance. Deconstruction will call for the reconstruction of accurate replacements for our society. Re-imagining the breast should be a goal for feminists.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>16</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 9-10

## FEMININISM

Although there are many definitions of feminism, all are dedicated to examination of the oppression of women, as well as its causes and continuation in our society. Several useful definitions emerge that support my research methodology. Ludic feminism is "a feminism that is founded upon poststructuralist assumptions about linguistic play, difference, and the priority of discourse and thus substitutes a politics of representation for radical social transformation."<sup>17</sup> This feminism sees the body as the central issue in feminist discourse and it becomes the deconstruction point for viewing Western binary oppositions such as male/female and culture/nature. According to Elizabeth Grosz, these "corporeal feminists" are concerned with "the lived body, the body insofar as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular culture . . . a body as social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power."<sup>18</sup> The feminist project is to visualize the body as specific, particular and the opposite of abstraction. Abstraction here is seen as masculine and phallogocentric.<sup>19</sup> This theory will reclaim the female body and thus relocate the grounds from which we speak. Our authority to speak on women resides in our ownership of the real body as opposed to a transcended embodiment of self.

This argument seems to place me well into the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate. To categorize women simply by their anatomy (functional/biological qualities) is opposed by anti-essentialist groups who stress difference as being the determining factor to define 'women'. Social constructionists state that woman as a category has been subject to, and formed by, false social constructions. (See Appendix 1. Fig. 1 which illustrates this anti-essentialist position.) In this image, Cindy Sherman deconstructs the 'natural' woman by wearing a breast protheseis

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<sup>17</sup> Theresa L. Ebert. *Ludic Feminism and After: Post modernism, Desire, and Labor in late Capitalism*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 235

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 236

which seems to be leaking (a stream) maternal milk. My desire is not to promote the immutable essence theory, nor to come out firmly on the constructionist perception of femininity, but rather to promote and celebrate difference based on the body. My argument requires a real body that is subject to social construction. Diana Fuss claims that even though essentialism is defined in direct opposition to difference, "constructionism ... really operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism. The bar between essentialism and constructionism is by no means as solid and as unassailable as advocates of both sides assume it to be."<sup>20</sup>

The category being used is that of sex rather than gender, since my thesis concerns the breasts of the human female. Our culture imposes a uniformity of breast images upon women, and it is here that I wish to engage in discourse. Feminism is often seen as a reclaiming of our past, with a view to improving our future, therefore the study of historical images will illustrate our past and may help us to define our future.

Some see the feminist project as correcting the past by including the history of women.

Women's history is told and passed down generationally by stories and other forms of material work (e.g., quilting, needlework, and recipes). Donna Haraway, even though her critique is on the philosophy of science, provides this useful definition:

Feminism is, in part, a project for the reconstruction of public life and public meanings: feminism is therefore a search for new stories, and so for a language which names a new vision of possibilities and limits ... a contest for public knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Feminist ethics clearly dictate an ethic of care. Women who participate in any feminist research project must not be exploited, judged, or subjected to any form of disrespect. Their lives and experiences must be documented from their lived experience and different ways of seeing. Women have the chance to tell their breast stories in my research, their voices, which

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<sup>20</sup> Diana Fuss. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. (New York: Routledge, 1989) xii

have the potential to create a new canon, will be heard. Recording the stories of women is feminist ethnography, and as such has the power to conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social context.

## METHODOLOGY

Since I come to this thesis from historically divergent paradigms, (science and feminist theory), a unique methodology is needed. My worldview is both scientific and feminist; subsequently my research requires components of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative requirement created two survey forms, one for any woman regardless of age, economic or racial identity and another specifically for mammographic technologists. The quantitative analysis based on the volume of survey respondents allowed me an extensive view of the attitudes of participants and produced empirical data. The demographic data identified on the form are age, the province of residence and an optional category of ethnicity or race. (See Appendix 2.) These forms allow women's voices to be heard and illuminate some of the differences contained within the category 'woman'. Professional colleagues contributed as well, by using the form designed for mammographers to reflect their particular concerns and abilities. (See Appendix 2.) The qualitative component consists of taped interviews with women of different age groups and different breast stories. I interviewed a plastic surgeon, a lactation specialist, and women with a history of breast reduction, augmentation, amputation and reconstruction due to breast cancer. This produced five taped interviews.

Six other women participated in various ways. When I went looking for other women to share their lives and experiences with me, two young sisters volunteered to be interviewed with their parents' consent. I felt it would be interesting to determine how their present bodily self-image have been influenced by either positive or negative factors. Their mother also volunteered to be interviewed. The mother signed the consent form for all three women, and the two girls were interviewed together.

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<sup>21</sup> Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature.* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 82

Two young women in their twenties, one of whom is lesbian, also volunteered to contribute to my body of knowledge. A young friend has had reduction mammoplasty, a tattoo and nipple piercing on her breast. A mammographic instructor provided a written opinion about mammographic technologists and her consent has been obtained for quotation purposes. A woman artist was also interviewed and her work will be presented in the art imaging section in chapter 3.

All eleven participants were given information enabling their informed consent. They were given an introductory letter approved by the university ethics committee. (See Appendix 3.) The ethical considerations of confidentiality, security, the storage time frame and ethical disposal of tapes and transcripts are covered in their letter. The interviews took place at a time and place comfortable for the participants. They have all been assigned a pseudonym, and all images used in the research bear no identifying marks, and my attitude will not be condescending or maternally beneficent. My attitude was caring, supportive, and non-judgmental. The interviews took place in an environment comfortable for both of us. Since I have had reduction mammopexy<sup>22</sup> and participate regularly in the British Columbia Breast Cancer Screening Project, my words and experiences are also reflected.

I have correlated the experience of my participants with feminist and cultural literature for comparison and conclusions. The survey forms provide numbers and a bigger population base to obtain data regarding women's current attitudes about their breasts across different ages, ethnic backgrounds and geographical locations.

The thesis will be organized in the following manner. The headings under which breast imaging are examined are; the sacred, domestic or functional, the erotic, as represented in Fine Art, the political, commercial and medical gaze. Within each division, the history of this representation of women's breasts is offered, with images and narrative to support my thesis. Any resistance is sought out and included.

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<sup>22</sup> Augmentation translates as implants to enlarge breast tissue; reduction refers to the surgical removal of breast tissue to make the breasts smaller. Mammopexy is a 'lift' to relocate the breasts in a more 'desirable' location.

Chapter One provides an introduction, definitions, and methodology. Chapter 2 offers a short history of sacred breasts. Images of the sacred breast being ridiculed and reduced to mortal levels can be seen here, as well as images providing resistance to the cultural norm.

Chapter 3 will explore the domestic imaging of the breast as an art form with breastfeeding examined from the viewpoint of modern culture. The value of breast milk is inherent in these studies and reveals political and sacred references. Images of the breast-feeding mother are influenced by the economic and political times as well as by prevailing philosophical theories. The interview with the lactation consultant will be included here. Feminist perspectives and the investigation of the notion of choice will illuminate areas of rebellion and resistance. Use of the breast as a political tool or, as I label this type of imaging, “the political breast” is illustrated in this chapter and given a feminist analysis.

Next the imaging of women in art will be explored using historical and modern images of the female breast. Especially interesting are the images being generated today by female artists, and theoretical review of the subject/viewer dichotomy illuminates resistance.

Chapter 4 will be a continuation of the investigation of historical breast images in the areas of fashion and commercial appropriations of our breasts. The commercial representation of the breast will introduce the modern cultural icon, Madonna, 'The Material Girl'. Fashion as a determinant of the acceptability of the size, shape and degree of breast visibility will be examined as well as tattoos, body piercing and other forms of breast adornment. A comparison of Marilyn Munroe and Madonna serve to illustrate the concept of women selling sex, in contrast to the commercial use of women’s breasts to sell commodities. Chapter 4 will also review the medical gaze, or medical imaging.

The sculpted or molded body will be examined by introducing the words of a plastic surgeon, and the experiences of women who have undergone surgical intervention in the creation of personal body image, integrated with existing medical literature. Mammography, Computed Tomography and Ultra Sound will provide images of women’s breasts. Discussion focuses on the need for this technology fueled by the increased incidence of breast cancer. Throughout the specific area of breast imaging, the words of the participants will be heard in appropriate context.

Chapter 5 will provide a space for women to speak, and my interviews with them will be intertwined with existing feminist and cultural literature. Here, our voices as real women detailing our lives are recorded. Our stories and feelings about the lived experiences of our breasts are the basis of the chapter's content. The survey results are presented and analyzed for content and meaning.

Chapter 6 presents the recommendations derived from my research, and expands on conclusions made from my observations. I also expand on a possible path of action for future feminists to continue to work upon and study.

Since I am a participant in my own research, and do not intend to define my research participants as 'the other', my writing will reflect use of the feminist first person. Patricia Maguire has provided my inspiration for feminist participatory research. According to McGuire, participatory research has the agenda of promoting social change by investigating reality.<sup>23</sup> The lived experience of women often differs from the ideology and constructions of their society, and this has initiated my thesis. Henrietta Moore argues that "the power to define reality is an economic and political power."<sup>24</sup> This power of defining reality should belong to women, as owners of breasts. The economic and political power will follow as we define our positions as being participatory and relevant to our society. The creation of an alternative paradigm concerned with what could or should be works to replace the existing structure of the present. Maguire also states that a more just society will benefit men and women, and that true feminist research should have this effect.<sup>25</sup> If women are living under a false reality, then men are also trapped into believing that the false representations are normal.

One of the problems associated with participatory research is the over involvement of the researcher in the lives of her participants and them in hers. This will be difficult for me, as I am very passionate about the topic and the lived reality of women. However, ethnography is a

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<sup>23</sup> Patricia Macguire. *Doing Participatory Research: a Feminist Approach*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1987) 3.

<sup>24</sup> Henrietta L. Moore. *A Passion for Difference. Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1994) 5.

<sup>25</sup> Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research*, 79.



multimethod of research. I interviewed, surveyed, observed, did archival analysis and participated in my own research. In doing so, I followed three major guidelines as offered by Shulamit Reinharz. First, to document the lives and experiences of women; second, to analyze experiences of women from our own point of view; and lastly, to see our behavior as a reflection of social contexts.<sup>26</sup> Since my research interviews women in the context of our shared reality, then relates and analyses our experiences in reference to a particular breast obsessing culture, my research meets the requirements for feminist ethnography and participatory research.

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<sup>26</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 51

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SACRED BREAST

In this chapter, breast images generated from 23,000 years BC to the onset of Christianity are presented. The historical representations of the pre-Christian breast are associated with natural cycles of life and death. Women were seen as possessing a sacred function in their societies, and as such, were revered and respected. This history of the breast derives from the work of Marilyn Yalom.<sup>27</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, the maternal breast meant life or death to children. Pre-agrarian societies have left figurines made of stone, bone and clay notable for large prominent breasts, and plump abdomens and buttocks. These figures are thought to be fertility goddesses, able to sustain life and to withstand times of famine. Such women could not only nurse their own children, but also could probably adopt the child of a mother less able to do so due to illness or deprivation.

The Venus figures recognizable to modern women are the Venus of Willendorf and of Grimaldi, both of which date to 23,000 to 25,000 BC (See Appendix 1 fig.2). Worship of these breast goddesses is thought to have continued in Eastern Europe until the advent of Islam in the seventh century. Modern women wear the figurine as jewelry. The rounded ample shape of this goddess defies current norms of the perfect female form, but is worn with pride. Affirmation of our special function of fertility and the consequent respect by community members is seen as being missing in our modern time. In our society, respect is not given to middle aged 'slightly obese' women. By wearing the Venus above our breasts we seem to be reclaiming our past.

In pre-Israelite Canaan, the goddess Astarte represented a "tangible prayer for fertility and nourishment."<sup>28</sup> Secret worship of fertility goddesses may have taken a long time to be repressed by the priests and prophets of Jahweh, since male gods were oriented more to war than the rebirth and nourishment cycle of the mother. Egypt honored Isis, who was associated with the tree of life and was also responsible for the validation of the new pharaoh. Her images shows her nursing the new pharaoh, her acceptance in this manner confirms his right to be the new ruler.

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<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Yalom. *A History of the Breast*. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1997)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Nevertheless a male god of the Nile, called Hapi, was depicted as having breasts because he was responsible for the annual flooding of the Nile, which renewed life and irrigated crops. This appropriation of female breasts was unusual and confirms their importance. Minoan (Crete) goddess figures from 1500-1600 BC, illustrate the power and prestige commanded by women in that civilization. Snake goddesses wore bell-like skirts, with tightly laced bodices. This fashion forced the breasts forwards and upward to an almost aggressive stance while snakes winding around their arms seem to advise the viewer to understand that poison may just as easily be dispensed as milk.<sup>29</sup> Snakes play a larger role in this history and are seen again in Christian origin myths.

Greek cults that worshipped the mother or nursing principle continued until the dawn of Christianity. One of the most astonishing archaeological finds in Turkey, was the discovery of two life-sized figures of the polymastic<sup>30</sup> goddess Artemis. Debate rages as to whether her many breasts were fruit, bull's testicles or breasts. This goddess, with her polymastic breasts promises unending supply fruitfulness. Also, the many teats of mammals link women to the realm of the natural world. However when we see an extra nipple on women today, we know that the mammary line runs down the chest and abdomen of all women and as such are not considered suspect or abnormal.<sup>31</sup> This many-breasted figure of Artemis epitomizes the timeless human fantasy of an endless and miraculous milk supply. This offering of the breast was later seen as the ability to grant favors and also emerges in the Christian representations of Mary the mother of Jesus. (See Appendix 1 fig.3)

During the fourth century BC, Aphrodite the goddess of love was presented in a state of partial undress, with her breasts becoming more erotic in their depiction. She also exhibited the earliest images of self-conscious gestures of privacy for her body. (See Appendix 1 fig.4) Helen of Troy, of Greek mythology, is said to have returned to her husband, Menelaus, and bared "the apples of her bosom" to secure his forgiveness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>30</sup> Many breasted

<sup>31</sup> Shirley Long. *Mammography 1 CAMRT Correspondence Course*. Ottawa, 1991 30

<sup>32</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 18

The myth of the Amazon women appears in Homeric literature in the eighth century, BC. Women are still referred to as amazons today if their strength is seen as masculine. Amazons were reputed to be a tribe of warlike women, governed by a queen. Their children were products of a short breeding time with men from another society. Male offspring were killed at birth, while female children were trained as warriors. These warrior women had a formidable reputation as fierce fighters, and are even said to have cut off their right breast to facilitate greater speed and strength with their bows. The remaining breast was left bared and became the preferred location for blows by their antagonists. Is this the early source for the "battle of the sexes"? Yalom offers her thesis that "the Amazons represented the destructive forces unleashed when women abandoned their role as the nurturers of men and appropriated virile attributes instead."<sup>33</sup> Do the over eight hundred portrayals of Amazons in Greek art portray the origins of gynophobia and/or misogyny?" (See Appendix 1 fig.5)

The breast cancer survivors of modern time reflect this heritage as they battle for life and a cure. In Vancouver, British Columbia there is a boat race held by breast cancer survivors, in conjunction with the Dragon Boat Festival. These women call their race the 'Abreast in a Boat Race'. One of the teams is called 'Amazons Abreast', and this team has written a poem that reflects their feelings. The title is *Amazons*, and is signed simply: A Tribe of Warrior Women.

Taken from the Greek word **a-mazos** (breastless)

A tribe of warrior women  
who destroyed one of their breasts  
to increase their accuracy  
with the javelin and the bow.

Women who know that to survive  
the aim of the arrow must be precise.  
thousands of women are members  
of a fierce tribe of survivors.

These warriors, these breast cancer  
survivors,  
have found weapons to fight and  
survive  
this dreaded disease.  
Faith, courage, community, science,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 24

rage, education, and power.<sup>34</sup>

This fierce testament has helped many women to survive, and to see themselves as active participants in their care, rather than being passive victims. Breast cancer patients use warlike words such as 'fight', 'battle', 'vanquish' and 'conquer'. We see here an old legend being revived and used with success.

Rome is still represented symbolically by the myth of Romulus and Remus. The twin sons of the god Mars and the mortal Rhea were rescued from the Tiber and nursed by a mother wolf. The infant boys absorbed the fierce qualities of their foster mother from her milk and became great kings.<sup>35</sup>

A Roman legend involving human participants, with a strong moral of filial piety and charity is repeated by Pliny the Elder (23-79), but attributed to the first century historian Valerius Maximus is as follows.

Of filial affection there have, it is true, being unlimited instances all over the world, but one at Rome with which the whole of the rest could not compare. A plebeian woman of low position who had just given birth to a child, had permission to visit her mother who had been shut up in prison as a punishment, and was always searched in advance by the doorkeeper to prevent her carrying in any food. She was detected giving her mother sustenance from her own breasts. In consequence of this marvel the daughter's pious affection was rewarded by the mother's release and both were awarded maintenance for life; and the place where it occurred was consecrated to the Goddess concerned, a temple dedicated to Filial Affection ....<sup>36</sup>

Works of art from the Renaissance Period have changed the recipient of this devotion from the female parent to the father. This introduces an incestuous theme to the story, as well as an element of cross-gendering.<sup>37</sup> These misinterpretations establish a tension between the nurturing female and the dangerous female body. The shift from reverence of the nurturing mother, the goddess of fertility and bearer of life, to fear of the person responsible for the evil

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<sup>34</sup> ABREAST in the West. Newsletter of the Alliance for Breast Cancer Information and Support. BC and Yukon. Spring 2000 Vol.1/no.3 p.6

<sup>35</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

suffered by man, has begun. Christianity introduces Eve, as first woman, then Mary as her perfect opposite. Both Eve and Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ, play important and impossible roles in the visual reality of Christian life for women.

Genesis, chapter three, details the temptation of Eve by the serpent and her subsequent fall from grace.<sup>38</sup> She gives the forbidden fruit to Adam, her husband, who then participates in her sin. God banishes them from the Garden of Eden, cursing them both in perpetuity. Eve is condemned to bear her children in pain and Adam to toil for his livelihood. Although Adam and Eve had sewn fig leaves together, thus creating loincloths, God fashioned the skins of animals into garments for them. Although no specific mention is made regarding the covering of Eve's breasts, artists throughout time have depicted Eve as having a protective arm across them.

On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of St. Peter's church in Rome, Leonardo Da Vinci shows not only Eve being banished, but also her nemesis the serpent, offering the forbidden fruit. The serpent has acquired feminine characteristics by this time, specifically breasts. This creation myth was able to substantiate and perpetuate many anti-female positions. Since Eve led man from the Divine gaze, her inferior status is absolute, and blame falls to all her descendants. Women today are being withheld from ministering by these implications of irredeemable guilt. Feminists question the allocation of total blame to Eve. Where was Adam's free will? Why is his culpability and subsequent whining to The Creator not regarded as significant? Eve reached for the tree of knowledge and was deprived of access to learning for centuries afterward.<sup>39</sup>

Reasons to despise Eve, as taught to women by patriarchal religions, inform us that through her sin of disobedience, death replaced immortality and sexuality replaced virginity. In the fourth century Saint John Chrysostom said: "Do you see where marriage took its origin? ... For where there is death, there too is sexual coupling; and where there is no death, there is no sexual coupling either."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *The New American Standard Bible.*

<sup>39</sup> Rosalind Miles. *The Women's History of the World.*(London, Harper Collins, 1993) 239

<sup>40</sup> David Kinsley. *The Goddesses' Mirror. Visions of the Divine from East and West.*(New York: State University Press, 1989) 225.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton challenged the anti-feminist stance perpetuated by patriarchal religions. She felt that the Bible represented the biggest obstacle to the proper equality of women and published her own version, called *The Woman's Bible* in 1898.<sup>41</sup> Eve stood as the quintessence of evil, not an inspiring image for women. Mary, the Mother of God, represented quite the opposite ideal. The image of women as either whore or mother still provides a damaging dichotomy for men today.

"A contrast was drawn between Mary and Eve, life and death, as in St. Jerome's *Twenty-second Letter*: 'Death came from Eve, but life has come through Mary'; and Irenaeus wrote that through Mary 'the guile of the serpent was overcome by the simplicity of the dove and we are set free from those chains by which we had been bound by death'. "<sup>42</sup>

Mary not only redeemed the world by bearing Christ, but offers redemption to women as well. Millions of Catholic women pray to Mary to help them with feminine (family) problems and for intercession with God the Father. As the mother of Jesus Christ, mortal women feel an affinity with her; she is a source of comfort and helps lead the way to eternal salvation. She followed the Word of God by conceiving and bearing His son, thereby demonstrating obedience and piety. She maintains her virginal status through her lifetime thus negating the stain of sexuality inherent in female flesh. Since she must not have the stain of original sin (the mark of the human condition) placed upon her at the time of her own conception, the Church fathers exempted her as part of their official church doctrine in the 1950's along with the Assumption into Heaven. The curse of Eve was avoided, in order that her body might bear a God. Mary was also declared a virgin throughout her lifetime, even after delivering the Christ child.

In further contrast to other mortal women, Mary did not suffer death. Although she was not resurrected like Christ, she ascended bodily into heaven a process called dormition.<sup>43</sup> Mary

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<sup>41</sup> Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, 238

<sup>42</sup> Julia Kristeva. "Sabat Mater" in *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) 103.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret R Miles. "The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture". In Susan Suleiman ed. *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, 196-207

offers insurmountable differences to women: a mother with no sexuality; a Virgin before, during and after childbirth; a celibate marriage and no death. Mary nursed the Child, but presents a virginal, high and immaculate breast to the world that does not correspond with the reality of nursing. Her covered breast usually shows no folds or bulges in her clothing, suggesting a flat non-breast. Again, this is an unrealistic portrayal of the functional breast in motherhood. (Appendix 1.fig.6)

Mary became Queen of Heaven, an assumed nobility, and can be seen to have acquired all the titles of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. Mortal women did not assume greatness within the institutions of Christian marriage and motherhood; rather they continued to be rated second best by Church fathers. Women were seen as a necessary evil and were given strict injunctions to suppress their evil body and its attendant lust and sexuality.

Mary is also depicted as spouse and daughter of God. She passes through all of the kinship systems with ease, roles certainly not available to mortal women without severe social restrictions.<sup>44</sup> Although women have adored Mary, prayed to her for Divine intercession and for assistance in childbirth, her image perpetuates the inferiority of the human female body. She is an impossible ideal for all women especially nuns, whose choice of celibacy confers childlessness. The support of Church Fathers given to the cult of the Virgin appears self-serving, in its perpetuation of the impossible notion of the 'good woman'. The message seems to be: this Mary was mortal in order to present the humanity of Christ, but not to present the humanity of women. Religious images, such as Mary, introduced impossible and conflicting images for Christian women and continue to reinforce patriarchal notions of control over the bodies of women.

Of course, images of the Virgin Mary have been produced that show a more human and maternal reality. For example, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Joos Van Clive painted a laughing Madonna and a round contented child. Every nursing mother can relate to the drowsy replete baby, and it is often amusing to see them so happy. (See Appendix 1.fig.7) My favorite comes from 1926, when Max Ernst portrayed the Virgin spanking the Christ child over her knee, His halo on the ground,

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<sup>44</sup> Kristeva, *Sabat Mater*, 105



hers askew, and His little buttocks nice and pink. (See Appendix 1.fig.8 and note the three shocked male faces peering through the window)

Resistance to the traditional maternal image in the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes from Cindy Sherman, who uses her own body and various props to image and challenge traditional female stereotypes. In her version of the traditional nursing Madonna scenario one false breast, perfect size and shape, not distended or swollen by milk, is displayed along with the flowing robes and crowned head of the original. (See Appendix 1 fig. 9) The contralateral breast is not shown or even intimated. A serene and perfect scene has been questioned. Male artists have also become engaged in challenging stereotypical representations of the Madonna, in terms of her racial signifiers.

In 1996, a young painter, Cris Ofili, left Britain for Zimbabwe in order to incorporate his cultural heritage and an appreciation of the natural landscape into his work. His work, committed to social and political concerns, created quite a stir when his new works appeared with elephant dung on them. His Madonna challenged existing social conventions by being depicted as black and sexual. Having glitter on the paint and representations of vagina, buttocks, and rectums floating around the divine breast which was made of real elephant dung, Chris challenged our cultural perceptions of the Virgin. (Appendix 1 fig. 10) The use of elephant dung instead of the traditional rib of Adam to create Eve, was a real blow to patriarchal religion.

Literary images of breasts are seen in the Holy Bible and are used to promote patriarchal control of the female body. The Bible has eight references to the word breast, which we would be able to interpret as the male chest or that of a sacrificial animal. (Ex.29.26; Lev.7.30 and 8.29; Num.6.20; Is.60. 16; Dan.2.32; Luke 18.13 and John 13.25) Fourteen references are made to female breasts. (Gen. 49.25; Job 3.12 and 21.24; Pro.5.19; Songs 4.5, 8.1 and 8.8; Is. 28.9; Ezek.16.7, 23.3 and 23.8; Hos.2.2; Luke 23.48; Rev. 15.6)<sup>45</sup> Breasts are used to define female beauty: the readiness of a young woman to be entered into marriage bartering and to suckle the Son of God.

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander Cruden. *Cruden's Concordance The Holy Scriptures*. (Fleming Revel Co. 1970) 77

Some of the most sensuous poetry seen in the Holy Bible appears in the Song of Solomon 4.5.

"Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies".<sup>46</sup>

However, stories of early Christian saints detail gender specific torture directed towards women.

St Agatha had her breasts cut off for refusing the amorous advances of Roman noble, and for refusing to deny her Christian faith. She is now the patron saint of nursing mothers and her help is sought against breast disease.<sup>47</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 11.) Patriarchal religions brought a new twist to women's experience and lives. Their bodies became the battleground for dominance and control.

Women were burned at the stake for witchcraft or tortured in the name of martyrdom during the Middle Ages. The Holy Inquisition lasted over 250 years (15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) and was responsible for the deaths of from 600,00 to 2,000,000 men, women and children. Women suffered particular attention to their breasts. Breasts were amputated using red-hot pinchers, and then the severed breasts were rubbed into their mouths and those of her sons. This not only negated their sexuality but also their motherhood. The message was clear: breasts are dangerous.<sup>48</sup>

The history of the sacred breast shows a more feminine or matriarchal influence, but the onset of Christianity introduces a masculine and appropriated image used for control. Breasts defined women, their place in society, and were used in the Inquisition, all to keep women subject to the 'higher' order of male control. Modern resistance by both male and female artists illustrates the need for change.

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<sup>46</sup> *The New American Standard Bible*. Text edition. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977)

<sup>47</sup> David Hugh Farmer. *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 6-7

<sup>48</sup> Anne Lewellyn Bartow. *Witchcraze A New History of the European Witch-Hunts*. (London: Pandora, 1994) 144-150

## CHAPTER 3

### DOMESTIC, NATIONAL AND FINE ART BREAST IMAGES

The functional or domestic breast as portrayed by the act of breastfeeding, would seem to be a straightforward representation of a woman's unique ability to feed her young. However, patriarchal notions of control, erotica and nationalistic requirements have all infiltrated domestic images. Feminists have also entered the debate along with the scientific or medical voices. How has the social construction of the breast over time influenced contemporary understanding and emotional responses to breastfeeding today? Images of breasts that record the act of breastfeeding have become intertwined with the emerging erotic breast and have caused confusion both for the new mother and the society in which she lives. The separation of my images into chapter three and four has been determined by their ease of distribution. Images generated by the Fine Arts are used to support and illustrate my narrative in chapter three, while the all-invasive media generated images help support my thesis for chapter four.

#### THE DOMESTIC OR FUNCTIONAL BREAST

Records from the Middle Ages detail the ancient practice of giving the newborn child to a wet nurse. The father of the child bartered with the nurse's husband, which makes the transaction both male directed and commercial. Since the qualities of the wet nurse were supposedly passed onto the child in her milk, a certain physical resemblance between the nurse and the natural mother was beneficial. The breasts themselves must not be too large, (so as not to flatten the child's nose), nor was the nurse to be sexually active thereby degrading milk quality. This practice was not always beneficial to the nurse's child who must now come second, or to the foster child who often died from neglect. The spacing of births that occurred naturally to breast feeding mothers was lost to upper class women, as well as the opportunity to enjoy breastfeeding themselves. The children of the rich displaced those of the poor household creating a social system that fostered class injustice. This system peaked in the eighteenth century, easing into obscurity in the nineteenth. There were instances of bonding between child and wet nurse, such as Alexander Pope who wrote a memorial to Mary Beach, who nursed him

in his infancy.<sup>49</sup> Some exceptions to the practice were Puritan women who nursed out of religious duty, and Queens who nursed out of social snobbery.<sup>50</sup>

Painters in the Dutch school best demonstrate the images idealizing the nursing mother in the seventeenth century. Domestic happiness includes a nursing mother at the fireside surrounded by homey everyday objects. Pieter de Hooch painted a nursing woman flanked by older children and a dog in his *Woman Nursing an Infant, with a Child* around 1658. Artists doing portraiture in the seventeenth century often depicted nursing mothers as allegorical representations of the virtue of Charity. For the depiction of a noblewoman and her children in this genre See Appendix 1 fig.12.

Since maternal blood formed both fetus and milk, medical, moral and religious beliefs in the seventeenth century heavily supported maternal breast-feeding. Jacob Cats, a magistrate and writer, (1577-1660) wrote this little rhyme in support of breastfeeding.

One who bears her children is a mother in part,  
But she who nurses her children is a mother at heart.<sup>51</sup>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) based his theories of social regeneration on the lactating mother. He linked the strengthening of the nuclear family and the role of the male partner to the 'real' mother. His idealized concepts of women and their natural role as mother provided a 'sexist world view' which dominated Western thinking for two centuries.<sup>52</sup> Further modern analyses of his life have revealed that several events of his life were obsessive and problematical. Although in his educational essay *Emile*, his child character was beneficially nursed, his own five children, the progeny of his long-term liaison Therese Lavasseur, were abandoned to a foundling hospital. His relationship to his wet-nurse has also been interpreted as obsessive<sup>53</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 13 for August Claude Le Grand's 1785 engraving of

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<sup>49</sup> Shari Thurer, *The Myths Of Motherhood-How Culture Reinvents The Good Mother*.(New York:Houghton Mifflin Co.,1994). 176

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 177

<sup>51</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 93

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

Rousseau entitled “ *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou L’Homme de la Nature* ”<sup>54</sup>.) His discourse has been subsequently seen as purely theoretical, especially in his own life.

Despite these emerging social theories, with their overtones of patriarchal control, by the middle of the eighteenth century, approximately fifty percent of Parisian babies were sent to a wet nurse, and by the end of the century as few as ten percent were nursed in their own homes. Strangely, by the dawn of the nineteenth century, fifty percent of French and two-thirds of English babies were nursed maternally.<sup>55</sup> This change is attributed to the connection between human and state health. Breasts were metonymically<sup>56</sup> linked to the passage of health (nursing) or corruption (wet nursing).

With the rise of medical science in conjunction with nationalistic aspirations, medical voices introduced notions of the health of the nation being paralled with the health of the family. Fathers were to stand guard as witness to this important maternal function, as “the production of milk . . . was considered too important a matter to be left in the hands of women, given that ‘ most Mothers of any Condition, either cannot, or will not undertake the troublesome Task of suckling their own Children’ ”<sup>57</sup>

Feminist analysis dictates that the women and their bodies involved in this debate are examined in context. How did the commodification of the child feeding system affect their lives? It is obvious that the lower class women sold their milk, but what of the cottage industry initiated by this system which brought a small income into the home? The more wealthy class further undermined the economic basis for the lower class. This female commodity was at the whim of male philosophers and social reformers, and not influenced by the women themselves. The more wealthy women were forced to conform to their culture even if they desired to nurse their own babies. They were required for social duties and sexual services by their husbands. When religion and science joined to enforce the social mores of the time, any exercise of female control and personal wishes was lost.

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau or The Natural Man

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>56</sup> Defined as the use of a part to represent the whole. e.g. using the breast to represent the health of a society or it’s membership

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 107

Issues of race intersect when slaves were used for wet nursing, and their breasts and potential lactating abilities were extolled on the auction block. (See Appendix 1 fig.14 for an 1850 daguerreotype depicting breasts as property.) It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the techniques of Louis Pasteur enabled bottle or hand feeding to become a safe alternate.<sup>58</sup> This introduced another issue that became problematic between babies and their mothers, and the world of commerce.

Nineteenth century thought around breast-feeding is reflected through the words of American psychologist and child-raising specialist G. Stanley Hall. His work identified those women desiring an education as defying evolution to become moral and medical freaks. According to Hall, if a woman made the choice to be educated, this selfish utilization of a life meant for her descendants, would have a predictable outcome for her descendants. “First, she loses her mammary function. . . .” lactation is seemingly directly related to a ‘natural unselfish womanly quality.’<sup>59</sup> But not, it seems, to education.

During this same period of time, Arabella Kenealy, M.D., believed that the educated or ‘mental’ female would sustain not just a loss of function, but actual breast loss. Her bony, angular and breastless body would then have to be augmented by the skilled dressmaker.<sup>60</sup> The ‘real’ woman became ‘unnatural’ and therefore in need of artifice to disguise her deformity. Apparently, having breasts conferred reality to women.

The twentieth century brought debates regarding control of women’s bodies, appropriation of maternal functions, issues of sexuality, fetal and infant rights, medical issues of nutrition and the ultimate purpose of the human breast were being constantly brought before the public. Anthropologists such as Desmond Morris and Lila Abu-Lughod have written their observations and conclusions on this topic.

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<sup>58</sup> Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood*, 219

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good. 150 Years of The Experts’ Advice to Women*. (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 129

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

Morris claims that the female bosom is “predominantly a sexual signaling device, rather than an expanded milk machine.”<sup>61</sup> His arguments are twofold, since the human mother must actively participate in the latching mechanism for the baby to be able to suckle, and since the baby suffocates due to the unnecessarily large breast, he reasons that breast function was not primarily for this purpose. Other mammalian females suckle their young with smaller breasts that shrink when no longer in use. These smaller breasts do not seem to play a part in sexual activity, as do those of the human female. His reason for our larger breasts is to transfer the attention of the male from the back to the front of the female by mimicking buttocks. This facilitates face-to-face mating, rather than rear entry. Face-to-face mating contributes to pair bonding, necessary for two-parent support of the infant.

Morris also states that emerging sexual signals indicating readiness to mate include body hair, breasts and body shape. He also concludes that underarm hair and odor bond the male while in the frontal mating position.<sup>62</sup> The modern North American female would probably not agree as standards of personal hygiene have changed. His claims seem blatantly sexist and essentialist to many readers including myself. His reasoning seems to designate the human female as a sex toy for men, even to the point of downplaying her role as mother. His words remove a part of our ‘essential’ anatomical role, only to increase our role as sexual partners.

Lila Abu-Lughod writes of Bedouin society, and despite the reluctance of Bedouin women to discuss their sexuality, their philosophy for breast feeding children is reflected. Although most children are breastfed, this society believes that boys should be breastfed for a longer period. Breast-feeding is seen as an ‘indulgence’ and will make girls ‘willful’; boys should be indulged in order to “gain a sense of power, rather than weakness, in interactions with others.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1984). 87

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>63</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments. Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 109

Willfulness is seen as an asset for male children and not for girls. They seem to be treated with equal love and respect in childhood and admiring tales of willful girls are told by women in private. The conditions of appropriate female willfulness seem to be different from those of their male relatives.

This study was done using the feminist principles of participant observation, while Desmond Morris has extrapolated data from his observations of lower species of mammals. His type of biased research has been identified as being non-beneficial to women.

Contradictory messages about breast-feeding seem to be inherent in our present culture. The advantages of proper nutrition for the child are clouded by our discomfort when faced with a nursing mother in public. Does this violate the still present boundaries between public and private spaces? I would argue this to be the case from my position of personal and participatory research

Although responsible mothers want to do their best for the child, they are caught up in the image of the breast as an erotic object. Their husbands, family and friends may be uncomfortable witnessing their nursing. This may result in transferring to formula rather than risk being excluded from their social network. This presents more of a problem for shy or inexperienced mothers rather than for the mothers who are confident in their sexuality. Breast-feeding can excite feelings of pleasure and sexual arousal, which causes apprehension and feelings of guilt or disgust in some women.<sup>64</sup> If pleasure was derived from sexual activity prior to motherhood, these feelings may be accepted and enjoyed.<sup>65</sup> My personal breast-feeding experiences support this situation and the sensations were totally unexpected. Husbands play a

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<sup>64</sup> Germain Greer, *The Whole Woman*. (London: Anchor Publishing, 2000) 60

<sup>65</sup> Jane Price, *Motherhood. What it Does to your Mind*. (London: Pandora Press, 1988) 61



role in supporting breastfeeding. If they feel jealous or undermined, husbands can apply subtle negative pressure to terminate the process.<sup>66</sup>

A nurse lactation specialist gave me an interview. Her research name is St. Agatha, in memory of the patron saint of nursing mothers. Agatha explores how the erotic image of breasts makes the functional image harder to accept, as well as offering a practical solution that she recommends to her clients. In the first half of the quotation she is referring to a specific First Nations, in the second she refers to her pre-natal classes for all couples. The technique described is taught to prepare the nipples for lactation, but also is a good way to actively involve the other parent, which hopefully helps to defuse sexual jealousy.

What happens is that the breast [is viewed] as belonging to men. This is a patriarchal society until the women reach about 40 at which point I guess they are not all that interesting to the men anymore and men turn to younger women. I am not too sure but the women seem to *take back their breasts*. . . .<sup>67</sup> You don't want to use soap on the nipples when you are pregnant. . . . Getting the husband to rub the nipples, roll the nipples, this is great or you can get him to you, you know.[suck on them] I mean this works well with love making. You know because the one thing in our society is breasts, like I said before have a sexual function. Breasts are something that please both the man and the woman just by him stimulating them. We have this fixation with breasts.<sup>68</sup>

The historic transference of the nursing breast to an image of eroticism is easily pinpointed by this story of Agnes Sorel. Jean Fouquet depicts Agnes, the mistress of Charles V11 of France, in a traditional Madonna pose in the second half of the fifteenth century. Her breast is presented as an erotic object, certainly not for the child, who seems to be looking and pointing elsewhere. I propose his mother is standing close by to ensure his cooperation. (See Appendix 1 fig.15)

Today, peer pressure, including lack of support from the grandmother may also initiate transference to the bottle. Fashionable theories influence maternal decision making and subsequent changes in these theories promote feelings of confusion and guilt in both parents.

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<sup>66</sup> I bid., 61

<sup>67</sup> Italics mine

One of the proposed solutions is to create a safe place for women to learn to nurse, to receive support from other women, and to discuss problems and sexuality issues. Assistance and teaching must be in a caring, confidential and trusting manner. Agatha recognizes this need for women to share their knowledge, and has set up her program to reflect her beliefs both in the hospital setting and in the various communities served by our region.

I don't own whether women breast-feed or not. Some people find that is very difficult believe. You know some people say 'well, you are a lactation consultant so therefore every woman you see, you must insist they breast-feed' and that is not true. I am looking at how women feel comfortable with themselves and with their body and some women are not just comfortable to put the baby to the breast. Sometimes it is a sexual abuse issue that they are unaware of. Sometimes it is just that they are not comfortable handling their breast, and there is sometimes other things going on in their lives. This is just not something that they want to do. We can't own what women decide and what they do with their bodies and that may be what this whole thing is about. . . . breastfeeding is a woman's right. I would add to that. Breast-feeding is a woman's right to choose. She doesn't have to choose breastfeeding. We don't want to make women feel uncomfortable if they choose not to and we need to not get censorious about the bottle feeding mother. What we need here is nurturing.<sup>69</sup>

Although Agatha proposes 'choice' for women, at the same time she acknowledges that the context of real life, the intersections of race and class added to the pressures of a sexist patriarchal society, play a restricting role in the exercise of this option. Social conditions may refute the exhortations of the 'experts' to nurse, by creating an atmosphere of disapproval for women nursing in public. The image of a mother nursing a child, particularly an older child does not fit with our society's preoccupation with the breast as an erotic object. The cultural definitions of appropriate behavior in public and the demands upon the time and bodies of women are factored into their decisions.

Working class women may be obligated to resume earning for their family as soon as possible. Some women may not have the time required to nurse due to other children and other tasks that extend their long day. Although negative connections have been made between

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<sup>68</sup> St. Agatha, interviewed by author, 21 may 2000

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

formula promotions and infant mortality in developing countries, the incidence of poverty and associated poor sanitation has not been addressed. Commercial formula must be made with boiled water. When the water is already contaminated and the access to a safe preparation area is reduced, sick babies are the result. It is, however, too simplistic to tell the mothers to return to breastfeeding as they may have to work outside the home for economic reasons.

Pam Carter introduces issues of both class and race when she states: "But perhaps there is just a hint of romanticism, even a touch of racism, in believing that third world women should be enabled by first world feminists to carry out their breast-feeding duties."<sup>70</sup> Agatha presents her point of view: "the people who are poorer in our society can least afford to feed their children formula so their children are going to be the ones who suffer from malnutrition more [with mothers] cutting formula."<sup>71</sup> She uses this as a pro breast-feeding argument without acknowledging the extent of poverty among women in all countries. Agatha presents an informed *medical* (feminist ?) gaze, while Carter develops an academic, almost theoretical view of breastfeeding, poverty, and maternal/child health issues.

Plans to encourage choice for women must also consider issues related to class. Poor women feel that women in a better financial position would bottle feed, and subsequently attempt to be scientific and enlightened. Black women are also seen as being 'resistant' to the practice of breast-feeding, but again the context of their lived reality is not that of middle class white feminists. Agatha also points out that although the practice of breast-feeding may have decreased in the lifetime of a young woman's mother, her grandmother may be able to teach, support and be proud of her granddaughter's efforts to suckle her infant. This realization has

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<sup>70</sup> Pam Carter, *Feminism, Breasts and Breastfeeding*, 20

<sup>71</sup> St. Agatha, interviewed by author,

encouraged the traditional respect given to tribal elders in many First Nation's cultures, to be re-instituted. This becomes an advantage to the entire community.<sup>72</sup>

Agatha, with the penetrating analysis of our modern culture, explains how the baby dolls sold to children promote bottle-feeding. The images of motherhood and bottle-feeding become linked in our consciousness at an extremely young age.

Bottles are everywhere in our culture. We see bottles being used in advertising on anything to do with babies. There are always bottles. Dolls are sold with bottles.

Well, how are you going to sell a doll with a breast, but you know the thing is that you could sell the doll without anything to feed it, then the child could learn to breast-feed.<sup>73</sup>

Agatha links these types of images with creating beliefs that influence feeding choices for all mothers.<sup>74</sup> These images affect all women, but especially young, less economically advantaged women. Immigrant women may want to assimilate into the new culture, sometimes even to the point of denying the advice of their elders.

The use of commercially prepared baby formula raises issues that feminists must be prepared to answer. Has the devaluation of mother's work been extended to the non-profit production of mother's milk, or have women's lives created a need for such a product? Is refusal to breast-feed a subtle form of resistance to increasing patriarchal control of women's bodies? Has increasing medical technology and the loss of trust in the "doctor knows best" theory, clouded the issue? My personal answer to these questions is yes. Economics, women's resistance and commercialism have combined to create a problematic atmosphere for lactation.

While calling for feminist analysis of the breast-feeding question, Barbara Sichtermann illuminates the 'act of love' between mother and child. The act of breast-feeding produces not only maternal child bonding, but provides ecstatic and serious sexual pleasure to both members

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

of this new couple. The mingling of both bodies and bodily fluids defines the perfect sexual union and the child becomes the second party in the sexual union of breastfeeding.<sup>75</sup>

Sichlermann leads us into the use of breast imaging for nationalistic purposes by noting that during the Nazi period in Germany, women were obligated to nurse for the production of healthy Aryans, and also at specific times of the day and night.<sup>76</sup> This was believed to start the child on a regimented routine that would eventually serve the state.<sup>72</sup> The German Government during WW2 used the traditional image of the nursing mother to fan national fervor. (See Appendix 1 fig 16.)

### THE NATIONALISTIC OR POLITICAL BREAST

Political iconography during Roman times consisted of goddesses and representations of virtues portrayed allegorically, images that depended on the female breast. Images depicting Virtue are indistinguishable from those representing the goddess Roma. An armed Amazon-like warrior figure depicts an active, independent virgin, whose naked breast spoke of wildness and a magical outsider status. Coins from the times of both Nero and Galba bear the more matronly figure of Tyche, but even she bares a breast.<sup>77</sup>

France justified colonization by representing the state as an egalitarian 'motherland' and offered her metaphorical breasts to both black and white subjects. Depiction of a bare breasted black woman being protected by a fully clothed white female, suggested the need for external white control. These images appeared on bank notes of the new French Republic and on those of their colonies. (See Appendix 1 fig. 17) Appropriations of the symbols of femininity were

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<sup>75</sup> Barbara Sichlermann. "The Lost Eroticism of the Breasts" in *Femininity, the Politics of the Personal*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 60

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>77</sup> Marina Warner. *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985) 280

not a concern during the eighteenth century any more than they are now and breastfeeding was seen as a patriotic duty and a commitment for women.

In 1830, Eugene Delacroix depicted Liberty as a defiant bare-breasted leader, whose upright breasts suggested an urgency aggression essential to the successful conclusion of the uprising. Her liberated breasts represent freedom thereby losing any erotic connotations. (See Appendix 1 fig. 18)

The allegorical female body either wears armor, emblematic of its wholeness and impregnability. . . . or proclaims its virtues by abandoning protective coverings, to announce it has no need of them. By exposing vulnerable flesh as if it were not so, and especially by uncovering the breast, softest and most womanly part of a woman, as if it were invulnerable, the semi-clad female figure expresses strength and freedom.<sup>78</sup>

Liberty's exposed breast stands for freedom rather than the usual erotic invitation. The lowered clothing is an indicator that we are expected to accept an ulterior motive, rather than being introduced to a real woman.<sup>79</sup> The bloodshed and violence of war seems denied by the aloof face of Liberty. The qualities of daring, dynamism, solidarity and sexual attraction are claimed by the French as part of a national character, and so around 1850, Marianne was created as the representation of these traits.<sup>80</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 19 to examine the upright breasts urging soldiers in WW1 on to victory.) Not only does she defy German bullets, she also casually places her hand on a smoking cannon.

Images of partially clad women continued well into the twentieth century with WW 1 Americans illustrating their German enemy as dripping-fanged gorillas, destroying the virtue of both America and women at the same time. This American enlistment poster was duplicated during the Second World War by the Germans to remind their people of their

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>80</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 123

former disgrace with the words 'Never Again' superimposed. Goebbels wasted no time in recycling good propaganda for German use.<sup>81</sup> (Appendix 1 See fig. 20)

It was not until the late half of the twentieth century that women bared their breasts to gain political advantage for themselves. The city of Rome in 1987 saw the bare breasts of La Cicciolina when she ran for parliament. Her successful platform was, not surprisingly, 'say no to sexual oppression'.<sup>82</sup> American women bared their breasts in the nineties to draw attention to women's problems in areas of health care, poverty, violence against women, pornography and sexual harassment.<sup>82</sup> The next image shows a participant in a Gay and Lesbian parade in San Francisco, her hand raised in sign language which translates to: 'I love you'. Her bared chest, with a visible mastectomy scar, screams not only about breast cancer and the millions of its victims, but also about sexist sentiments demonstrated by health care and research funding allotments. (See Appendix 1 fig 21)

### BREASTS IN FINE ART

Male generated images of women, which were produced for their own pleasure, portrayed idealistic and perfectly proportioned female bodies. Greek mythology inspired artists from pre-Christian eras to the present century. Shifts and changes in perception were demonstrated within cultural and historic frameworks. Kenneth Clark states that the nude as an art form originated in the fifth century with the Greeks, and that the term was created by art critics in seventeenth century Italy.<sup>83</sup> Classical figures were allegorical representations of women as goddess or as one of the virtues. The fourteenth century portrayed the sacred breast including the Madonna. The breast as an erotic plaything for men and a reference point for pure pleasure came during the second half the fifteenth century.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.,130-131

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude A Study in Ideal Form*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1984)

Sandro Botticelli received the commission for *The Birth of Venus* in 1482. (Appendix 1 Figure 22), which illustrates the combination of classical and Christian elements to demonstrate Christian love.<sup>84</sup> (Review Appendix 1 fig. 15 for the *Virgin of Melum*.) Painted around the same time as the *Birth of Venus*, *The Virgin of Melum* marked the point of entry for the erotic breast.

## THE EROTIC BREAST

“The story of Agnes Sorel was both the harbinger of a new era in French history, and the sign of a new social construction of the breast.”<sup>85</sup> During the fifteenth century in England, Henry VI discouraged displays of female breasts as being unseemly. The Italian Renaissance allowed the images of prostitutes and other ‘debased’ women to be painted in the idealistic style, small, hard, high and round. Jean Cousin in *Eva Prima Pandora*, paints disproportionately long torso and legs, and demonstrates the erotic ideal of the Renaissance. Since the breasts were sometimes painted with the same bright cosmetics used for the face, the concept of the breast as being part of the face was introduced. Young women are still fighting this image today. (See Appendix 1 fig.23)

A painting done in the late half of the sixteenth century, in the School of Fontainebleau, illustrates two women at their bath. Both women are bare breasted, but one woman tweaks the nipple of the other. Several explanations for this strange image have been presented. The official explanation was that the woman whose breast is being tweaked is Gabrielle d’Estrees and the other woman is one of her sisters. A second interpretation is that Gabrielle’s nipple is being handled by her replacement, the new mistress of Henry IV of France, Henriette d’Entragues.

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<sup>84</sup> Milli and Geri Diesch, Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), [online] Cited 15 sept.2000 Available from World Wide Web: (<http://www.msc.csuhayward.edu/~malek/Botticelli.html>)

<sup>85</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 49



The hand of a woman on the breast of another, at a time when ownership of the breast was accorded to male lovers and to babies, created a slightly subversive and shocking (possibly homosexual) image for French society.<sup>86</sup> (Appendix 1 Fig.24)

This erotic imagery was evident in a peculiar type of poetry called the 'blazon' and the 'antiblazon'. In this poetry, breasts were both extolled and repulsed as evidenced by the poetry of Clement Marot. The first, the blazon, extols the beauty and attraction of the female breast. The following example was composed in the winter of 1535-36, and is called "The Beautiful Breast".

A little ball of ivory  
In the middle of which sits  
A strawberry or a cherry.

...

For every reason, happy is he  
Who will fill you with milk,  
Turning the virgin's breast into  
The breasts of a beautiful, complete woman.

This admiration and promise is lost when full maturity is reached. Marot's antiblazon called "Antiblazon to the Breast", demonstrates his loathing and misogynistic fear of the innate 'otherness' of women.

Breast, that is nothing but skin,  
Flaccid breast, flaglike breast

...

Breast with a big, ugly black tip  
Like that of a funnel,

...

Breast that's good for nursing  
Lucifer's children in Hell.

...

Go away, big ugly stinking breast,  
When you sweat, you could provide  
Sufficient musk and perfume  
To kill off a hundred thousand.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 75

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 62-3

This breast is not only objectified, but creates fragmentation. It almost seems unrelated to any living woman. The writer glories in his power to cause lactation, then reviles the results of childbearing, breast-feeding and age. His decline and mortality is disassociated from the female, and thereby denied. It is amusing to read as an insult, the 'bad breast' being called stinking, since my anatomical research detailed in chapter four will describe the breast as a modified sweat gland.

The seventeenth century produced artists such as Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Rubens (1577-1640). (See Appendix 1 fig. 25 for the *Venus* as portrayed by Rubens.) These men painted lusty forms, wrinkles and large expanses of human flesh. However, the end of their century saw the return of idealism in the form of Neo-Classicism, which extended into the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth century saw the classical ideal challenged as artists produced more realistic images of women, not only physically, but in their settings and poses.<sup>86</sup> The twentieth century produced women who painted not only in the current style, but represented themselves and their unique vision of femininity photographically. Reconstruction of women's images, lives, and perceptions were underway.

#### NUDITY VERSUS NAKEDNESS

The attempt to differentiate between nudity and nakedness illustrates efforts taken to justify the appropriation of women's breasts for the exclusive erotic pleasure of a hegemonic society. John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, and Kenneth Clark in his book, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, present their individual definitions but also present a difference in perspective. Although Clark's writings date from the middle of the twentieth century and those of Berger at least twenty years later, the effects of Clark's negative word images affected the women of my generation as well as that of my mother. Since the female tradition is to teach and pass on female knowledge through the generations, a fragmented and destroyed self-image becomes a

critical issue. The sense of pride and self-confidence exhibited by my mother and grandmother had a direct influence on my personal estimation of my body.

John Berger states that “to be naked is to be oneself. . . .without disguise . . . .revealing itself.”<sup>88</sup> By contrast, “to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet *not recognized for oneself*.”<sup>89</sup> A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude.”<sup>90</sup>

Berger goes on to explain that skin and hair clothe a nude. The covering of the external surface not only hides the woman within, but also becomes clothing, which negates the definition of naked. A naked woman has no clothes, and can be recognized as a real person. When a naked body becomes a nude it is objectified then offered to the viewer. A body seen by a spectator/viewer can then be used as an object.<sup>91</sup>

He further offers that even if a lover is shown with the nude, her gaze is still towards the viewer, who is her true lover, inviting sexual knowledge and pleasure.<sup>92</sup> It is fascinating to realize that the removal of body hair on the nude desexualizes and negates a possibly dangerous female physicality. How does this relate to the Western practice of bodily hair removal? Emphasis is now placed on the cranial hair, which must be clean, luxurious and available to be part of a lover’s facial caress.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve serves to illustrate this difference again. After eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness (no clothes) and covered themselves. Their ability to see themselves had changed; therefore, nakedness was created in the mind of the beholder.

The second striking fact is that the woman is blamed and is punished by being made subservient to the man.  
In relation to the woman, the man becomes the agent of God.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54

<sup>89</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>90</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 48

John Berger recognizes the historical influence of images on the construction of femininity, and his deconstruction encourages our recognition and reconstruction.

Kenneth Clark, an English art critic, gave a series of lectures in a graduate seminar on the topic of the nude, and his observations are prolific, derogatory to artists, extremely misogynist. He defines naked as having no clothes, being embarrassed and defenseless. The nude however, is a re-formed or perfect body presented to an appreciative audience. This image, although naked, represents the central subject of the art world and as such expresses our highest ideals and aspirations.<sup>93</sup>

The Greeks perfected the nude in order that a man might feel like a God, and in a sense this is still its function, for although we no longer suppose that God is like a beautiful man, we still feel close to divinity in those flashes of self-identification when, through our own bodies, we seem to be aware of a universal order.<sup>94</sup>

Although Clark no longer sees God as a beautiful man, to illustrate his descriptions of women I offer these quotations, “the deplorable body of a middle aged female . . . there are more women whose bodies look like a potato. . . the shape to which the female body tends to return is one that emphasizes its biological functions. . . Aphrodite is always ready to relapse into her first vegetable condition . . . the pitiable inadequacy of the flesh. . . Rembrandt and his painful visions of human nakedness.”<sup>95</sup> After reviewing Clark’s comments on the ugliness of the real female form, I wonder why he lost his belief in God being a beautiful man. He was certainly able to distinguish the nude (perfect and idealized) versus the naked (real and disgusting) images of women.

In the eighteenth century art critics and artists were able to convince the public that a nude was acceptable art, while condemning the more base (erotic) purposes of the image of a naked

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<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude A Study in Ideal Form*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 3

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 370

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 93, 388

female. That is not to say that Clark, 200 years later denies any erotic satisfaction as being possible from this idealized female form. While extolling the need for the idealized nude, he cannot ignore the erotic reactions inspired in men while viewing the nude. To deny any response, no matter how faint, he says would be “bad art and false morals.”<sup>96</sup>

Instincts cannot be sublimated when a real nude is seen, but obviously repugnance can be generated when viewing the nudes of Picasso, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Rodin, Donatello, Cezane and Rouault.<sup>97</sup> This is an amazing assortment of painters whose nudes were demoted by Clark to being inappropriate images of women.

Clark also devalues and dismisses Japanese prints that are expressions of life called *ukiyo-e*. These scenes include intimate details of life, and would probably be seen today as feminist representations of women in their life context.<sup>98</sup> These scenes are of women washing children; washing their own genitals, and in conversational groups which include their children playing around them.<sup>99</sup> They are all either nude or partially clad, but since these images are not offered to the male for his erotic possession, they become mundane and worthless in Clark’s opinion.

Although a thorough treatment of artists and their work is not within the scope of this paper, I would like to direct the reader to Pablo Picasso’s *Woman with a Bird*. Picasso (1882-1973) contributed to the visual fragmentation of women in art, and has been defended by critics as trying to break away from the idealized classical image of the nude. Kenneth Clark calls his work a scarcely resolved struggle between love and hate.<sup>100</sup> I cannot see myself in his savage distortions and deformations of women’s bodies, nor am I able to appreciate his works. I notice that Picasso uses the breast as a signifier for the feminine, even where the breasts are misplaced, misshapen or singular. (See Appendix 1, fig. 26)

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 361,251,338

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 342

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 343

Edouard Manet (1832-1883) startled the art world and his Victorian contemporaries, with two paintings in 1863. *Picnic on the Grass* and *Olympia* imaged nudes who returned the gaze of the viewer/painter/spectator. (See Appendix 1, fig.27 and 28) *Picnic* shows a female nude seated with fully clothed males and is suggestive of carnality. This opened the door for the erotic stimulation of the viewer. *Olympia* stares out at the viewer, challenging not only his gaze, but also challenging the pretext for the nude genre. She seems to blatantly remind the viewer that this body is for sale. Her defiant gaze seems to control and dominate the image while informing the viewer that she sets the tone of the negotiations for any use of her body. This is the start of the demonstration of female resistance, and I am still in awe that this image was painted by a male over 100 years ago.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY AS ART AND AS RESISTANCE

The photographic works of Cindy Sherman and Sabrina Ovesen illustrate modern resistance to male dominated art culture. Photography is a new way of seeing. Photographic images surround us so completely, that we almost don't see them anymore. Or that's what we would like to think. The shift from the artist as the creator of unique images, to producing images of existing forms that reflect and reinforce the production of cultural ideology is perhaps the most dramatic and clearly defined aspect of post-modernism.<sup>101</sup>

The work of Cindy Sherman sharply illuminates the false sense of reality and truth normally associated with photography. Her work shows the construction of female stereotypes. By photographing herself, complete with props, makeup, and by becoming both photographic subject and photographer, she deconstructs images from the past and present. She forces us to see more than one meaning in her work by making the stereotype obvious, and that helps us to

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 361

<sup>101</sup> Refer to p.4 for definition of post-modernism. The artist no longer has sole possession or ability to reflect the world, but now produces images that either reflect or support existing cultural ideologies, for better or worse.

identify and defuse the real message of control. We are forced to analyze the conventions of truth surrounding media generated and male generated images of women.

Sherman presents images of the familiar; the clothing, settings, and gestures that mimic the false mirror of existing representations of women. The complicity of photography in perpetuating false images is inherent in her work.

Her women are always passive, slightly tragic, emotionally distraught, objectified, confused, foolish. Because they exist alone in the images, the women appear trapped waiting to be released. In highlighting the subjective focus of these familiar-looking characterizations and images Sherman is able to reveal the shortcomings that such views of women perpetuate.<sup>102</sup>

The erotic image of Agnes Sorrel in Appendix 1, fig.15 has already shown the false maternal image as depicted by 14<sup>th</sup> century painters. Cindy Sherman in her *Untitled 216, 1989* repeats this image but allows the false breast and distantly held child to further display misogynist notions of motherhood.<sup>103</sup> (See Appendix 1. fig.9) Another popular nursing Madonna –style stereotype is undermined in *Untitled #178, 1990*. (See Appendix 1 fig. 29.)

In this image, the obviously false breast being presented to a doll, along with the caring gaze of the mother, illustrates the objectification of both child and breast. Angela Smith quotes Judith Butler from her text *Gender Trouble* as remarking: “There is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects”.<sup>104</sup>

Sherman has her critics, most notable being the American Art critic James Gardner, who reviews much of Sherman’s work, praising only her early black and white images. This excludes *Untitled#146, 1985*. He describes her breast prosthesis as being typical post-modern fakery. Her ridicule of the stereotypical feminine genie is called a ‘doctored image’ as

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>103</sup> Angela Smith. *Kristeva, Sherman, and the Maternal Body*. Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2000. Available at: <http://english.cla.umn.edu/Visiting/MJanette/Installations/Angela/Sherm5.htm>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1

compared to the truth of modern imaging. (See Appendix 1.Fig.30). Her descent' into color has become problematic for him and he infers that she seems to "be undergoing a profound multiple personality disorder and to be recording for the camera each stage of her psychosis"<sup>105</sup> He sums up her work as being self-gratifying and exhibitionist. Her secret agenda is to have men admire her body, thus pleasing herself before her audience.<sup>106</sup> Gardner does not seem to appreciate the feminist deconstruction or self-stated interpretation of Cindy Sherman's work.

Another photographic artist, who uses her own body as the subject, is Sabrina Oveson.

Oveson likes to challenge the subject/object dichotomy. Like Sherman she uses her own body as photographer's model, but without props. Her body is offered to the viewer, naked, wrinkled and folded, blemished and voluptuous. No excuses are made and the use of black and white films emphasis the reality of female flesh. Many women find this exposure to be painful, embarrassing, and perhaps even difficult to view.

A request to become a model for Oveson might meet with fear, as our culture negates age and average body weight. This perpetuates media representations of unnatural and unrealistic expectations of body images for millions of women.<sup>107</sup>

A naked female body on display can be viewed as a passive object and to contradict this perspective, I have intentionally chosen a vertical format and created attention to the touch. Also, by actively participating in the image-making by using my own body, I cannot help but challenge the history, codes and tradition of female images. The emphasized skin surface displays scars, blemishes and wrinkles; this is not an innocent body without history, but a person who has experienced life. . . .The aging, imperfect body can be associated with corruption, loss of sexuality and decay. Through this exhibition of photographic self-portraits I want to encourage pleasure in viewing a woman's body that is not a limited icon of masculine heterosexual desire.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> James Gardner. *Culture or Trash? A Provocative View of Contemporary Painting, Sculpture and Other Costly Commodities.*(New York:Coral Publishing Group, 1993) 180

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.,179, 181

<sup>107</sup> Annette Schroeter, Foreword to Exhibition Catalogue *Sabrina Oveson Self-Portraits* (Prince George: Art Gallery,1999)



When I interviewed Sabrina, she wanted her name used in her quotations. She felt her words and images belonged to her and although she was more than willing to share these with me, she did not want anonymity. Now is a good time to examine figures 31 and 32 in Appendix 1. Figure 31 shows the gaze of the viewer being imaged by the subject of the photograph. This is a nice turn of convention and a feminist statement of resistance. There is a camera located at both sexually charged areas of her body that makes definite her point. The area of subject as object is being neatly illuminated and defused. Figure 32 shows the plastic female torsos used for cake decorating, being held to her breasts. This challenges the ideology of perfect breasts by placing the plastic/perfect doll torsos next to Sabrina's real but culturally imperfect breasts.

When asked about her motivation for producing these images, Sabrina said:

I was at a particular age. I was quite a bit older than most of the other students, into my thirties, had gained weight and it was almost like I was being written off sexually. How dare you! It was sort of a defiance thing, how dare you write me off sexually and say that my body isn't beautiful or perfect. . . . it was defiance because a lot of the photographs that were being made were in the art school tradition of nude photography. It is a certain type of body, and that was O.K., but you didn't get to see photographs of other types of bodies.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps it was her age, or inherent feminism that gave her the courage to give her anger a voice, but Sabrina says that she was inspired to do self-portraits by seeing the work of John Coplan. He was in his 60's with an aging body and she saw him as being brave and honest. Her work does not have a high commercial value yet, and Sabrina says "no-one is going to want to hang it over the top of their sofa".<sup>110</sup> I disagree; one day Sabrina may be hailed as an important artist who challenged the status quo. However, many women feel uncomfortable

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<sup>108</sup> Sabrina Oveson, Artist's Statement Exhibition Catalogue *Sabrina Oveson: Self-Portraits* (Prince George: Art Gallery, 1999) 24

<sup>109</sup> Sabrina Oveson, personal interview, taped by the author, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2000

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

with such honest representations of our bodies, and feminists may add to the confusion. Sabrina says, "there are some feminist artists who believe that you shouldn't even be showing the female body at all. It is just playing into the [heterosexual] game by depicting the body."<sup>111</sup>

These feminists are also trying to fight the essentialist theory that woman as a category is defined by her anatomy. Anti-essentialists focus on difference and would approve of Sabrina's work. Social constructionists would have difficulties here because, if the category 'woman' is a social construction, then by eliminating social constructions you could eliminate both the category and women's problems at once. Sabrina is engaged in tearing down social constructs of woman as an erotic possession of men, but is reconstructing the image to be real and more representative of female experience.

This chapter has focused on representations of women's breasts as the functional or breastfeeding breast; the breasts being used for political purposes; and the images generated by the world of art. These images have demonstrated the appropriation of the breasts by others. Modern resistance, which exemplifies the acquisition of a new awareness of the control contained within many images, is seen in the works of women especially within the medium of photography. Images generated by more modern methods such as the media and medicine continue my exploration. To examine these images of women I move on to chapter four.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE COMMERCIAL, FASHIONABLE AND MEDICALIZED BREAST

The purpose of chapter four is to examine images of women's breasts as portrayed by the popular media, advertising firms, fashion leaders and the world of medicine. Not only does a modern medium generate these images but also they lead into each other. The commercial breast is used either to sell products, or sometimes to sell their owner. This leads into garments designed to maximize or create a specific image, leading directly into health problems. Corsets and the modern equivalent of binding bras are still suspected of having an adverse effect on women's breast health. When media or medicine focuses its gaze on a particular area of the female anatomy, women respond by viewing their own body as being comprised as parts. Parts which must be made to conform, be properly dressed or adorned, and be subjected to the particular and intense gaze of the medical fraternity. The ongoing question of cause and effect reveals the subtle pressure women confront every day. Images, narrative and the words of John Berger will continue to be used to illustrate my position.

Women's bodies, especially breasts, are used to sell commodities by accessing the blatant appeal of sex. Seemingly unrelated objects, from automobiles to zebras are linked with the female body, offering pleasure and promise to the purchaser. The beauty of the idealized female form, coupled with the item for sale, promises the purchaser prestige, status, and the envy of friends and associates, irresistibly combined with the promise of sexual success. Women, it is implied, especially this type of desirable, high status female, will rush to be with the viewer. Her high profile sexuality hints of power, yours to possess and flaunt. Men are measured by their possessions; the same way women are measured by their bust size. (See Appendix 1, fig.33 for a literal view of measuring up, demonstrated on a 1950 U.S. postcard.)

It is my aim to explore the relationship of women as both buyers and sellers in the breast market. To do that I will use images of breasts in the world of commerce, fashion and medicine.

Images that we 'see' without 'seeing'. Images so pervasive and common that we take them for granted and assimilate them into our unconscious. We then create false definitions of 'normal' and 'beauty' that create negative self-perceptions. They, in turn, create far-reaching consequences that extend into our adult lives.

These areas of breast image production intersect and overlap each other, and since the modern reproductive techniques available create a new and extensive audience, I decided to create a new chapter separate from those images generated by historical paintings, literature or art forms. Areas such as pornography and erotica, including lesbian definitions of the latter; the influence of the Internet; the relationship between breast cancer, the bra and the definition of normal; issues in mammography; body adornment, and breast displays in prostitution are explored.

John Berger offers a deconstructive analysis of the relationship between images generated by fine art and the media, and the hidden issues of pleasure, envy, glamour, and happiness being successfully accessed by the retail market.<sup>112</sup> Berger's words are used to illustrate my thesis that the images of breasts being produced today are as powerful and pervasive as the historical images already considered in previous chapters. The effects on modern women through advertising, the dictates of fashion and the intervention of medicine are objectifying and destructive to women of all ages. Seeing ourselves begins in the cradle and continues throughout our life. Our self-esteem predicts our behavior, with positive commercial results and occasionally negative personal outcomes.

Medicine has capitalized in this era of media-influenced body image by providing the tools to re-make or sculpt the perfect body. This creates the 'Official breast', which conforms to a culturally generated standard of normalcy and beauty. Plastic surgery, as well as the medicalization of normal breast growth and size, provides fertile areas for analysis. Images, interviews and the correlation of feminist literature with medical definitions of 'need' are

presented in this chapter. Breast images as produced by Diagnostic Medical Imaging Departments are offered, along with a comparison of different available imaging modalities.

### THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Carolyn Latteier compares our cultural obsession with the breast to a form of fetishism. She defines fetishism as a sexual fixation; the transference of sexual power from a person to an object or a person whose sexual practices place them outside of 'normal' and into the category of 'deviant'.<sup>113</sup> Taking these definitions a step further creates political fetishism. Karl Marx wrote about "commodity fetishism in capitalist societies"<sup>114</sup> suggesting that the replacement of value from the worker to the product was creating a power displacement. Objects now held the power rather than the people who labored in the creation of that object: "This object obscures and replaces social relations".<sup>115</sup> The reality of long shifts in factories, with the attendant physical and mental cost to the workers, is not reflected in the sleek packaging of a new car. Freedom, prestige, sexuality and an improved sense of self, are the messages sent to the consumer. Beautiful bodies, especially beautiful body parts, become so entwined with the product that it becomes difficult to separate them. Advertising has put sex and sales together so completely that women have been forced to relinquish ownership of their own body.

However, as Berger points out to us, the poses of women used in commerce are stereotypes: the good mother, housewife, mistress, secretary, perfect hostess (spectator-owner's wife/woman?), or sex object.<sup>116</sup> But what about the 'new liberated woman'? Increased visibility of women is used to proclaim the era of post-feminism. But visibility is not reflected by statistics of women having equal representation in the real world of business and commerce. Even where

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<sup>112</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 129-154

<sup>113</sup> Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998) 114

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

<sup>116</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 138

the majority of workers are female, e.g. healthcare, the management teams are predominately male. Berger sums up the issue of visibility in advertising contrasting with the real world:

Publicity [advertising] turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world. Publicity adds up to a kind of philosophical system. It explains everything in its own terms. It interprets the world.<sup>117</sup>

To extrapolate these words into a feminist perspective is not too difficult: we are still oppressed even if we look great in the advertisements.

I remember my family buying a new car in the late 1950's. What I cannot remember is at whose request I posed with the car for a photograph. Did I enhance the car, like the advertisement, or did the car enhance my image? When men pose with their vehicles, it seems to reflect their power. Ownership, mobility and the ability to attract women for sexual purposes are the messages being sent. The message sent by the female body, or even a part of her body, is 'buy me'. Buy this product (car, aftershave, credit card, etc.) and get a free girl. (See Appendix 1. Fig. 34)

John Berger offers a thorough discussion of the nature of advertising combined with the appropriation of the female body. Berger explains that reproduced paintings, when used in advertising, often change meaning to the viewer when either situated out of context, or when narrative is added to the image thus changing the original meaning. In other words, what is seen either before or after the image may influence or redistribute its authority<sup>118</sup>. The claims of feminists that existing philosophy, history and other representations of culture are exclusionary towards women are supported by this same problem of context. The experience and knowledge of women as developed by our unique life situation, or simply put, our life context, has not been acknowledged or considered important. To realize that the meaning of a picture may be distorted

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 149

or lost when presented in different context illustrates our position clearly. For example consider the seemingly innocuous *Sears* catalogue. When I was a child I spent many hours poring over the images of women in bras. So did my brother. But where I was picking out a body (shape) for myself, he was picking out his dream girl (body). We were both forming the cultural definition of normal and desirable that shaped our self-image and our relationships with others for the rest of our lives.

Therefore, it can be taken further, that a group or classes of persons, who do not see themselves reflected in recorded history, do not develop a sense of identity and purpose. This is one of the pressing problems of feminist scholars and artists, and lends credence to my thesis that the objectification of any part of a woman's anatomy will lead to a sense of invisibility for the whole. Being separated from our breasts for commercial reasons raises issues of ownership and control.

### THE COMMERCIAL GAZE

To explore my thesis in the area of commerce, I will compare two highly commodified women, both in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who became sexual icons. Marilyn Munroe and Madonna both women became sex symbols; both used their anatomy as an instrument to obtain their goals, but they are judged by our culture to be different. To find and define this difference will involve images, both photographic and literary. The common bond between these women is that of women selling sex, in opposition to the previous discussion of women's sex being used to sell retail. However, Marilyn is seen as a victim, while Madonna is seen as a very enterprising young woman. In the following unit, sources such as a biography of Marilyn Munroe, the Internet and feminist examinations of Madonna as a cultural phenomenon are explored and analyzed.

### MARILYN MUNROE

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 29

Marilyn Munroe, originally Norma Jean Baker, was born June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926. Her mother, Gladys was single at the time of the birth and listed the father as unknown. Marilyn was never sure of her paternity, and due to financial and mental health problems in her mother's life, Marilyn spent her childhood in a series of foster homes. Marilyn was quoted in her later life as describing her childhood this way:

“The world around me then was kind of grim. I had to learn to pretend in order to...I don't know... block the grimness. The whole world seemed sort of closed to me...(I felt) on the outside of everything, and all I could do was to dream up any kind of pretend –game.”<sup>119</sup>

Marilyn married early for financial support, but soon learned that posing for photographers was easy and fun. Throughout her marriages, she complained that the role of dutiful housewife was boring and did not mesh with her personal desires to have fun and to fulfill her fantasy of becoming a star.<sup>120</sup> Marilyn started off being photographed by the Army as part of the war effort. Women were shown to the troops to remind them that their women were working in factories and farms to support them in their fight for freedom. For Marilyn, this was her stepping stone into fame.

In 1949 she posed nude for a calendar for \$50.00, reputedly to get her car out of the garage.<sup>121</sup> Later, when Marilyn was a big star, a reporter in reference to the nude photos asked her; did she have anything on? Her reply was ‘Oh yes, a radio.’ Norman Mailer interprets this comment as not being a deliberate attempt at humor. He says that “ to lie nude before a photographer in a state of silence was a different condition, and much more naked, than to be nude with the

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<sup>119</sup> The Marilyn Pages. [cited 4 November 2000] Available from World Wide Web (<http://ellensplace.net/mmbio3.html>)

<sup>120</sup> Norman Mailer. *Marilyn*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap Inc., 1972

<sup>121</sup> The Marilyn Pages, ‘Quotes’ 2



protection of sound. She did not have a skin like others.”<sup>122</sup> The difference between naked and nudity is seen as crucial and resonates with Berger’s theories.

Mailer also addresses the model as object /artist as spectator dichotomy: “For if the photographer is usually seen as the artist, and his model as a species of still life, she paints the picture into the camera, she becomes the artist when she takes a pose: she paints the picture into the camera, and few photographers will fail to pay her homage.”<sup>123</sup> Marilyn looks into the camera, engaging the gaze of the artist/viewer, and her gaze, like Monet’s *Olympia*, seems to say: “You can fuck me if you’re lucky, Mr. Sugar.”<sup>124</sup> (Look at Appendix 1 fig. 35 to support this determination). Mailer reduces Marilyn’s humanity by his use of demeaning and disempowering language, and never seems to realize that Marilyn gives her power away with her permission to be objectified and used.

Mailer’s biography offers us facts, opinions, images and a rather love-struck narrative. However, along with the effusive descriptions of her physical beauty, he slips in a few insightful comments about Marilyn and her problems. He clearly details her effects on others, saying she was a cornucopia of delight, a promise of sexual fulfillment as never before experienced, a real woman; the living embodiment of feminine pulchritude. He describes her smile promising to fulfill the need of every human.<sup>125</sup> The lure for every man was to possess her, and for every female to be like her. Something for everyone, sex became ice cream and Marilyn was the treat of the week.

“Yet she was more. She was a presence. She was ambiguous. She was the angel of sex, and the angle was *in her detachment. For she was separated from what she offered.*”<sup>126</sup> Diana Trilling wrote: None but Marilyn Munroe could suggest such purity of sexual delight. The boldness with which she could parade herself

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<sup>122</sup> Norman Mailer, *Marilyn*, 47

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>126</sup> Italics by the author

and yet never be gross, her sexual flamboyance and bravado which yet breathes an air of mystery and even reticence, her voice which carried such ripe overtones of erotic excitement and yet was the voice of a small child—these complications were integral to her gift. And they describe a young woman trapped in some never-never land of unawareness.”<sup>127</sup>

Mailer bares her dependence on sleeping pills, her facial faults that were corrected by the studio, her hair color change, her running and use of barbells to keep her figure, her ample body size (16), her abortions (12) and subsequent failure to bear children, but manages to reveal as well her humanity and lack of ‘otherness’.

He quotes Elizabeth Taylor as saying, “Get that dyke away from me.”<sup>128</sup> Of course, Liz and Marilyn were in a competition for publicity, but it still seems an odd remark. He continues to give coverage to her failings by telling us that she had two seemingly opposite parts of her personality. He compares her to a calculating computer and a dumb, animal like angel at the same time. “Anyone else who contained such opposite personalities within his body would be ferociously mad. It is her transcendence of these opposites into a movie star that is her triumph.”<sup>129</sup>

Not only do I see her transcendence of her dichotomous personality, but his as well. Marilyn can do nothing to effectively tarnish her image with Mailer. I also like the change in personal pronouns in the quotation. Why the need to introduce a male term of reference while describing a female? Is it an attempt to define her as ‘not other’ or to include her in the nature and rationality of men?

An example of her awareness of her commercial value can be seen in the story told during the filming of *The Misfits* in 1960. Marilyn had to compete with Clark Gable, Eli Wallach, Montgomery Clift, and the larger than life director, John Houston. During a ‘morning after’ scene with Clark Gable, Marilyn lets the sheet slip, exposing her breast to one of the cameras.

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<sup>127</sup> Norman Mailer, *Marilyn*, 16

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 218

The dilemma of using the shot or not eventually came down to the director, who while stating: "I've always known that girls have breasts" did not want the "aesthetic slant of his film to be nudged by her competitive tit."<sup>130</sup> Now we have a new stakeholder: 'the competitive tit'. What was the competition, or what male area being threatened?

## MADONNA

Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone was born to two parents on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1958. She was the third of eight siblings, in a strong Catholic Italian family. Although her mother died of breast cancer when Madonna was six, she still lived with her family in Michigan. In school Madonna was a straight-A student, and cheerleader. Dance classes and hard work resulted in a scholarship to the University of Michigan. After one year, the atmosphere was not to her personal agenda, so Madonna left for New York. Her success is measured by 14 recordings, 4 tours, 16 films and two stage performances. She also produced her own graphically illustrated *Sex* book in 1992. She was married briefly (four years) to Sean Penn in 1985 and since then has produced two children and an additional marriage. She is not beautiful but professional make-up and professional hair care, combined with a slim, culturally acceptable body, creates the illusion of beauty. Her sharp nose and chin have not been altered, nor have the spaces between her teeth been corrected. She ranks third behind Bill and Melinda Gates and Prince William of Britain as a coveted party guest.<sup>131</sup> Those are the facts, but her reputation as a 'bad girl' or as a producer of sometime-offensive lyrics and costumes, needs to be examined more closely.

Madonna generates either love or hate, exposes deep-seated racial and religious conflicts in our society, and has been accused of banality and self-conscious constructionism. She seems to be all of these things, but most interestingly, she has generated academic discourse. Cathy

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>131</sup> Jim Jerome, 'Lady Madonna.' People Magazine, 13 March 2000, 106

Schichtenberg has edited a book of essays that try to define and understand Madonna in the critical light of ideology and perhaps to document or initiate cultural struggle.

“Subcultural identities are. . . . always forged in struggle over and against the dominant. Madonna’s subculturally evocative texts may very well present the conditions for the coalescence and mobilization of identities yet to be pacified within the larger purview of late capitalism . . . .”<sup>132</sup>

Schichtenberg’s collection identifies four areas that highlight different cultural representations in Madonna’s work. The areas are; race and religion, gay politics, identity and representation; (gender representation especially for women) and finally consumerism as practiced by using Madonna’s inauthenticity and reinvention as marketing strategies. Her work, when compared to the work of photographic artist Cindy Sherman, reveals similarities in their refusal to become easily identified or predictable in their commercial representations.

One such essay by Ronald B. Scott reviews the video *Like A Prayer*, discussing the images of a black male statue brought to life by Madonna, a white girl inappropriately dressed for church. This video exposes the myth of the overly erotic black man preying on innocent white females. Madonna presents the moral of the story as ‘making the right choice’, her problem is resolved properly, the black statue returns to its proper place, and the sub-plot of the misapprehension of an innocent black man is resolved. The challenge here is not to interpret the video as condoning or encouraging interracial relationships, but to acknowledge the historically grounded prejudices in the North American culture.<sup>133</sup> The religious overtones in her work have been severely condemned by fundamentalist religions; however, the moral, social and political overtones speak more to the more grounded black religious experience. So, we can see here the public love-hate relationship developing.

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<sup>132</sup> Cathy Schichtenberg, *The Madonna Connection Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities and Cultural Theory*. (Boulder: Westview press, 1993) 3

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

Madonna also raises questions around sexual and homophobic taboos. She was seen with another woman, and encourages open sexuality. She stands for 'outness', the 'bad girl', and allows her different representations to free her from the bonds of a homophobic society. If disguise is the flip side of disclosure, then her ability to fluidly move from one sexual pose to another encourages gays and lesbians to celebrate their identity.<sup>134</sup>

Madonna questions identity, or perhaps notions of femininity and masculinity, as based on dress. Sometimes she wears a man's suit only to disclose a sharply pointed bra, or she may wear a harsh stereotypical parody of femininity and receive harsh critical judgments as a result. Her defiant gender bending could be viewed not just as an assault on our patriarchal system, but as posing the question of what it would be like to live in a society that did not insist on making these delineation's on the basis of gender.<sup>135</sup> "The imagery invoked by Madonna does not . . . reverse power relations . . . rather, it attempts to subvert subjugation."<sup>136</sup>

One of the most fascinating aspects of Madonna's career is its longevity. Her ability to repackage, and re-image herself, seems to say that power, success, manipulation and celebrity are interchangeable terms in her world.<sup>137</sup> David Tetzlaff explains that Madonna has demonstrated two major themes throughout her career. They are "the appropriation and decontextualization of discourses of sexuality and morality and the commodification and exploitation of the realm of the personal in exchange for public power."<sup>138</sup> Madonna would probably agree, and her blatant self-promotion is seen both as an extension of her power, including her clever marketing practices and as an ability to stay afloat in a late capitalist marketplace.<sup>139</sup> Our culture seems to appreciate a successful commodity over human values.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 121-122

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 199

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 233

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 257

Power and visibility are sought by those without power, the marginalized and disadvantaged. Perhaps this is her appeal. Marilyn's appeal was that of a sensuous innocent being sold without her consent while Madonna represents commercial knowledge and salesmanship. So, looking at the question of women selling sex, why are these two women perceived as being different when they both did the same thing?

## COMPARISON

Although their names bear a resemblance in the relationship to Mary the Mother of Christ, their childhoods were spent differently: at home (Madonna) versus in a home (Marilyn). Their careers were both public exhibitions of the female body, but with vital differences. Marilyn portrayed the promise of sex, the stereotypical dumb blond next door, while Madonna has become involved in social issues. Madonna stridently grabs your attention, uses any means possible to transmit her message, even to the point of being considered a slut. It is difficult to imagine Marilyn Munroe grabbing at her crotch, with a grimace of raw power daring you to enjoy sex with her. (See Appendix 1 fig.36 for an image of Madonna doing just that.) Marilyn has been portrayed as being victimized by the male studio system, as being manipulated to create a sensuous persona. However, Madonna is unabashedly in control of the product: herself. (See Appendix 1. Fig.37 to look at an image Madonna created for her *Sex Book*.) Racial and heterosexual conventions are challenged and overthrown. This image can also be interpreted as pornography by some people and is easily accessible on the Internet.

The complicity of both women in the creation of their image can be seen in my research. The question of their difference is this: it exists only in the eyes and hearts of their fans. Both women used sex to sell themselves, and both were successful. The above-board presentation of the Madonna package speaks to changes in society due to feminism, in comparison to conventions created by the restrictive definitions of femininity present in the 1950's. The relationship of these women and their particular situations to my original thesis shows us how the enviable or 'official

breast' has historically influenced the self-image of modern women. The commercial usage of breasts can be further explored in the areas of prostitution, pornography and the much-reviled *Barbie* doll.

## PROSTITUTION

Breasts are not sold in prostitution, but they can be used to attract or advertise the owner's availability. The bared breast, when shown in defiance of the sexual and cultural norms of the day, suggests availability and the owners' willingness to confer sexual favors. Yale tells us that during the Italian Renaissance in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, prostitutes or courtesans supported the state with their taxed earnings. Prostitution was also encouraged in order to "counter the widespread 'vice' of sodomy among homosexual men."<sup>140</sup> The availability of prostitutes was seen to lead all men to a heterosexual orientation, thus eliminating the possibility of a homosexual sexuality.

These women were permitted to stand bare breasted to advertise their wares, and their location in the neighborhood of Castelletto was called the *Ponte delle Tette* (Bridge of Breasts).<sup>141</sup> These women used make-up on their breasts, were obliged to wear yellow veils over them when not working, and were also not permitted to wear pearls. Sumptuary laws define what colors, fabric and ornamentation persons of different classes may wear, also further restrict clothing choices worn while in the presence of their sovereign. Pearls are a symbol of purity and according to San Bernardino da Siena in 1417, and also indicate the morality of the wearer. He did not propose that those persons of debatable moral and commercial intent should reform their lifestyle, but rather that their exterior be altered and proscribed.<sup>142</sup> No surprise is the fact that these women

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<sup>140</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 56

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>142</sup> Adrian W.B.Randolf. "Performing the Bridal Body in Fifteenth-Century Florence." In *Art History*, Jun98, Vol.21 Issue2, 182

flaunted all manner of other costly jewelry between their breasts, including beautiful crosses in their cleavage.<sup>143</sup>

Even if the owner is not using her breasts for marketing purposes, large breasts are often interpreted as belonging to a willing participant in sexual games. Large breasts convey an easy morality and availability to others.<sup>144</sup> Large breasts are fetishized and commodified in pornography in our present culture, with the Internet introducing increased access worldwide. (Such an example can be found in Appendix 1 fig. 38).

The analysis of pornography in this paper is restricted to possible definitions, arguments arising from the production of pornography, and the images generated by the industry. The effects on women resulting from these images are painfully felt in our culture, with anorexia, bulimia and unnecessary cosmetic surgery being identified as direct negative results. Laws and controls such as censorship have entered the debate, with women taking many different positions.

David Frantz quotes Rodger Thompson's definitions of pornography as being:

(i) *Pornographic*, writing or representation intended to arouse lust, create sexual Fantasies, or feed auto-erotic desires. The pornographer aims for erection (at least) in the pornophile. (ii) *Obscene*, intended to shock or disgust, or to render the *subject*<sup>145</sup> of the writing shocking or disgusting. This seems to be the purpose in our period of the use of taboo words or casual descriptions of sexual perversions, and is often a companion of satire. (iii) *Bawdy*, intended to provoke amusement about sex; most dirty jokes, for example belong to this category. (iv) *Erotic*, intended to place sex within the context of love, mutuality and affection; orgasm is the end but the beginning."<sup>146</sup>

Pornography (from the Greek: writing the body) has its beginnings in art and literature, and was usually available only to wealthy men.<sup>147</sup> Post WW2, mass production coupled with

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<sup>143</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*. 58

<sup>144</sup> My experience at puberty and throughout life.

<sup>145</sup> Italics by author

<sup>146</sup> David O. Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis. A Study of Renaissance Erotica*. (Columbus Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1989) 4

<sup>147</sup> Alison Assiter, and Carol Avedon. *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures, The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*. (London: Pluto Press, 1993) 25



advances in telecommunications, created a genre of generally regarded 'cheap stuff' or pornography as opposed to the 'high class' more artistic production of classier, less blatant, less sexually explicit erotica.<sup>148</sup> Assiter quotes Gloria Steinem from *MS* magazine as saying: "Erotica is rooted in Eros or passionate love, and thus in the idea of positive choice, free will, the yearning for a particular person, whereas in pornography the subject is not love at all, but domination and violence against women."<sup>149</sup> So, for me, the issue is now beginning to clarify. If you want to use this type of material, it is erotic. If, on the other hand, you are made fearful or threatened by the material is pornographic.

Pornography depicts explicit sex with women being objectified, abused, vilified and degraded in order to arouse men. It also supports sexism, racism and elitism by portraying women as mindless objects; women of color as animals and women in general as being of lower class. Feminist contentions are that the violence is real, the rape and torture is real and that the smiling female is not really happy to be so used. Also by extension, they argue that such images promote and maintain an atmosphere for violence against women in our society. This brings pornography into being an act or practice, which is abuse. "It turns violence into an erotic spectacle [which] depicts women as dispensable objects, as things, less than human."<sup>150</sup> Susan Cole lists scenarios that would be included in a thorough exploration of porn, one of which states clearly "women's body parts- including but not limited to vagina, breasts or buttocks- are exhibited such that women are reduced to these parts."<sup>151</sup> However, women who are pro-porn are not all necessarily just standing as anti-censorship.

Wendy McElroy argues that the charges made by anti-porn feminists are false. Her argument is based on her own research within the business which denies that abuse is constant, that

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>150</sup> Susan G. Cole *Pornography and the Sex Crisis*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1992) 18, 19

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 98

consensus among the actors and the producer is freely exchanged, and that the workers in this industry feel that they are being degraded and marginalised by feminist anti-porn rhetoric. Her research indicated that it is not a simple oppression of women by the patriarchy, and that women are complicit in and exercising their right to choose their employment. She interviews prominent producers and finds that they are subject to censorship laws which although allowing scenes of mild violence, “ the slapping of breasts and faces was in a legal gray zone.”<sup>152</sup> What is erotic or pleasure producing becomes individual here. I cannot say the image of a breast being slapped is a positive one for women.

I remember as a very young woman, worrying about my nipples because they were not the color or shape of the centerfolds in *Playboy*. My experience with sexually explicit material is guided by my ‘gut’ reaction. If I am horrified or disgusted, then I know that material is not for me, however porn, (erotica?) is not out for me, just selective. Perhaps the problem of not seeing yourself in erotic material produces insecurities with body image, but these images could also initiate fear and dismay in the very young. This type of accidental or unsupervised viewing serves as an introduction to the Internet, which has created the problem of non-parental approved access. Many tastes and needs are reflected by this industry, and the Internet make such material too easily obtainable. I would recommend the reader to both Wendy McElroy and Susan Cole and to the video by Andrea Dworkin.<sup>153</sup> Also recommended is Adrienne Rich and her essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*.<sup>154</sup> These readings give an excellent and through overview of both sides of the pornography debate, while Rich’s essay offers a new perspective on the effects of our heterosexual society.

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<sup>152</sup> Wendy McElroy, *XXX A Woman’s Right to Pornography*. (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1995) 6

<sup>153</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography*.(Princeton,N.J.: Films for the Humanities, Amaya Distribution,1991), video

<sup>154</sup> Try: Henry Abelove, et al. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 666

## PORNOGRAPHY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Lesbian women historically did not see themselves in heterosexual pornographic or erotic material. They saw only the male generated images of woman to woman sex, which were meant for heterosexual men. Stereotypical images of lesbians and gays were being challenged by modern theories of increased awareness of sexual diversity, and in this climate, lesbian and homosexual men started to produce images of their reality and lives. They exhibit "skepticism about the reflective nature of photography, and display a strong interest in subversive strategies of representation."<sup>155</sup> Once again the issue of visibility is brought up. Joan E. Biren, an American lesbian feminist wrote in 1983: "Without a visible identity, we have no community, no support network, no movement. Making ourselves visible is a political act. Making ourselves visible is a continual process."<sup>156</sup> Reclaiming ownership of body image is my main argument. All women benefit from the instigation of exposure/ownership by lesbians, and the works of female artists such as Cindy Sherman, and the collections of lesbian photography are on the edge of change.<sup>157</sup>

Lesbians and gay men see the issue of censorship in the pornographic industry as a serious problem. They have been the first casualties of this war, and thus lose any affirmative images of themselves in the public arena. As discussed earlier while examining the different positions of Wendy McElroy and Susan Cole, ideological feminist conflict became overt over the censorship of pornography. Canadian Customs officials repeatedly targeted a gay and lesbian bookstore in Vancouver British Columbia for trying to import material designated as pornographic. Confusing this issue was the fact that this material was allowed to pass unchallenged to other bookstores, such as *Duthies Books*. This fact was researched as part of

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<sup>155</sup> Tessa Boffin, and Jean Fraser. *Stolen Glances: Lesbians take Photographs*. (London: Pandora press, 1991) 14

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

the book stores defence. Homophobia and sexism combined to create this situation. *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium* took their case to the Supreme Court of Canada, spending 16 years and lots of energy and money to successfully defend their right to access lesbian pornography. The views of anti-pornographic feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon formed the basis for the Canadian Butler Report in Canada in 1992. This report defined heterosexual pornography and provided the means for censoring lesbian and gay publication.<sup>158</sup>

Tessa Boffin quotes Carole Vance as saying:

People deprived of images become demoralized and isolated, and they become increasingly vulnerable to attacks on their private expressions of non-conformity, which are inevitable once sources of public solidarity and resistance have been eliminated.<sup>159</sup>

These words are true for all women. Others have generated our images, for their own uses. All women suffer from loss of public solidarity and our resistance must now become overt. (See Appendix 1 fig. 39 and 40 for female generated erotic images.) Jenny Rains has produced these images on a pornographic Internet site, and are her photographic expressions of lust and female desire.

## BARBIE-THE REAL DOLL

No examination of the commercial use of the breast would be complete without Barbie, the doll who sells at the rate of 2 dolls per second throughout the world.<sup>160</sup> *Barbie™* is the creation of Ruth Handler. She and her husband Elliot were the co-founders of Mattel, and her original inspiration was for a doll who was not a baby doll or companion doll, but would represent every girl's dream of her future. Ruth had bought three German dolls that had breasts, wore

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<sup>157</sup> See: Suzy Bright. *Nothing but the Girl. The Blatent Lesbian Image*. New York: L.P. CinBook, 1996

<sup>158</sup> Ian Stewart. "BAD Attitude(s) on Trial" in *Canadian Dimension*, Sept/Oct97, Vol.31 Issue 5,45

<sup>159</sup> Boffin, *Stolen Glances*, 20

tight skirts and tops and were referred to as sex dolls. But, Barbie was supposed to represent the innocence of teenage America, even though her measurements, when extrapolated up into human size are 39-18-33.<sup>161</sup> Barbie comes with separate outfits for all occasions, homes, automobiles, friends, a boyfriend, careers, and even attitude to demonstrate her up to date image. If little girls love her, parents buy her, fans collect and discuss her, what is the problem?

Barbie does not age, she never has children, never changes shape or nurtures. Her measurements are not only unrealistic, her long legs and torso combined with long arms cause a disproportion that would result in the real Barbie falling down and walking on all fours. Real women are not like Barbie; we age, cry, lose our pubescent shape, and use our breasts (no matter what size) for nursing, and in the giving and receiving of pleasure. Not only do real women come in different sizes and shapes; we also come in different colors, and from different economic backgrounds. The African American dolls have the same body and hair as Barbie, only in a different color. Life for women of color is not that simplistic, and children are being presented with a racist and elitist view of the world. Once again images generated by our culture are unrealistic, being used for profit, and continue to fuel feelings of inadequacy. In trying to connect with my inner child to gauge possible reactions from my own Barbie-less childhood, I feel that I would have liked the pretty clothes. I collected pictures of women in full evening dress, and probably would have loved Barbie too. However, some girls mutilated their Barbies or put them in sexually charged situations. There is a lesbian Barbie site on the Internet. Resistance can be overt, but still command attention.

Barbie doesn't need a bra, thanks to her hard high breasts, even if they are large. However, real girls and women have this garment presented to them as 'natural and necessary' from

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<sup>160</sup> WTN *Herstory*. "Barbie Nation- The Untold Story of the Barbie doll" March 23 2000

<sup>161</sup> Michael J. Weiss, *Toys Were Us*. 'Life in Plastic, it's Fantastic...' Discovery Online Canada, 2000 Available from World Wide Web (<http://www.discovery.com/stories/history/toys/BARBIE/shoulda.html>)

infancy. (To see the differences in women's breasts shown in a humorous manner, see Appendix 1 fig. 41.) Although this illustration was designed to be a bit of bawdy humor, it represents the reality of difference, and the enforced notion of normalcy as promised by the bra structure. Where did this device come from and why do we need it?

## THE BRA CULTURE

In Classical Greek Culture, women wore supporting undergarments called apodemos, which were bands of linen or kid. These bands did not display the breasts, and sometimes even flattened them under the chiton.<sup>162</sup> A short loose dress that draped over the body was referred to in Greek times, as a chiton.<sup>163</sup> During the fourteenth century, or the Renaissance, women's clothing became tighter and necklines plunged. Décolletage had arrived. The rounded belly was still important as the style of breast exposure called décolletage rose and fell in popularity. However, the seventeenth century brought a change in women's posture due to the corset.

The corset, in many forms and degree of physical restriction, defined the female bosom for over two hundred years.<sup>164</sup> During post-revolution years in France, (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) the new sense of freedom and liberty allowed women's breasts to be very lightly covered and with transparent draperies. Sometimes, the scanty tops were moistened with water to resemble the clinging drapery on a Greek statue.<sup>165</sup> This was a definite health hazard for women, but the returning corset gave no respite in the nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw reforms in clothing for both men and women, but came too late for many women who bore the physical deformities and scars from the corset for their entire lives.

Paul Schultze-Naumberg wrote a comprehensive report on the physical dangers of the corset in 1901, which also addressed the cultural pressures on women to use these devices to attain the

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<sup>162</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession*, (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1998) 29

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

desired or 'perfect' shape. He called the overvaluation of large breasts in society 'artificial and decadent'. He detailed deformed inner organs; reduced breathing capacity (resulting in the 'vapors'); disturbances in the digestive system; restricted muscle tone in the abdomen resulting in difficult and dangerous childbirth; permanent scars on the skin; and permanently deformed posture.<sup>166</sup>

By the time the 'flappers' arrived in the 1920's the new look laughed at corsets, but the androgenous body shape required the breasts to be bound. "Ironically, women's new freedom bound their breasts."<sup>167</sup> In 1913 Mary Phelps Jacob, invented the first brassiere, in order to dispense with a boned bodice. In 1913 France, Paul Poivet, claimed to have invented the first brassiere.<sup>168</sup> But the name seems to be a bit of bungled French. Brassiere means an infant's undershirt, and the garment in question is called a *soutien-gorge*. Literally translated, this means "a garment to hold up the throat."<sup>169</sup> Looking at the brassieres (bras) of today, and still questioning their purpose, I think the name suits perfectly.

During the 1950's women wore bras shaped like torpedoes. Breasts were encased in whirlpool-stitched cones, which gave the bust a sharp pointed shape.<sup>170</sup> (See Appendix 1 Fig.42 for my favorite advertisement from that era.) Note the gloved hand on the bull's horn; no subtle phallic image here. (Cindy Sherman parodies this image of the *Maidenform* bra in her self photograph in Appendix 1 fig.43) This bra created those types of problems for me as a young woman, and I resorted to filling the pointed tips with cotton baton. (See Appendix 1 fig.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>166</sup> Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny. A Cultural History of the Human Body*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co.,Inc., 1975) 14-15

<sup>167</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 37

<sup>168</sup> Maggie Pexton Murray, *Changing Styles in Fashion. Who, What, Why*. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1990) 125

<sup>169</sup> Carilyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 37

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 38

44 for one artist's recreation of her young self while trying to produce the acceptable, full bra look.)

## BEAUTY UNDER SEIGE

The 1960's brought a radical new change to clothing, politics, (Black, gay and women's liberation movements), and to world culture. While Rudi Gernreich was designing the 'topless' bathing suit and the 'no-bra' bra in France, women in America were protesting the Miss America beauty pageant of 1968. Although a trashcan was filled with items that fueled the patriarchal image of femininity, no fire was ever lit. The protesters could not obtain a fire permit from the Atlantic City fire department. Items such as make-up, a *Chatalaine* magazine and bras were thrown into the 'freedom trashcan'. The 'bra-burners' were a fabrication. However, good copy overrode accuracy, for the *New York Post*.<sup>171</sup>

According to Candace Savage, breasts of pageant winners were used to sell bras and these perfect women in their perfect bras were used to support the national war effort by visiting wounded soldiers in 1944. She connects the 1968 Feminist Manifesto with identifying this misappropriation of our bodies by stating: 'The living bra and the dead Soldier: We refuse to be used as mascots for murder.'<sup>172</sup> However, the assistance of the bra to help us measure up, is not always enough. Sometimes specific bras with specific abilities to change our natural inferior shape to more a commercially and culturally perfect version of femininity are needed. Bra companies with their sales teams have come to our rescue.

## MEDIA INTERVENTION

Advertising takes away our natural body, re-packages it and sells it back to us. (See Appendix 1 fig. 44). A natural (naked) body does not come with a bra. Exercise tones the female bodies into a tight, slight body, but breasts do not cooperate. (See Appendix 1 fig.45 to show advertising

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>172</sup> Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens, A Playful History*(Vancouver:Greystone Books, 1998) 5



that feeds directly into that fear. Look again at Appendix 1 fig, 46 to see how women are advised to adjust their 'weapons' for a good, better and best presentation.) Germain Greer summarizes the control of uniformity fostered by the bra industry:

About 50 per cent of women have the left breast larger than the right, and 45 per cent of women have the right larger than the left, and about 5 percent have exactly equal breasts. Even breasts that are equal in size do not necessarily sit at the same angle on the rib cage. None of this is important, except to women who, when they see in the mirror that their breasts are not perfectly symmetrical, feel that they are deformed. The straightjacket of the brassiere equalizes, uplifts, pads out and separates breasts into rigidifies pairs.<sup>173</sup>

The bra industry has devised a bra for all occasions, the sports bra (to reduce bounce and jiggle while at play), the decollage push-up bra (for that special occasion), and of course, the training bra. When I questioned young girls about the purpose of a training bra they were unsure. They said: "they are special because nobody else has a bra. You get a bra [and it] makes you feel better. Less like a little kid."<sup>174</sup> Both of them laughed when I asked them why they were in training. Their statements seemed to reflect that a step towards adulthood had been taken.

This notion is supported by Joan Bromberg when she states that "the training that a training bra was supposed to accomplish was the first step toward motherhood and a sexually alluring figure, as it was defined in the 1950s."<sup>175</sup> It seems to still be the "occasion on which a girl acquire the trappings of womanhood."<sup>176</sup>

## BRAS AND BREAST CANCER

The underwire bra, however, has been blamed for blocking the return flow of lymphatic fluid from the breast. Painful, cystic breasts are becoming common, and many women believe that the underwire bra is the culprit. There is an interesting book that links the bra with increased breast cancer incidence, and I would certainly recommend reading this semi-scientific participatory

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<sup>173</sup> Germain Greer. *The Whole Woman*. (London: Anchor Publishing, 2000) 57

<sup>174</sup> Artemis, interviewed by author, June 15,2000

<sup>175</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg. *The Body Project. An Intimate History of American Girls*. (New York: Random House Publishing Inc., 1998) 112

thesis to all women.<sup>177</sup> The perfect breast is for sale though, and will be examined as part of the medical gaze.

Breast adornment however, has always been an option for the innovative. Most people today believe that the 'nipple ring' worn by both men and women, is a new idea. Actually, in the late 1890's, in Paris, the 'bosom ring' was briefly fashionable. The rings were sometimes linked by a small golden chain and kept the nipples in a state of constant erection. It was more common for women to pad their bras in those days, but a foolish few actually inserted rubber under their skin. The medical establishment of that time was outraged, because the true purpose of the breast was being obscured.<sup>178</sup> The opinions of the medical establishment in our own era will be examined during the following examination of medical imaging. Needless to say, their opinions and subsequent definition/ acceptance of the 'medical need' for these types of cosmetic procedures has complied with the commercially viable requests/needs of their female patients.

Marilyn Yalom offers this comment on nipple rings: "Many observers see the nipple ring less as a sign of a stage of life or an erotic adornment, than as a form of bodily mutilation."<sup>179</sup> Women have used the nipple ring to make many statements, from marking a transition from one stage of life to another, to distinguishing themselves from others, to signal sexual availability (but not for procreation at the moment), to including a desire to make the statement of breast ownership. (Appendix 1 fig. 47 images a nipple ring.)

Joan Brumberg has revealed in her research that piercing

"signals your personal politics". If you become an "urban aboriginal" at the end of the twentieth century, it is usually a sign of two things: sexual liberalism (because piercing symbolizes opposition to conventional sexual norms) and cultural relativism (because it evokes the primitive and exotic).<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 22

<sup>177</sup> Sydney Singer, and Soma Gresmaier. *Dressed to Kill. The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras*. (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1995) passim

<sup>178</sup> Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny*, 97

<sup>179</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 203

<sup>180</sup> Joan Bromberg, *The Body Project*, 134

When Demeter was interviewed about her nipple ring she said:

I had my nipple pierced when I was twenty. I had it done because I like piercings. The procedure hurt me at the time but healed quickly and I seldom have any trouble with it. I continue to wear it. [three years later] I have never encountered a lover who wasn't enthusiastic or turned on by the ring. The most common comment from friends is usually related to pain-did it hurt? (As they cringe in imaginary pain and hold their breast.)<sup>181</sup>

Although Demeter mentions her age, she does not say it was a transition time for her. She explains her desire to acquire a nipple ring as part of her pattern of multiple piercing and not as being site specific. She also does not say what it does for her erotic feelings, but perhaps pleasing her lovers is inherent in her expression of her sexuality. Demeter also has adorned her breast with a tattoo and tells me about it in these words:

The tattoo on my breast is only visible if I wear a low cut shirt. I liked the femininity of the ladybug and decided that was a good place to have it. I am still happy about this decision.<sup>182</sup>

I have heard women say 'it is my breast and I will do what I like with it' and I have to concur with the ownership issue. However, for me, the issue of medical problems arising during pregnancy as a result of torn milk ducts, seems horrendous. My age and professional concerns have placed me in a gray area for understanding this phenomenon.

### MEDICAL GAZE

My profession as a mammographer has caused me to study the female breast in anatomical and radiographic detail. The medical gaze or medical imaging continues the traditional fragmentation of body parts, and provides a site for the ongoing discourse of recognition of the whole person. It can also be said of the invention of x-ray in particular (W.C.Roentgen 1895), that this diagnostic tool caused doctors to depend more on the information gained from the sense of sight

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<sup>181</sup> Demeter, interviewed by author, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2000

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

rather than from the traditional sense of touch.<sup>183</sup> The medical gaze has been granted access to the interior of the body without surgical intervention. This access brought the codification, objectification and quantification of the body into parts or fragments.<sup>184</sup>

The content of this last part of chapter three, the medical gaze, will include the anatomy of the breast, images generated by mammography, computerized tomography and ultrasound, along with a brief comparison of these imaging methods. Discussion around surgical interventions such as reduction, and augmentation mammoplasty, post mastectomy breast reconstruction will be presented, as well as the words of women who have engaged with these procedures.

Medical staff see the breasts as two glands located on the anterior chest wall, at the level of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> rib extending to the level of the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> rib. These glands are composed of fat, skin, connective tissue and glandular tissue. They have an arterial and venous blood supply, and are liberally supplied with a lymphatic drainage system. The breasts are covered with skin with a nipple and areola, and extend from the medial margin of the sternum to the midaxillary line. (Appendix 1 fig.49) For the purposes of localizing and mapping areas of breast tissue, the breast is divided into four quadrants and an axillary tail, which extends into the armpit. These glands are modified sweat glands that secrete a thin white substance when stimulated (by hormones), called milk. The glands arise along a 'milk line' or ridge during embryonic life that extends from the axilla to the groin. (See Appendix 1 fig. 50 for the illustration of the milk line.<sup>185</sup>) Usually only two papillae develop at the level of the 5<sup>th</sup> intercostal space. It is possible for nipples to be found anywhere along this line, and are not cause for execution of the patient as a witch. In my practice as a mammographer, I have seen these extra nipples, usually around the base of the breast, and have heard from patients that during lactation (milk-production) they may leak or

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<sup>183</sup> William A. Ewing, *The Body. Photographs of the Human Form*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994) 18

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>185</sup> H. Stephen Gallagher et al, *The Breast* (Saint Louis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1978) 3

become distended. The breasts of the newborn may be swollen at this time and leak milk due to the absorption of placental prolactin. This is still called witch's milk.<sup>186</sup>

The pattern for identifying a normal growth pattern was established by a M.D called J.M.Tanner.<sup>187</sup> Tanner linked age and weight to the status of menstruation and breast growth and formed a reference tool for assessing pubertal changes in relation to the development of secondary sexual characteristics. Although he states that variance is normal, and that irregular growth can be expected, medicine has created a language around breasts that medicalises breast experiences. When combined with our cultural fixation with breasts, trouble soon arises. If your large breasts are called macromastica, or your small breasts are called micromastica, it then seems permissible to correct the 'defect' by surgery. However, before getting into cosmetic surgery, I would like to examine the process of mammography.

## MEDICAL IMAGING

### MAMMOGRAPHY

Mammography is the production of breast images using ionizing radiation. This is done either as a screening or diagnostic service; both being part of a standard breast cancer detection program. As women age, their breast tissue is replaced from front to back with fat. This breast tissue appears white on the film, fat appears black and cancers or benign growths appear white. Microcalcifications (suspicious small bits of calcium) and their relative, macrocalcifications (non-suspicious larger bits of calcium) appear white as well. It makes differentiation of these areas difficult or impossible when the breast tissue is still present as in the breasts of a young (under 40) woman. The inability of the mammogram to distinguish between two areas of tissue

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<sup>186</sup> Ruth A. Lawrence, *Breastfeeding A Guide for the Medical Profession*, (St.Lewis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1994) 267

<sup>187</sup> Henry M. Seidel et al, *Mosby's Guide to Physical Examination*, (St.Lewis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1987) 79

because of their similar densities results in the statistics of 10-20% of breast cancers being missed by mammography.

The images of each breast are read together, back to back, because although breast tissue patterns are individual, they are like each other. Changes in breast architecture are compared this way, and are also reviewed every year looking for interval changes.<sup>188</sup> (See Appendix 1 figs 51 and 52 for normal radiographic breast images. See Appendix 1 fig.53 for a white cancer visible in the breast and see fig.54 for a needle that has been placed within the breast to act as a marker for the surgeon.) This is the pre-operative localization of a non-palpable mammographic lesion.

Breast images in the Diagnostic Medical Imaging Department are not erotic, and are sometimes heartbreaking. As a woman, the mammographer brings a personal perspective into her work. The words of mammographic technologists will be reviewed in the next chapter on survey and interview results.

## ULTRASOUND

An ultrasound of the breast is another imaging modality using sound waves rather than ionizing radiation. The sound waves are sent out from a hand held device called a transducer, which also receives the waves being returned or 'bounced back' from the internal structures. The ability to distinguish between a cyst and a solid lesion is vital to the patient as surgical intervention can then usually be avoided. Mammography may not be able to make that determination and the aspiration of the cyst can be performed under ultrasound guidance. There is no compression required or any radiation exposure so investigations on young women are usually initiated this way. (See Appendix 1 fig. 55 for the ultrasound image of a breast cyst.) The cyst is the black area within the gray tissue. Pain and cyclic swelling of the breast(s) may

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<sup>188</sup> Interval changes occur between screenings. e.g. one to two years

indicate cysts and other benign fibrocystic changes such as adenosis and other inflammatory processes.<sup>189</sup>

Microcalcifications are not demonstrated using this technique, nor is "it reliable in detecting occult, nonpalpable breast carcinoma."<sup>190</sup> Microcalcifications are suspicious for breast cancer because they are often in, or near, a lesion. Their shape, size, number and location are of importance when attempting to make this determination.

#### COMPUTERIZED AXIAL TOMOGRAPHY

Computerized axial tomography, (CT) is the use of a focused beam of x-radiation delivered by a rotating tube that produces images in slices. A computer can reassemble these slices, and the cross-section images are very distinct for location. CT, at this time, is too slow and costly to be used as a screening tool, and is reserved for demonstrating lesions located posteriorly and peripherally in the breast. CT can determine staging of the breast cancer, as it is able to identify metastatic disease in the thorax and axilla.<sup>191</sup> See (Appendix 1 fig. 56 for two CT cross-sectional images of a thorax. The breasts show silicone implants, which are starting to lose their integrity and leak into the breast tissue.

#### MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING

The imaging modality called magnetic resonance (MR) is the use of an extremely strong magnet, which produces the most detailed cross-sectional image produced to date. This new modality is not accessible to everyone, is very expensive, and still not as good as mammography for the detection of cancer. MR has a sensitivity that is too high for the breast, and too low a specificity, possibly resulting in an increased biopsy rate. The image shows too much without

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<sup>189</sup> Carole M. Rumack, and Stephen Wilson, et al, *Diagnostic Ultrasound* Vol. 1 (St.Louis: Mosby Yearbook, 1991) 541

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 541

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 541

being able to differentiate between normal and malignant areas of tissue. It also is not able, at this time, to visualize microcalcifications.

## FROM DIAGNOSIS TO TREATMENT

Taken in 1908, this photograph, (Appendix 1. Fig.57) captures one of the first x-ray treatments being given to the female breast for breast cancer. This is not diagnostic radiology but rather the use of radiation as a treatment method. The patient is horizontal which seems to emphasize her vulnerability, his vertical stance combined with his high hat, seems to re-inforce this image of control versus submission.<sup>192</sup> According to Sigmund Freud, the horizontal plane indicates an animalistic or genital focus, while the vertical indicates beauty, a departure from the earth towards the light. When you can introduce the element of distance into looking, then the carnal desires become sublimated.<sup>193</sup> This photograph illustrates for me the historical power imbalance inherent in the medical system, even today.

A painting called *The Giantess*, by Rene Magritte offers us a fairly recent image to compare with the medical man and his patient. The female image in *The Giantess* towers over the man, and it is his image that seems out of proportion with the accouterments of their setting. (Examine Appendix 1 fig. 58.) The woman is seemingly unconcerned with the tiny male who is looking at her, and control of her body seems to be hers alone. In this case, the vertical woman seems to require a great height to be in control. In contrast, the horizontal position of the woman receiving therapy seems passive and submissive. Struggles for equality are still being made and the history of our images once again establishes this fact. Did I uncover any other images that may have been produced in resistance to the penetrating gaze of the x-ray beam?

(Look at Appendix 1 fig. 59 to see the work of Meret Oppenheim.) This x-ray image has earrings, and other jewelry, which seem to declare the subject female. The issue here seems to be

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<sup>192</sup> Yalom, *The History of the The Breast*, 230



that if no feminine constructs were present, could you tell if this person was male or female? As a radiographer, I know the density and configuration of the skull can determine the sex of a patient and can always be determined by the bones of the pelvis. However, the superficiality of our masculine/feminine constructions is shown with great drama in this image.

Alison Watt has painted a triptych, within which she is comparing her hospital experience with that of a pig in a slaughterhouse. (See Appendix 1 fig. 60.) Both are pink, and hairless. The pig drips into a bowl and the female patient has her head bandaged. She holds an x-ray of her abdomen in front of her body, not hiding behind it, but rather as an offering. She has become a number, a nameless image of her body part. The sheet meant to cover her winds around her ankles, imprisoning her in the medical system. Her reduction to a piece of meat grieves me. As a healthcare worker, this is what I work against. Images need to be shown to the 'imager' as well. Professionals need to be constantly reminded that their 'patient' is a human being.

#### COSMETIC OR CORRECTIVE SURGERY

Cosmetic surgery is considered either an accessible option for many women, or as the frivolous pursuit of a 'perfect' body. If exercise or body shaping bras do not secure the desired shape for you, then the molded or sculpted body is for sale. Plastic surgery represents the branch of medicine that corrects defects and promises to make your dreams a reality. The ability to make breasts larger, smaller or to make corrections in shape and of placement on the chest wall is now a reality.

Breast implants became the most common procedure in cosmetic surgery by the 1980s.<sup>194</sup> Several reasons are identified for this increased demand. First, an excess of plastic surgeons graduated in the United States resulted in an advertising campaign designed to promote easy, accessible and affordable access to their services. This no-money down easy-credit solution to

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<sup>193</sup> as quoted in Rosalind Krauss. *Cindy Sherman: 1975-1993*. (New York: Rizzoli international publications, inc. 1993) 90

the problem of imperfection resulted in the doubling of patients in the five years between 1983 and 1988.

Also, a new generation of professional and working women now had the wealth available to spend. The concept of 'choice' was utilized to reflect their desire to buy perfection as a reward for working hard and taking care of themselves. The strange thing is that often these women keep their implants a secret. By having larger breasts a woman becomes more acceptable to the cultural ideals of beauty, but the flesh changing ritual must remain a secret.<sup>195</sup> I was unaware of this truth until I tried to research this topic. Women were reluctant to talk, or be taped and insisted on strict confidentiality.

The analysis of the breast augmentation phenomena tells us that form becomes more important than function. Looks take priority over feeling. These implants can feel hard to the touch, and may interfere with breastfeeding and mammography. (See Appendix 1 fig.61 for the mammographic image of silicone implants.) The breast tissue is compressed and hidden behind the opaque mass of the implant. Breast cancer detection becomes much more difficult due to the severe discomfort of the examination, and will probably be either neglected or performed improperly. The little publicized complications of pain, hardness, postoperative infection, and decreased sensation as well as the health risks of silicone, do not seem affect the request rate for this procedure. (See Appendix 1 fig. 62 presenting an advertisement for augmentation presently found on the Internet.)

Breast reconstruction using implants after the amputation of a cancerous breast (20% of surgeries) is usually seen as medically necessary for the patient, but the underlying reason of returning 'the appearance of normalcy' can still be questioned. Many women feel that one breast is natural, no breasts can be natural, and it is women dead from breast cancer that is

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<sup>194</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 44

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

unnatural, yet the proper fitting of garments, the heavy alternative of a prosthesis, and the desire to resume a pre-cancerous appearance and existence, all qualify as medical need. These patients are not considered frivolous or as being the stereotypical vain female.<sup>196</sup>

Breast implants are given as graduation gifts as well as prizes. A pub in Vancouver BC ran a contest that featured a \$3,000.00 in plastic surgery prize. At the time of the article, 2,000 entries had been received.<sup>197</sup> I also feel that the allocation of medical terms that signify a 'disease' condition in reference to the growth, size, shape or placement of women's breasts opens the door for 'corrective' surgical intervention. Reduction mammoplasty or the removal of breast tissue is another choice for many women.

Women with large heavy breasts speak of shoulder pain from bra straps, back pain from the weight, poor posture and pain when attempting sports, heat rashes under the breasts and the inability to find clothes that fit properly. The medical insurance plans of all provinces recognize that this is a quality of life issue and cover the surgical costs for breast reductions.

Does the image of a slim female with large breasts reassure these women that what they have been given is wonderful? The reality of excess amounts of breast tissue is not as pleasant as you might expect. Although the surgery is painful, any woman that I have spoken to about this surgery believes she made the right choice, and indeed, would make the same decision again. I am one of those women, and would consider having it done again due to the additional accumulation of breast fat after my mid-life weight gain.

This surgery leaves scars, bruises, sometimes desensitizes the nipple area, and creates an unnaturally round areola. (View Appendix 1 fig. 63 for 'before and after' reduction images obtained from the Internet.) Most women are thrilled with the results, and apparently fondle their

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<sup>196</sup> For an interesting study, I recommend reading: Linda Cook et al, "Characteristics of Women With and Without Breast Augmentation" in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, May 28, 1997-Vol.277, No.20 1612-1617

<sup>197</sup> Southam Newspapers, "Bar's Breast Surgery Contest Drawing Plenty of Attention."

breasts frequently after healing, as part of the assimilation of the new breast into their sense of self and body- image.<sup>198</sup> Even though I would not have verbalized this behavior, I recognize it as my own, both after my surgery and today.

The adjustment to a smaller size and shape is sometimes reflected through feelings of grief and loss. The large breast is sometimes used as a buffer between the woman and her world, and this requires some psychological shifts.<sup>199</sup> Most women, however, are satisfied by their surgery and feel that the post surgical effects are a small price to pay for either reduction or augmentation mammoplasty.

The commercial use of breasts in advertising and sales is a direct appropriation of our bodies for the use of others. Sex stars and cultural icons such as Madonna and Marilyn Munroe have capitalized on this obsession with the female body, especially breasts, to create a successful career for themselves. The question here is why does our society have this obsession? Does the obsession create the consumerist society, or do the commercial productions of our society create the obsession? I believe that the images shown to date have demonstrated that the fascination with breasts is historical and not related to female self-perception.

Images created during the 1950s certainly exploited breasts: the post card pin-up girls were blatantly sexist. The nostalgic remembrance of times past, of *Leave it to Beaver*, June Cleaver and other family sit-coms, neglect the true position of women during those times. Women of all colors, ethnic and economic groups felt the pressure to be the model mother and housewife, while the economic realities were quite different.

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*The Prince George Citizen* Friday September 1, 2000, 5

<sup>198</sup> Marcia Kraft Goin, "Psychological Reactions to Surgery of the Breast" in *Clinics in Plastic Surgery* July 1982 Vol. 9, No.3. 349

<sup>199</sup> Marcia Goin, et al "The Psychic Consequences of a Reduction Mammoplasty." In *Plastic Reconstructive Surgery*, April 19 1977 530-534

Images generated by fashion called for restricting and uncomfortable undergarments. Bra manufacturers promoted styles to create the perfect shape while creating a cultural imperative that bras were essential for breast health. Support was deemed essential for all breasts, and no indication of maturity, imperfection or natural movement was allowed.

This insistence on the current definition of breast perfection leads not only to the use of restrictive garments, but to the perceived need for plastic surgery. Women feel that they do not measure up, and follow through on this misconception by availing themselves of bust enhancing products, bust reducing and reshaping bras and finally, by feeling abnormal after surgical mastectomy for breast cancer. The use of a breast prosthesis, reconstructive surgery and feelings of shame have been created and supported by this cultural obsession. I don't believe that we are ready to abandon the bra, but perhaps we can insist on a more comfortable garment designed for our bodies, rather than for cultural fads generated by society.

Medical imaging is intrusive, fragmenting and codifying, but the personnel responsible for ordering and performing these tests need not be part of this system. Care, empathy, and complete explanations given in an understanding manner would do a lot to reduce this negative effect. Medical personnel are most often dedicated individuals who are subject to extraordinary pressures. Time to reconnect with our primary function of patient care is becoming a luxury. It is time for women to not only participate in their own healthcare and decision making, but to insist that everyone involved in their care behave in a caring ethical and professional manner.

Looking at all the images in the thesis so far has shown us that historically our images were not generated by, nor were they intended for, women themselves. Surrounded by our history, we realize that we have a rich heritage on which to draw for help. "Help to work through the

variations on naturalness and artificiality, sensuality and discipline, and power and dependency."<sup>200</sup> The words of women and their analysis move us to chapter five.

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<sup>200</sup> Lattier, *Breasts*, 39

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VOICES, REFLECTIONS, AND SURVEYS

In this chapter, I will give voice to the women who consented to be interviewed as part of my research.<sup>201</sup> The interviews cover breast augmentation<sup>202</sup> and reconstruction; reduction; growth patterns and the reactions and feelings of these women as they grew; and the effects their breasts had on their lives or sexuality. I also looked for the results of external forces on self-perception. Their remarks will be integrated and compared with existing literature. The women vary in age from 13 to mid-fifties, were mostly white, (one First Nations woman), heterosexual, except for one self-identified lesbian, and middle class.

My survey forms have been analyzed for content, and any interesting or unusual findings illuminated and discussed. My pet kittens 'helped' by damaging my box of survey forms, so my husband and I had a great afternoon separating and recording the data. We both felt that the surveys came close to being thrown out, but I felt determined to rescue the information. We found that this form of research allows people to write comments without being identified, and this was both astounding and enlightening.

Throughout this chapter I will continue to use images that help demonstrate my points and support the voices of women. Women themselves do not always generate these images, but they reflect the purposes of their creation as defined by their male creators.

#### VOICES

#### REDUCTION MAMMOPLASTY

In initiating my research on breast surgery, I interviewed a plastic surgeon. He gave me a lot of printed material on the different procedures available, and was very willing to discuss his

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<sup>201</sup> All names given are pseudonyms, picked by the researcher and sometimes by the women, and bear no relationship or association with real women.

<sup>202</sup> Augmentation means to make larger, hence implants.

work from my psychosocial perspective. When asked about the reasons women give for a reduction mammoplasty, he said:

The reasons are almost universal and health is quite significant. [They suffer from] quite significant upper neck and back pain; reduced shoulder movement from the bra straps; inability to practice bathing activities; important stuff because of the breast weight. Rashes on the undersurface of the breast mostly in the summertime, but it can happen anytime and a lot of them have headaches, and that is pretty much it.<sup>203</sup>

This is substantiated by the literature, which confirms the chronic effects of *gigantomastica*,<sup>204</sup> and that surgery for these patients “restores . . . a semblance of normalcy.”<sup>205</sup> The objectives of reduction mammoplasty are:

1. To relieve symptoms caused by heavy breasts;
2. To improve aesthetic conical appearance of the breasts; and
3. To preserve projection sensation and erectile function of the nipple.<sup>206</sup>

Ages of the women will vary. In addition to physical symptoms, many women are self-conscious and have been sensitized by casual and thoughtless remarks about their large breasts. The elderly who ‘survived’ the mockery simply seek the operation to relieve the symptoms.<sup>207</sup>

This article by Charlene DiNobile continues by giving indications and contraindications for this type of surgery. She discusses how to determine resulting size (“patient’s own view rather than the surgeon”), the presence of stretch marks, and the requirement of ideal weight. She stresses emotional support, both during the administration of pre-operative medication, and later during the post-operative recovery period. Her contraindications include: motivation from external sources, expectations that the surgery will produce immediate change in attitude others may have towards the patient, a vagueness in the patient describing what she expects and a history of severe mental illness.

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<sup>203</sup> Zeus, interviewed by the author, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000

<sup>204</sup> Italics by author, medicalization of breasts to justify correction of a fault.

<sup>205</sup> Charlene DiNobile, “Reconstructing a self-image Reduction Mammoplasty” in *Today’s O.R.Nurse* vol.7, No.11. 18

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 18



The resulting scars, the possibility of reduced sensation in the nipple or a reduced capacity to breastfeed are not discussed. It is interesting that although surgical techniques are discussed, and illustrations given, this author focuses on the mental as well as physical needs of her patient. This author is a nurse.

Another research project designed to assess results of reduction surgery as shown by patient satisfaction was carried out in 1986. Pers, Nielsen and Gerner showed that primary complications were more frequent in overweight patients. Complications were infection, excessive scarring (1/3 of patients), loss of sensation (also 1/3) and reduced aesthetic appearance. The ability to lactate successfully post surgery had a higher percentage of success, than those women who reported not being able to do so did. Secondary scar repair surgery was performed on a low number (5%) of patients. They also found that older patients (30 and up) were more easily satisfied.<sup>208</sup> I found the lowest possible weight requirement problematic, especially as advancing age replaced the initial weight loss and returned the generous breast size. Venus explained her need for a breast reduction by telling this story.

Mentally you must be prepared for the physical changes and the way people see you. One week after having the reduction [surgery] I was presenting awards at a conference. One sales representative came up to introduce himself to me, thinking we had never met me before. I had in fact known him for over five years. However, it was the first time he had looked above my chest level and actually seen me. This event repeated itself many times over the next year as I re-met people. I had been known as the lady with the big breasts and now they had to (reconnect) recognize me some other way.<sup>209</sup>

Demeter was only 14 years old when she started to develop breasts, and had a reduction at the age of 17. She explains that:

For a short time I was the same size as other girls in my age group, but soon developed at a more rapid speed. I was embarrassed by how big my breasts got by the time I was 15. I went from being flat to a D cup by 14 years. I don't recall experiencing any

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 18

<sup>208</sup> Michael Pers, Inger Margrethe Nielsen and Neel Gerner, "Results Following Reduction Mammoplasty as Evaluated by the Patients." in *Annals of Plastic Surgery* 17 December 1986, 454

<sup>209</sup> Venus, interviewed by the author July 28<sup>th</sup> 2000

growing pains but I do remember tenderness and a sore back when playing sports or riding my horse. They hurt my back and I was very embarrassed at them flopping around all the time.<sup>210</sup>

She goes on to tell me that the surgeon determined the size, and that the provincial medical plan paid for the procedure, since it was degrading her quality of life. She, like many other women who have undergone this procedure, including myself, is still pleased and satisfied with the results. Demeter speaks for all of us when she says she is happy, but introduces several notes of reality.

I had trouble with the dissolving stitches not dissolving, but I am otherwise thrilled with the results. I find that my scars are worse than those I've seen in pictures or personally on others. They rarely bother me and don't seem to bother lovers either. Now I feel that I should have waited a year or two to develop and get the surgery as I am again back to a D or DD and am slightly out of proportion with my build.<sup>211</sup>

I would have it again, and have met women who have had more than one surgery. I cannot describe my delight in being able to wear a one-piece outfit, shoestring straps, and not be embarrassed in a bathing suit. Uniforms, dresses, sweaters, and sleepwear are all options new to a former sufferer. Reduction is a change in life-style for women, and I believe for the better. Media images are influential in causing you to feel over-endowed but physical discomfort in our active lives plays a crucial part in the decision. (See Appendix 1 fig.23 for the expression of the statement made by Venus). Women whose breasts are defined as 'too small' document the opposite scenario.

## BREAST AUGMENTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

During my research, medical sizing standards for reduction were not revealed however medical men in the 1950's proposed these standards for developing perfect breast geometry in cases requiring augmentation.

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<sup>210</sup> Demeter, interviewed by the author, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2000

Penn (1945-1955) devised [a system] involving an equilateral triangle, each side six and one-half inches long, its points lying on the two nipples and sternal notch. Malinac's (1950) system was based on six inches and Da Silva's (1964) on eight centimeters. Each system proposed to isolate ideal measurements that could work for every woman.<sup>212</sup>

These standards have been discarded in favor of a *Sears* catalogue type of approach. Women now browse through pictures of before and after images and pick one they like. The Internet provides images and encourages women to take these pictures to their surgeon or come directly to the owner of that site. (Refer back to Appendix 1 figs 62 and 63 to review the before and after images advertising breast augmentation and reduction).

This procedure makes breasts into objects, especially when the shape and feel of the breast is determined by the insertion of a man-made object. The controversy surrounding silicone implants and saline filled silicone containers is too extensive to explore here, but these concerns do not seem to reduce the number of women asking for these devices.<sup>213</sup> Hiliary Cunningham, an anthropologist at the University of Toronto, offers her assessment of women who request silicone implants in the face of negative publicity. She states that: "the mental gain [of this cosmetic surgery] outweighs the risk factors."<sup>214</sup> All invasive tests including the use of radiation are subject to the risk versus benefit rule. Cunningham also goes on to explain that the woman requesting this type of surgery suffers from an aberration of her internal harmony, which cannot be resolved any other way.<sup>215</sup> Silverman states that although exact figure are hard to obtain, numbers of women with implants in the United States range from 8 per 1000 women, to 11-12

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Lattier, *Breasts*, 55

<sup>213</sup> Recommended reading; Barbara Silverman et al. "Reported Complications of Silicone Gel Breast Implants: An Epidemiologic Review." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 124 April 1996: 744-765

<sup>214</sup> Life Network, "Skin Deep", December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2130

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

per 1000 women. Between 1963 and 1988, the estimates in New York State indicated that 890,000 had women received implants.<sup>216</sup>

The complications of augmentation are: rupture of the capsule, or leaking into breast tissue; contracture of the capsule (causing hard breasts), breast pain, infection, delayed wound healing, changes in nipple and breast sensation, shifting or misplaced implants and reduced cancer detection especially by mammography.<sup>217</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig.61 for the radiographic appearance of implants.) The breast tissue is compressed and the method of mammography is made more difficult by the threat of rupture. A complete examination requires twice as many images and radiation, and must be performed by a dedicated technologist with the patience and desire to image as much breast tissue as possible.

Women have many reasons for requesting implants; they are no longer restricted to the realm of movie stars, entertainers and women in the sex trades. Reported reasons for desiring augmentation are to improve body image and confidence; to mark a milestone or major change in their lives and to increase sexual satisfaction for herself and her sexual partners.<sup>218</sup> The issue of breast augmentation is not an easy one, but I wonder how dissatisfaction with our breasts has been initiated and fostered. I believe women feel better after their surgery, but why do we consider small, uneven or floppy a deformity?<sup>219</sup>

Of course my perception is skewed since I experienced the opposite problem, and would undergo the surgery again to obtain smaller breasts. The plastic surgeon discusses reasons that women have given to him.

The greatest proportion of augmentation requests are post breastfeeding, or post partum kinds of involuntional changes. It is really just to bring them back to their pre-partum breast size and shape, and sometimes a little bit more. It is really just constant in that aspect; the sense of feeling good.

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<sup>216</sup> Silverman, Reported Complications, 745

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 747

<sup>218</sup> Lattier, *Breasts*, 56-57

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 58

Patients that feel that they are just too small, range from 16-17 years to 40-5- years of age. They [patients] need a change in their lives because they can afford it; a marriage break up or whatever. They have always thought they have wanted to be a bit bigger and go to it.<sup>220</sup>

Zeus feels that his patients for reduction and augmentation are happy with the results, unless there is an underlying psychological problem. The women are coming in more informed due to the Internet, and he shows them before and after pictures from his personal file. Women often bring pictures, either from the Internet or magazines, to help them articulate their specific wishes for change.

Finding a woman with implants to interview was more difficult than I expected. I could not access my patients without becoming involved in a 'breach of confidentiality' situation. Several people were contacted, and did not appear for the appointment, so I asked a personal acquaintance to be interviewed. Our conversation follows, and I have included my questions in italics.

*When did you get implants?*

25 years ago.

*What were your reasons?*

I didn't want to be big. I just wanted breasts back. I went to nothing after having a baby, so all I wanted was a breast back.

*What size were you before your babies and breastfeeding?*

34AA.

*And after?*

34-nipple. I am not exaggerating. I went down.

*Size after surgery?*

34B. I didn't want big ones. I had a good shape, carried no weight at all, very athletic, and wore fairly nice clothes. I got right back to my shape after the babies, but had nothing left on it [chest] and I have fairly large shoulders.

*Did the surgery affect your sex life?*

Actually, it didn't really affect it at all. My husband actually preferred it [my breasts] before because they were more sensitive, but it was my choice.

*Are you happy now with your breasts?*

Actually I personally myself have gotten a lot of pleasure and satisfaction. The only problem and it is not even really a problem is them being a little firmer than they should be, and it doesn't really bother me or the husband.

*Have you ever worried about them leaking?*

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<sup>220</sup> Zeus, July 16,2000

Yeah, but I wouldn't have mammography or CT done here. I am thinking about having them removed but not very hard.

*Would you put in the newer implants if you had yours removed?*

No.<sup>221</sup>

According to Linda Reid, breast implants have been in use in Canada for over 30 years, with between 100,000 and 2000,000 women recipients. Of these 80% were done for cosmetic reasons and the remaining 20% were performed as part of a post-cancer reconstruction project.<sup>222</sup>

Silicone was first used in Canada for reconstruction purposed in 1971, and has been in voluntary moratorium since January 1992. Reid also explores the issues around safety, and tells us that silicone or saline devices are see as being more justifiable for post-mastectomy cancer patients.<sup>223</sup>

Diana underwent mastectomy for cancer, then at a later date opted for contralateral mastectomy followed by bilateral reconstruction. As it turned out, the second breast contained several small pockets of Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (or DCIS) which would have caused trouble later.<sup>224</sup> Once again I will put questions in italics and the answers follow:

*When you went for reconstruction, did you get to choose your size?*

Pretty much. My end result I wasn't too happy with. I ended up having to have another surgery because they hadn't taken enough tissue the first time. I had no shape. I looked worse than I did before and it didn't result [in my not having to wear] a prosthesis. My right side is a little bigger than the left but with the bra it has given me enough that I can wear certain clothing. It hangs better and it looks more like I have got natural breasts.

*Do you still have nipples?*

No.

*Are you smaller now than before the reconstruction?*

Yes. I was really big before my cancer.

*So, if you were able to speak to every young girl who is about 19 or 20 years old and they would take to heart what you said to them*

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<sup>221</sup> *Aphrodite*, interviewed by the author, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2000

<sup>222</sup> Linda Reid, "Breast implants: A Gendered Issue?" in *The Canadian Nurse* 92 February 1995: 38-40

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 39

<sup>224</sup> Diana, interviewed by the author, June 21,2000

*what would you say?*

Breasts are a natural part of our human body. It is not the end of all your life. To look natural is more appealing than doing something to your body that makes it look like that is exactly what you have done. [sic]

*How would you define natural?*

I feel that I look natural. I obviously don't wear really tight clothing, I never did but I feel that I look natural. I feel that I look feminine. I am not going to be a man stopper. That was never my intention in life. I am comfortable with my body and if other people aren't, well that is their problem.

*Why does our society have such an obsession with breasts?*

I think in essence I guess men have just gone over the line, well I guess it is not just men. We, as a society I think, put far too much stock on a perfect 10 body instead of looking beyond the exterior beauty in people. We should be looking more to what is inside what a person is really like as a person, not just as an image that you see through your eyes. There is a lot more to a person.

*Have you ever been involved with a breast cancer survivor who didn't want to wear prosthesis?*

Um, I really don't know. Most of the women that I associate with that are breast cancer survivors, all wear a prosthesis. Some of the older ladies choose not to and I don't know why that is. Some of the smaller busted women find that it really doesn't make much of a difference. I think in the end for those people whom I know, it is just a little more security. That they look more natural and that there isn't something missing to people who just happen to glance.<sup>225</sup>

I asked this question because there is a school of thought that wearing prosthesis contributes to the invisibility of breast cancer in our society. It also reduces the disease to merely a cosmetic problem. Many women feel that if large numbers of one/no breasted women marched on our parliament buildings, the effects would be phenomenal.<sup>226</sup> Being able to actually see the extent of this disease would shock those delegating health care funding into more positive action.

## REFLECTIONS ON BREASTS

I interviewed four young women and one woman in her mid-thirties, all of whom were asked similar questions about their breast origin stories, including reactions of other women/girls to breast size and visibility and those of their male peer group. They also commented on the

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>226</sup> Recommended reading: Sharon Blatt, *Patient No More, The Politics of Breast Cancer*. (Charlottetown, P.E.I., Gynergy Books, 1994)

commercial breast versus the personal breast. Their names and ages are as follows. Bodicea, 26 years; Gaea, age 26; Hera, 38 years; and Artemis, age 14; and Athena, age 16.

*How old were you when your breasts appeared?*

#### BODICEA

Oh, that would have been grade 6 I believe so I would have been 11 or 12. I was the first one to get them in my class so they were pretty noticeable.<sup>227</sup>

#### GAEA

I don't remember exactly, I have a bad memory about childhood things but I think about grade 4. I resented them probably a lot just because nobody else really had them at that time and I was teased quite a bit. They were there but they weren't big enough that they were [obvious], they were just little nipples and they were kind of funny looking because no one else had them and all the guys noticed.<sup>228</sup>

#### HERA

I was in elementary school so it was the end of my grade 7 year, I would have been 13. My first year in high school I had gone from not wearing a bra at all, (I was flat chested in elementary school) to my September start in high school being in a C cup. In that first year, I went from a C to a double D, and it was a dramatic change. Stretch marks from my ears to my ends and it was very hard to deal with the other girl's imaginations. I had nothing when they had seen me the year before to being externally overendowed in their eyes and in such a flash. I was accused of everything from stuffing my bra to taking shots. I just developed rapidly, that is all there is to it.<sup>229</sup>

#### ARTEMIS

I was 13. I didn't even notice. I am 15 now, and now wear size C42, which is too small in the cup. Breasts are a pain in the butt. I wear sports bras to keep from jiggling and bouncing.<sup>230</sup>

#### ATHENA

Grade four. (approx. 9) No, they don't really bug me about it because there are quite a few girls in grade 9 that have the same problem. . . . The guys are the problem.<sup>231</sup>

*Tell me about bra wearing. Would you ever go without one*

#### BODICEA

I don't know, it was uncomfortable, itchy, didn't care much for it

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<sup>227</sup> Bodicea, interviewed by author, October 29, 2000

<sup>228</sup> Gaea, interviewed by the author, October 29, 2000

<sup>229</sup> Hera, interviewed by the author, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000

<sup>230</sup> Artemis, interviewed by the author, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000

<sup>231</sup> Athena, interviewed by the author, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000



but I wanted something so I wasn't bouncing all over the place while running up and down in a gym. I consider them inconvenient because they are in the way of a lot of things, You dress up at night that is what we do; wear the bra to show everything off with revealing clothing. I was never one to consider them part of the mating ritual, to show off your cleavage. . . . I do (go without a bra) at home, but rarely out in public just don't like a lot of motion and I just want them to be held in place.<sup>232</sup>

#### GAEA

I got my sister's [bra] It was just handed to me one day and it Wasn't a training bra. I had gone without one for a while and They were large and it [the bra] did not fit. . . . I would love not wearing a bra and actually at home I tend not to. Once I am out of the public I tend to take it off just because it is more comfortable for me. if it became fashionable to not wear one I probably still might because you get into the habit of doing something and I don't know, when I was growing up it was always more proper to wear a bra because it made your breasts less obvious to other people. Especially male attention, and stuff like that.<sup>233</sup>

#### ARTEMIS

I always wear a bra. I don't look at them when my bra is off. I would only not wear a bra at home but not in public. I Don't know it just kind of makes me feel like a floppy bunny.<sup>234</sup>

#### ATHENA

I go without a bra. I have a pink halter-top, and you don't wear a bra with it. I wear sweatshirts in all my classes when I wear it.<sup>235</sup>

Hera just laughed when I asked her about not wearing a bra, and then introduced a new take on the breast/bra controversy. Hera equated her accelerated breast growth with sexual power, and thought of her breasts as 'mighty weapons', that had gotten her into a lot of trouble by her using her breasts as a means to communicate with men. She says:

I went from being a country bumpkin to a 'hey, wow' and it was dramatic. This applied to male or female [reactions]. I was immature. To me my breasts weren't a part of who I was. They were more of an add on to use and one day I wouldn't need them. They could be put away.

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<sup>232</sup> Bodicea

<sup>233</sup> Gaea

<sup>234</sup> Artemis

<sup>235</sup> Athena

I went from using myself, from believing it was the only way people would accept me, (see my chest, see and use my body), the only way that I could get places and people liked me, to experiencing an overnight realization that I am better than this. It was as if someone had thrown a switch. I am important. If they [only] like what I have got, that is tough, they can go and look for it elsewhere, because what I have got is mine. It was then I came back [home] pregnant, aborted the child and changed. I went from being what everyone else wanted me to be to being more me. It was like taking the bull by the horns and changing. I changed how I dressed and the way I carried myself. There was no more shoulders back, hips forward, that sort of thing with everything sticking out and shining. I was relaxed. I didn't care about my weight. I didn't surround myself with people that only wanted to talk to my body. If they could only relate to my body then I wasn't interested and it was dramatic. It was a switch. It was waking up one morning and saying 'no'.<sup>236</sup>

Artemis and Athena addressed issues around peer perception by saying that girls were jealous and felt threatened by a large-breasted classmate. They believed that boys would automatically flock to the larger breasts, even when these fears were not backed up by reality. They seemed to feel that boys had an unexplainable obsession with breasts and the girls resorted to kicking their tormentors. Stereotypes such as large breasts indicating sexual availability, provocative dressing indicating similar or cheap behavior, and that bigger is better were recognized easily by all the women, and refused as reality. They all seemed to recognize the falseness of certain breast sizes on media stars, and that reduction could be a medical necessity for women. Reduction was viewed as being more of a 'necessity' than the augmentation procedure. Reconstruction also seemed acceptable, since no one wants to look different or abnormal.

*What would you say to women who think their breasts are not good enough?*

ARTEMIS

Be happy with your selves. [Although] people do not want to be stared at or to be considered different.<sup>237</sup>

BODCICEA

You see all the magazines with women running around with plastic surgery and their personal trainers, and they will try to say that this is the ideal body. That is not the way it works. There is no ideal body. The one you have is the one you have, why wish you had another one?<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Hera

<sup>237</sup> Artemis

<sup>238</sup> Bodicea

## GAEA

False [media] standards present something that is only one way of thinking. They do not reflect the diversity of women.<sup>239</sup>

When the women answered their questions, I noticed unease about remembering the origins of their breast history. They remembered feelings of being uncomfortable with the remarks and attitudes of peers, both male and female. No one seemed ready for their arrival, and their movement was tightly held in check. No one seems to like wearing a bra, but not wearing one is more problematic. Hera lost her identity with the precipitous arrival of large breasts, and made a few wrong choices based on her interpretation of her value as being only sexual. Culture has played a role in defining normal by sizing women's clothing to a specific norm. If you can't close your blouse, it is not surprising that you feel your breasts are too big. Their closing remarks indicate a new realization of self-perception. Their emphasis on the natural body as versus a false construction seems to speak well for the future. The recognition of false standards is difficult and being able to defuse their message and refuse conformity requires strength.

## MAMMOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGIST SURVEY

Survey forms were given to mammographers from as many different sites as possible. I received 18 returns out of 35 or 51%, which seem to reflect the workload of technologists in Western Canada. Since I have worked as a technologist in this area for many years, and have interacted professionally with many others in this profession, I am comfortable with that assessment. (Please refer to appendix 2 for the survey forms used to obtain these results.)

Analysis of results will first be discussed in narrative form followed by the information in a chart detailing erotic, medical or evasive answers. The identification of minorities was included to allow women the opportunity of situating themselves in any self-identified space desired. There were 15 'no' replies to the question of inclusion within an ethnic or racial background which the

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<sup>239</sup> Gaea

respondant felt needed to be identified (88%), and 3 identifications (17%), which consisted of 1 of Japanese origin and 2 Filipino technologists. The years practicing mammography ranged from 33 to 1, averaging out to 14 years.

Question one, which queried the possibility of having to overcome any aversion to this type of work, produced 16 negative replies (88%) and 2 positive. Both replies that indicated having to work to overcome this aversion concentrated on the medical breast and the medical need for imaging this area. Question two, asked if any technologists were known to the respondents who did not like or actively refused to do these examinations. There were only two (11%) respondents who answered 'no' to this question and 16 (88%) who could answer 'yes' to this question. Reasons for technologists not wanting to work in this area were somewhat evasive and can be placed in two categories, the medical or the professional outlook and the erotic. These distinctions often overlap and show a pattern of ambiguity that becomes more pronounced as I proceed.

One technologist sought me out and declared that she 'was going to come right out with it'. Her insight was the only answer that addresses the problem directly, in clear language. She said that technologists do not like performing mammography due to 'the sexual identification with breasts'. This supports my thesis that the historic imaging of breasts has impacted on women to the point of our being unable to work in a medical area involved in women's breast health. This inability has been fostered in us by the constant media obsession with the erotic and commercial breast. I am placing some answers in a third category labeled 'evasive' since the answers skirt around the erotic issue. It is unclear to me if the respondents were aware of this evasive maneuver or were merely unable to articulate the reasons due to an exaggerated sense of social propriety.

EROTIC	MEDICAL	EVASIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sexual identification with breasts</li> <li>✓ Too intimate</li> <li>✓ Dislike of personal body areas<sup>240</sup></li> <li>✓ Uncomfortable handling the breasts of other women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The positioning and technique must be so exact</li> <li>✓ Want to expand their radiographic knowledge into different areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Lack of interest</li> <li>✓ Does not like doing them</li> <li>✓ Not comfortable with the situation</li> </ul>

Question three asked if being a mammographer had changed her mind about her own breasts.

Twelve (66%) respondents said 'no', while 5 (27%) said yes and interestingly, there was one left blank (5%). The changes in self-perception are divided into two categories.

The first and most popular was the transference of medical knowledge into their personal lives as the perception of breast problems which might occur to them. The other was identified as having impacted on their personal breast self- perception.

MEDICAL	PERSONAL IMAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Never get implants</li> <li>✓ Check your breast monthly</li> <li>✓ Not panicked about personal breast problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I like mine a lot a lot better</li> <li>✓ Now aware of real size, no longer self conscious about mine</li> <li>✓ Increased self-confidence</li> </ul>

The last question posed to mammographic technologists was to find out if, while performing this examination, they had experienced any change in their original perception of the breasts of other women. Their answers reinforced my notion of the lack of knowledge in this area. The knowledge of the breasts of real woman has been lost in our society. We are surrounded by images of breasts, yet these technologists discovered the reality of breasts, and their answers reflect their surprise at the acquisition of this information, for example, information that breasts are different sizes and shapes. This in turn demonstrates the lack of and need for this information today. The two categories identified by this question are the personal and the medical (as applied

to their profession). There were 11 (61%) who did not change their opinions on the breasts of other women, and 8(44%) who gave specific answers.

MEDICAL	PERSONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I constantly reassure the majority of patients that they are of average size.</li> <li>✓ Patients seem to be very self-conscious about their breasts and always ask questions about pain tolerance related to the size and shape of breasts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The acknowledgment of existing variety</li> <li>✓ Everyone is so different</li> </ul>

Hestia, who is one of the most highly regarded and published teaching mammographic technologists in Canada, shared her thoughts on breasts with me. Her remarks comment on the social relations of women, the erotification of breasts and their impact on our sense of identity. She also identifies social attitudes on breast size and explores the notions of normalcy.

I have never been fascinated with breasts, as some people seem to be. It has always amazed me that males are so obsessed with them – after all they are just breasts like any other body part, be it eyes, hair, etc. I suppose it is because they are usually hidden – that is the factor that makes them so intriguing . . . .

When I was young, I was jealous of women with large breasts. With maturity and time (hard to say what is the biggest factor) I have done a complete turnaround and now I feel very sorry for women with large breasts. They are a real burden – heavy and floppy – they bounce too much when you exercise or run and they would get in the way so often. . . .

I was watching the Academy Awards recently and Dolly Parton was the M.C. I could not help but think how difficult it would be to do her mammogram. And she is so top-heavy – it is so unnatural looking – I have difficulty Thinking that she finds this part of her anatomy *attractive*<sup>241</sup> . . . .

I think it is quite fascinating that some women are very shy and modest about their breasts, while others enjoy to openly display them with plunging necklines, tight sweaters and perhaps no bra. The interesting thing is that it is not always the person with the *really attractive breasts*<sup>242</sup> that shows them off. Mind you, self-confidence has nothing to do with bra size. . . .

I wish breasts weren't so sensitive and tender. It would make our job so much easier. . . .

It is quite interesting that our breasts can evoke an entire spectrum of emotions – depending on the situation – pride, shame, embarrassment,

<sup>240</sup> This seems problematic in light of other 'personal body areas' radiographed daily  
<sup>241</sup> Italics mine. How is this determination made?  
<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

joy, anger and fear.<sup>243</sup>

Hestia never separates completely from her job as a mammographer and I find this a common trait shared by most of these professionals. Our gaze seems to combine the comparative personal and the assessing professional at the same time. It has been my personal experience on many occasions to witness and to share their strong sense of dedication to our specific imaging modality. This has created a defensive aura around me when mammography is being debated in my classes, which reflects itself in my negative reaction to criticism.

When Hestia speaks of the potential for the breast to initiate anger, she refers to the reaction of many women to the threat of breast cancer. Women fear this disease so much that bilateral prophylactic mastectomies are being performed at the request of cancer-free women. Anger was, however, demonstrated by a technologist participating in my survey designed for the general public. (Please review survey form included in appendix 1, specifically designed for women who were not engaged in mammography, but often did include medical radiation technologists.)

The respondent that replied in anger, was a technologist who raised several questions for me. She wrote "is this a joke?" in large letters across question one, which asked, "how do you feel about your breasts?" There was no reply indicated for question two, but a furious reply was elicited by question three, which asked about feelings regarding the breasts of other women. The words, written in a forceful hand, read "none of your business". Is this the anger referred to by Hestia? My experience translates this anger as a fear of the breasts being a cancerous time bomb, which could cause death at any time.

This anger reflects the sense of a social invasion having been committed by the survey questions. The strong emotion of anger was evident, but the causal relationship between her anger and breasts can only be speculative.

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<sup>243</sup> Written interview with Hestia, May 10/2000

It was a source of personal distress to uncover homophobia within my professional peer group. This was perceived two ways. First, the inference was that I must have an unhealthy interest in the breasts of other women, which questioned my sexuality. Secondly, I was accused of asking these questions in order to establish the sexuality of my group. The inference being, of course, that I believed them to be lesbian. The reason for the anger shown in this written response still remains unknown to me, but my first visceral reaction was that of unarticulated homophobia.

GENERAL BREAST SURVEY

The general breast survey was sent across Canada, with five returned from the east, two from Quebec and fifty from the western provinces. The total number of surveys returned was fifty-seven out of 100 being distributed. This produces a return rate of 51%. There was no discernible difference in the responses from different areas. There were three self-identified minorities, (5.2%), one Japanese and two Catholic respondents. The responses to question one, which was how do you feel about your breasts, have been placed in table form.

POSITIVE		NEGATIVE	
Fine	39 or 68%	Floppy	8 or 14%
Fantastic	4 or 7%	Too small	7 or 12%
Beautiful	5 or 8%	Too large	3 or 5%
		Ugly	2 or 3%
		Too heavy	3 or 5%

SELF-IDENTIFIED POSITIVE		SELF-IDENTIFIED NEGATIVE	
Round and perky	1	Is this a joke	1
Bodacious	1	One larger than the other	1
I like my nipple ring	1	Lopsided	1
Perky	1	Painful	1
Total	52 or 65.8%	Total	27 or 34.2%



Although there were fifty-seven (57) respondents, there were seventy-nine (79) answers. This indicates several answers from the same person. From my observation of these surveys and from personal experience, women will say that their breasts are 'fine' but further conversation elicits the next observation, which tends to be more specific, personal and accurate. It was a surprise to me that the majority of women seemed satisfied, even happy, with their breasts. Does the 34% reflect that portion of women dissatisfied enough to seek medical intervention? It would be an interesting research topic to determine what percentage of this population of women (assessing variables such as age, position within a social class, cultural expectations, social acceptance of plastic surgery, availability etc.) would carry this dissatisfaction to operative levels.

In response to question two, have you ever felt differently about your breasts, 24 (42%) women answered in the negative. Of the 33(57%) which answered in the affirmative, most comments were related to stages or experiences in life such as childbirth, aging, weight changes, or the perceptions of others in their lives.

- ✓ As a teen my breasts were smaller
- ✓ Age and gravity have changed them for the worse
- ✓ Increased age has brought increased fat
- ✓ Pre-childbirth they were not so big and saggy
- ✓ Too small
- ✓ Too big
- ✓ Before my breast reduction I felt top-heavy
- ✓ I used to want them to be larger, but now that I'm older they are firm. They may not have been if I was larger.
- ✓ I have scars from breast reduction, but who cares?
- ✓ From 13 to 27 years of age, I was 36DD to DDD. My chest hurt, shoulders ached, headache and no one saw above my breasts.
- ✓ *Other women* told me they were too small.<sup>244</sup>
- ✓ First they were too small, then all of me too large.
- ✓ When I was overweight, they were a lot more fill out and perky.
- ✓ I thought I was too small, then I gained weight and they were perfect.
- ✓ Too big and floppy when I'm fat or pregnant
- ✓ They get in the way. I was a late bloomer so I was embarrassed because I thought they were too small. But now I think they are too big.
- ✓ As a twelve-year-old tomboy I didn't want any.
- ✓ Different days feel heavy or painful
- ✓ At one time I wanted them bigger, then I grew up.
- ✓ As I have grown up (and out) and matured both physically and mentally, I have discovered that me naked is a good thing, not to be embarrassed about.
- ✓ I'm not as young as I once was and gravity sucks.

- ✓ *My boyfriend*<sup>245</sup> has really boosted my morale about my breasts because he really likes them.
- ✓ Thought they were great, perhaps getting a little floppy. I am now treating myself to good bras.

John Berger offers us an explanation of the link between female self-perception and the perception of others.

From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. . . .

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves.<sup>246</sup>

Berger recognizes the interrelationship of looking and being looked at, but more importantly, he recognizes the impossible task of developing self-esteem based on an accurate self-perception.

Question three asked, "How do you feel about the breasts of other women?" The replies demonstrate our continued sense of ambiguity. The erotic, domestic and medical gazes overlap.

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<sup>244</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>245</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>246</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 46-47

Fine	43 or 75%
I never look	5 or 8%
They are sexy	8 or 14%
They are all better than mine	2 or 3.5%
They are all not as good as mine	2 or 3.5%

#### OTHER FEELINGS ON THE BREASTS OF OTHER WOMEN

EROTIC GAZE	DOMESTIC GAZE	MEDICAL GAZE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I love women's bodies fantastic</li> <li>✓ None of your business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Functional for breast feeding</li> <li>✓ I see them as sexual, milk producing and rounding out our wonderful figures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How difficult to x-ray</li> <li>✓ Do bigger breasts get more cancer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I somewhat envy other women</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I think that heavy breasts would be uncomfortable</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ I admire breasts but I abhor women with implants</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Everyone (almost) notices other people's figures.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Every woman has breasts unique to herself, they are very personal.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ They are a very important part of lovemaking.</li> </ul>		

The assignment of breasts to the erotic and domestic sphere quite often obscures the fact that breasts belong to women and can bring both pleasure and pain to their owner. Quite a number of women say that they never look at other women's breasts, but this statement is challenged by Nancy Friday who declares that Breast Envy has replaced Penis envy as a component of women's psyche. Women, as well as men, long for the perfect breast to fulfill sexual and control fantasies.<sup>247</sup>

Today women push men aside to worship at the breast,  
to gaze rapturously at what has come to mean something more  
significant to women themselves than to mere men, who  
couldn't possibly understand the real message of the breasts.  
The role that breasts now play in women's lives has nothing  
to do with men. . . .

Women are not raised to look at men . . . .

As it is, we all stare at women's bodies. Women as well as men,  
look with nostalgia at centerfolds of naked female bodies;  
we envy our friend's large breasts.<sup>248</sup>

Friday did a survey in which women were asked, "Why is beauty important to women? She found that women listed men *fifth* as a reason, while men listed women as the *first* reason they strive for good looks.<sup>249</sup> After reading this, I decided to test her theory myself. My attendance at a large formal event created the arena for experimentation. I wore a cleavage enhancing underwire bra, and placed a crystal tattoo (ornament) on the exposed skin of my breast. I ran the gamut of the expected stares and some remarks from men, but was surprised at the number and varied ages of the women who openly appraised my breast. Most men were very discreet with

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<sup>247</sup> Nancy Friday. *The Power of Beauty*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993) 272

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 272,439,440

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 440

their gaze, even speaking to me with averted eyes, but not the women. Although only a few friends openly commented, I would put a figure of almost 100% on the number of women who openly gazed at my ornamented breast. (See appendix 1 fig 64 for a picture of my breast being used as a research tool.)

This chapter has put forth the voices of many women, including my own. The rationale offered by the participants seems reasonable to them, and as such must be given respect. The correlation of the words of women as participants agree in most matters, even if the participants are not aware of the reasons or background for their observations. For example, the young girls, Artemis and Athena, were aware of the exclusion of their group once they developed breasts that were seen as bigger and more threatening.

Nancy Friday identifies this sense of competition and threat by a group of women by telling us: "I've seen it all my life, at work, socially, even (especially) among close friends, where little/big girls still can't resist 'punishing' one girl, thus drawing the others tighter".<sup>250</sup> Her analysis of the female control over beauty along with the attendant and predictable social problems makes an important statement.

The overlap and ambiguity evident in the survey responses was a surprise, as was my realization that my ability to work in the mammographic imaging area was dependent upon my doing the same thing. As long as I handle the breasts of my patients while firmly in my medical mode, I am fine with this work. But, when a woman brings in the statements or findings of her lover, I become embarrassed.

Overall, women have indicated a positive feeling about their breasts as a percentage, but their feelings of imperfection were worded strongly. I found that when talking to women about my

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<sup>250</sup> Nancy Friday, *The Power of Beauty*, 79

project, their initial responses to my question of breast self-perception were positive. However, it did not take very long to hear them say their breasts were too big, too small or 'too' something. The impression I was left with was that although women's words seemed to be becoming more positive, they were still uncertain as to what constituted perfect, attractive or normal breasts. The historic and modern breast images still seem to be exerting an influence on our self-perception. It also became clear to me that although women were happily choosing surgery as part of a liberating notion of 'choice', they were not questioning the origin of their need to become 'better'. Feminist literature supports both options of choice and the denial of patriarchal values, but the serious consideration of the needs and views of individual women are neglected. The medicalization of breasts has opened a door of complaints, complaints which medicine happily addresses without giving us full knowledge or obtaining an informed consent.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The thesis of this paper is to determine if breast images, both historic and modern, have an effect on the self-perception of women especially towards their breasts. In the determination of cause and effect, images have been presented, interviews analyzed and diverse literature sources consulted, however, the final answer still seems equivocal.

Ambiguity and the inability for women to see themselves included in the definition of perfect continue to cloud the issue. Attractive breasts were identified, but not defined and were rarely located on the respondent.<sup>251</sup> Women seem to be able to make an intellectual identification of the falseness of most breast images, but have not yet taken the next step to recognizing and defusing the internalized criticism. Unconscious internalization of the message promoting false perceptions of beauty is much harder to eradicate. Knowing does not immediately confer a solution. Immunity to the huge number of historical appropriations of breast imaging is never easy, but major breakthroughs are in progress.<sup>252</sup> Future generations of women will hopefully be better equipped to resist the old molds of feminine beauty and will carry out our cries for change. "Cultural revolution does not happen in a day, or even, sometimes, in a generation."<sup>253</sup>

Changes in attitudes were evident in the positive self-assessments (84%) versus the negative (39%).<sup>254</sup> Since these numbers add up to 123%, several women indicated more than one positive or negative perception. I found that women often start out a conversation being either positive or rather dismissive about their breasts, but soon the self-doubt or declarations of the need for 'just a small change' arise. Distaste for revealing such intimate details became evident throughout my research. For example, over 100 survey forms were sent out to mammography students, however

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<sup>251</sup> See survey results in Chapter Five.

<sup>252</sup> Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts*, 165

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 165

<sup>254</sup> Review data, page 109



none were sent back to me. My family members resisted participation as well, indicating a strong dislike of the subject. In contrast, other women wanted to share stories with me after we had explored my thesis topic for a few minutes. This leads me to believe that survey forms are made out with reluctance, possibly only by a small segment of women, which creates bias through inaccurate representation. I feel that the feminist participatory method of interviewing women face to face is a better tool.

The second area being questioned in this thesis involves the ability of mammographic technologists to perform this intimate but necessary radiographic imaging technique. The difficulty being presented was accurately identified as the intrusion of the medical gaze into the erotic zone, thus violating personal privacy and sexuality. It came as a shock to me that the strict segmentation of breast imaging into erotic or medical was the tool used by my fellow professionals and in my personal practice. If the two gazes overlapped, we were then reduced to confronting our own acquired notions of propriety. It seems that ambiguity or the necessity of carrying the burden of double vision extends from the private to the professional.<sup>255</sup>

## RESISTANCE

Throughout this manuscript, I have introduced images of resistance. The imaging of reality or the mocking of an accepted stereotype has traditionally been women's method of resistance. I have identified five areas of resistance in which we need to work: recognize, refuse, reverse, reclaim, and role model. I will elaborate on these areas, citing existing examples and recommending how we can continue to move forward. These examples will touch upon the divisions used in earlier chapters, and may present new 'ways of seeing.'<sup>256</sup>

## RECOGNISE

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<sup>255</sup> Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts*, 165

<sup>256</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

The obvious need to recognize false standards of breast beauty often obscures the more subtle influences of medical standards. Terms that are designed to promote the image of 'disease' or 'correctable faults' are seen as the sanctification and justification of the false cultural beauty norms. Asymmetrical breasts, micromastia, gross breasts, hypertrophy of the breasts, precocious thelarche, post-lactation flaccid and empty breasts, all of these terms indicate pathological conditions that must be medically remedied.<sup>257</sup> Although some feminists support these surgical options as a self-affirming and control-taking measure, each woman should examine the risks and realities of this unnecessary surgery. Not only is a true informed consent rarely given, the underlying need is not given enough consideration.

Why does changing our breasts make us 'feel better'? The ambiguity identified during my research becomes evident again. We all say that media images are not related to reality, we all recognize that Barbie and Dolly Parton are top heavy, movie stars and porn queens are seen as commercializing and enhancing their assets, but millions of women still flock for implants each year. Magazines are now starting to feature breast surgery as seen on certain models. The emphasis is on the surgery, not the breasts. "The trend toward breast surgery is created by a culture that blocks out all breasts that are not the Official Breast. . . ."<sup>258</sup> The surgically altered breast is often less sensitive, so the erotic pleasure is lost in favor of a false cultural ideal. Women seek assurance from their mammographic technologists that their breasts are 'normal' because they have been denied knowledge about the breasts of other women. The determination of 'normal' or 'beautiful' has become a social construction.<sup>259</sup> Breasts are so varied that the Official Breast is found naturally on very few women. The few that fulfill the requirements of being 'perky, full, round and large' belong to young women whose anatomical immaturity will

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<sup>257</sup> One breast smaller, too small, capable of having at least one pound removed during reduction, big breasts, early breast growth (8-9 yr.), floppy and flat.

<sup>258</sup> Naomi Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*. (Toronto: Random House, 1991) 246

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 247

be short lived. We need to recognize the pressures exerted by this cultural obsession. The 'improvement' of the body has become for some women, the improvement of self.

## REFUSE

What can we refuse? Does that mean wearing a bra should be refused, or those inaccurate images of women should be burned? Perhaps we could refuse to wear uncomfortable bras. The push, pull and bind your breast theory of bra design could be refused. Refusal to be intimidated by the media glamour images could be an option.

Conformity to current fashion trends that inhibit our health and comfort could be reduced, or even denied. As we have already discussed, pornographic breast images are a problematic area for a few feminists, as denying gay or lesbian erotica can be caught up in heterosexual censorship. Refusing to allow our daughters to be told they are not 'normal' or 'beautiful' should be a priority.

When I was a young teenager and saw my first *Playboy* magazine in the 1960's, my first reaction was one of fear. The centerfold was a woman with dark areolas. Mine were pink then, and still are after nursing children. What was wrong with me? Was I abnormal, and worse yet, who could I ask? Knowledge of other women's breasts helps to refuse distorted media imaging.

We can refuse to allow our images to be used to promote, support or otherwise encourage war. Women need to write letters to their governmental representatives, boycott products, and demonstrate solidarity against the appropriation of our bodies by policies and programs that we do not support. War destroys our loved ones, our homes and lives; to use our bodies for the political or national purpose should be refused. We are becoming more effective at presenting our views to both the government and the public and this contributes to the effectiveness of refusal.

## REVERSE

The device called 'reversal' is to expose the hidden male/female stereotypes contained in images. This exposes the meanings in imaging, which are often used to define and categorize women.<sup>260</sup> This reversal of male and female images in a painting or advertisement reveals the dominant ideology that is at work. If you replace passive non-participating women with active aggressive powerful men who are in control, then the written or visual message is negated. The resultant image is either seen to be ridiculous or sometimes quite violent. Try reversing the images on these magazine covers. Put men's faces on the covers. What is the message now? Obviously, men's breasts do not have quite the same message for our heterosexual society. (Appendix 1 fig.65)

Linda Nochlin demonstrated this technique by publishing an image of a young woman, bearing a tray of apples, among which her bare breasts were presented. Along with this nineteenth century soft porn print (*Achetez des Pommes*), Nochlin juxtaposed a photograph of a nude man holding a tray of bananas. Of course, penises have not experienced a precedent of being compared to edible fruit. Such reversals serve to rupture dominant ideology and initiate change.<sup>261</sup>

Historically, images of women, especially nudes, were images created by men for the pleasure of men. This type of pleasure, derived from looking at a distance, is called voyeurism. Narcissism, however, is defined as deriving pleasure and identification by regarding your own image. Narcissism also implies an unhealthy frivolity and self-indulgence.

Female artists such as Sylvia Sleigh and Laura Knight have challenged the object (female)/viewer (male) dichotomy with their paintings *Philip Golub Reclining*, 1971 and *Self Portrait* 1913. Sylvia Sleigh painted a male nude, who gazes enchanted in a mirror, while the artist, busily painting, is also reflected. The object is male, narcissistic, nude and horizontal. The

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<sup>260</sup> Rosemary Betterton, *Looking on. Images of Feminity in the Visual arts and Media*. (London: Pandora Press, 1987) 41

artist is female, voyeuristic, and presumably painting for (female?) voyeurs, clothed and vertically positioned. This reverses traditional power and control issues.<sup>262</sup>

Laura Knight painted her nude standing while looking into a mirror. The artist painted herself at work, but looking away from her female model and the reflection of the model in the mirror. Both painters have reversed normative roles of the painter as viewer/owner, the male who looks, and the nude female who is being looked at.<sup>263</sup>

If women are narcissistic and in love with their image as proposed by traditional patriarchal ideology,

[i]t follows then that women will anxiously scrutinize images held up as ideals of femininity for signs that they can appropriate to themselves. But since there is usually a mismatch between ourselves and the images held up to us, the response cannot be one simply of pleasurable narcissism. The relation of women to their images is profoundly uncomfortable, a relation which, describing the negative sense women have of their own self image matched against the ideal.<sup>264</sup>

This destructive process has been supported by my presentation of historical breast images. We have been exposed to destructive images and their subliminal message for too long. Reversal of this pattern is underway.

The concepts of voyeurism and reversal are seen in Nancy Friday's comments about her husband. When Friday observed that her husband took pleasure in watching the reaction of other men to her carefully contrived public image, she encouraged him to participate, and thus reversed and complicated the roles of voyeur/ narcissist, object and viewer.

I invited him into the mirror, took him to Bergdorf's, sat in a little gold chair, and watched him watching himself in the mirror as the tailor fitted his suit.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>262</sup> Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer, and Joanna Frueh. Eds. *Feminist Art Criticism. An Anthology*. (London: Icon Editions, 1998) 120

<sup>263</sup> Rosemary Betterton, *Looking On*, 5

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 220

<sup>265</sup> Nancy Friday, *The Power of Beauty*, 438

This process of reversal also entails the representation of female reality by women themselves, often first seen as self-portraiture. This representation disrupts accepted images by portraying 'the real' versus 'stereotypical and controlling'. Rachel Lewis, for example, has combined media images that have influenced her anorexia, with her superimposed, gaunt and starving reality. (See Appendix 1. Fig. 66.)

## RECLAIM

What needs to be reclaimed? How does this process start? We need to reclaim, to take back ownership of our bodies and breasts. The fragmentation of our external selves should be halted by not allowing our body parts to be shown in isolation as if the part was the whole. Word such as 'my breasts' as well as 'my body' should be incorporated into our everyday speech. Minorities such as lesbians, Blacks, persons of adequate and comfortable body size or age have taken into their own usage words originally designed to hurt. When we can use words such as breast, feminist, or dyke in our everyday speech, they become defused as words of difference and 'otherness'.

The angry and politicized fight to legalize breast-feeding in public, is a reclamation of our rights as women. It seems a frightening commentary on our society that breasts can sell soft drinks, but not be seen as providing nourishment for our children. Breastfeeding should be assigned a monetary value, according to Mary King, a Portland State University economics professor, a position taken while speaking at the International Association for Feminist Economics. "Wages for breastfeeding could be based on the market value of the product, minimum wage, or opportunity cost, meaning the amount a mother could earn if she worked

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outside the home.”<sup>266</sup> Another point made was that while all members of a society benefit from the ‘production’ of children, not everyone contributes to that ‘production’. We can assign our own value to our breasts and present them in ways that we endorse or value.

One woman artist who, like Cindy Sherman, uses her own body or at least her face to (re)image the female form, is Jenny Seville. Her images are done on a massive scale that transforms the ordinary. The body is shown foreshortened, with ample body tissue. Scripted upon her flesh are words used by our society to proscribe women. Words like decorative, delicate and support; terms that do not approximate her reality, but may however reflect cultural pressures placed on her in order to access plastic surgery. “The conventions of painting flesh are overlaid with a contemporary anxiety or ambiguity.”<sup>267</sup> (Refer to Appendix 1 Fig.67) Another form of feminine representation of our breasts can be found in recent literature.

One Monday morning, September 1972, in Moosejaw Saskatchewan, Gloria Johnson experiences the Second Coming. Gloria and Jesus sit on her deck and have a conversation. Her housedress flops open in the breeze and her breasts are exposed. Jesus not only comments on the beauty of her breasts, but also flicks her nipple when He leaves. Gloria continues with her laundry after His departure and feels that all is right with the world. Although this story is meant to illustrate the extraordinary in the ordinary, I feel that this story reveals a feminine perspective on breasts and their importance in our lives. This quote sums it up nicely. “ I went inside the house. Well, now, wasn’t that a nice visit. Wasn’t that something . . . . I tucked my breasts back

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<sup>266</sup> *The Prince George Citizen*, Feminists Pushing Concept of Money for Breastfeeding. Monday, June 21<sup>st</sup>.1999 6

<sup>267</sup> Brooks Adams, Lisa Jardine, Martin Malony, Norman Rosenthal and Richard Stone, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. (London: Royal Academy of the Arts (Thames and Hudson), 18<sup>th</sup> September-28<sup>th</sup> December 1997) 33

into my kimono and lugged the [laundry] basket downstairs.”<sup>268</sup> The casual air of the story reduces the erotic breast to the normal. This is a perspective that needs developing.

## ROLE MODEL

The best resistance to false images is to be a role model for our young women. Girls who see women content with their bodies, comfortable with themselves and successful in their lifestyle will be able to make informed choices. Unfortunately, many young girls are setting their personal standards by women in the musical or movie worlds. Pop stars, such as Britiany Spears, whether they deny artificially constructed or ‘man-made’ breasts or not, fuel an eager desire for younger and younger teenagers to seek out breast augmentation. According to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, “breast surgery has become the third most frequent plastic surgery (after nose jobs and ear pinning) for girls 18 and under. In 1998, 1,840 girls received breast implants, up 57 per cent from 1996 and 89 percent from 1992.”<sup>269</sup> Recently, in Britain, a 15-year-old shocked the world with her plans to seek breast augmentation surgery on her 16th birthday. Her reasons were that the women on TV were successful, had implants, therefore success and implants were linked. Her parents seemed supportive, and her mother had undergone surgery on her breasts, nose, cheeks, stomach and hips. This young girl could benefit from a responsible role model. This story brings my historical breast imaging into the present, and provides a definite cause and effect situation. In this case, the false media images have had a direct and negative effect on the self-perception of a very young woman. I would like to briefly review the Internet before concluding.

## INTERNET

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<sup>268</sup> Gloria Sawai. The Day I Sat with Jesus on the Sun Deck and a Wind Came Up and Blew My Kimono Open and He Saw My Breasts. in Jo-Anne Elder and Colin O’Connell Eds. *Voices and Echoes. Canadian Women’s Spirituality*. (Waterloo:Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997) 31

<sup>269</sup> *The Prince George Citizen*. More Teens Seeking Breast Implants. Thursday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999



The use of the Internet is increasing worldwide, with many minority groups being able to express themselves. A good example is found in the area of pornography. Jenny Rains contributes to an erotic site, and this site enables her to share her photographic vision of female lust and desire. (Please review images numbered 39 and 40 found in Appendix 1) Lesbian, Gay and heterosexual porn, both soft and hard with all its attendant variations is freely available. Some exceptional sites of benefit to women can be found as well.

For example, a site containing the Century Project by Frank Cordelle, can be found at <http://century.conknet.com/photos.htm>. This site is a series of pictures of women from birth to a century of years. All ages, races, differences and disabilities are featured. Many of the images are accompanied by the words of the participants themselves. Mr. Cordelle graciously sent me two images for inclusion in my paper, as they are under copyright. These women are real women in real bodies and are a tribute to womanhood. I could not believe that a man produced such caring and exquisite images. ) See Jacqueline at Appendix 1 fig.68.)

Jacqueline has undergone a mastectomy and states that in this photograph she is without her 'false front and feeling stunning'.

What do I mean my false front? My prosthesis that mimics that diseased part of my body that was cut away years ago to save my life. My fake boob, my rubber tit, my concession to society's denial that women lose breasts every day. My bra goes along with the farce, holding my other breast high and firm like a sixteen-year oldie's that has never seen battle. Well, my breast is not high and firm, it hangs from my chest and rolls when I walk. It has nourished and nurtured dozens of children and it smiles at the memory of those lips that have rested there.<sup>270</sup>

The second woman's image chosen to represent Frank Cordelle's work is that of Ethel.<sup>271</sup> She is an older woman, (73), who reminded me of Marilyn Monroe. She states that the cardinal rule of

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<sup>270</sup> Jacqueline, age 38. *The Century Project* Available at <http://century.conknet.com/photos.htm>  
Copyright Frank Cordelle. 27 October 2000

<sup>271</sup> Ethel, age 73. Ibid.

being photographed in the nude is to have your socks and lipstick match. Marilyn felt that if the radio was, on she was not really completely naked. I loved both of their attitudes. (See Appendix 1 fig.69) However, some Internet sites perpetuate sexism and racism under the guise of entertainment.

I acquired an image from an Internet site, which reproduces a Black woman suffering from elephantiasis.<sup>272</sup> This woman is held up for ridicule, and disgust. (Compare figure 70 with figure 71 in Appendix 1.) Figure 70 shows a Black woman, standing completely exposed, while her white counterpart, suffering the same disease, covers her head. The loss of face covering for the Black woman exemplifies the semi-animalistic regard in which her white male photographer held her. Both photographs were taken around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however the women were treated differently. The fact that the suffering Black female had a disfigured breast from the disease, has placed her as an object of disdain and morbid disgust by this web site.<sup>273</sup> The racism inherent in the uncovered photograph demonstrates the anthropological mores of the early twentieth century. However, how far have we come from that point as we move into a new millennium?

## CONCLUSION

The question I have left to answer is related to the original thesis. I have shown that historical imaging has influenced self-perception for women, we have identified resistance, proposed long-term solutions. However, women can start to celebrate 'what is' instead of 'what is desired'. "Rather than asking "How do I look?" as a question of identity, many women are asking "How

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<sup>272</sup> Elephantiasis is defined as long standing edema of one or both lower extremities, and sometimes of the arms and other body parts, that is due to lymphatic obstruction. The involved part is tremendously swollen and hardened, and the skin surface folds and produces fissures, causing it to resemble the leg of an elephant. This condition may be caused by filariasis, (an infestation of a parasitic worm), heart failure or chronic obstruction of the lymphatic vessels. Charles J Tortora, and Nicholas P. Anagnostakos. *Principles of Anatomy and Physiology*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition.(New York: Harper and Row, 1990) 685

<sup>273</sup> <http://vagina.rotten.com/elephtits>

have I been taught to see myself?" as a way of critiquing cultural assumptions."<sup>274</sup> I would like to present one last image for your consideration. (See Appendix 1 Fig. 72) Although this image looks like the first images produced in a mammographic series (the craniocaudal), it is an astrological event. This image of the White Dwarf proves without a doubt, that women have heavenly bodies, especially our breasts.

If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate. (Seeing comes before words.) Not only personal experience, but also the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents.<sup>275</sup>

John Berger and I agree on the importance of images. To accurately reflect on images and their relation to power enables us to link them with our past and future. The power to define, image and present our breasts belongs to women. Images and the ideals of breasts have changed over time to fit the dictates and priorities of a particular time and place. These changes have impacted on women to a greater and lesser degrees. The ways that women have historically responded to these images provides hope for our future. The next generation of women is already defusing and refusing messages and images that are destructive to their self-image.

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<sup>274</sup> Patricia Foster.ed. *Minding the Body*.(New York: Doubleday, 1994) 10

<sup>275</sup> John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. 33

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## APPENDIX I IMAGES





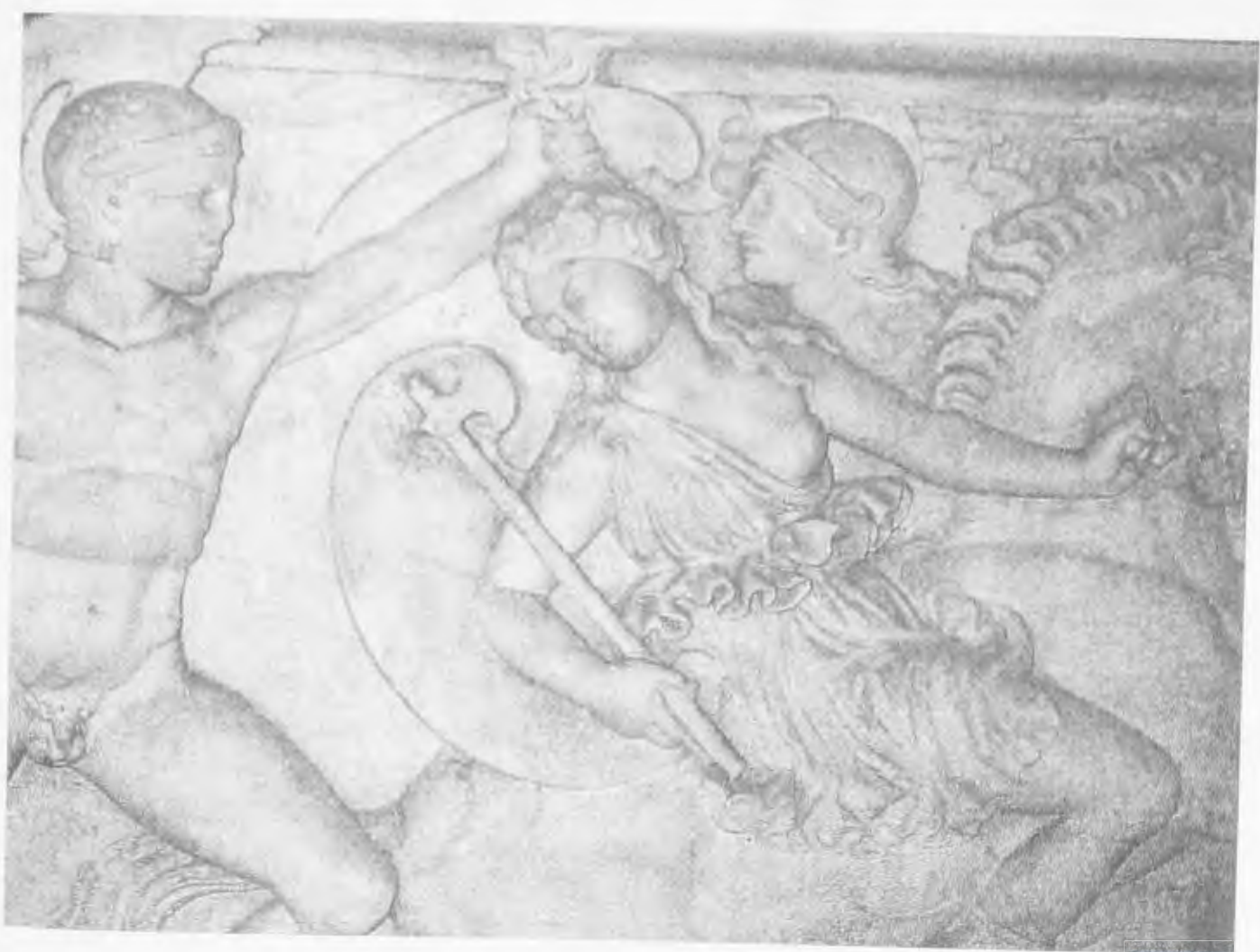




displays his wounds and Mary bares her





























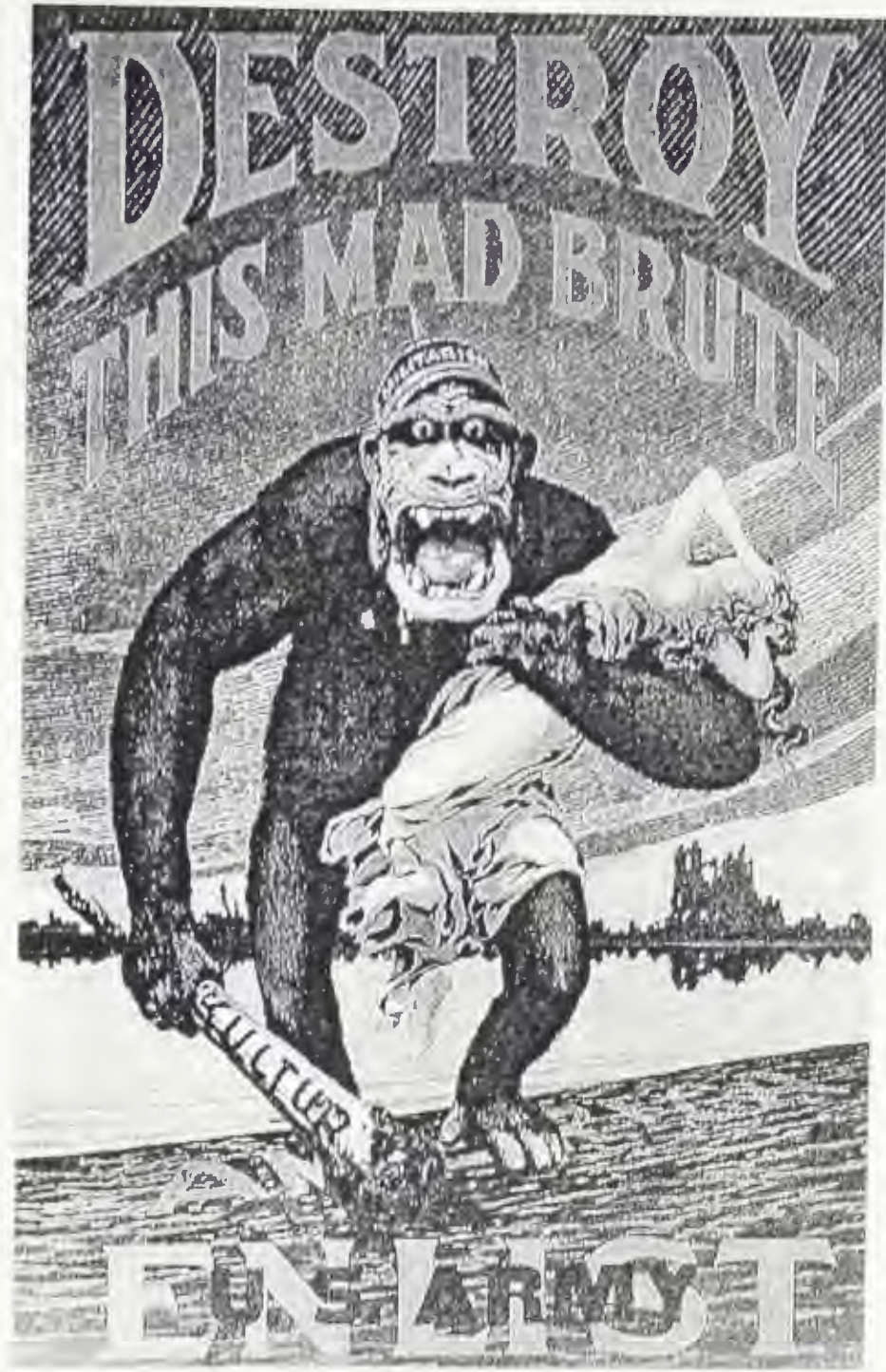




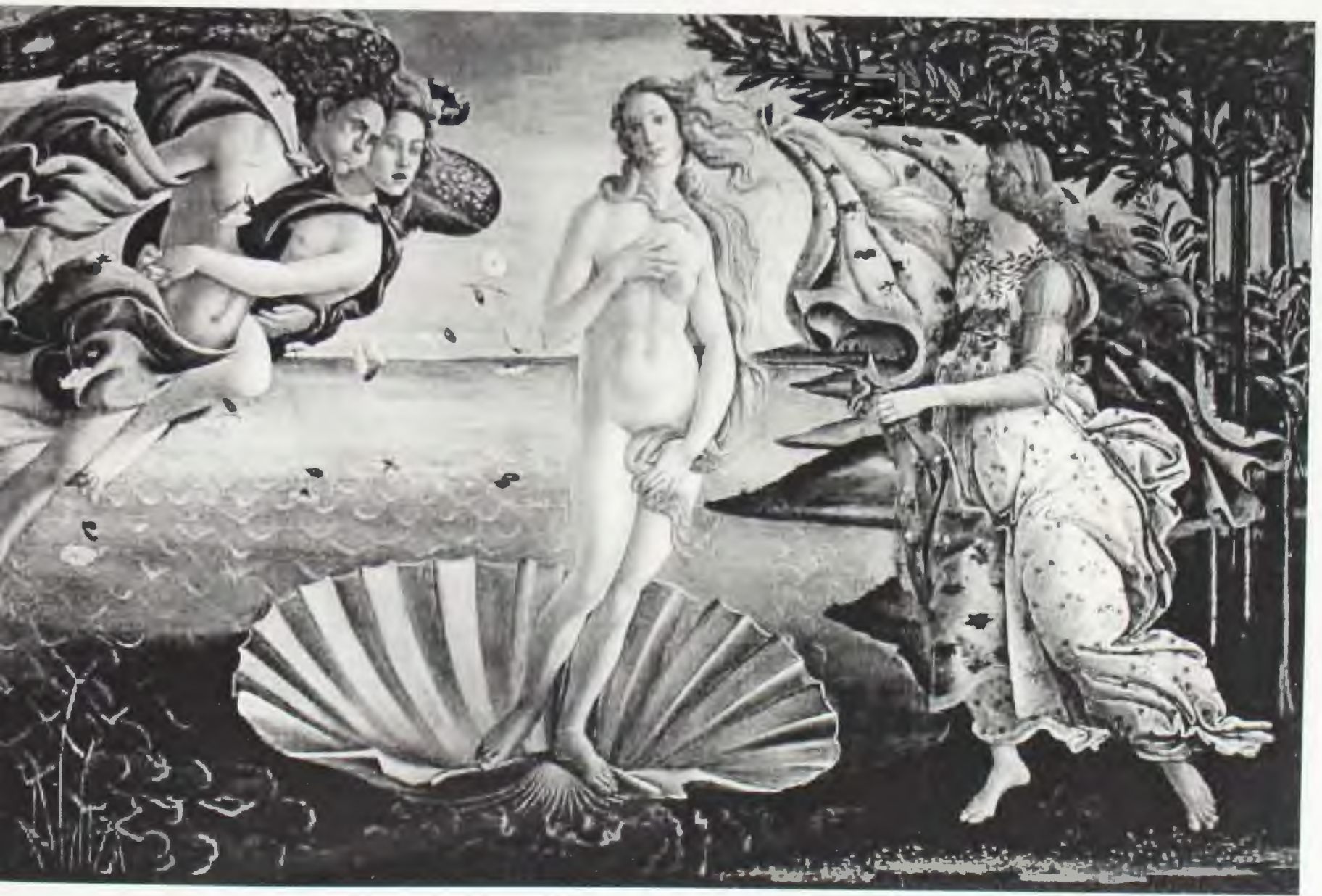


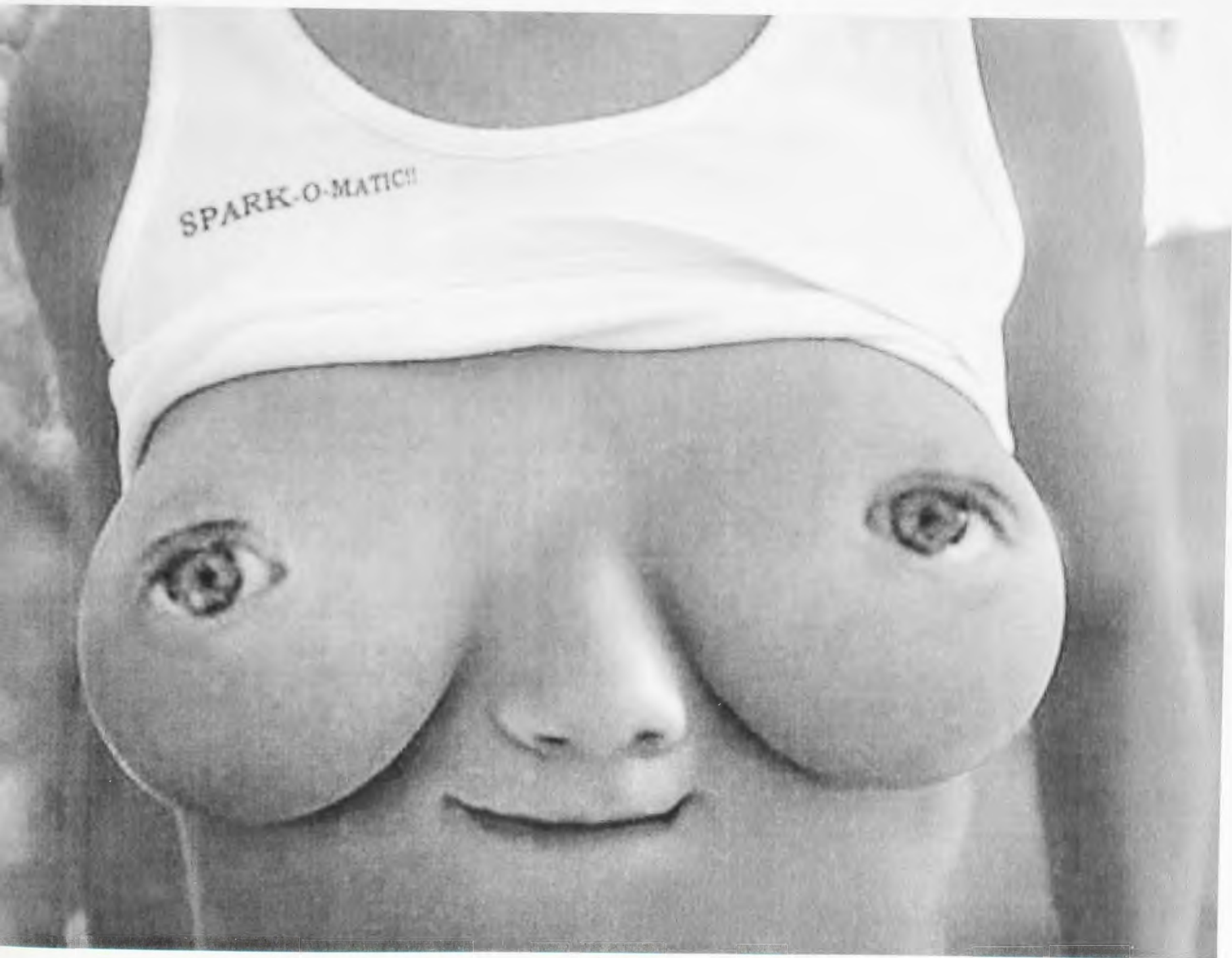


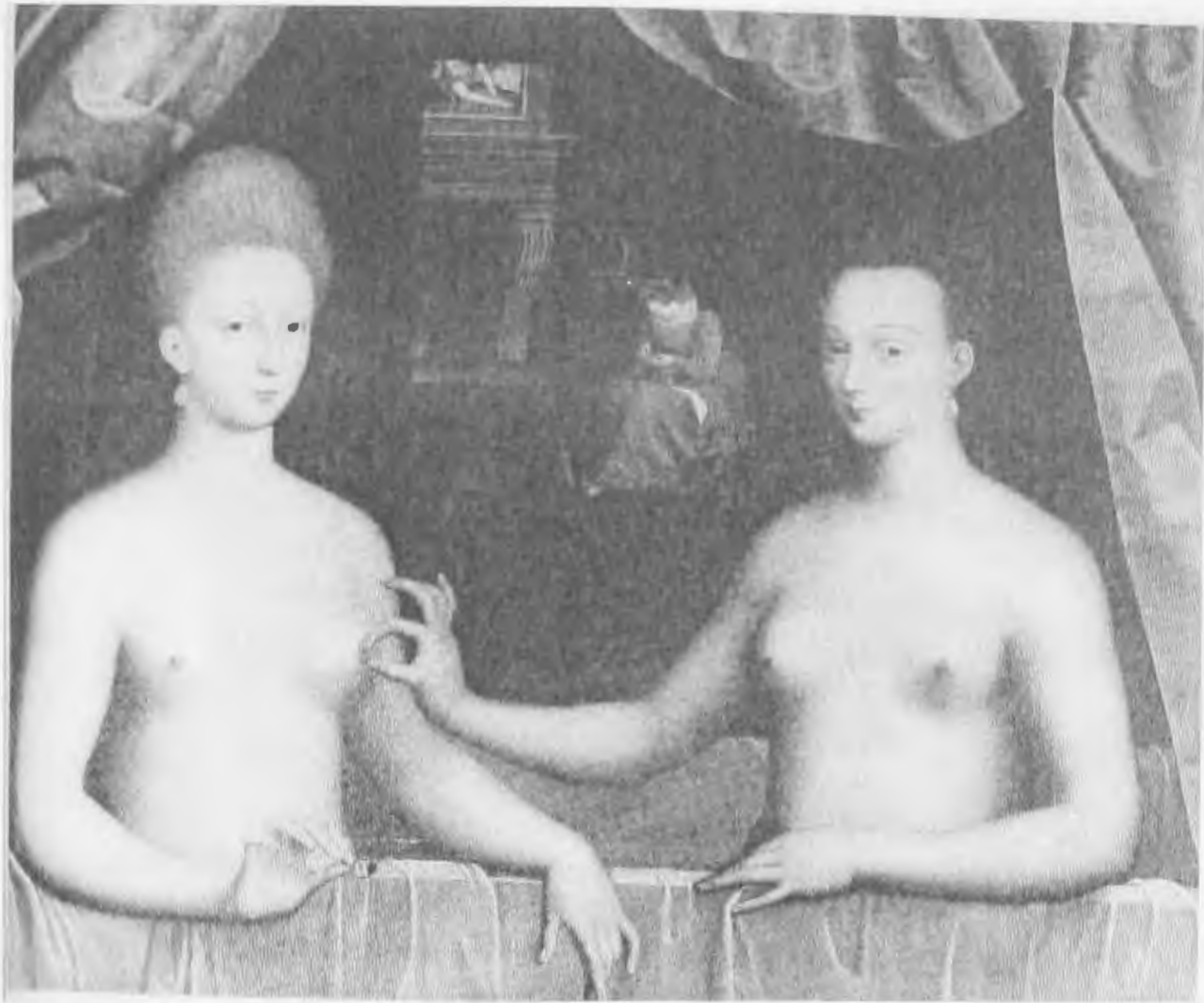
















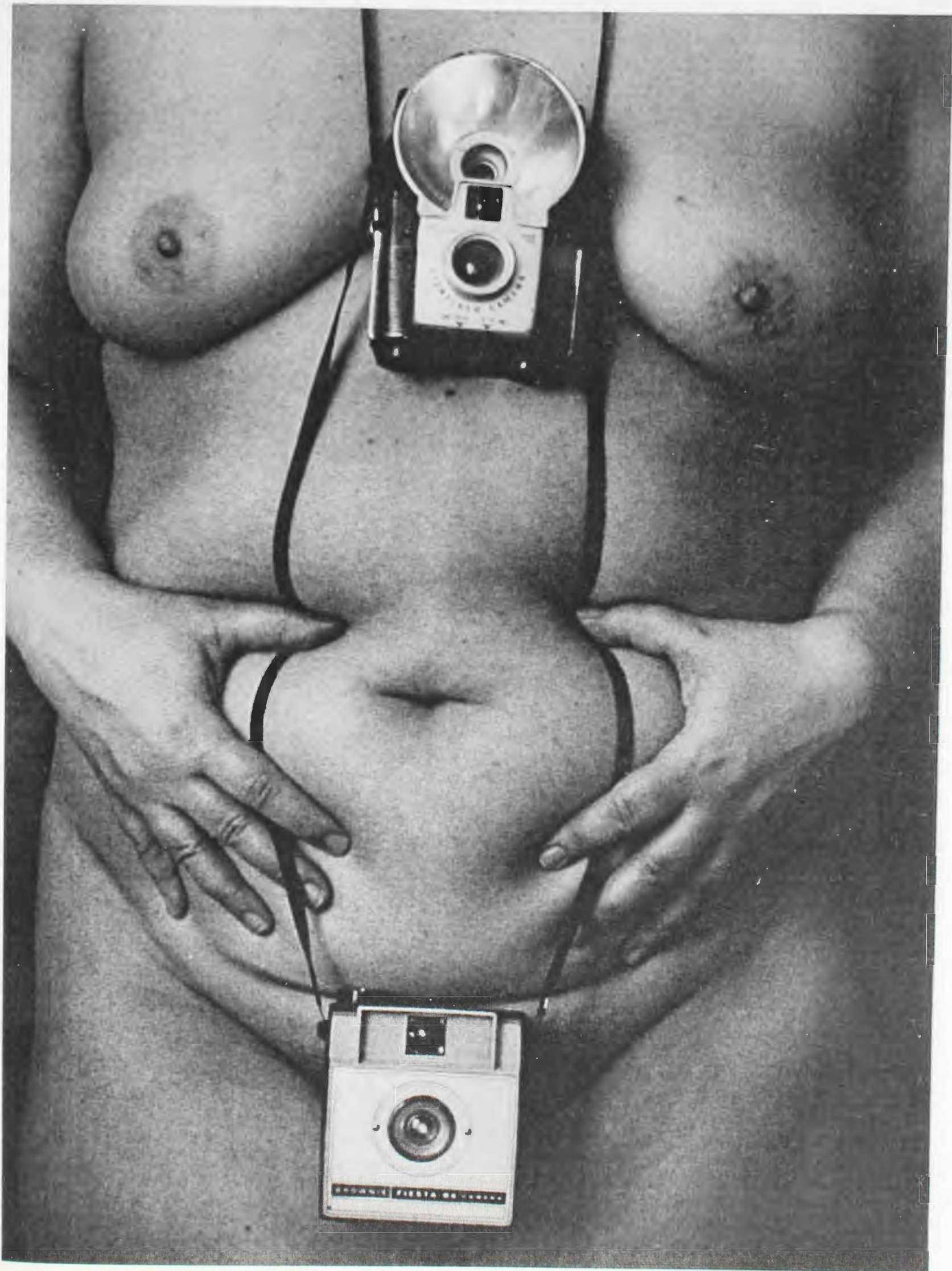


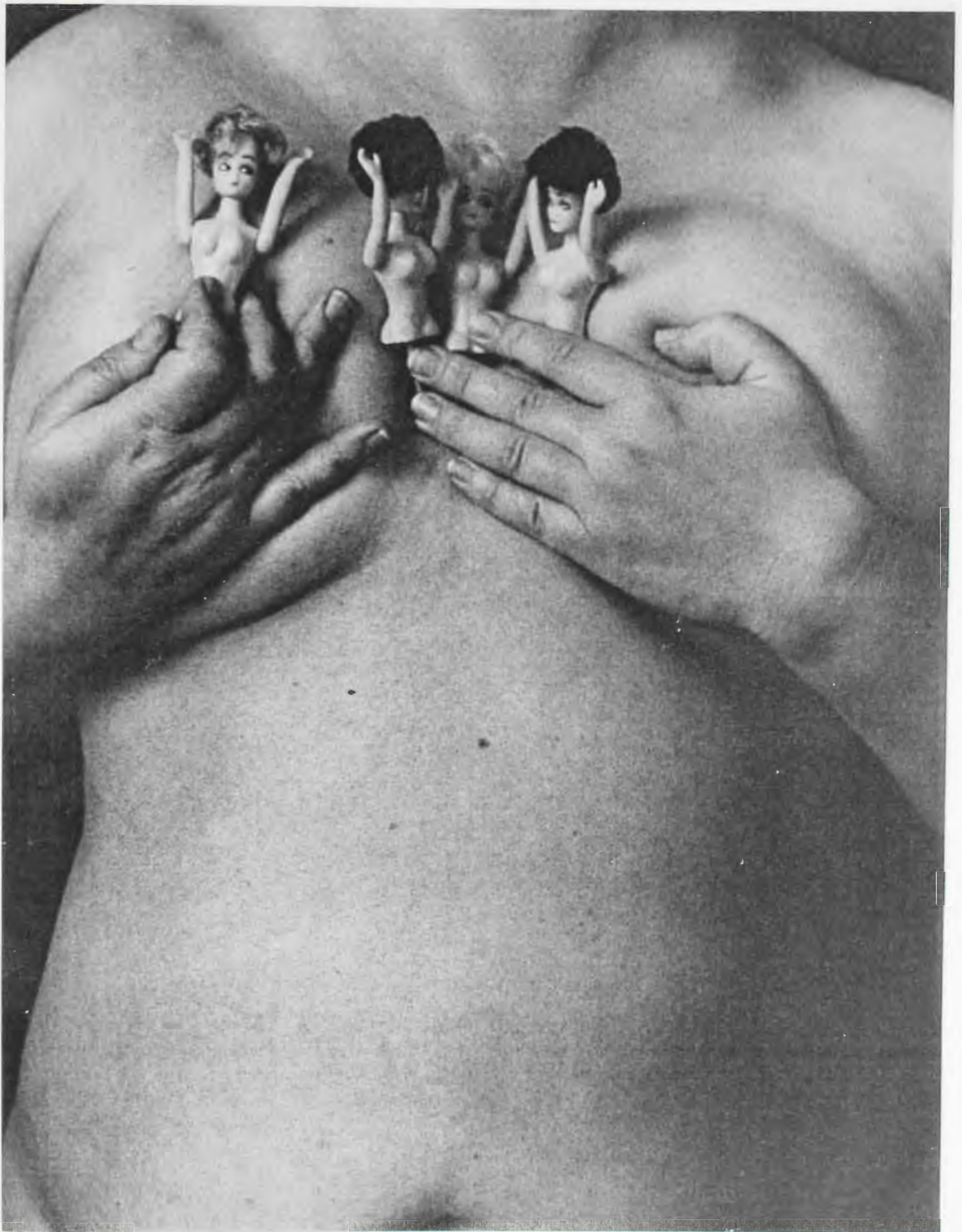




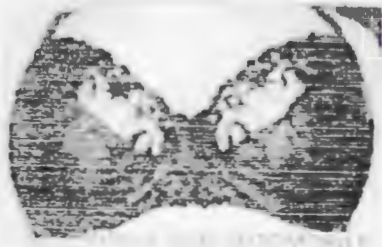




















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J.Rains (c) 1998



Title: "Tattoo". Price: \$19.00 Signed and numbered hand print. Size 8"x10" Pearl finish



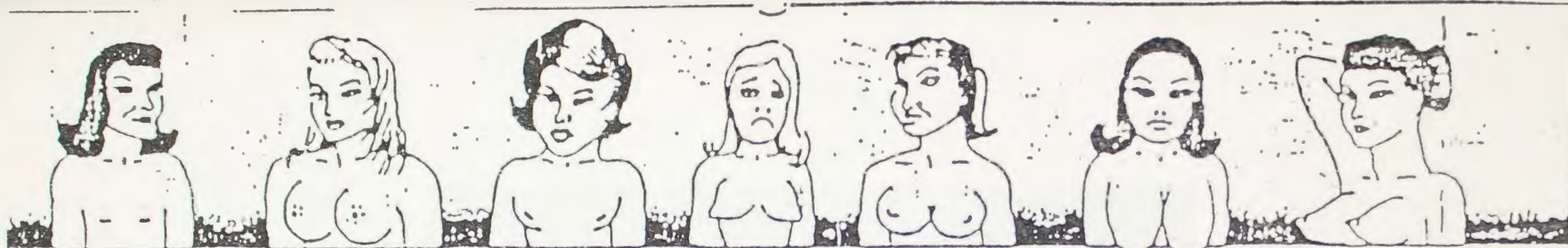
Title: "Blind...Again.". Price: \$19.00 Signed and numbered hand print. Size 8"x10" Pearl finish.

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CRANBERRIES

ORANGES

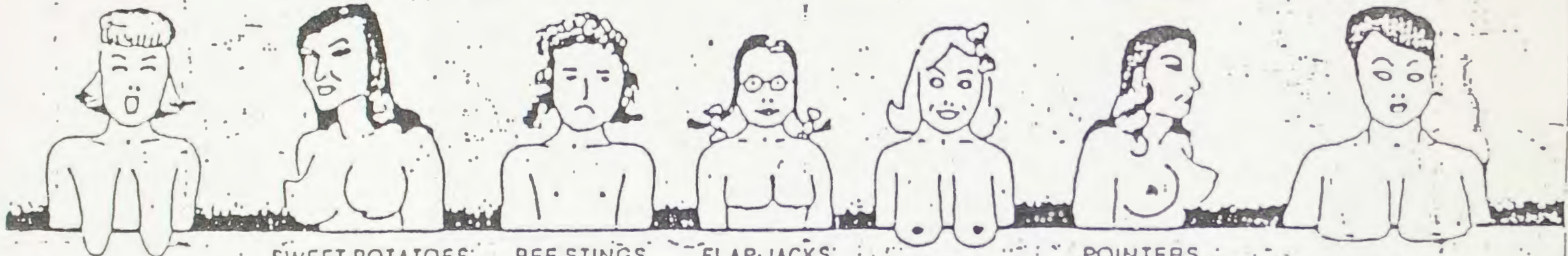
PEACHES

LEMONS

GRAPE-FRUITS

WATER-MELONS

PEARS



CUCUMBERS

SWEET POTATOES

BEE STINGS

FLAP-JACKS

HAS-BEENS

POINTERS

MAIL-BAGS



UNDER CHINNERS

CUP CAKES

BALLOONS

WATER-WINGS

COAT HOOKS

BLOCK BUSTERS

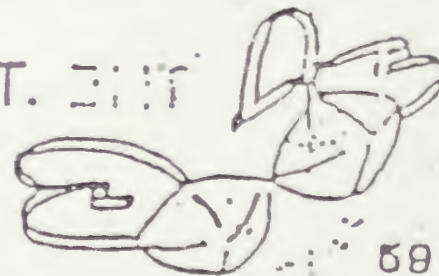
HOT WATER BOTTLES

THE "COSY TIT" BRASSIERE Co.

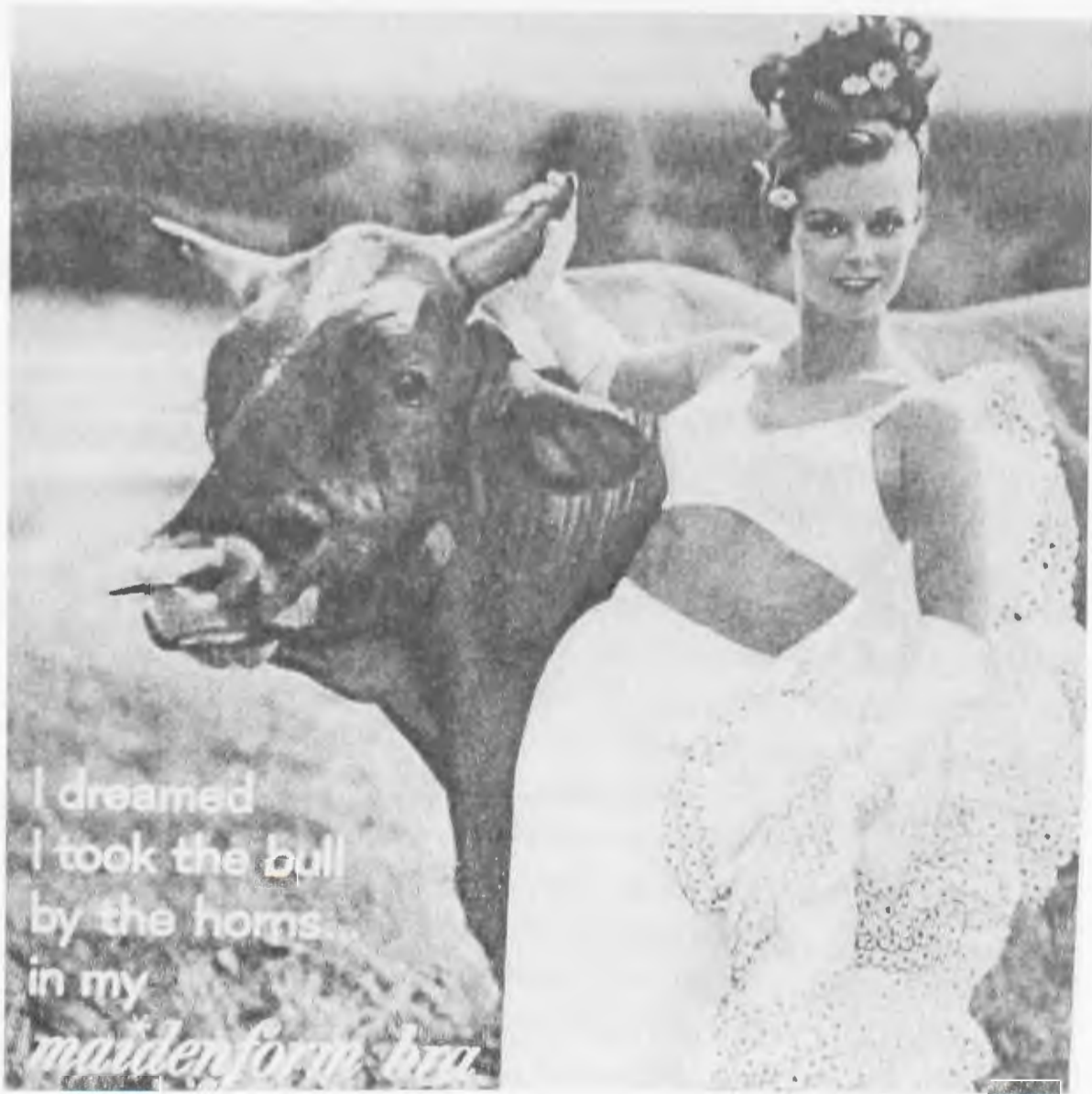
ORDER CHART.

NOTE: TO AVOID MISTAKES • ORDER BY MODEL NAME

The "COSY TIT" fits the best on any breast!



17



I dreamed  
I took the bull  
by the horns  
in my  
*maidenform bra*







bare  
your  
body  
in  
a  
whole  
new  
way

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EXERCISE CAN  
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IN YOUR BODY.  
EXCEPT THE ONE IN YOUR BREAST.

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# DRAW YOUR WEAPONS



LILY OF FRANCE

**X·BRA**<sup>TM</sup>  
YOUR SECRET WEAPON



## Anterolateral dissection

Pectoralis major muscle (deep to pectoral fascia)

Serratus anterior muscle

External oblique muscle

Clavicle

2nd rib

Pectoralis major muscle

Pectoral fascia

Intercostal muscles

Intercostal vessels and nerve

Lung

6th rib

Suspensory ligaments (Cooper)

Areolar glands

Areola

ipple

Lactiferous ducts

Lactiferous sinus

Fat

Gland lobules

Suspensory ligaments (Cooper)

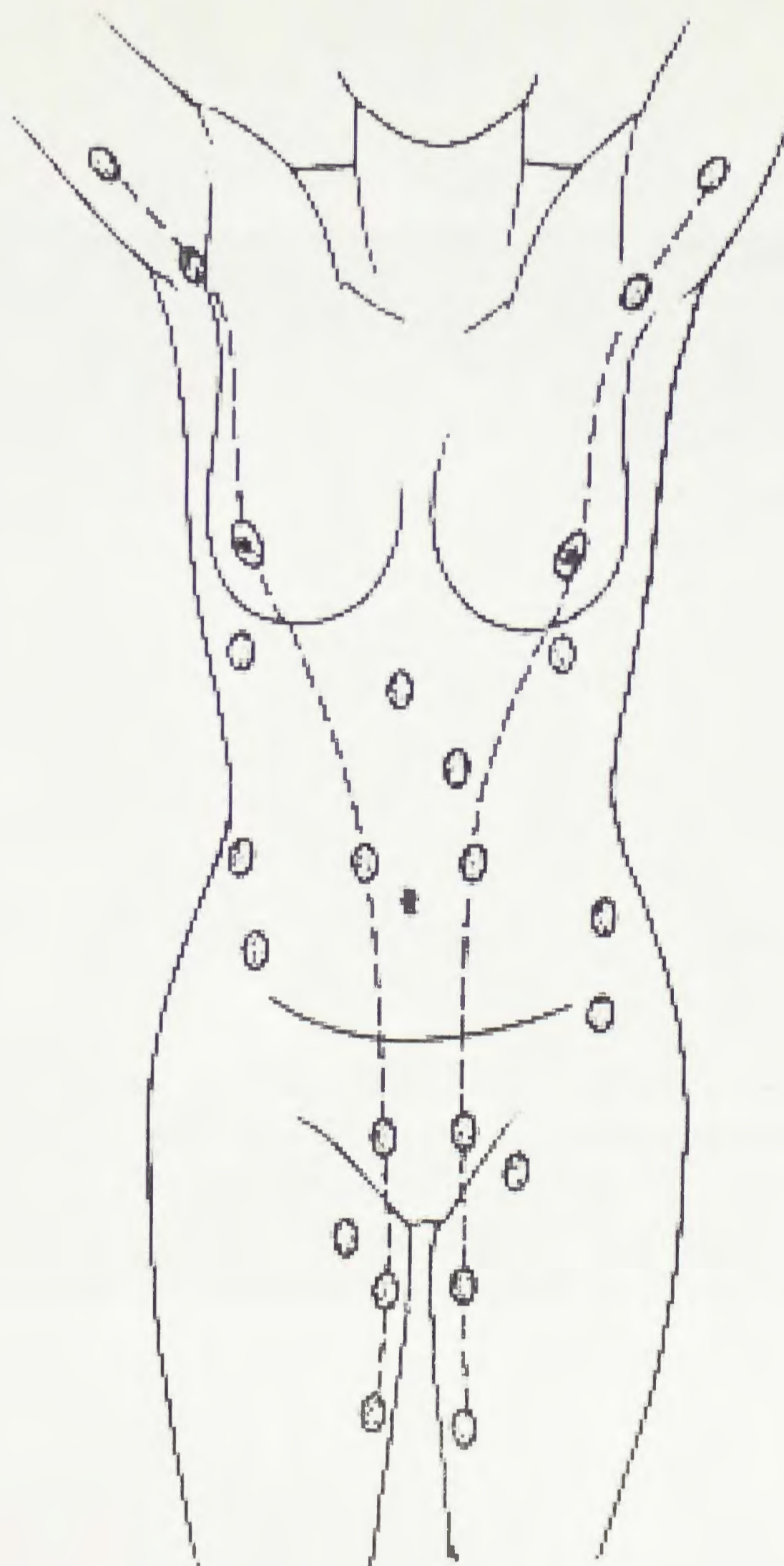
Lactiferous duct

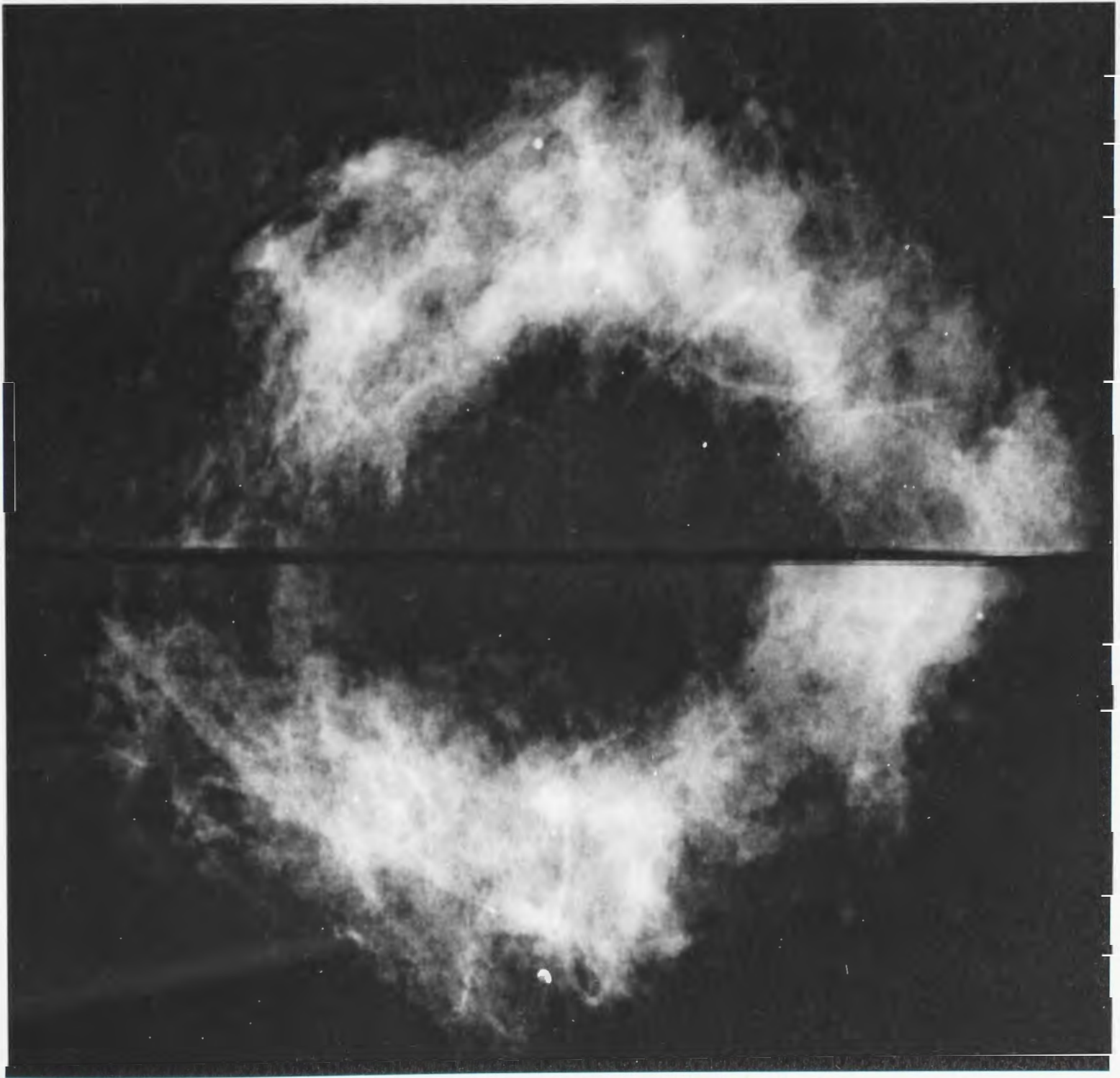
Lactiferous sinus

Gland lobules

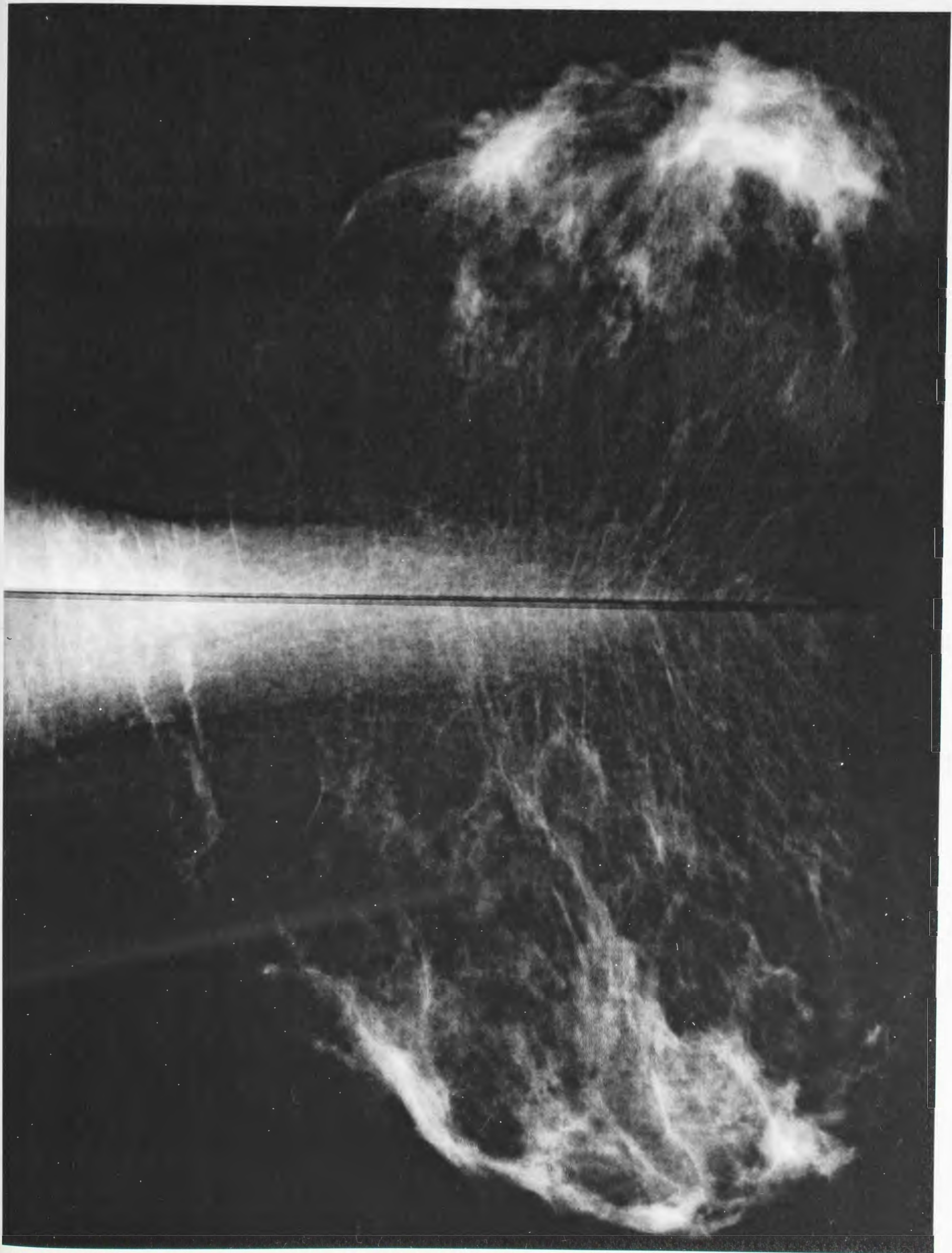
Intercostal vessels and nerve

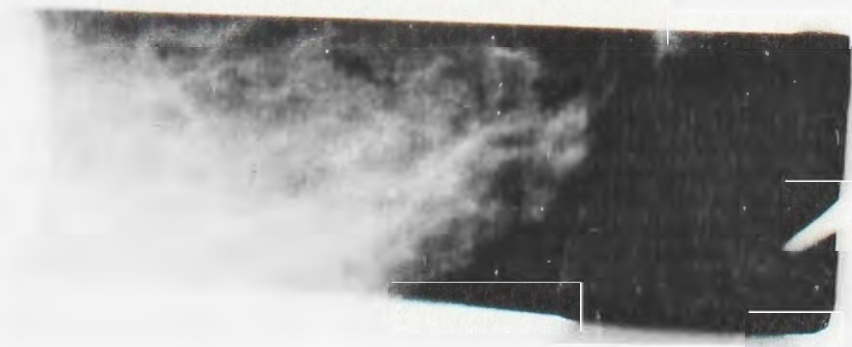
## Sagittal section

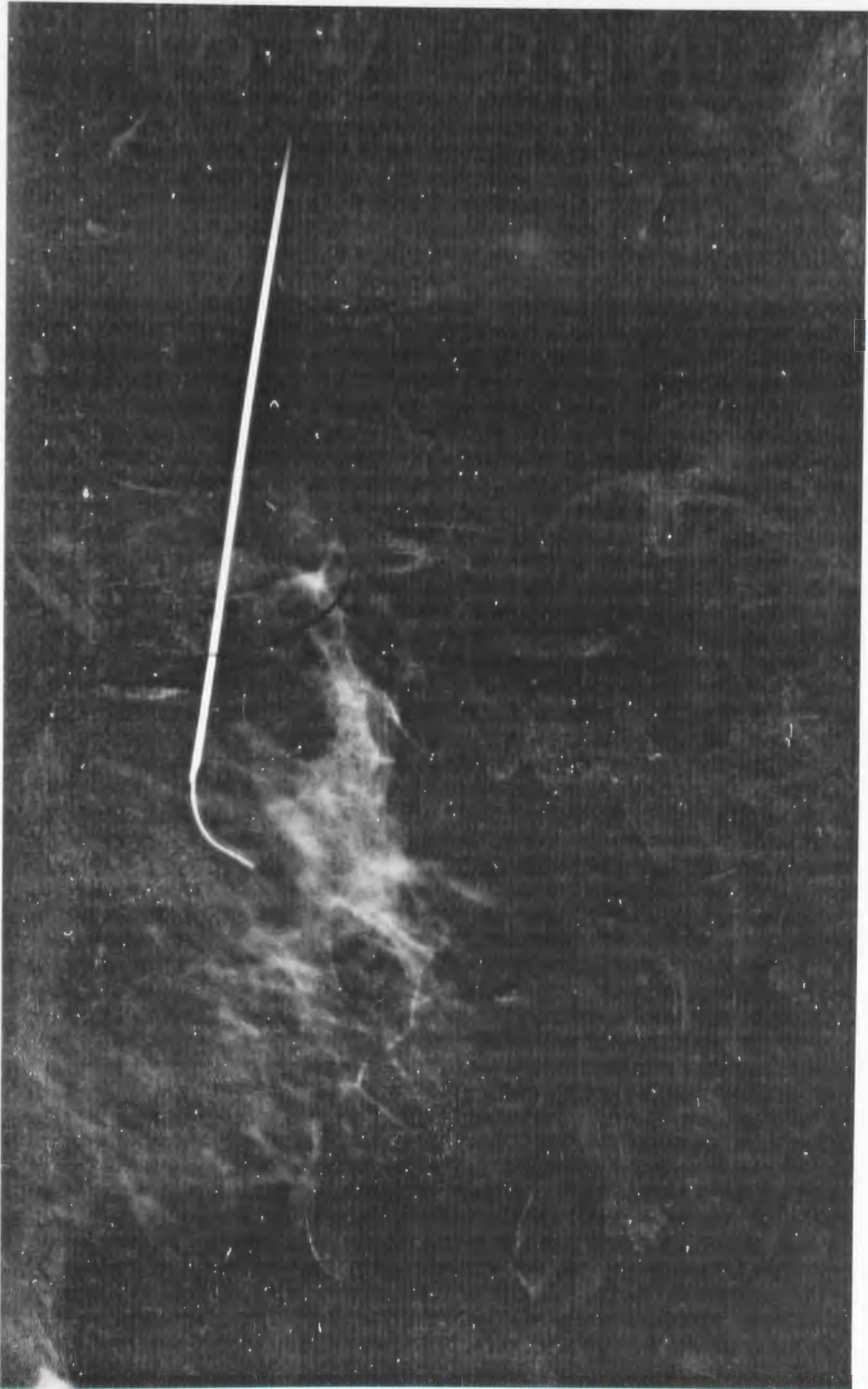
















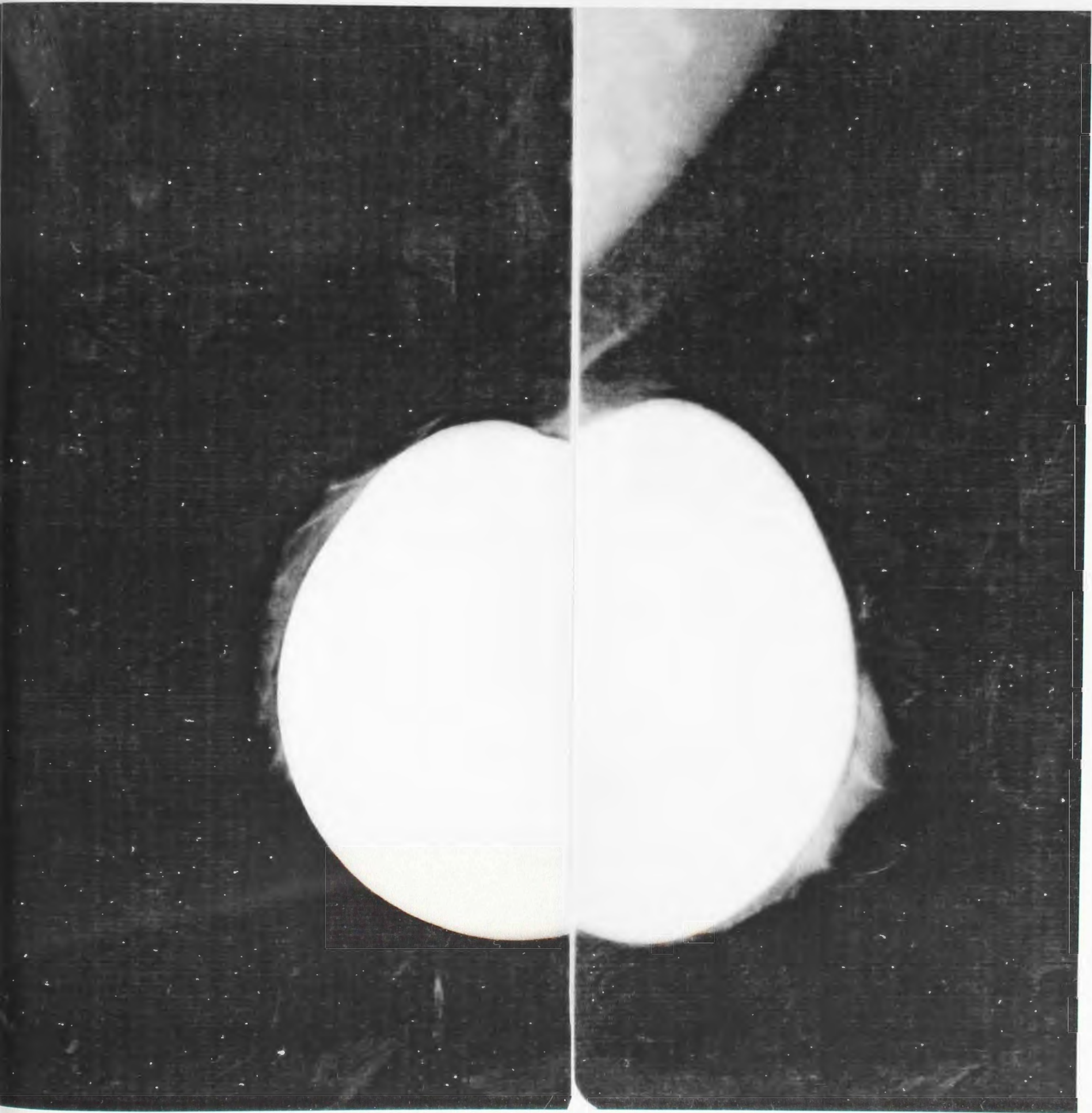












# Breast Implants 411

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## Size A to D

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Patient age:23, Height: 5'8", Weight: 130lbs., Implant style: Mentor, smooth, round, saline., Implant size: 425cc filled to 440cc., Position: Sub-pectoral.

*Photographs courtesy of Michael E. Ciaravino, M.D.*



Pre-op

Post-op

Pictures [1-1]

"Because there are things women need to know about breast augmentation"

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# Case Five

## Description

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Patient Before Surgery



Patient After Surgery







Klinsmann, Völler und Co - die Alten kommen

**ENTHOUSE**  
KGB pob...  
SIE IN DE...  
SSEM PYSHE...  
PREBRSJALA...  
Tobolna Jono Cskovi...

**VANITY FAIR**

COUTURE CL...  
Soleil L'empres...  
Sale of a Life...  
by Bryna Gurno...  
AGENT PROVOCATE...  
A Mowat's Investigat...  
Stalks a Serial Kill...  
by Ron Rosenber...

**WILSON**

**PH**  
SPECIAL REPORTAGE

LES STARS DE MARK SELIGER  
RWANDA: L'HORREUR  
MATERIAL WORLD - LE DOCUMENT  
NICARAGUA: L'ENFANCE BRISÉE  
USA: LES MARGINAUX

MICHAEL CASH

FILLES DE...











# Elephantiasis Mammaria

rotten.com

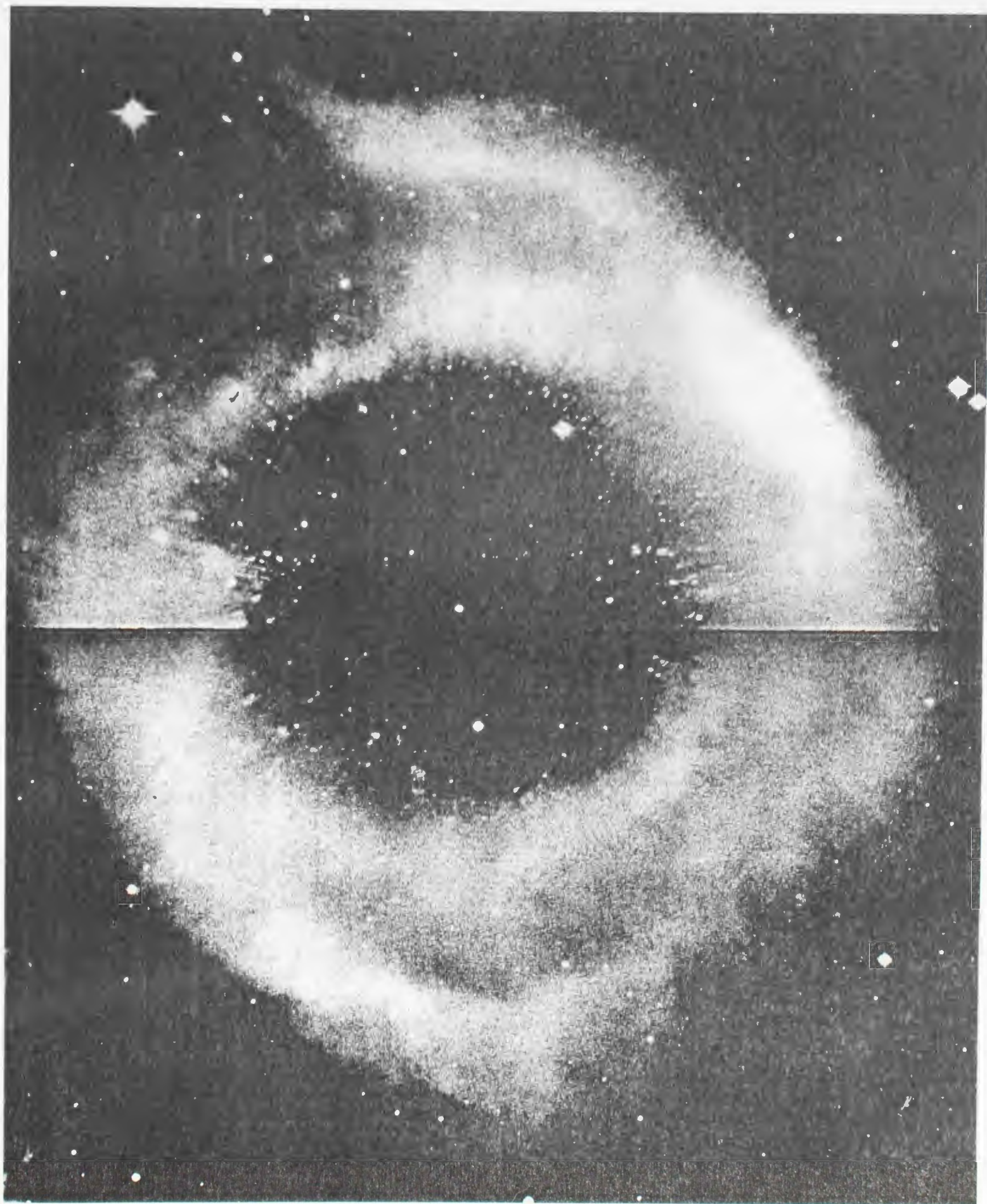


## Elephantiasis

Elephantiasis of this nature is very rare, this is the best picture of this condition we have ever seen. This vintage photo of a Sudanese woman from the 1910's was acquired in Los Angeles recently. It is unretouched.

[[return to rotten.com](http://www.rotten.com)]





## APPENDIX II SURVEY FORMS

# MAMMOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGIST BREAST SURVEY

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Check one of the following:

Current residence

Eastern provinces \_\_\_\_\_

Western provinces \_\_\_\_\_

Ontario \_\_\_\_\_

Quebec \_\_\_\_\_

Are you the member of an ethnic minority or religious group that you would **like** to identify?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years performing mammography \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have to overcome an aversion to handling other women's breasts? No. \_\_\_\_\_

yes \_\_\_\_\_ How did you do this if answer was yes? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you know technologists that would not like to work in mammography? No \_\_\_\_\_

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ What do you think is the main reason? \_\_\_\_\_

Has being a mammographer changed your opinion about your breasts? No \_\_\_\_\_

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ How \_\_\_\_\_

Has being a mammographer changed your opinion about the breasts of other women? No \_\_\_\_\_

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ How \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a story about breasts either patient initiated or personal that you would like to share? Please use this space as well as the reverse of the form. Thank you.

## General Breast Survey Form

### DEMOGRAPHIC DATA:

Check one of the following

Current residence

Western provinces \_\_\_\_\_

Eastern provinces \_\_\_\_\_

Ontario \_\_\_\_\_

Quebec \_\_\_\_\_

Age:

15-25 yrs \_\_\_\_\_

25-45 yrs \_\_\_\_\_

45- up yrs \_\_\_\_\_

Are you the member of an ethnic minority or religious group that you would **like** to identify?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

### SURVEY QUESTIONS :

How do you feel about your breasts? Are they:

Fine \_\_\_\_\_

Too small \_\_\_\_\_

Fantastic \_\_\_\_\_

Too large \_\_\_\_\_

Beautiful \_\_\_\_\_

Ugly \_\_\_\_\_

Floppy \_\_\_\_\_

Too heavy \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever felt differently about your breasts?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ Because \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel about the breasts of other women?

Fine \_\_\_\_\_

I never look \_\_\_\_\_

They are sexy \_\_\_\_\_

They are all better than mine \_\_\_\_\_

They are all not as good as mine \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

If you have a story you would like to tell about your breasts, e.g. puberty, sexual encounters, nursing babies, mammography or aging please use the back of this form. Thank you



APPENDIX III SAMPLE CONSENT FORM AND  
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

----This is to state that I agree to participate in a thesis project of research for Helen Domshy entitled “(Re) Imaging the Breast. A Feminist Analysis of a Cultural Obsession”

----I understand that this interview will be written.

----I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent to discuss my experiences and to discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

----I understand that data from this study will be used as part of a thesis on this topic and may be published in scholarly articles.

----I understand that I am participating in this research solely in order to advance knowledge and that this study has no further motive with which I have not been acquainted.

----I understand that my anonymity will be preserved

----I understand that, if I request, the researcher will show me relevant parts of the manuscript(s) to ensure that the information provided by me is not quoted out of context, and that is correctly interpreted.

As part of your informed consent, you will be given a copy of the research proposal, the consent form, the statement of confidentiality regarding the research, and a full discussion and answer time prior to signing consent form, should you so wish.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT, AND THEREFORE I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM HELEN DOMSHY 564-4288  
OR DR. J. FISKE AT UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

LETTER TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN  
THESIS PROJECT FOR HELEN DOMSHY

(RE)IMAGING THE BREAST. A POST MODERN LOOK AT A CULTURAL OBSESSION

To the participants in my study

I wish to take this opportunity to give you a few written details about my project. You have been selected by me to discuss either your medical profession, or your personal experiences with your breasts. I will tape our conversation, and will stop the tape at any time at your request. My goal is to examine the perceptions of women about their breasts and the breasts of other women; look for changes in these attitudes if any, and the reason(s) for any possible change. I also wish to examine motivation for cosmetic breast surgery, and the medical practice of this speciality area. My ultimate goal is to satisfy requirements for candidacy for an M.A. degree from U.N.B.C. It has always been a part of my life to examine breast images, and this thesis topic will publish my observations, and that of other women. It is my hope that recognizing the impact of breast imaging in our culture and the ensuing destructive results, will help push for change and a reclaiming of breasts by the women who own them.

There are no risks associated with the study, and any benefits would be long range to the community of women as a whole. Your conversations are taped and transcribed and the two items are kept separate in different locked containers. The transcriptionist will not have access to your name. There will not be any identifying names or situations be contained within the paper. The tapes and their transcription will be kept for one approximately one year, then destroyed after the defense of my thesis. I will be the only person to have access to these records. My name and phone number is on the consent form, and to repeat, I can be reached at 564-4288. Any questions or concerns can also be addressed to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, UNBC.

I will show you your words as written in my paper, to verify their correct contextual usage, at your request. I would be happy to discuss my findings with you at a mutually convenient time. Thank you so much for your participation.

Yours truly,

Helen Domshy

- Fig.40. Jenny Rains. *Blind...Again*. 2000
- Fig.41. Anonymous
- Fig.42. Maidenform Bra Ad. "I dreamed I took the bull by the horns in my Maidenform bra." 1962
- Fig.43. Cindy Sherman. *Untitled #131*. 1983
- Fig.44. Rosy Martin. *The Construction of Heterosexuality Part 4: An Act of Duplicity*. 1986
- Fig.45. Victoria's Secret Advertisement. *Mademoiselle*. March 2000
- Fig.46. Nike Inner Actives advertisement. *Fitness* September 1999
- Fig.47. Lily of France X-Bra. *Mademoiselle*. March 2000
- Fig.48. Reid S. Yalom. *Nipple Ring. U.S.A.* 1995
- Fig.49. Frank Netter. *Anatomy of the Mammary Gland*.
- Fig.50. Anatomy of the Human Breast. from *Breastfeeding. A Guide for the Medical Profession*. 1994
- Fig.51. Craniocaudad mammogram. Used with permission.
- Fig.52. Medio-lateral mammogram. Used with permission.
- Fig.53. Breast Cancer. Used with permission.
- Fig.54. Breast with wire marker. Used with permission.
- Fig.55. Breast Ultrasound. Used with permission.
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- Fig.63. Before and after reduction images from Internet
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- Fig.69. Frank Cordell. *The Century Project. Ethel* 2000 © Used with Permission
- Fig.70. Elephantiasis Mammaria. 1910. Rotten.com 2000
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- Fig.72. Anonymous. *A White Dwarf. Celestial Happening*. 1999

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the people who gave me their unfailing support during the entire process of working toward this degree: Denis Domshy, Karen Eldridge, Leslie Marx and Larry Breckon. I would also like to thank Dr. Marika Ainley for her faith in me. Also, thanks you to my thesis committee: Professor Beverly Leipert, Dr. Theresa Healy and Dr. JoAnne Fiske for their untiring support of my work. Dr. J. Fisk requires a special word of thanks for her calm belief in my ability and her frequent transmission of this confidence to me.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Edna D. Rushton-Skerry

## INTRODUCTION

Beata cujus umbera  
Summo replete munere  
Terris alebant unicum  
Terrae polique gloriam ...<sup>1</sup>

Since the Venerable Bede (A.D. > 673-735) penned these words, many more have been used to imagine the female breast. Poems, prose, sculpture, paintings, religious theory and even national laws have all contributed to the message sent to women in regard to our breasts. The intent of this thesis is to examine breast images throughout the ages and to explore the possibility that these images have forced a fragmented and destructive self-image upon modern women. This aim will be accomplished by examining many diverse sources of breast representations to determine any possible relationship between them and the breast self-perception of contemporary women in my survey. An analysis of historical images of the breast reveals the creative actions that have been employed by women to resist cultural ideals imposed on them.

Women have often accepted the imposed usage and terminology related to their breasts throughout time; however, we need to reclaim the pride of reality as well as to celebrate the differences of breasts. Appreciation of their bodily realities and differences in structure is essential for women and will defuse the impossible standards as presently being defined by the media. We need to recognize the construction of this false body image in order to identify the racist, elitist and sexist overtones inherent within them. The deconstruction of breast imagery will bring truth, reality and empowerment to the owners of breasts. Liberation will create "new ways of seeing."<sup>2</sup>

My identification of the need for this type of research came from two sources. During my professional practice as a hospital-based diagnostic mammographer, I noticed quite a variety of reactions by women to this examination. Their words and body language conveyed feelings

---

<sup>1</sup>"Thou whose blessed breasts, filled with a gift from on high, fed for all lands the unique glory of earth and heaven..." Marina Warner, *Alone of all Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). 197



ranging from dislike and hatred of their breasts to total denial of their presence and importance in their lives. Shame, excessive modesty, homophobia and apologies for self-perceived inadequacies were a few of these reactions. Pride and enjoyment of breasts were very rare. Women also exhibited different levels of comfort when being handled in such an intimate manner during mammography by another woman.

These observations connected with the knowledge acquired while receiving my own mammographic training and later while teaching student mammographers. I learned that some technologists never feel comfortable performing this examination and choose not to work in this specialized area. It seems to be difficult for some technologists to overcome the social taboo against handling the breasts of other women. I wondered what caused these differences in perception, and do these perceptions change over a lifetime? How do mammographers overcome the initial distaste for the intimacy of this work? What influence does the medical gaze exert? What changes in self-perception have been caused by the increased incidence of breast cancer?

The second impetus to examine this topic arose from my study of feminist theory and the deconstructive analysis of our image-laden culture. The body and bared breast of the human female have been used throughout history to represent fertility, domesticity and eroticism and to promote nationalistic fervor.

During the 20th century, images of breasts were appropriated for commercial usage, which has contributed heavily to the fragmented and objectified self-image of modern women. Advertisements using appropriated images of breasts for products ranging from automobiles to toothpaste promise the purchaser the hope of becoming either the perfect man/woman or the possibility of possessing the perfect person depicted in the image. Media-generated images, with the assistance of the airbrush and computer, have fostered a false ideal of the human female.

---

<sup>2</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. (London: Penquin Books, 1976)

Childlike waifs dominate the world stage and create an impossible ideal for females over the age of twelve.

As a result of these media images adult females now question their natural body and engage in a life long struggle for control of their seemingly inadequate bodies. Our society feels this effect by watching our loved ones suffering from bulimia or anorexia. This struggle extends into the area of fashion as an analysis of corsets and other 'corrective' garments will show in chapter four. Since breasts do not respond to aerobic exercise and diet and refuse to be controlled or manipulated, I will also be introducing the role of the plastic surgeon in creating the molded or sculptured body in the same chapter. As I will argue, since plastic surgery is not available to all women, due to the high cost of plastic surgery, we must consider a class perspective on perfection.

Racism and sexism combine in the story of Saartje Baartman, also known as the 'Hottentot Venus'. She was exhibited as a side show freak in early nineteenth century Europe. Excessively large nipples and protuberant buttocks demonstrated her 'otherness' and overt animalistic sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The dominant culture of Anglo-Saxon beauty recoils from bodily excess, which racial and cultural ideals attribute to women of color. Full lips are now accepted as sexy, but assimilation dictates no large breasts, thighs or legs, no differences in noses or eyes and as white a skin as possible. This association with size and racism is seen clearly in this statement: "The distribution of weight in our bodies made us low, closer to earth; this baseness was akin to sexual excess (while not being sexy at all) and decidedly not feminine."<sup>4</sup> False images not only promote the destruction of a female self-image, but also, sexism, racism and the stereotypical classification of women.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>4</sup> Susan Bordo, *Twilight Zones The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 135

Feminists have long decried the words of Freud who declared that "anatomy is destiny."<sup>5</sup> The slogan "The personal is political"<sup>6</sup> was adopted as a more accurate reflection of social significance. Although the fragmentation of the body has been identified, no specific discourse on breasts has been initiated. We anguish in private, opt for 'corrective' surgery when possible and often hate an innocent part of our anatomy. Feminist scholars need to begin this discourse and all women need access to this information. Feminist research has the potential to be participatory, when women raise their own voices valuable information is disseminated to the academy and the community.

### THEORETICAL DEBTS

My plan is to place breast imaging in historical perspective, discuss the ways of seeing and being seen, examine the medical gaze with reference to any positive or negative effects reported on surveys and interviews conducted. My goal is to document the attitudes and perceptions of real women, analyze feminist literature, then combine both to propose a new way of seeing that will truly liberate us in the area of the body. This in turn may liberate men from their false notions of the body and will allow for a more balanced perspective of the human body.

To examine these issues requires definite tools. Feminist analysis and the postmodern tools of deconstruction have guided my research methods. I use the words of Catherine Stimpson, Linda Alcoff, and Susan Bordo to support my position. In general, postmodernists situate themselves after the modern period (1840-1930)<sup>7</sup> and see a plurality and fluidity of knowledge as being preferable to Jean Francois Lyotard's "metanarratives."<sup>8</sup> (Metanarratives are sweeping statements about medicine, history or science that claim to be the final and total word on the subject.) This ability to see more than one meaning for existing images and literature and

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<sup>5</sup> MacMillian. *Dictionary of Quotations*. (New York: Bloomsbury 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Rosalie Maggio. *Beacon Book of Quotations by Women*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Jencks. *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Group, 1996) 8

<sup>8</sup> Donna Landry, and Gerald MacLean. *Materialist Feminisms*. (Cambridge; Blackwell Publishers. 1993) 7.

to critically analyze them for gender bias has become a tool for feminism called "deconstruction".

Coined by Jacques Derrida,<sup>9</sup> deconstruction has provoked opposing arguments in academic feminist theory. On one hand, some feminists have shown that our view of women is a cultural construct. The fragmentation of the category 'woman' created by the fluidity and more open postmodern critiques of gender may be acceptable in order to reject any totalizing claims about women or their essence. Catherine Stimpson supports this position,<sup>10</sup> while Linda Alcoff fears that feminism may be lost as a movement for the equality of women, if the category of women and therefore their oppression, is lost to relativism."<sup>11</sup>

Susan Bordo points to the necessity of an embodiment in the light of the post-modern claim of "the new imagination of disembodiment: a dream of being everywhere."<sup>12</sup> I am in agreement with her belief that the body and its experiences, especially the visual, must be built into the appreciation of feminine experience and construction of identity. My argument depends on the notion of woman as embodied, and the assumption that the female body has been culturally constructed in an ideal form. Ideal images, especially of breasts, are not related to reality but rather to ideals generated by a patriarchal culture for particular objectives throughout time. This review, using historical images of breasts will compare patriarchal images to matriarchial visions

Pam Carter addresses the reality of different and particular social and economic cultures specific to the life of an individual woman. Addressing these differences prohibits the use of one single category 'woman', and introduces notions of power, control, resistance and individuality. Carter also quotes Michael Foucault as being the developer of the concept of power as being connected to discourse, and the possibility for resistance within that structure.<sup>13</sup> Discourses can be located in specific bodies of knowledge, such as medicine or art, which are reflected in accompanying social practices; discourses determine social and cultural responses. Spaces

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Held. *Feminist Morality Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 28.

between the multiplicity of discourses allow for the rebellious expression of resistance.<sup>14</sup> Resistance takes place on the margins of a hegemonic culture, and the different discourses allow room for subversive resistance and the formation of new discourses based on feminine perceptions.

As each of the different areas of breast imaging is introduced, examination of women's resistance can be identified by careful readings of women's self-imaging in art and literature. This resistance to control and the patriarchal power structure inherent in our societies is sometimes subtle and hard to determine. Modern resistance seems more overt, especially in photography, although the pressure to conform and 'behave ourselves' has never been more open. Advertisements equate weight loss with control; nevertheless make-up and plastic surgery are read by some feminists as 'taking control' of our lives and bodies. However, I contend that following a false, media-generated ideal of normal is not being in control; it is pure transference of power to an external source. Women have internalized the external dictates, and subsequently police themselves.

Criticism and degradation of the principles of the Women's movement are evident in the dismissive statement 'feminism is dead' or the new distaste for any public association with the term 'feminism'. The fear of feminism is seen in the media. Using feminist goals in advertising and programing sends the message that feminism has done it's work, and can now be discarded. Feminist research and analysis must ask the questions: Who has the power? Whose reality is distorted or controlled by this power? Lastly, resistance must be identified, shared and encouraged. Knowledge, when shared, empowers and supports us. It also inspires new creativity and the usage of formal methods of resistance, such as political lobbying and pressure tactics. We need to be involved in the definition of femininity and to consider the effect such definitions have on our sexuality.

The term 'culture' appears in my title and since it reflects the implications of gender in society, it cannot be separated from the term society. To quote cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz; "culture denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols; a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 28.

system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [human beings] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."<sup>15</sup> This definition expressly refers to methods of communication, which has frequently meant images, and connects the development of a false body image to women's exposure both historically and in modern images of the 'perfect breast'. Culture includes the production of images, art and ways of knowing. Changing culture by challenging the existing hegemonic epistemology is essential for the hope of a post patriarchal society.

Images are historic products of culture and as such are defined by John Berger as being 'man made'.

An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved-for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. . . Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented: it then showed how something or somebody had once looked- and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. . . No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature.<sup>16</sup>

Berger explains that the image represented is dependent on the gaze of the creator. The gaze of the viewer shares this interpretation. I will argue that the images presented since the early Christian era have been (and still are) constructed by a patriarchal society. Women need to challenge this male/female dichotomy as well as the surveyed/surveyor accepted notion of image production and viewing. A feminist perspective of deconstruction encourages such new understandings, which transforms existing social arrangements and promotes resistance. Deconstruction will call for the reconstruction of accurate replacements for our society. Re-imagining the breast should be a goal for feminists.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>16</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 9-10

## FEMININISM

Although there are many definitions of feminism, all are dedicated to examination of the oppression of women, as well as its causes and continuation in our society. Several useful definitions emerge that support my research methodology. Ludic feminism is "a feminism that is founded upon poststructuralist assumptions about linguistic play, difference, and the priority of discourse and thus substitutes a politics of representation for radical social transformation."<sup>17</sup> This feminism sees the body as the central issue in feminist discourse and it becomes the deconstruction point for viewing Western binary oppositions such as male/female and culture/nature. According to Elizabeth Grosz, these "corporeal feminists" are concerned with "the lived body, the body insofar as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular culture . . . a body as social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power."<sup>18</sup> The feminist project is to visualize the body as specific, particular and the opposite of abstraction. Abstraction here is seen as masculine and phallogocentric.<sup>19</sup> This theory will reclaim the female body and thus relocate the grounds from which we speak. Our authority to speak on women resides in our ownership of the real body as opposed to a transcended embodiment of self.

This argument seems to place me well into the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate. To categorize women simply by their anatomy (functional/biological qualities) is opposed by anti-essentialist groups who stress difference as being the determining factor to define 'women'. Social constructionists state that woman as a category has been subject to, and formed by, false social constructions. (See Appendix 1. Fig. 1 which illustrates this anti-essentialist position.) In this image, Cindy Sherman deconstructs the 'natural' woman by wearing a breast protheseis

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<sup>17</sup> Theresa L. Ebert. *Ludic Feminism and After: Post modernism, Desire, and Labor in late Capitalism*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 235

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 236

which seems to be leaking (a stream) maternal milk. My desire is not to promote the immutable essence theory, nor to come out firmly on the constructionist perception of femininity, but rather to promote and celebrate difference based on the body. My argument requires a real body that is subject to social construction. Diana Fuss claims that even though essentialism is defined in direct opposition to difference, "constructionism ... really operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism. The bar between essentialism and constructionism is by no means as solid and as unassailable as advocates of both sides assume it to be."<sup>20</sup>

The category being used is that of sex rather than gender, since my thesis concerns the breasts of the human female. Our culture imposes a uniformity of breast images upon women, and it is here that I wish to engage in discourse. Feminism is often seen as a reclaiming of our past, with a view to improving our future, therefore the study of historical images will illustrate our past and may help us to define our future.

Some see the feminist project as correcting the past by including the history of women.

Women's history is told and passed down generationally by stories and other forms of material work (e.g., quilting, needlework, and recipes). Donna Haraway, even though her critique is on the philosophy of science, provides this useful definition:

Feminism is, in part, a project for the reconstruction of public life and public meanings: feminism is therefore a search for new stories, and so for a language which names a new vision of possibilities and limits ... a contest for public knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Feminist ethics clearly dictate an ethic of care. Women who participate in any feminist research project must not be exploited, judged, or subjected to any form of disrespect. Their lives and experiences must be documented from their lived experience and different ways of seeing. Women have the chance to tell their breast stories in my research, their voices, which

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<sup>20</sup> Diana Fuss. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. (New York: Routledge, 1989) xii



have the potential to create a new canon, will be heard. Recording the stories of women is feminist ethnography, and as such has the power to conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social context.

## METHODOLOGY

Since I come to this thesis from historically divergent paradigms, (science and feminist theory), a unique methodology is needed. My worldview is both scientific and feminist; subsequently my research requires components of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative requirement created two survey forms, one for any woman regardless of age, economic or racial identity and another specifically for mammographic technologists. The quantitative analysis based on the volume of survey respondents allowed me an extensive view of the attitudes of participants and produced empirical data. The demographic data identified on the form are age, the province of residence and an optional category of ethnicity or race. (See Appendix 2.) These forms allow women's voices to be heard and illuminate some of the differences contained within the category 'woman'. Professional colleagues contributed as well, by using the form designed for mammographers to reflect their particular concerns and abilities. (See Appendix 2.) The qualitative component consists of taped interviews with women of different age groups and different breast stories. I interviewed a plastic surgeon, a lactation specialist, and women with a history of breast reduction, augmentation, amputation and reconstruction due to breast cancer. This produced five taped interviews.

Six other women participated in various ways. When I went looking for other women to share their lives and experiences with me, two young sisters volunteered to be interviewed with their parents' consent. I felt it would be interesting to determine how their present bodily self-image have been influenced by either positive or negative factors. Their mother also volunteered to be interviewed. The mother signed the consent form for all three women, and the two girls were interviewed together.

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<sup>21</sup> Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature.* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 82

Two young women in their twenties, one of whom is lesbian, also volunteered to contribute to my body of knowledge. A young friend has had reduction mammoplasty, a tattoo and nipple piercing on her breast. A mammographic instructor provided a written opinion about mammographic technologists and her consent has been obtained for quotation purposes. A woman artist was also interviewed and her work will be presented in the art imaging section in chapter 3.

All eleven participants were given information enabling their informed consent. They were given an introductory letter approved by the university ethics committee. (See Appendix 3.) The ethical considerations of confidentiality, security, the storage time frame and ethical disposal of tapes and transcripts are covered in their letter. The interviews took place at a time and place comfortable for the participants. They have all been assigned a pseudonym, and all images used in the research bear no identifying marks, and my attitude will not be condescending or maternally beneficent. My attitude was caring, supportive, and non-judgmental. The interviews took place in an environment comfortable for both of us. Since I have had reduction mammopexy<sup>22</sup> and participate regularly in the British Columbia Breast Cancer Screening Project, my words and experiences are also reflected.

I have correlated the experience of my participants with feminist and cultural literature for comparison and conclusions. The survey forms provide numbers and a bigger population base to obtain data regarding women's current attitudes about their breasts across different ages, ethnic backgrounds and geographical locations.

The thesis will be organized in the following manner. The headings under which breast imaging are examined are; the sacred, domestic or functional, the erotic, as represented in Fine Art, the political, commercial and medical gaze. Within each division, the history of this representation of women's breasts is offered, with images and narrative to support my thesis. Any resistance is sought out and included.

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<sup>22</sup> Augmentation translates as implants to enlarge breast tissue; reduction refers to the surgical removal of breast tissue to make the breasts smaller. Mammopexy is a 'lift' to relocate the breasts in a more 'desirable' location.

Chapter One provides an introduction, definitions, and methodology. Chapter 2 offers a short history of sacred breasts. Images of the sacred breast being ridiculed and reduced to mortal levels can be seen here, as well as images providing resistance to the cultural norm.

Chapter 3 will explore the domestic imaging of the breast as an art form with breastfeeding examined from the viewpoint of modern culture. The value of breast milk is inherent in these studies and reveals political and sacred references. Images of the breast-feeding mother are influenced by the economic and political times as well as by prevailing philosophical theories. The interview with the lactation consultant will be included here. Feminist perspectives and the investigation of the notion of choice will illuminate areas of rebellion and resistance. Use of the breast as a political tool or, as I label this type of imaging, “the political breast” is illustrated in this chapter and given a feminist analysis.

Next the imaging of women in art will be explored using historical and modern images of the female breast. Especially interesting are the images being generated today by female artists, and theoretical review of the subject/viewer dichotomy illuminates resistance.

Chapter 4 will be a continuation of the investigation of historical breast images in the areas of fashion and commercial appropriations of our breasts. The commercial representation of the breast will introduce the modern cultural icon, Madonna, 'The Material Girl'. Fashion as a determinant of the acceptability of the size, shape and degree of breast visibility will be examined as well as tattoos, body piercing and other forms of breast adornment. A comparison of Marilyn Munroe and Madonna serve to illustrate the concept of women selling sex, in contrast to the commercial use of women's breasts to sell commodities. Chapter 4 will also review the medical gaze, or medical imaging.

The sculpted or molded body will be examined by introducing the words of a plastic surgeon, and the experiences of women who have undergone surgical intervention in the creation of personal body image, integrated with existing medical literature. Mammography, Computed Tomography and Ultra Sound will provide images of women's breasts. Discussion focuses on the need for this technology fueled by the increased incidence of breast cancer. Throughout the specific area of breast imaging, the words of the participants will be heard in appropriate context.

Chapter 5 will provide a space for women to speak, and my interviews with them will be intertwined with existing feminist and cultural literature. Here, our voices as real women detailing our lives are recorded. Our stories and feelings about the lived experiences of our breasts are the basis of the chapter's content. The survey results are presented and analyzed for content and meaning.

Chapter 6 presents the recommendations derived from my research, and expands on conclusions made from my observations. I also expand on a possible path of action for future feminists to continue to work upon and study.

Since I am a participant in my own research, and do not intend to define my research participants as 'the other', my writing will reflect use of the feminist first person. Patricia Maguire has provided my inspiration for feminist participatory research. According to McGuire, participatory research has the agenda of promoting social change by investigating reality.<sup>23</sup> The lived experience of women often differs from the ideology and constructions of their society, and this has initiated my thesis. Henrietta Moore argues that "the power to define reality is an economic and political power."<sup>24</sup> This power of defining reality should belong to women, as owners of breasts. The economic and political power will follow as we define our positions as being participatory and relevant to our society. The creation of an alternative paradigm concerned with what could or should be works to replace the existing structure of the present. Maguire also states that a more just society will benefit men and women, and that true feminist research should have this effect.<sup>25</sup> If women are living under a false reality, then men are also trapped into believing that the false representations are normal.

One of the problems associated with participatory research is the over involvement of the researcher in the lives of her participants and them in hers. This will be difficult for me, as I am very passionate about the topic and the lived reality of women. However, ethnography is a

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<sup>23</sup> Patricia Macguire. *Doing Participatory Research: a Feminist Approach*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1987) 3.

<sup>24</sup> Henrietta L. Moore. *A Passion for Difference. Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1994) 5.

<sup>25</sup> Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research*, 79.

multimethod of research. I interviewed, surveyed, observed, did archival analysis and participated in my own research. In doing so, I followed three major guidelines as offered by Shulamit Reinharz. First, to document the lives and experiences of women; second, to analyze experiences of women from our own point of view; and lastly, to see our behavior as a reflection of social contexts.<sup>26</sup> Since my research interviews women in the context of our shared reality, then relates and analyses our experiences in reference to a particular breast obsessing culture, my research meets the requirements for feminist ethnography and participatory research.

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<sup>26</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 51

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SACRED BREAST

In this chapter, breast images generated from 23,000 years BC to the onset of Christianity are presented. The historical representations of the pre-Christian breast are associated with natural cycles of life and death. Women were seen as possessing a sacred function in their societies, and as such, were revered and respected. This history of the breast derives from the work of Marilyn Yalom.<sup>27</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, the maternal breast meant life or death to children. Pre-agrarian societies have left figurines made of stone, bone and clay notable for large prominent breasts, and plump abdomens and buttocks. These figures are thought to be fertility goddesses, able to sustain life and to withstand times of famine. Such women could not only nurse their own children, but also could probably adopt the child of a mother less able to do so due to illness or deprivation.

The Venus figures recognizable to modern women are the Venus of Willendorf and of Grimaldi, both of which date to 23,000 to 25,000 BC (See Appendix 1 fig.2). Worship of these breast goddesses is thought to have continued in Eastern Europe until the advent of Islam in the seventh century. Modern women wear the figurine as jewelry. The rounded ample shape of this goddess defies current norms of the perfect female form, but is worn with pride. Affirmation of our special function of fertility and the consequent respect by community members is seen as being missing in our modern time. In our society, respect is not given to middle aged 'slightly obese' women. By wearing the Venus above our breasts we seem to be reclaiming our past.

In pre-Israelite Canaan, the goddess Astarte represented a "tangible prayer for fertility and nourishment."<sup>28</sup> Secret worship of fertility goddesses may have taken a long time to be repressed by the priests and prophets of Jahweh, since male gods were oriented more to war than the rebirth and nourishment cycle of the mother. Egypt honored Isis, who was associated with the tree of life and was also responsible for the validation of the new pharaoh. Her images shows her nursing the new pharaoh, her acceptance in this manner confirms his right to be the new ruler.

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<sup>27</sup> Marilyn Yalom. *A History of the Breast*. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1997)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Nevertheless a male god of the Nile, called Hapi, was depicted as having breasts because he was responsible for the annual flooding of the Nile, which renewed life and irrigated crops. This appropriation of female breasts was unusual and confirms their importance. Minoan (Crete) goddess figures from 1500-1600 BC, illustrate the power and prestige commanded by women in that civilization. Snake goddesses wore bell-like skirts, with tightly laced bodices. This fashion forced the breasts forwards and upward to an almost aggressive stance while snakes winding around their arms seem to advise the viewer to understand that poison may just as easily be dispensed as milk.<sup>29</sup> Snakes play a larger role in this history and are seen again in Christian origin myths.

Greek cults that worshipped the mother or nursing principle continued until the dawn of Christianity. One of the most astonishing archaeological finds in Turkey, was the discovery of two life-sized figures of the polymastic<sup>30</sup> goddess Artemis. Debate rages as to whether her many breasts were fruit, bull's testicles or breasts. This goddess, with her polymastic breasts promises unending supply fruitfulness. Also, the many teats of mammals link women to the realm of the natural world. However when we see an extra nipple on women today, we know that the mammary line runs down the chest and abdomen of all women and as such are not considered suspect or abnormal.<sup>31</sup> This many-breasted figure of Artemis epitomizes the timeless human fantasy of an endless and miraculous milk supply. This offering of the breast was later seen as the ability to grant favors and also emerges in the Christian representations of Mary the mother of Jesus. (See Appendix 1 fig.3)

During the fourth century BC, Aphrodite the goddess of love was presented in a state of partial undress, with her breasts becoming more erotic in their depiction. She also exhibited the earliest images of self-conscious gestures of privacy for her body. (See Appendix 1 fig.4) Helen of Troy, of Greek mythology, is said to have returned to her husband, Menelaus, and bared "the apples of her bosom" to secure his forgiveness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>30</sup> Many breasted

<sup>31</sup> Shirley Long. *Mammography 1 CAMRT Correspondence Course*. Ottawa, 1991 30

<sup>32</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 18

The myth of the Amazon women appears in Homeric literature in the eighth century, BC. Women are still referred to as amazons today if their strength is seen as masculine. Amazons were reputed to be a tribe of warlike women, governed by a queen. Their children were products of a short breeding time with men from another society. Male offspring were killed at birth, while female children were trained as warriors. These warrior women had a formidable reputation as fierce fighters, and are even said to have cut off their right breast to facilitate greater speed and strength with their bows. The remaining breast was left bared and became the preferred location for blows by their antagonists. Is this the early source for the "battle of the sexes"? Yalom offers her thesis that "the Amazons represented the destructive forces unleashed when women abandoned their role as the nurturers of men and appropriated virile attributes instead."<sup>33</sup> Do the over eight hundred portrayals of Amazons in Greek art portray the origins of gynophobia and/or misogyny?" (See Appendix 1 fig.5)

The breast cancer survivors of modern time reflect this heritage as they battle for life and a cure. In Vancouver, British Columbia there is a boat race held by breast cancer survivors, in conjunction with the Dragon Boat Festival. These women call their race the 'Abreast in a Boat Race'. One of the teams is called 'Amazons Abreast', and this team has written a poem that reflects their feelings. The title is *Amazons*, and is signed simply: A Tribe of Warrior Women.

Taken from the Greek word **a-mazos** (breastless)

A tribe of warrior women  
who destroyed one of their breasts  
to increase their accuracy  
with the javelin and the bow.

Women who know that to survive  
the aim of the arrow must be precise.  
thousands of women are members  
of a fierce tribe of survivors.

These warriors, these breast cancer  
survivors,  
have found weapons to fight and  
survive  
this dreaded disease.  
Faith, courage, community, science,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 24



rage, education, and power.<sup>34</sup>

This fierce testament has helped many women to survive, and to see themselves as active participants in their care, rather than being passive victims. Breast cancer patients use warlike words such as 'fight', 'battle', 'vanquish' and 'conquer'. We see here an old legend being revived and used with success.

Rome is still represented symbolically by the myth of Romulus and Remus. The twin sons of the god Mars and the mortal Rhea were rescued from the Tiber and nursed by a mother wolf. The infant boys absorbed the fierce qualities of their foster mother from her milk and became great kings.<sup>35</sup>

A Roman legend involving human participants, with a strong moral of filial piety and charity is repeated by Pliny the Elder (23-79), but attributed to the first century historian Valerius Maximus is as follows.

Of filial affection there have, it is true, being unlimited instances all over the world, but one at Rome with which the whole of the rest could not compare. A plebeian woman of low position who had just given birth to a child, had permission to visit her mother who had been shut up in prison as a punishment, and was always searched in advance by the doorkeeper to prevent her carrying in any food. She was detected giving her mother sustenance from her own breasts. In consequence of this marvel the daughter's pious affection was rewarded by the mother's release and both were awarded maintenance for life; and the place where it occurred was consecrated to the Goddess concerned, a temple dedicated to Filial Affection ....<sup>36</sup>

Works of art from the Renaissance Period have changed the recipient of this devotion from the female parent to the father. This introduces an incestuous theme to the story, as well as an element of cross-gendering.<sup>37</sup> These misinterpretations establish a tension between the nurturing female and the dangerous female body. The shift from reverence of the nurturing mother, the goddess of fertility and bearer of life, to fear of the person responsible for the evil

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<sup>34</sup> ABREAST in the West. Newsletter of the Alliance for Breast Cancer Information and Support. BC and Yukon. Spring 2000 Vol.1/no.3 p.6

<sup>35</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

suffered by man, has begun. Christianity introduces Eve, as first woman, then Mary as her perfect opposite. Both Eve and Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ, play important and impossible roles in the visual reality of Christian life for women.

Genesis, chapter three, details the temptation of Eve by the serpent and her subsequent fall from grace.<sup>38</sup> She gives the forbidden fruit to Adam, her husband, who then participates in her sin. God banishes them from the Garden of Eden, cursing them both in perpetuity. Eve is condemned to bear her children in pain and Adam to toil for his livelihood. Although Adam and Eve had sewn fig leaves together, thus creating loincloths, God fashioned the skins of animals into garments for them. Although no specific mention is made regarding the covering of Eve's breasts, artists throughout time have depicted Eve as having a protective arm across them.

On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of St. Peter's church in Rome, Leonardo Da Vinci shows not only Eve being banished, but also her nemesis the serpent, offering the forbidden fruit. The serpent has acquired feminine characteristics by this time, specifically breasts. This creation myth was able to substantiate and perpetuate many anti-female positions. Since Eve led man from the Divine gaze, her inferior status is absolute, and blame falls to all her descendants. Women today are being withheld from ministering by these implications of irredeemable guilt. Feminists question the allocation of total blame to Eve. Where was Adam's free will? Why is his culpability and subsequent whining to The Creator not regarded as significant? Eve reached for the tree of knowledge and was deprived of access to learning for centuries afterward.<sup>39</sup>

Reasons to despise Eve, as taught to women by patriarchal religions, inform us that through her sin of disobedience, death replaced immortality and sexuality replaced virginity. In the fourth century Saint John Chrysostom said: "Do you see where marriage took its origin? ... For where there is death, there too is sexual coupling; and where there is no death, there is no sexual coupling either."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *The New American Standard Bible.*

<sup>39</sup> Rosalind Miles. *The Women's History of the World.*(London, Harper Collins, 1993) 239

<sup>40</sup> David Kinsley. *The Goddesses' Mirror. Visions of the Divine from East and West.*(New York: State University Press, 1989) 225.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton challenged the anti-feminist stance perpetuated by patriarchal religions. She felt that the Bible represented the biggest obstacle to the proper equality of women and published her own version, called *The Woman's Bible* in 1898.<sup>41</sup> Eve stood as the quintessence of evil, not an inspiring image for women. Mary, the Mother of God, represented quite the opposite ideal. The image of women as either whore or mother still provides a damaging dichotomy for men today.

"A contrast was drawn between Mary and Eve, life and death, as in St. Jerome's *Twenty-second Letter*: 'Death came from Eve, but life has come through Mary'; and Irenaeus wrote that through Mary 'the guile of the serpent was overcome by the simplicity of the dove and we are set free from those chains by which we had been bound by death'."<sup>42</sup>

Mary not only redeemed the world by bearing Christ, but offers redemption to women as well. Millions of Catholic women pray to Mary to help them with feminine (family) problems and for intercession with God the Father. As the mother of Jesus Christ, mortal women feel an affinity with her; she is a source of comfort and helps lead the way to eternal salvation. She followed the Word of God by conceiving and bearing His son, thereby demonstrating obedience and piety. She maintains her virginal status through her lifetime thus negating the stain of sexuality inherent in female flesh. Since she must not have the stain of original sin (the mark of the human condition) placed upon her at the time of her own conception, the Church fathers exempted her as part of their official church doctrine in the 1950's along with the Assumption into Heaven. The curse of Eve was avoided, in order that her body might bear a God. Mary was also declared a virgin throughout her lifetime, even after delivering the Christ child.

In further contrast to other mortal women, Mary did not suffer death. Although she was not resurrected like Christ, she ascended bodily into heaven a process called dormition.<sup>43</sup> Mary

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<sup>41</sup> Miles, *The Women's History of the World*, 238

<sup>42</sup> Julia Kristeva. "Sabat Mater" in *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) 103.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret R Miles. "The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture". In Susan Suleiman ed. *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, 196-207

offers insurmountable differences to women: a mother with no sexuality; a Virgin before, during and after childbirth; a celibate marriage and no death. Mary nursed the Child, but presents a virginal, high and immaculate breast to the world that does not correspond with the reality of nursing. Her covered breast usually shows no folds or bulges in her clothing, suggesting a flat non-breast. Again, this is an unrealistic portrayal of the functional breast in motherhood. (Appendix 1.fig.6)

Mary became Queen of Heaven, an assumed nobility, and can be seen to have acquired all the titles of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. Mortal women did not assume greatness within the institutions of Christian marriage and motherhood; rather they continued to be rated second best by Church fathers. Women were seen as a necessary evil and were given strict injunctions to suppress their evil body and its attendant lust and sexuality.

Mary is also depicted as spouse and daughter of God. She passes through all of the kinship systems with ease, roles certainly not available to mortal women without severe social restrictions.<sup>44</sup> Although women have adored Mary, prayed to her for Divine intercession and for assistance in childbirth, her image perpetuates the inferiority of the human female body. She is an impossible ideal for all women especially nuns, whose choice of celibacy confers childlessness. The support of Church Fathers given to the cult of the Virgin appears self-serving, in its perpetuation of the impossible notion of the 'good woman'. The message seems to be: this Mary was mortal in order to present the humanity of Christ, but not to present the humanity of women. Religious images, such as Mary, introduced impossible and conflicting images for Christian women and continue to reinforce patriarchal notions of control over the bodies of women.

Of course, images of the Virgin Mary have been produced that show a more human and maternal reality. For example, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Joos Van Clive painted a laughing Madonna and a round contented child. Every nursing mother can relate to the drowsy replete baby, and it is often amusing to see them so happy. (See Appendix 1.fig.7) My favorite comes from 1926, when Max Ernst portrayed the Virgin spanking the Christ child over her knee, His halo on the ground,

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<sup>44</sup> Kristeva, *Sabat Mater*, 105

hers askew, and His little buttocks nice and pink. (See Appendix 1.fig.8 and note the three shocked male faces peering through the window)

Resistance to the traditional maternal image in the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes from Cindy Sherman, who uses her own body and various props to image and challenge traditional female stereotypes. In her version of the traditional nursing Madonna scenario one false breast, perfect size and shape, not distended or swollen by milk, is displayed along with the flowing robes and crowned head of the original. (See Appendix 1 fig. 9) The contralateral breast is not shown or even intimated. A serene and perfect scene has been questioned. Male artists have also become engaged in challenging stereotypical representations of the Madonna, in terms of her racial signifiers.

In 1996, a young painter, Cris Ofili, left Britain for Zimbabwe in order to incorporate his cultural heritage and an appreciation of the natural landscape into his work. His work, committed to social and political concerns, created quite a stir when his new works appeared with elephant dung on them. His Madonna challenged existing social conventions by being depicted as black and sexual. Having glitter on the paint and representations of vagina, buttocks, and rectums floating around the divine breast which was made of real elephant dung, Chris challenged our cultural perceptions of the Virgin. (Appendix 1 fig. 10) The use of elephant dung instead of the traditional rib of Adam to create Eve, was a real blow to patriarchal religion.

Literary images of breasts are seen in the Holy Bible and are used to promote patriarchal control of the female body. The Bible has eight references to the word breast, which we would be able to interpret as the male chest or that of a sacrificial animal. (Ex.29.26; Lev.7.30 and 8.29; Num.6.20; Is.60. 16; Dan.2.32; Luke 18.13 and John 13.25) Fourteen references are made to female breasts. (Gen. 49.25; Job 3.12 and 21.24; Pro.5.19; Songs 4.5, 8.1 and 8.8; Is. 28.9; Ezek.16.7, 23.3 and 23.8; Hos.2.2; Luke 23.48; Rev. 15.6)<sup>45</sup> Breasts are used to define female beauty: the readiness of a young woman to be entered into marriage bartering and to suckle the Son of God.

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<sup>45</sup> Alexander Cruden. *Cruden's Concordance The Holy Scriptures*. (Fleming Revel Co. 1970) 77

Some of the most sensuous poetry seen in the Holy Bible appears in the Song of Solomon 4.5.

"Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies".<sup>46</sup>

However, stories of early Christian saints detail gender specific torture directed towards women.

St Agatha had her breasts cut off for refusing the amorous advances of Roman noble, and for refusing to deny her Christian faith. She is now the patron saint of nursing mothers and her help is sought against breast disease.<sup>47</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 11.) Patriarchal religions brought a new twist to women's experience and lives. Their bodies became the battleground for dominance and control.

Women were burned at the stake for witchcraft or tortured in the name of martyrdom during the Middle Ages. The Holy Inquisition lasted over 250 years (15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) and was responsible for the deaths of from 600,00 to 2,000,000 men, women and children. Women suffered particular attention to their breasts. Breasts were amputated using red-hot pinchers, and then the severed breasts were rubbed into their mouths and those of her sons. This not only negated their sexuality but also their motherhood. The message was clear: breasts are dangerous.<sup>48</sup>

The history of the sacred breast shows a more feminine or matriarchal influence, but the onset of Christianity introduces a masculine and appropriated image used for control. Breasts defined women, their place in society, and were used in the Inquisition, all to keep women subject to the 'higher' order of male control. Modern resistance by both male and female artists illustrates the need for change.

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<sup>46</sup> *The New American Standard Bible*. Text edition. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1977)

<sup>47</sup> David Hugh Farmer. *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 6-7

<sup>48</sup> Anne Lewellyn Bartow. *Witchcraze A New History of the European Witch-Hunts*. (London: Pandora, 1994) 144-150

## CHAPTER 3

### DOMESTIC, NATIONAL AND FINE ART BREAST IMAGES

The functional or domestic breast as portrayed by the act of breastfeeding, would seem to be a straightforward representation of a woman's unique ability to feed her young. However, patriarchal notions of control, erotica and nationalistic requirements have all infiltrated domestic images. Feminists have also entered the debate along with the scientific or medical voices. How has the social construction of the breast over time influenced contemporary understanding and emotional responses to breastfeeding today? Images of breasts that record the act of breastfeeding have become intertwined with the emerging erotic breast and have caused confusion both for the new mother and the society in which she lives. The separation of my images into chapter three and four has been determined by their ease of distribution. Images generated by the Fine Arts are used to support and illustrate my narrative in chapter three, while the all-invasive media generated images help support my thesis for chapter four.

#### THE DOMESTIC OR FUNCTIONAL BREAST

Records from the Middle Ages detail the ancient practice of giving the newborn child to a wet nurse. The father of the child bartered with the nurse's husband, which makes the transaction both male directed and commercial. Since the qualities of the wet nurse were supposedly passed onto the child in her milk, a certain physical resemblance between the nurse and the natural mother was beneficial. The breasts themselves must not be too large, (so as not to flatten the child's nose), nor was the nurse to be sexually active thereby degrading milk quality. This practice was not always beneficial to the nurse's child who must now come second, or to the foster child who often died from neglect. The spacing of births that occurred naturally to breast feeding mothers was lost to upper class women, as well as the opportunity to enjoy breastfeeding themselves. The children of the rich displaced those of the poor household creating a social system that fostered class injustice. This system peaked in the eighteenth century, easing into obscurity in the nineteenth. There were instances of bonding between child and wet nurse, such as Alexander Pope who wrote a memorial to Mary Beach, who nursed him

in his infancy.<sup>49</sup> Some exceptions to the practice were Puritan women who nursed out of religious duty, and Queens who nursed out of social snobbery.<sup>50</sup>

Painters in the Dutch school best demonstrate the images idealizing the nursing mother in the seventeenth century. Domestic happiness includes a nursing mother at the fireside surrounded by homey everyday objects. Pieter de Hooch painted a nursing woman flanked by older children and a dog in his *Woman Nursing an Infant, with a Child* around 1658. Artists doing portraiture in the seventeenth century often depicted nursing mothers as allegorical representations of the virtue of Charity. For the depiction of a noblewoman and her children in this genre See Appendix 1 fig.12.

Since maternal blood formed both fetus and milk, medical, moral and religious beliefs in the seventeenth century heavily supported maternal breast-feeding. Jacob Cats, a magistrate and writer, (1577-1660) wrote this little rhyme in support of breastfeeding.

One who bears her children is a mother in part,  
But she who nurses her children is a mother at heart.<sup>51</sup>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) based his theories of social regeneration on the lactating mother. He linked the strengthening of the nuclear family and the role of the male partner to the 'real' mother. His idealized concepts of women and their natural role as mother provided a 'sexist world view' which dominated Western thinking for two centuries.<sup>52</sup> Further modern analyses of his life have revealed that several events of his life were obsessive and problematical. Although in his educational essay *Emile*, his child character was beneficially nursed, his own five children, the progeny of his long-term liaison Therese Lavasseur, were abandoned to a foundling hospital. His relationship to his wet-nurse has also been interpreted as obsessive<sup>53</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 13 for August Claude Le Grand's 1785 engraving of

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<sup>49</sup> Shari Thurer, *The Myths Of Motherhood-How Culture Reinvents The Good Mother*.(New York:Houghton Mifflin Co.,1994). 176

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 177

<sup>51</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 93

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 111



Rousseau entitled “ *Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou L’Homme de la Nature* ”<sup>54</sup>.) His discourse has been subsequently seen as purely theoretical, especially in his own life.

Despite these emerging social theories, with their overtones of patriarchal control, by the middle of the eighteenth century, approximately fifty percent of Parisian babies were sent to a wet nurse, and by the end of the century as few as ten percent were nursed in their own homes. Strangely, by the dawn of the nineteenth century, fifty percent of French and two-thirds of English babies were nursed maternally.<sup>55</sup> This change is attributed to the connection between human and state health. Breasts were metonymically<sup>56</sup> linked to the passage of health (nursing) or corruption (wet nursing).

With the rise of medical science in conjunction with nationalistic aspirations, medical voices introduced notions of the health of the nation being paralled with the health of the family. Fathers were to stand guard as witness to this important maternal function, as “the production of milk . . . was considered too important a matter to be left in the hands of women, given that ‘most Mothers of any Condition, either cannot, or will not undertake the troublesome Task of suckling their own Children’.”<sup>57</sup>

Feminist analysis dictates that the women and their bodies involved in this debate are examined in context. How did the commodification of the child feeding system affect their lives? It is obvious that the lower class women sold their milk, but what of the cottage industry initiated by this system which brought a small income into the home? The more wealthy class further undermined the economic basis for the lower class. This female commodity was at the whim of male philosophers and social reformers, and not influenced by the women themselves. The more wealthy women were forced to conform to their culture even if they desired to nurse their own babies. They were required for social duties and sexual services by their husbands. When religion and science joined to enforce the social mores of the time, any exercise of female control and personal wishes was lost.

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau or The Natural Man

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>56</sup> Defined as the use of a part to represent the whole. e.g. using the breast to represent the health of a society or it’s membership

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 107

Issues of race intersect when slaves were used for wet nursing, and their breasts and potential lactating abilities were extolled on the auction block. (See Appendix 1 fig.14 for an 1850 daguerreotype depicting breasts as property.) It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the techniques of Louis Pasteur enabled bottle or hand feeding to become a safe alternate.<sup>58</sup> This introduced another issue that became problematic between babies and their mothers, and the world of commerce.

Nineteenth century thought around breast-feeding is reflected through the words of American psychologist and child-raising specialist G. Stanley Hall. His work identified those women desiring an education as defying evolution to become moral and medical freaks. According to Hall, if a woman made the choice to be educated, this selfish utilization of a life meant for her descendants, would have a predictable outcome for her descendants. “First, she loses her mammary function. . . .” lactation is seemingly directly related to a ‘natural unselfish womanly quality.’<sup>59</sup> But not, it seems, to education.

During this same period of time, Arabella Kenealy, M.D., believed that the educated or ‘mental’ female would sustain not just a loss of function, but actual breast loss. Her bony, angular and breastless body would then have to be augmented by the skilled dressmaker.<sup>60</sup> The ‘real’ woman became ‘unnatural’ and therefore in need of artifice to disguise her deformity. Apparently, having breasts conferred reality to women.

The twentieth century brought debates regarding control of women’s bodies, appropriation of maternal functions, issues of sexuality, fetal and infant rights, medical issues of nutrition and the ultimate purpose of the human breast were being constantly brought before the public. Anthropologists such as Desmond Morris and Lila Abu-Lughod have written their observations and conclusions on this topic.

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<sup>58</sup> Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood*, 219

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good. 150 Years of The Experts’ Advice to Women*. (New York: Doubleday,1989) 129

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

Morris claims that the female bosom is “predominantly a sexual signaling device, rather than an expanded milk machine.”<sup>61</sup> His arguments are twofold, since the human mother must actively participate in the latching mechanism for the baby to be able to suckle, and since the baby suffocates due to the unnecessarily large breast, he reasons that breast function was not primarily for this purpose. Other mammalian females suckle their young with smaller breasts that shrink when no longer in use. These smaller breasts do not seem to play a part in sexual activity, as do those of the human female. His reason for our larger breasts is to transfer the attention of the male from the back to the front of the female by mimicking buttocks. This facilitates face-to-face mating, rather than rear entry. Face-to-face mating contributes to pair bonding, necessary for two-parent support of the infant.

Morris also states that emerging sexual signals indicating readiness to mate include body hair, breasts and body shape. He also concludes that underarm hair and odor bond the male while in the frontal mating position.<sup>62</sup> The modern North American female would probably not agree as standards of personal hygiene have changed. His claims seem blatantly sexist and essentialist to many readers including myself. His reasoning seems to designate the human female as a sex toy for men, even to the point of downplaying her role as mother. His words remove a part of our ‘essential’ anatomical role, only to increase our role as sexual partners.

Lila Abu-Lughod writes of Bedouin society, and despite the reluctance of Bedouin women to discuss their sexuality, their philosophy for breast feeding children is reflected. Although most children are breastfed, this society believes that boys should be breastfed for a longer period. Breast-feeding is seen as an ‘indulgence’ and will make girls ‘willful’; boys should be indulged in order to “gain a sense of power, rather than weakness, in interactions with others.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1984). 87

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>63</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments. Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 109

Willfulness is seen as an asset for male children and not for girls. They seem to be treated with equal love and respect in childhood and admiring tales of willful girls are told by women in private. The conditions of appropriate female willfulness seem to be different from those of their male relatives.

This study was done using the feminist principles of participant observation, while Desmond Morris has extrapolated data from his observations of lower species of mammals. His type of biased research has been identified as being non-beneficial to women.

Contradictory messages about breast-feeding seem to be inherent in our present culture. The advantages of proper nutrition for the child are clouded by our discomfort when faced with a nursing mother in public. Does this violate the still present boundaries between public and private spaces? I would argue this to be the case from my position of personal and participatory research

Although responsible mothers want to do their best for the child, they are caught up in the image of the breast as an erotic object. Their husbands, family and friends may be uncomfortable witnessing their nursing. This may result in transferring to formula rather than risk being excluded from their social network. This presents more of a problem for shy or inexperienced mothers rather than for the mothers who are confident in their sexuality. Breast-feeding can excite feelings of pleasure and sexual arousal, which causes apprehension and feelings of guilt or disgust in some women.<sup>64</sup> If pleasure was derived from sexual activity prior to motherhood, these feelings may be accepted and enjoyed.<sup>65</sup> My personal breast-feeding experiences support this situation and the sensations were totally unexpected. Husbands play a

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<sup>64</sup> Germain Greer, *The Whole Woman*. (London: Anchor Publishing, 2000) 60

<sup>65</sup> Jane Price, *Motherhood. What it Does to your Mind*. (London: Pandora Press, 1988) 61

role in supporting breastfeeding. If they feel jealous or undermined, husbands can apply subtle negative pressure to terminate the process.<sup>66</sup>

A nurse lactation specialist gave me an interview. Her research name is St. Agatha, in memory of the patron saint of nursing mothers. Agatha explores how the erotic image of breasts makes the functional image harder to accept, as well as offering a practical solution that she recommends to her clients. In the first half of the quotation she is referring to a specific First Nations, in the second she refers to her pre-natal classes for all couples. The technique described is taught to prepare the nipples for lactation, but also is a good way to actively involve the other parent, which hopefully helps to defuse sexual jealousy.

What happens is that the breast [is viewed] as belonging to men. This is a patriarchal society until the women reach about 40 at which point I guess they are not all that interesting to the men anymore and men turn to younger women. I am not too sure but the women seem to *take back their breasts*. . . .<sup>67</sup> You don't want to use soap on the nipples when you are pregnant. . . . Getting the husband to rub the nipples, roll the nipples, this is great or you can get him to you, you know.[suck on them] I mean this works well with love making. You know because the one thing in our society is breasts, like I said before have a sexual function. Breasts are something that please both the man and the woman just by him stimulating them. We have this fixation with breasts.<sup>68</sup>

The historic transference of the nursing breast to an image of eroticism is easily pinpointed by this story of Agnes Sorel. Jean Fouquet depicts Agnes, the mistress of Charles V 11 of France, in a traditional Madonna pose in the second half of the fifteenth century. Her breast is presented as an erotic object, certainly not for the child, who seems to be looking and pointing elsewhere. I propose his mother is standing close by to ensure his cooperation. (See Appendix 1 fig.15)

Today, peer pressure, including lack of support from the grandmother may also initiate transference to the bottle. Fashionable theories influence maternal decision making and subsequent changes in these theories promote feelings of confusion and guilt in both parents.

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<sup>66</sup> I bid., 61

<sup>67</sup> Italics mine

One of the proposed solutions is to create a safe place for women to learn to nurse, to receive support from other women, and to discuss problems and sexuality issues. Assistance and teaching must be in a caring, confidential and trusting manner. Agatha recognizes this need for women to share their knowledge, and has set up her program to reflect her beliefs both in the hospital setting and in the various communities served by our region.

I don't own whether women breast-feed or not. Some people find that is very difficult believe. You know some people say 'well, you are a lactation consultant so therefore every woman you see, you must insist they breast-feed' and that is not true. I am looking at how women feel comfortable with themselves and with their body and some women are not just comfortable to put the baby to the breast. Sometimes it is a sexual abuse issue that they are unaware of. Sometimes it is just that they are not comfortable handling their breast, and there is sometimes other things going on in their lives. This is just not something that they want to do. We can't own what women decide and what they do with their bodies and that may be what this whole thing is about. . . . breastfeeding is a woman's right. I would add to that. Breast-feeding is a woman's right to choose. She doesn't have to choose breastfeeding. We don't want to make women feel uncomfortable if they choose not to and we need to not get censorious about the bottle feeding mother. What we need here is nurturing.<sup>69</sup>

Although Agatha proposes 'choice' for women, at the same time she acknowledges that the context of real life, the intersections of race and class added to the pressures of a sexist patriarchal society, play a restricting role in the exercise of this option. Social conditions may refute the exhortations of the 'experts' to nurse, by creating an atmosphere of disapproval for women nursing in public. The image of a mother nursing a child, particularly an older child does not fit with our society's preoccupation with the breast as an erotic object. The cultural definitions of appropriate behavior in public and the demands upon the time and bodies of women are factored into their decisions.

Working class women may be obligated to resume earning for their family as soon as possible. Some women may not have the time required to nurse due to other children and other tasks that extend their long day. Although negative connections have been made between

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<sup>68</sup> St. Agatha, interviewed by author, 21 may 2000

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

formula promotions and infant mortality in developing countries, the incidence of poverty and associated poor sanitation has not been addressed. Commercial formula must be made with boiled water. When the water is already contaminated and the access to a safe preparation area is reduced, sick babies are the result. It is, however, too simplistic to tell the mothers to return to breastfeeding as they may have to work outside the home for economic reasons.

Pam Carter introduces issues of both class and race when she states: "But perhaps there is just a hint of romanticism, even a touch of racism, in believing that third world women should be enabled by first world feminists to carry out their breast-feeding duties."<sup>70</sup> Agatha presents her point of view: "the people who are poorer in our society can least afford to feed their children formula so their children are going to be the ones who suffer from malnutrition more [with mothers] cutting formula."<sup>71</sup> She uses this as a pro breast-feeding argument without acknowledging the extent of poverty among women in all countries. Agatha presents an informed *medical* (feminist ?) gaze, while Carter develops an academic, almost theoretical view of breastfeeding, poverty, and maternal/child health issues.

Plans to encourage choice for women must also consider issues related to class. Poor women feel that women in a better financial position would bottle feed, and subsequently attempt to be scientific and enlightened. Black women are also seen as being 'resistant' to the practice of breast-feeding, but again the context of their lived reality is not that of middle class white feminists. Agatha also points out that although the practice of breast-feeding may have decreased in the lifetime of a young woman's mother, her grandmother may be able to teach, support and be proud of her granddaughter's efforts to suckle her infant. This realization has

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<sup>70</sup> Pam Carter, *Feminism, Breasts and Breastfeeding*, 20

<sup>71</sup> St. Agatha, interviewed by author,

encouraged the traditional respect given to tribal elders in many First Nation's cultures, to be re-instituted. This becomes an advantage to the entire community.<sup>72</sup>

Agatha, with the penetrating analysis of our modern culture, explains how the baby dolls sold to children promote bottle-feeding. The images of motherhood and bottle-feeding become linked in our consciousness at an extremely young age.

Bottles are everywhere in our culture. We see bottles being used in advertising on anything to do with babies. There are always bottles. Dolls are sold with bottles.

Well, how are you going to sell a doll with a breast, but you know the thing is that you could sell the doll without anything to feed it, then the child could learn to breast-feed.<sup>73</sup>

Agatha links these types of images with creating beliefs that influence feeding choices for all mothers.<sup>74</sup> These images affect all women, but especially young, less economically advantaged women. Immigrant women may want to assimilate into the new culture, sometimes even to the point of denying the advice of their elders.

The use of commercially prepared baby formula raises issues that feminists must be prepared to answer. Has the devaluation of mother's work been extended to the non-profit production of mother's milk, or have women's lives created a need for such a product? Is refusal to breast-feed a subtle form of resistance to increasing patriarchal control of women's bodies? Has increasing medical technology and the loss of trust in the "doctor knows best" theory, clouded the issue? My personal answer to these questions is yes. Economics, women's resistance and commercialism have combined to create a problematic atmosphere for lactation.

While calling for feminist analysis of the breast-feeding question, Barbara Sichtermann illuminates the 'act of love' between mother and child. The act of breast-feeding produces not only maternal child bonding, but provides ecstatic and serious sexual pleasure to both members

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



of this new couple. The mingling of both bodies and bodily fluids defines the perfect sexual union and the child becomes the second party in the sexual union of breastfeeding.<sup>75</sup>

Sichlermann leads us into the use of breast imaging for nationalistic purposes by noting that during the Nazi period in Germany, women were obligated to nurse for the production of healthy Aryans, and also at specific times of the day and night.<sup>76</sup> This was believed to start the child on a regimented routine that would eventually serve the state.<sup>72</sup> The German Government during WW2 used the traditional image of the nursing mother to fan national fervor. (See Appendix 1 fig 16.)

### THE NATIONALISTIC OR POLITICAL BREAST

Political iconography during Roman times consisted of goddesses and representations of virtues portrayed allegorically, images that depended on the female breast. Images depicting Virtue are indistinguishable from those representing the goddess Roma. An armed Amazon-like warrior figure depicts an active, independent virgin, whose naked breast spoke of wildness and a magical outsider status. Coins from the times of both Nero and Galba bear the more matronly figure of Tyche, but even she bares a breast.<sup>77</sup>

France justified colonization by representing the state as an egalitarian 'motherland' and offered her metaphorical breasts to both black and white subjects. Depiction of a bare breasted black women being protected by a fully clothed white female, suggested the need for external white control. These images appeared on bank notes of the new French Republic and on those of their colonies. (See Appendix 1 fig. 17) Appropriations of the symbols of femininity were

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<sup>75</sup> Barbara Sichlermann. "The Lost Eroticism of the Breasts" in *Femininity, the Politics of the Personal*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 60

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>77</sup> Marina Warner. *Monuments and Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985) 280

not a concern during the eighteenth century any more than they are now and breastfeeding was seen as a patriotic duty and a commitment for women.

In 1830, Eugene Delacroix depicted Liberty as a defiant bare-breasted leader, whose upright breasts suggested an urgency aggression essential to the successful conclusion of the uprising. Her liberated breasts represent freedom thereby losing any erotic connotations. (See Appendix 1 fig. 18)

The allegorical female body either wears armor, emblematic of its wholeness and impregnability. . . . or proclaims its virtues by abandoning protective coverings, to announce it has no need of them. By exposing vulnerable flesh as if it were not so, and especially by uncovering the breast, softest and most womanly part of a woman, as if it were invulnerable, the semi-clad female figure expresses strength and freedom.<sup>78</sup>

Liberty's exposed breast stands for freedom rather than the usual erotic invitation. The lowered clothing is an indicator that we are expected to accept an ulterior motive, rather than being introduced to a real woman.<sup>79</sup> The bloodshed and violence of war seems denied by the aloof face of Liberty. The qualities of daring, dynamism, solidarity and sexual attraction are claimed by the French as part of a national character, and so around 1850, Marianne was created as the representation of these traits.<sup>80</sup> (See Appendix 1 fig. 19 to examine the upright breasts urging soldiers in WW1 on to victory.) Not only does she defy German bullets, she also casually places her hand on a smoking cannon.

Images of partially clad women continued well into the twentieth century with WW 1 Americans illustrating their German enemy as dripping-fanged gorillas, destroying the virtue of both America and women at the same time. This American enlistment poster was duplicated during the Second World War by the Germans to remind their people of their

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>80</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 123

former disgrace with the words 'Never Again' superimposed. Goebbels wasted no time in recycling good propaganda for German use.<sup>81</sup> (Appendix 1 See fig. 20)

It was not until the late half of the twentieth century that women bared their breasts to gain political advantage for themselves. The city of Rome in 1987 saw the bare breasts of La Cicciolina when she ran for parliament. Her successful platform was, not surprisingly, 'say no to sexual oppression'.<sup>82</sup> American women bared their breasts in the nineties to draw attention to women's problems in areas of health care, poverty, violence against women, pornography and sexual harassment.<sup>82</sup> The next image shows a participant in a Gay and Lesbian parade in San Francisco, her hand raised in sign language which translates to: 'I love you'. Her bared chest, with a visible mastectomy scar, screams not only about breast cancer and the millions of its victims, but also about sexist sentiments demonstrated by health care and research funding allotments. (See Appendix 1 fig 21)

### BREASTS IN FINE ART

Male generated images of women, which were produced for their own pleasure, portrayed idealistic and perfectly proportioned female bodies. Greek mythology inspired artists from pre-Christian eras to the present century. Shifts and changes in perception were demonstrated within cultural and historic frameworks. Kenneth Clark states that the nude as an art form originated in the fifth century with the Greeks, and that the term was created by art critics in seventeenth century Italy.<sup>83</sup> Classical figures were allegorical representations of women as goddess or as one of the virtues. The fourteenth century portrayed the sacred breast including the Madonna. The breast as an erotic plaything for men and a reference point for pure pleasure came during the second half the fifteenth century.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.,130-131

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude A Study in Ideal Form*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1984)

Sandro Botticelli received the commission for *The Birth of Venus* in 1482. (Appendix 1 Figure 22), which illustrates the combination of classical and Christian elements to demonstrate Christian love.<sup>84</sup> (Review Appendix 1 fig. 15 for the *Virgin of Melum*.) Painted around the same time as the *Birth of Venus*, *The Virgin of Melum* marked the point of entry for the erotic breast.

## THE EROTIC BREAST

“The story of Agnes Sorel was both the harbinger of a new era in French history, and the sign of a new social construction of the breast.”<sup>85</sup> During the fifteenth century in England, Henry VI discouraged displays of female breasts as being unseemly. The Italian Renaissance allowed the images of prostitutes and other ‘debased’ women to be painted in the idealistic style, small, hard, high and round. Jean Cousin in *Eva Prima Pandora*, paints disproportionately long torso and legs, and demonstrates the erotic ideal of the Renaissance. Since the breasts were sometimes painted with the same bright cosmetics used for the face, the concept of the breast as being part of the face was introduced. Young women are still fighting this image today. (See Appendix 1 fig.23)

A painting done in the late half of the sixteenth century, in the School of Fontainebleau, illustrates two women at their bath. Both women are bare breasted, but one woman tweaks the nipple of the other. Several explanations for this strange image have been presented. The official explanation was that the woman whose breast is being tweaked is Gabrielle d’Estrees and the other woman is one of her sisters. A second interpretation is that Gabrielle’s nipple is being handled by her replacement, the new mistress of Henry IV of France, Henriette d’Entragues.

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<sup>84</sup> Milli and Geri Diesch, Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), [online] Cited 15 sept.2000 Available from World Wide Web: (<http://www.msc.csuhayward.edu/~malek/Botticelli.html>)

<sup>85</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 49

The hand of a woman on the breast of another, at a time when ownership of the breast was accorded to male lovers and to babies, created a slightly subversive and shocking (possibly homosexual) image for French society.<sup>86</sup> (Appendix 1 Fig.24)

This erotic imagery was evident in a peculiar type of poetry called the 'blazon' and the 'antiblazon'. In this poetry, breasts were both extolled and repulsed as evidenced by the poetry of Clement Marot. The first, the blazon, extols the beauty and attraction of the female breast. The following example was composed in the winter of 1535-36, and is called "The Beautiful Breast".

A little ball of ivory  
In the middle of which sits  
A strawberry or a cherry.

...

For every reason, happy is he  
Who will fill you with milk,  
Turning the virgin's breast into  
The breasts of a beautiful, complete woman.

This admiration and promise is lost when full maturity is reached. Marot's antiblazon called "Antiblazon to the Breast", demonstrates his loathing and misogynistic fear of the innate 'otherness' of women.

Breast, that is nothing but skin,  
Flaccid breast, flaglike breast

...

Breast with a big, ugly black tip  
Like that of a funnel,

...

Breast that's good for nursing  
Lucifer's children in Hell.

...

Go away, big ugly stinking breast,  
When you sweat, you could provide  
Sufficient musk and perfume  
To kill off a hundred thousand.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 75

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 62-3

This breast is not only objectified, but creates fragmentation. It almost seems unrelated to any living woman. The writer glories in his power to cause lactation, then reviles the results of childbearing, breast-feeding and age. His decline and mortality is disassociated from the female, and thereby denied. It is amusing to read as an insult, the 'bad breast' being called stinking, since my anatomical research detailed in chapter four will describe the breast as a modified sweat gland.

The seventeenth century produced artists such as Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Rubens (1577-1640). (See Appendix 1 fig. 25 for the *Venus* as portrayed by Rubens.) These men painted lusty forms, wrinkles and large expanses of human flesh. However, the end of their century saw the return of idealism in the form of Neo-Classicism, which extended into the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth century saw the classical ideal challenged as artists produced more realistic images of women, not only physically, but in their settings and poses.<sup>86</sup> The twentieth century produced women who painted not only in the current style, but represented themselves and their unique vision of femininity photographically. Reconstruction of women's images, lives, and perceptions were underway.

#### NUDITY VERSUS NAKEDNESS

The attempt to differentiate between nudity and nakedness illustrates efforts taken to justify the appropriation of women's breasts for the exclusive erotic pleasure of a hegemonic society. John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, and Kenneth Clark in his book, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, present their individual definitions but also present a difference in perspective. Although Clark's writings date from the middle of the twentieth century and those of Berger at least twenty years later, the effects of Clark's negative word images affected the women of my generation as well as that of my mother. Since the female tradition is to teach and pass on female knowledge through the generations, a fragmented and destroyed self-image becomes a

critical issue. The sense of pride and self-confidence exhibited by my mother and grandmother had a direct influence on my personal estimation of my body.

John Berger states that “to be naked is to be oneself. . . .without disguise . . . .revealing itself.”<sup>88</sup> By contrast, “to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet *not recognized for oneself*.”<sup>89</sup> A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude.”<sup>90</sup>

Berger goes on to explain that skin and hair clothe a nude. The covering of the external surface not only hides the woman within, but also becomes clothing, which negates the definition of naked. A naked woman has no clothes, and can be recognized as a real person. When a naked body becomes a nude it is objectified then offered to the viewer. A body seen by a spectator/viewer can then be used as an object.<sup>91</sup>

He further offers that even if a lover is shown with the nude, her gaze is still towards the viewer, who is her true lover, inviting sexual knowledge and pleasure.<sup>92</sup> It is fascinating to realize that the removal of body hair on the nude desexualizes and negates a possibly dangerous female physicality. How does this relate to the Western practice of bodily hair removal? Emphasis is now placed on the cranial hair, which must be clean, luxurious and available to be part of a lover’s facial caress.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve serves to illustrate this difference again. After eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness (no clothes) and covered themselves. Their ability to see themselves had changed; therefore, nakedness was created in the mind of the beholder.

The second striking fact is that the woman is blamed and is punished by being made subservient to the man.  
In relation to the woman, the man becomes the agent of God.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54

<sup>89</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>90</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 48

John Berger recognizes the historical influence of images on the construction of femininity, and his deconstruction encourages our recognition and reconstruction.

Kenneth Clark, an English art critic, gave a series of lectures in a graduate seminar on the topic of the nude, and his observations are prolific, derogatory to artists, extremely misogynist. He defines naked as having no clothes, being embarrassed and defenseless. The nude however, is a re-formed or perfect body presented to an appreciative audience. This image, although naked, represents the central subject of the art world and as such expresses our highest ideals and aspirations.<sup>93</sup>

The Greeks perfected the nude in order that a man might feel like a God, and in a sense this is still its function, for although we no longer suppose that God is like a beautiful man, we still feel close to divinity in those flashes of self-identification when, through our own bodies, we seem to be aware of a universal order.<sup>94</sup>

Although Clark no longer sees God as a beautiful man, to illustrate his descriptions of women I offer these quotations, "the deplorable body of a middle aged female . . . there are more women whose bodies look like a potato. . . the shape to which the female body tends to return is one that emphasizes its biological functions. . . Aphrodite is always ready to relapse into her first vegetable condition . . . the pitiable inadequacy of the flesh. . . Rembrandt and his painful visions of human nakedness."<sup>95</sup> After reviewing Clark's comments on the ugliness of the real female form, I wonder why he lost his belief in God being a beautiful man. He was certainly able to distinguish the nude (perfect and idealized) versus the naked (real and disgusting) images of women.

In the eighteenth century art critics and artists were able to convince the public that a nude was acceptable art, while condemning the more base (erotic) purposes of the image of a naked

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<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude A Study in Ideal Form*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 3

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 370

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 93, 388



female. That is not to say that Clark, 200 years later denies any erotic satisfaction as being possible from this idealized female form. While extolling the need for the idealized nude, he cannot ignore the erotic reactions inspired in men while viewing the nude. To deny any response, no matter how faint, he says would be “bad art and false morals.”<sup>96</sup>

Instincts cannot be sublimated when a real nude is seen, but obviously repugnance can be generated when viewing the nudes of Picasso, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Rodin, Donatello, Cezane and Rouault.<sup>97</sup> This is an amazing assortment of painters whose nudes were demoted by Clark to being inappropriate images of women.

Clark also devalues and dismisses Japanese prints that are expressions of life called *ukiyo-e*. These scenes include intimate details of life, and would probably be seen today as feminist representations of women in their life context.<sup>98</sup> These scenes are of women washing children; washing their own genitals, and in conversational groups which include their children playing around them.<sup>99</sup> They are all either nude or partially clad, but since these images are not offered to the male for his erotic possession, they become mundane and worthless in Clark’s opinion.

Although a thorough treatment of artists and their work is not within the scope of this paper, I would like to direct the reader to Pablo Picasso’s *Woman with a Bird*. Picasso (1882-1973) contributed to the visual fragmentation of women in art, and has been defended by critics as trying to break away from the idealized classical image of the nude. Kenneth Clark calls his work a scarcely resolved struggle between love and hate.<sup>100</sup> I cannot see myself in his savage distortions and deformations of women’s bodies, nor am I able to appreciate his works. I notice that Picasso uses the breast as a signifier for the feminine, even where the breasts are misplaced, misshapen or singular. (See Appendix 1, fig. 26)

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 361,251,338

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 342

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 343

Edouard Manet (1832-1883) startled the art world and his Victorian contemporaries, with two paintings in 1863. *Picnic on the Grass* and *Olympia* imaged nudes who returned the gaze of the viewer/painter/spectator. (See Appendix 1, fig.27 and 28) *Picnic* shows a female nude seated with fully clothed males and is suggestive of carnality. This opened the door for the erotic stimulation of the viewer. *Olympia* stares out at the viewer, challenging not only his gaze, but also challenging the pretext for the nude genre. She seems to blatantly remind the viewer that this body is for sale. Her defiant gaze seems to control and dominate the image while informing the viewer that she sets the tone of the negotiations for any use of her body. This is the start of the demonstration of female resistance, and I am still in awe that this image was painted by a male over 100 years ago.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY AS ART AND AS RESISTANCE

The photographic works of Cindy Sherman and Sabrina Ovesen illustrate modern resistance to male dominated art culture. Photography is a new way of seeing. Photographic images surround us so completely, that we almost don't see them anymore. Or that's what we would like to think. The shift from the artist as the creator of unique images, to producing images of existing forms that reflect and reinforce the production of cultural ideology is perhaps the most dramatic and clearly defined aspect of post-modernism.<sup>101</sup>

The work of Cindy Sherman sharply illuminates the false sense of reality and truth normally associated with photography. Her work shows the construction of female stereotypes. By photographing herself, complete with props, makeup, and by becoming both photographic subject and photographer, she deconstructs images from the past and present. She forces us to see more than one meaning in her work by making the stereotype obvious, and that helps us to

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 361

<sup>101</sup> Refer to p.4 for definition of post-modernism. The artist no longer has sole possession or ability to reflect the world, but now produces images that either reflect or support existing cultural ideologies, for better or worse.

identify and defuse the real message of control. We are forced to analyze the conventions of truth surrounding media generated and male generated images of women.

Sherman presents images of the familiar; the clothing, settings, and gestures that mimic the false mirror of existing representations of women. The complicity of photography in perpetuating false images is inherent in her work.

Her women are always passive, slightly tragic, emotionally distraught, objectified, confused, foolish. Because they exist alone in the images, the women appear trapped waiting to be released. In highlighting the subjective focus of these familiar-looking characterizations and images Sherman is able to reveal the shortcomings that such views of women perpetuate.<sup>102</sup>

The erotic image of Agnes Sorrel in Appendix 1, fig.15 has already shown the false maternal image as depicted by 14<sup>th</sup> century painters. Cindy Sherman in her *Untitled 216, 1989* repeats this image but allows the false breast and distantly held child to further display misogynist notions of motherhood.<sup>103</sup> (See Appendix 1. fig.9) Another popular nursing Madonna –style stereotype is undermined in *Untitled #178, 1990*. (See Appendix 1 fig. 29.)

In this image, the obviously false breast being presented to a doll, along with the caring gaze of the mother, illustrates the objectification of both child and breast. Angela Smith quotes Judith Butler from her text *Gender Trouble* as remarking: “There is a subversive laughter in the pastiche-effect of parodic practices in which the original, the authentic, and the real are themselves constituted as effects”.<sup>104</sup>

Sherman has her critics, most notable being the American Art critic James Gardner, who reviews much of Sherman’s work, praising only her early black and white images. This excludes *Untitled#146, 1985*. He describes her breast prosthesis as being typical post-modern fakery. Her ridicule of the stereotypical feminine genie is called a ‘doctored image’ as

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>103</sup> Angela Smith. *Kristeva, Sherman, and the Maternal Body*. Accessed September 8<sup>th</sup> 2000. Available at: <http://english.cla.umn.edu/Visiting/MJanette/Installations/Angela/Sherm5.htm>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1

compared to the truth of modern imaging. (See Appendix 1.Fig.30). Her descent' into color has become problematic for him and he infers that she seems to "be undergoing a profound multiple personality disorder and to be recording for the camera each stage of her psychosis"<sup>105</sup> He sums up her work as being self-gratifying and exhibitionist. Her secret agenda is to have men admire her body, thus pleasing herself before her audience.<sup>106</sup> Gardner does not seem to appreciate the feminist deconstruction or self-stated interpretation of Cindy Sherman's work.

Another photographic artist, who uses her own body as the subject, is Sabrina Oveson.

Oveson likes to challenge the subject/object dichotomy. Like Sherman she uses her own body as photographer's model, but without props. Her body is offered to the viewer, naked, wrinkled and folded, blemished and voluptuous. No excuses are made and the use of black and white films emphasis the reality of female flesh. Many women find this exposure to be painful, embarrassing, and perhaps even difficult to view.

A request to become a model for Oveson might meet with fear, as our culture negates age and average body weight. This perpetuates media representations of unnatural and unrealistic expectations of body images for millions of women.<sup>107</sup>

A naked female body on display can be viewed as a passive object and to contradict this perspective, I have intentionally chosen a vertical format and created attention to the touch. Also, by actively participating in the image-making by using my own body, I cannot help but challenge the history, codes and tradition of female images. The emphasized skin surface displays scars, blemishes and wrinkles; this is not an innocent body without history, but a person who has experienced life. . . .The aging, imperfect body can be associated with corruption, loss of sexuality and decay. Through this exhibition of photographic self-portraits I want to encourage pleasure in viewing a woman's body that is not a limited icon of masculine heterosexual desire.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> James Gardner. *Culture or Trash? A Provocative View of Contemporary Painting, Sculpture and Other Costly Commodities.*(New York:Coral Publishing Group, 1993) 180

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.,179, 181

<sup>107</sup> Annette Schroeter, Foreword to Exhibition Catalogue *Sabrina Oveson Self-Portraits* (Prince George: Art Gallery,1999)

When I interviewed Sabrina, she wanted her name used in her quotations. She felt her words and images belonged to her and although she was more than willing to share these with me, she did not want anonymity. Now is a good time to examine figures 31 and 32 in Appendix 1. Figure 31 shows the gaze of the viewer being imaged by the subject of the photograph. This is a nice turn of convention and a feminist statement of resistance. There is a camera located at both sexually charged areas of her body that makes definite her point. The area of subject as object is being neatly illuminated and defused. Figure 32 shows the plastic female torsos used for cake decorating, being held to her breasts. This challenges the ideology of perfect breasts by placing the plastic/perfect doll torsos next to Sabrina's real but culturally imperfect breasts.

When asked about her motivation for producing these images, Sabrina said:

I was at a particular age. I was quite a bit older than most of the other students, into my thirties, had gained weight and it was almost like I was being written off sexually. How dare you! It was sort of a defiance thing, how dare you write me off sexually and say that my body isn't beautiful or perfect. . . . it was defiance because a lot of the photographs that were being made were in the art school tradition of nude photography. It is a certain type of body, and that was O.K., but you didn't get to see photographs of other types of bodies.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps it was her age, or inherent feminism that gave her the courage to give her anger a voice, but Sabrina says that she was inspired to do self-portraits by seeing the work of John Coplan. He was in his 60's with an aging body and she saw him as being brave and honest. Her work does not have a high commercial value yet, and Sabrina says "no-one is going to want to hang it over the top of their sofa".<sup>110</sup> I disagree; one day Sabrina may be hailed as an important artist who challenged the status quo. However, many women feel uncomfortable

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<sup>108</sup> Sabrina Oveson, Artist's Statement Exhibition Catalogue *Sabrina Oveson: Self-Portraits* (Prince George: Art Gallery, 1999) 24

<sup>109</sup> Sabrina Oveson, personal interview, taped by the author, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2000

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

with such honest representations of our bodies, and feminists may add to the confusion. Sabrina says, "there are some feminist artists who believe that you shouldn't even be showing the female body at all. It is just playing into the [heterosexual] game by depicting the body."<sup>111</sup>

These feminists are also trying to fight the essentialist theory that woman as a category is defined by her anatomy. Anti-essentialists focus on difference and would approve of Sabrina's work. Social constructionists would have difficulties here because, if the category 'woman' is a social construction, then by eliminating social constructions you could eliminate both the category and women's problems at once. Sabrina is engaged in tearing down social constructs of woman as an erotic possession of men, but is reconstructing the image to be real and more representative of female experience.

This chapter has focused on representations of women's breasts as the functional or breastfeeding breast; the breasts being used for political purposes; and the images generated by the world of art. These images have demonstrated the appropriation of the breasts by others. Modern resistance, which exemplifies the acquisition of a new awareness of the control contained within many images, is seen in the works of women especially within the medium of photography. Images generated by more modern methods such as the media and medicine continue my exploration. To examine these images of women I move on to chapter four.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE COMMERCIAL, FASHIONABLE AND MEDICALIZED BREAST

The purpose of chapter four is to examine images of women's breasts as portrayed by the popular media, advertising firms, fashion leaders and the world of medicine. Not only does a modern medium generate these images but also they lead into each other. The commercial breast is used either to sell products, or sometimes to sell their owner. This leads into garments designed to maximize or create a specific image, leading directly into health problems. Corsets and the modern equivalent of binding bras are still suspected of having an adverse effect on women's breast health. When media or medicine focuses its gaze on a particular area of the female anatomy, women respond by viewing their own body as being comprised as parts. Parts which must be made to conform, be properly dressed or adorned, and be subjected to the particular and intense gaze of the medical fraternity. The ongoing question of cause and effect reveals the subtle pressure women confront every day. Images, narrative and the words of John Berger will continue to be used to illustrate my position.

Women's bodies, especially breasts, are used to sell commodities by accessing the blatant appeal of sex. Seemingly unrelated objects, from automobiles to zebras are linked with the female body, offering pleasure and promise to the purchaser. The beauty of the idealized female form, coupled with the item for sale, promises the purchaser prestige, status, and the envy of friends and associates, irresistibly combined with the promise of sexual success. Women, it is implied, especially this type of desirable, high status female, will rush to be with the viewer. Her high profile sexuality hints of power, yours to possess and flaunt. Men are measured by their possessions; the same way women are measured by their bust size. (See Appendix 1, fig.33 for a literal view of measuring up, demonstrated on a 1950 U.S. postcard.)

It is my aim to explore the relationship of women as both buyers and sellers in the breast market. To do that I will use images of breasts in the world of commerce, fashion and medicine.

Images that we 'see' without 'seeing'. Images so pervasive and common that we take them for granted and assimilate them into our unconscious. We then create false definitions of 'normal' and 'beauty' that create negative self-perceptions. They, in turn, create far-reaching consequences that extend into our adult lives.

These areas of breast image production intersect and overlap each other, and since the modern reproductive techniques available create a new and extensive audience, I decided to create a new chapter separate from those images generated by historical paintings, literature or art forms. Areas such as pornography and erotica, including lesbian definitions of the latter; the influence of the Internet; the relationship between breast cancer, the bra and the definition of normal; issues in mammography; body adornment, and breast displays in prostitution are explored.

John Berger offers a deconstructive analysis of the relationship between images generated by fine art and the media, and the hidden issues of pleasure, envy, glamour, and happiness being successfully accessed by the retail market.<sup>112</sup> Berger's words are used to illustrate my thesis that the images of breasts being produced today are as powerful and pervasive as the historical images already considered in previous chapters. The effects on modern women through advertising, the dictates of fashion and the intervention of medicine are objectifying and destructive to women of all ages. Seeing ourselves begins in the cradle and continues throughout our life. Our self-esteem predicts our behavior, with positive commercial results and occasionally negative personal outcomes.

Medicine has capitalized in this era of media-influenced body image by providing the tools to re-make or sculpt the perfect body. This creates the 'Official breast', which conforms to a culturally generated standard of normalcy and beauty. Plastic surgery, as well as the medicalization of normal breast growth and size, provides fertile areas for analysis. Images, interviews and the correlation of feminist literature with medical definitions of 'need' are



presented in this chapter. Breast images as produced by Diagnostic Medical Imaging Departments are offered, along with a comparison of different available imaging modalities.

### THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Carolyn Latteier compares our cultural obsession with the breast to a form of fetishism. She defines fetishism as a sexual fixation; the transference of sexual power from a person to an object or a person whose sexual practices place them outside of 'normal' and into the category of 'deviant'.<sup>113</sup> Taking these definitions a step further creates political fetishism. Karl Marx wrote about "commodity fetishism in capitalist societies"<sup>114</sup> suggesting that the replacement of value from the worker to the product was creating a power displacement. Objects now held the power rather than the people who labored in the creation of that object: "This object obscures and replaces social relations".<sup>115</sup> The reality of long shifts in factories, with the attendant physical and mental cost to the workers, is not reflected in the sleek packaging of a new car. Freedom, prestige, sexuality and an improved sense of self, are the messages sent to the consumer. Beautiful bodies, especially beautiful body parts, become so entwined with the product that it becomes difficult to separate them. Advertising has put sex and sales together so completely that women have been forced to relinquish ownership of their own body.

However, as Berger points out to us, the poses of women used in commerce are stereotypes: the good mother, housewife, mistress, secretary, perfect hostess (spectator-owner's wife/woman?), or sex object.<sup>116</sup> But what about the 'new liberated woman'? Increased visibility of women is used to proclaim the era of post-feminism. But visibility is not reflected by statistics of women having equal representation in the real world of business and commerce. Even where

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<sup>112</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 129-154

<sup>113</sup> Carolyn Latteier, *Breasts The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998) 114

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 120

<sup>116</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* 138

the majority of workers are female, e.g. healthcare, the management teams are predominately male. Berger sums up the issue of visibility in advertising contrasting with the real world:

Publicity [advertising] turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world. Publicity adds up to a kind of philosophical system. It explains everything in its own terms. It interprets the world.<sup>117</sup>

To extrapolate these words into a feminist perspective is not too difficult: we are still oppressed even if we look great in the advertisements.

I remember my family buying a new car in the late 1950's. What I cannot remember is at whose request I posed with the car for a photograph. Did I enhance the car, like the advertisement, or did the car enhance my image? When men pose with their vehicles, it seems to reflect their power. Ownership, mobility and the ability to attract women for sexual purposes are the messages being sent. The message sent by the female body, or even a part of her body, is 'buy me'. Buy this product (car, aftershave, credit card, etc.) and get a free girl. (See Appendix 1. Fig. 34)

John Berger offers a thorough discussion of the nature of advertising combined with the appropriation of the female body. Berger explains that reproduced paintings, when used in advertising, often change meaning to the viewer when either situated out of context, or when narrative is added to the image thus changing the original meaning. In other words, what is seen either before or after the image may influence or redistribute its authority<sup>118</sup>. The claims of feminists that existing philosophy, history and other representations of culture are exclusionary towards women are supported by this same problem of context. The experience and knowledge of women as developed by our unique life situation, or simply put, our life context, has not been acknowledged or considered important. To realize that the meaning of a picture may be distorted

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 149

or lost when presented in different context illustrates our position clearly. For example consider the seemingly innocuous *Sears* catalogue. When I was a child I spent many hours poring over the images of women in bras. So did my brother. But where I was picking out a body (shape) for myself, he was picking out his dream girl (body). We were both forming the cultural definition of normal and desirable that shaped our self-image and our relationships with others for the rest of our lives.

Therefore, it can be taken further, that a group or classes of persons, who do not see themselves reflected in recorded history, do not develop a sense of identity and purpose. This is one of the pressing problems of feminist scholars and artists, and lends credence to my thesis that the objectification of any part of a woman's anatomy will lead to a sense of invisibility for the whole. Being separated from our breasts for commercial reasons raises issues of ownership and control.

### THE COMMERCIAL GAZE

To explore my thesis in the area of commerce, I will compare two highly commodified women, both in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who became sexual icons. Marilyn Munroe and Madonna both women became sex symbols; both used their anatomy as an instrument to obtain their goals, but they are judged by our culture to be different. To find and define this difference will involve images, both photographic and literary. The common bond between these women is that of women selling sex, in opposition to the previous discussion of women's sex being used to sell retail. However, Marilyn is seen as a victim, while Madonna is seen as a very enterprising young woman. In the following unit, sources such as a biography of Marilyn Munroe, the Internet and feminist examinations of Madonna as a cultural phenomenon are explored and analyzed.

### MARILYN MUNROE

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 29

Marilyn Munroe, originally Norma Jean Baker, was born June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1926. Her mother, Gladys was single at the time of the birth and listed the father as unknown. Marilyn was never sure of her paternity, and due to financial and mental health problems in her mother's life, Marilyn spent her childhood in a series of foster homes. Marilyn was quoted in her later life as describing her childhood this way:

“The world around me then was kind of grim. I had to learn to pretend in order to...I don't know... block the grimness. The whole world seemed sort of closed to me...(I felt) on the outside of everything, and all I could do was to dream up any kind of pretend –game.”<sup>119</sup>

Marilyn married early for financial support, but soon learned that posing for photographers was easy and fun. Throughout her marriages, she complained that the role of dutiful housewife was boring and did not mesh with her personal desires to have fun and to fulfill her fantasy of becoming a star.<sup>120</sup> Marilyn started off being photographed by the Army as part of the war effort. Women were shown to the troops to remind them that their women were working in factories and farms to support them in their fight for freedom. For Marilyn, this was her stepping stone into fame.

In 1949 she posed nude for a calendar for \$50.00, reputedly to get her car out of the garage.<sup>121</sup> Later, when Marilyn was a big star, a reporter in reference to the nude photos asked her; did she have anything on? Her reply was ‘Oh yes, a radio.’ Norman Mailer interprets this comment as not being a deliberate attempt at humor. He says that “ to lie nude before a photographer in a state of silence was a different condition, and much more naked, than to be nude with the

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<sup>119</sup> The Marilyn Pages. [cited 4 November 2000] Available from World Wide Web (<http://ellensplace.net/mmbio3.html>)

<sup>120</sup> Norman Mailer. *Marilyn*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap Inc., 1972

<sup>121</sup> The Marilyn Pages, ‘Quotes’ 2

protection of sound. She did not have a skin like others.”<sup>122</sup> The difference between naked and nudity is seen as crucial and resonates with Berger’s theories.

Mailer also addresses the model as object /artist as spectator dichotomy: “For if the photographer is usually seen as the artist, and his model as a species of still life, she paints the picture into the camera, she becomes the artist when she takes a pose: she paints the picture into the camera, and few photographers will fail to pay her homage.”<sup>123</sup> Marilyn looks into the camera, engaging the gaze of the artist/viewer, and her gaze, like Monet’s *Olympia*, seems to say: “You can fuck me if you’re lucky, Mr. Sugar.”<sup>124</sup> (Look at Appendix 1 fig. 35 to support this determination). Mailer reduces Marilyn’s humanity by his use of demeaning and disempowering language, and never seems to realize that Marilyn gives her power away with her permission to be objectified and used.

Mailer’s biography offers us facts, opinions, images and a rather love-struck narrative. However, along with the effusive descriptions of her physical beauty, he slips in a few insightful comments about Marilyn and her problems. He clearly details her effects on others, saying she was a cornucopia of delight, a promise of sexual fulfillment as never before experienced, a real woman; the living embodiment of feminine pulchritude. He describes her smile promising to fulfill the need of every human.<sup>125</sup> The lure for every man was to possess her, and for every female to be like her. Something for everyone, sex became ice cream and Marilyn was the treat of the week.

“Yet she was more. She was a presence. She was ambiguous. She was the angel of sex, and the angle was *in her detachment. For she was separated from what she offered.*”<sup>126</sup> Diana Trilling wrote: None but Marilyn Munroe could suggest such purity of sexual delight. The boldness with which she could parade herself

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<sup>122</sup> Norman Mailer, *Marilyn*, 47

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>126</sup> Italics by the author

and yet never be gross, her sexual flamboyance and bravado which yet breathes an air of mystery and even reticence, her voice which carried such ripe overtones of erotic excitement and yet was the voice of a small child—these complications were integral to her gift. And they describe a young woman trapped in some never-never land of unawareness.”<sup>127</sup>

Mailer bares her dependence on sleeping pills, her facial faults that were corrected by the studio, her hair color change, her running and use of barbells to keep her figure, her ample body size (16), her abortions (12) and subsequent failure to bear children, but manages to reveal as well her humanity and lack of ‘otherness’.

He quotes Elizabeth Taylor as saying, “Get that dyke away from me.”<sup>128</sup> Of course, Liz and Marilyn were in a competition for publicity, but it still seems an odd remark. He continues to give coverage to her failings by telling us that she had two seemingly opposite parts of her personality. He compares her to a calculating computer and a dumb, animal like angel at the same time. “Anyone else who contained such opposite personalities within his body would be ferociously mad. It is her transcendence of these opposites into a movie star that is her triumph.”<sup>129</sup>

Not only do I see her transcendence of her dichotomous personality, but his as well. Marilyn can do nothing to effectively tarnish her image with Mailer. I also like the change in personal pronouns in the quotation. Why the need to introduce a male term of reference while describing a female? Is it an attempt to define her as ‘not other’ or to include her in the nature and rationality of men?

An example of her awareness of her commercial value can be seen in the story told during the filming of *The Misfits* in 1960. Marilyn had to compete with Clark Gable, Eli Wallach, Montgomery Clift, and the larger than life director, John Houston. During a ‘morning after’ scene with Clark Gable, Marilyn lets the sheet slip, exposing her breast to one of the cameras.

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<sup>127</sup> Norman Mailer, *Marilyn*, 16

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 218

The dilemma of using the shot or not eventually came down to the director, who while stating: "I've always known that girls have breasts" did not want the "aesthetic slant of his film to be nudged by her competitive tit."<sup>130</sup> Now we have a new stakeholder: 'the competitive tit'. What was the competition, or what male area being threatened?

## MADONNA

Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone was born to two parents on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1958. She was the third of eight siblings, in a strong Catholic Italian family. Although her mother died of breast cancer when Madonna was six, she still lived with her family in Michigan. In school Madonna was a straight-A student, and cheerleader. Dance classes and hard work resulted in a scholarship to the University of Michigan. After one year, the atmosphere was not to her personal agenda, so Madonna left for New York. Her success is measured by 14 recordings, 4 tours, 16 films and two stage performances. She also produced her own graphically illustrated *Sex* book in 1992. She was married briefly (four years) to Sean Penn in 1985 and since then has produced two children and an additional marriage. She is not beautiful but professional make-up and professional hair care, combined with a slim, culturally acceptable body, creates the illusion of beauty. Her sharp nose and chin have not been altered, nor have the spaces between her teeth been corrected. She ranks third behind Bill and Melinda Gates and Prince William of Britain as a coveted party guest.<sup>131</sup> Those are the facts, but her reputation as a 'bad girl' or as a producer of sometime-offensive lyrics and costumes, needs to be examined more closely.

Madonna generates either love or hate, exposes deep-seated racial and religious conflicts in our society, and has been accused of banality and self-conscious constructionism. She seems to be all of these things, but most interestingly, she has generated academic discourse. Cathy

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>131</sup> Jim Jerome, 'Lady Madonna.' *People Magazine*, 13 March 2000, 106

Schichtenberg has edited a book of essays that try to define and understand Madonna in the critical light of ideology and perhaps to document or initiate cultural struggle.

“Subcultural identities are. . . . always forged in struggle over and against the dominant. Madonna’s subculturally evocative texts may very well present the conditions for the coalescence and mobilization of identities yet to be pacified within the larger purview of late capitalism . . . .”<sup>132</sup>

Schichtenberg’s collection identifies four areas that highlight different cultural representations in Madonna’s work. The areas are; race and religion, gay politics, identity and representation; (gender representation especially for women) and finally consumerism as practiced by using Madonna’s inauthenticity and reinvention as marketing strategies. Her work, when compared to the work of photographic artist Cindy Sherman, reveals similarities in their refusal to become easily identified or predictable in their commercial representations.

One such essay by Ronald B. Scott reviews the video *Like A Prayer*, discussing the images of a black male statue brought to life by Madonna, a white girl inappropriately dressed for church. This video exposes the myth of the overly erotic black man preying on innocent white females. Madonna presents the moral of the story as ‘making the right choice’, her problem is resolved properly, the black statue returns to its proper place, and the sub-plot of the misapprehension of an innocent black man is resolved. The challenge here is not to interpret the video as condoning or encouraging interracial relationships, but to acknowledge the historically grounded prejudices in the North American culture.<sup>133</sup> The religious overtones in her work have been severely condemned by fundamentalist religions; however, the moral, social and political overtones speak more to the more grounded black religious experience. So, we can see here the public love-hate relationship developing.

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<sup>132</sup> Cathy Schichtenberg, *The Madonna Connection Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities and Cultural Theory*. (Boulder: Westview press, 1993) 3

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 67



Madonna also raises questions around sexual and homophobic taboos. She was seen with another woman, and encourages open sexuality. She stands for 'outness', the 'bad girl', and allows her different representations to free her from the bonds of a homophobic society. If disguise is the flip side of disclosure, then her ability to fluidly move from one sexual pose to another encourages gays and lesbians to celebrate their identity.<sup>134</sup>

Madonna questions identity, or perhaps notions of femininity and masculinity, as based on dress. Sometimes she wears a man's suit only to disclose a sharply pointed bra, or she may wear a harsh stereotypical parody of femininity and receive harsh critical judgments as a result. Her defiant gender bending could be viewed not just as an assault on our patriarchal system, but as posing the question of what it would be like to live in a society that did not insist on making these delineation's on the basis of gender.<sup>135</sup> "The imagery invoked by Madonna does not . . . reverse power relations . . . rather, it attempts to subvert subjugation."<sup>136</sup>

One of the most fascinating aspects of Madonna's career is its longevity. Her ability to repackage, and re-image herself, seems to say that power, success, manipulation and celebrity are interchangeable terms in her world.<sup>137</sup> David Tetzlaff explains that Madonna has demonstrated two major themes throughout her career. They are "the appropriation and decontextualization of discourses of sexuality and morality and the commodification and exploitation of the realm of the personal in exchange for public power."<sup>138</sup> Madonna would probably agree, and her blatant self-promotion is seen both as an extension of her power, including her clever marketing practices and as an ability to stay afloat in a late capitalist marketplace.<sup>139</sup> Our culture seems to appreciate a successful commodity over human values.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 121-122

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 199

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 233

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 257

Power and visibility are sought by those without power, the marginalized and disadvantaged. Perhaps this is her appeal. Marilyn's appeal was that of a sensuous innocent being sold without her consent while Madonna represents commercial knowledge and salesmanship. So, looking at the question of women selling sex, why are these two women perceived as being different when they both did the same thing?

## COMPARISON

Although their names bear a resemblance in the relationship to Mary the Mother of Christ, their childhoods were spent differently: at home (Madonna) versus in a home (Marilyn). Their careers were both public exhibitions of the female body, but with vital differences. Marilyn portrayed the promise of sex, the stereotypical dumb blond next door, while Madonna has become involved in social issues. Madonna stridently grabs your attention, uses any means possible to transmit her message, even to the point of being considered a slut. It is difficult to imagine Marilyn Munroe grabbing at her crotch, with a grimace of raw power daring you to enjoy sex with her. (See Appendix 1 fig.36 for an image of Madonna doing just that.) Marilyn has been portrayed as being victimized by the male studio system, as being manipulated to create a sensuous persona. However, Madonna is unabashedly in control of the product: herself. (See Appendix 1. Fig.37 to look at an image Madonna created for her *Sex Book*.) Racial and heterosexual conventions are challenged and overthrown. This image can also be interpreted as pornography by some people and is easily accessible on the Internet.

The complicity of both women in the creation of their image can be seen in my research. The question of their difference is this: it exists only in the eyes and hearts of their fans. Both women used sex to sell themselves, and both were successful. The above-board presentation of the Madonna package speaks to changes in society due to feminism, in comparison to conventions created by the restrictive definitions of femininity present in the 1950's. The relationship of these women and their particular situations to my original thesis shows us how the enviable or 'official

breast' has historically influenced the self-image of modern women. The commercial usage of breasts can be further explored in the areas of prostitution, pornography and the much-reviled *Barbie* doll.

## PROSTITUTION

Breasts are not sold in prostitution, but they can be used to attract or advertise the owner's availability. The bared breast, when shown in defiance of the sexual and cultural norms of the day, suggests availability and the owners' willingness to confer sexual favors. Yale tells us that during the Italian Renaissance in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, prostitutes or courtesans supported the state with their taxed earnings. Prostitution was also encouraged in order to "counter the widespread 'vice' of sodomy among homosexual men."<sup>140</sup> The availability of prostitutes was seen to lead all men to a heterosexual orientation, thus eliminating the possibility of a homosexual sexuality.

These women were permitted to stand bare breasted to advertise their wares, and their location in the neighborhood of Castelletto was called the *Ponte delle Tette* (Bridge of Breasts).<sup>141</sup> These women used make-up on their breasts, were obliged to wear yellow veils over them when not working, and were also not permitted to wear pearls. Sumptuary laws define what colors, fabric and ornamentation persons of different classes may wear, also further restrict clothing choices worn while in the presence of their sovereign. Pearls are a symbol of purity and according to San Bernardino da Siena in 1417, and also indicate the morality of the wearer. He did not propose that those persons of debatable moral and commercial intent should reform their lifestyle, but rather that their exterior be altered and proscribed.<sup>142</sup> No surprise is the fact that these women

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<sup>140</sup> Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 56

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>142</sup> Adrian W.B.Randolf. "Performing the Bridal Body in Fifteenth-Century Florence." In *Art History*, Jun98, Vol.21 Issue2, 182

flaunted all manner of other costly jewelry between their breasts, including beautiful crosses in their cleavage.<sup>143</sup>

Even if the owner is not using her breasts for marketing purposes, large breasts are often interpreted as belonging to a willing participant in sexual games. Large breasts convey an easy morality and availability to others.<sup>144</sup> Large breasts are fetishized and commodified in pornography in our present culture, with the Internet introducing increased access worldwide. (Such an example can be found in Appendix 1 fig. 38).

The analysis of pornography in this paper is restricted to possible definitions, arguments arising from the production of pornography, and the images generated by the industry. The effects on women resulting from these images are painfully felt in our culture, with anorexia, bulimia and unnecessary cosmetic surgery being identified as direct negative results. Laws and controls such as censorship have entered the debate, with women taking many different positions.

David Frantz quotes Rodger Thompson's definitions of pornography as being:

(i) *Pornographic*, writing or representation intended to arouse lust, create sexual Fantasies, or feed auto-erotic desires. The pornographer aims for erection (at least) in the pornophile. (ii) *Obscene*, intended to shock or disgust, or to render the *subject*<sup>145</sup> of the writing shocking or disgusting. This seems to be the purpose in our period of the use of taboo words or casual descriptions of sexual perversions, and is often a companion of satire. (iii) *Bawdy*, intended to provoke amusement about sex; most dirty jokes, for example belong to this category. (iv) *Erotic*, intended to place sex within the context of love, mutuality and affection; orgasm is the end but the beginning."<sup>146</sup>

Pornography (from the Greek: writing the body) has its beginnings in art and literature, and was usually available only to wealthy men.<sup>147</sup> Post WW2, mass production coupled with

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<sup>143</sup> Yalom, *History of the Breast*. 58

<sup>144</sup> My experience at puberty and throughout life.

<sup>145</sup> Italics by author

<sup>146</sup> David O. Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis. A Study of Renaissance Erotica*. (Columbus Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1989) 4

<sup>147</sup> Alison Assiter, and Carol Avedon. *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures, The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*. (London: Pluto Press, 1993) 25

advances in telecommunications, created a genre of generally regarded 'cheap stuff' or pornography as opposed to the 'high class' more artistic production of classier, less blatant, less sexually explicit erotica.<sup>148</sup> Assiter quotes Gloria Steinem from *MS* magazine as saying: "Erotica is rooted in Eros or passionate love, and thus in the idea of positive choice, free will, the yearning for a particular person, whereas in pornography the subject is not love at all, but domination and violence against women."<sup>149</sup> So, for me, the issue is now beginning to clarify. If you want to use this type of material, it is erotic. If, on the other hand, you are made fearful or threatened by the material is pornographic.

Pornography depicts explicit sex with women being objectified, abused, vilified and degraded in order to arouse men. It also supports sexism, racism and elitism by portraying women as mindless objects; women of color as animals and women in general as being of lower class. Feminist contentions are that the violence is real, the rape and torture is real and that the smiling female is not really happy to be so used. Also by extension, they argue that such images promote and maintain an atmosphere for violence against women in our society. This brings pornography into being an act or practice, which is abuse. "It turns violence into an erotic spectacle [which] depicts women as dispensable objects, as things, less than human."<sup>150</sup> Susan Cole lists scenarios that would be included in a through exploration of porn, one of which states clearly "women's body parts- including but not limited to vagina, breasts or buttocks- are exhibited such that women are reduced to these parts."<sup>151</sup> However, women who are pro-porn are not all necessarily just standing as anti-censorship.

Wendy McElroy argues that the charges made by anti-porn feminists are false. Her argument is based on her own research within the business which denies that abuse is constant, that

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>150</sup> Susan G. Cole *Pornography and the Sex Crisis*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1992) 18, 19

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 98

consensus among the actors and the producer is freely exchanged, and that the workers in this industry feel that they are being degraded and marginalised by feminist anti-porn rhetoric. Her research indicated that it is not a simple oppression of women by the patriarchy, and that women are complicit in and exercising their right to choose their employment. She interviews prominent producers and finds that they are subject to censorship laws which although allowing scenes of mild violence, “ the slapping of breasts and faces was in a legal gray zone.”<sup>152</sup> What is erotic or pleasure producing becomes individual here. I cannot say the image of a breast being slapped is a positive one for women.

I remember as a very young woman, worrying about my nipples because they were not the color or shape of the centerfolds in *Playboy*. My experience with sexually explicit material is guided by my ‘gut’ reaction. If I am horrified or disgusted, then I know that material is not for me, however porn, (erotica?) is not out for me, just selective. Perhaps the problem of not seeing yourself in erotic material produces insecurities with body image, but these images could also initiate fear and dismay in the very young. This type of accidental or unsupervised viewing serves as an introduction to the Internet, which has created the problem of non-parental approved access. Many tastes and needs are reflected by this industry, and the Internet make such material too easily obtainable. I would recommend the reader to both Wendy McElroy and Susan Cole and to the video by Andrea Dworkin.<sup>153</sup> Also recommended is Adrienne Rich and her essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*.<sup>154</sup> These readings give an excellent and through overview of both sides of the pornography debate, while Rich’s essay offers a new perspective on the effects of our heterosexual society.

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<sup>152</sup> Wendy McElroy, *XXX A Woman’s Right to Pornography*. (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1995) 6

<sup>153</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography*.(Princeton,N.J.: Films for the Humanities, Amaya Distribution,1991), video

<sup>154</sup> Try: Henry Abelove, et al. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 666

## PORNOGRAPHY AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Lesbian women historically did not see themselves in heterosexual pornographic or erotic material. They saw only the male generated images of woman to woman sex, which were meant for heterosexual men. Stereotypical images of lesbians and gays were being challenged by modern theories of increased awareness of sexual diversity, and in this climate, lesbian and homosexual men started to produce images of their reality and lives. They exhibit "skepticism about the reflective nature of photography, and display a strong interest in subversive strategies of representation."<sup>155</sup> Once again the issue of visibility is brought up. Joan E. Biren, an American lesbian feminist wrote in 1983: "Without a visible identity, we have no community, no support network, no movement. Making ourselves visible is a political act. Making ourselves visible is a continual process."<sup>156</sup> Reclaiming ownership of body image is my main argument. All women benefit from the instigation of exposure/ownership by lesbians, and the works of female artists such as Cindy Sherman, and the collections of lesbian photography are on the edge of change.<sup>157</sup>

Lesbians and gay men see the issue of censorship in the pornographic industry as a serious problem. They have been the first casualties of this war, and thus lose any affirmative images of themselves in the public arena. As discussed earlier while examining the different positions of Wendy McElroy and Susan Cole, ideological feminist conflict became overt over the censorship of pornography. Canadian Customs officials repeatedly targeted a gay and lesbian bookstore in Vancouver British Columbia for trying to import material designated as pornographic. Confusing this issue was the fact that this material was allowed to pass unchallenged to other bookstores, such as *Duthies Books*. This fact was researched as part of

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<sup>155</sup> Tessa Boffin, and Jean Fraser. *Stolen Glances: Lesbians take Photographs*. (London: Pandora press, 1991) 14

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

the book stores defence. Homophobia and sexism combined to create this situation. *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium* took their case to the Supreme Court of Canada, spending 16 years and lots of energy and money to successfully defend their right to access lesbian pornography. The views of anti-pornographic feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon formed the basis for the Canadian Butler Report in Canada in 1992. This report defined heterosexual pornography and provided the means for censoring lesbian and gay publication.<sup>158</sup>

Tessa Boffin quotes Carole Vance as saying:

People deprived of images become demoralized and isolated, and they become increasingly vulnerable to attacks on their private expressions of non-conformity, which are inevitable once sources of public solidarity and resistance have been eliminated.<sup>159</sup>

These words are true for all women. Others have generated our images, for their own uses. All women suffer from loss of public solidarity and our resistance must now become overt. (See Appendix 1 fig. 39 and 40 for female generated erotic images.) Jenny Rains has produced these images on a pornographic Internet site, and are her photographic expressions of lust and female desire.

## BARBIE-THE REAL DOLL

No examination of the commercial use of the breast would be complete without Barbie, the doll who sells at the rate of 2 dolls per second throughout the world.<sup>160</sup> *Barbie™* is the creation of Ruth Handler. She and her husband Elliot were the co-founders of Mattel, and her original inspiration was for a doll who was not a baby doll or companion doll, but would represent every girl's dream of her future. Ruth had bought three German dolls that had breasts, wore

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<sup>157</sup> See: Suzy Bright. *Nothing but the Girl. The Blatent Lesbian Image*. New York: L.P. CinBook, 1996

<sup>158</sup> Ian Stewart. "BAD Attitude(s) on Trial" in *Canadian Dimension*, Sept/Oct97, Vol.31 Issue 5,45

<sup>159</sup> Boffin, *Stolen Glances*, 20



tight skirts and tops and were referred to as sex dolls. But, Barbie was supposed to represent the innocence of teenage America, even though her measurements, when extrapolated up into human size are 39-18-33.<sup>161</sup> Barbie comes with separate outfits for all occasions, homes, automobiles, friends, a boyfriend, careers, and even attitude to demonstrate her up to date image. If little girls love her, parents buy her, fans collect and discuss her, what is the problem?

Barbie does not age, she never has children, never changes shape or nurtures. Her measurements are not only unrealistic, her long legs and torso combined with long arms cause a disproportion that would result in the real Barbie falling down and walking on all fours. Real women are not like Barbie; we age, cry, lose our pubescent shape, and use our breasts (no matter what size) for nursing, and in the giving and receiving of pleasure. Not only do real women come in different sizes and shapes; we also come in different colors, and from different economic backgrounds. The African American dolls have the same body and hair as Barbie, only in a different color. Life for women of color is not that simplistic, and children are being presented with a racist and elitist view of the world. Once again images generated by our culture are unrealistic, being used for profit, and continue to fuel feelings of inadequacy. In trying to connect with my inner child to gauge possible reactions from my own Barbie-less childhood, I feel that I would have liked the pretty clothes. I collected pictures of women in full evening dress, and probably would have loved Barbie too. However, some girls mutilated their Barbies or put them in sexually charged situations. There is a lesbian Barbie site on the Internet. Resistance can be overt, but still command attention.

Barbie doesn't need a bra, thanks to her hard high breasts, even if they are large. However, real girls and women have this garment presented to them as 'natural and necessary' from

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<sup>160</sup> WTN *Herstory*. "Barbie Nation- The Untold Story of the Barbie doll" March 23 2000

<sup>161</sup> Michael J. Weiss, *Toys Were Us*. 'Life in Plastic, it's Fantastic...' Discovery Online Canada, 2000 Available from World Wide Web (<http://www.discovery.com/stories/history/toys/BARBIE/shoulda.html>)

infancy. (To see the differences in women's breasts shown in a humorous manner, see Appendix 1 fig. 41.) Although this illustration was designed to be a bit of bawdy humor, it represents the reality of difference, and the enforced notion of normalcy as promised by the bra structure. Where did this device come from and why do we need it?

## THE BRA CULTURE

In Classical Greek Culture, women wore supporting undergarments called apodemos, which were bands of linen or kid. These bands did not display the breasts, and sometimes even flattened them under the chiton.<sup>162</sup> A short loose dress that draped over the body was referred to in Greek times, as a chiton.<sup>163</sup> During the fourteenth century, or the Renaissance, women's clothing became tighter and necklines plunged. Décolletage had arrived. The rounded belly was still important as the style of breast exposure called décolletage rose and fell in popularity. However, the seventeenth century brought a change in women's posture due to the corset.

The corset, in many forms and degree of physical restriction, defined the female bosom for over two hundred years.<sup>164</sup> During post-revolution years in France, (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) the new sense of freedom and liberty allowed women's breasts to be very lightly covered and with transparent draperies. Sometimes, the scanty tops were moistened with water to resemble the clinging drapery on a Greek statue.<sup>165</sup> This was a definite health hazard for women, but the returning corset gave no respite in the nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw reforms in clothing for both men and women, but came too late for many women who bore the physical deformities and scars from the corset for their entire lives.

Paul Schultze-Naumberg wrote a comprehensive report on the physical dangers of the corset in 1901, which also addressed the cultural pressures on women to use these devices to attain the

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<sup>162</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession*, (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1998) 29

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

desired or 'perfect' shape. He called the overvaluation of large breasts in society 'artificial and decadent'. He detailed deformed inner organs; reduced breathing capacity (resulting in the 'vapors'); disturbances in the digestive system; restricted muscle tone in the abdomen resulting in difficult and dangerous childbirth; permanent scars on the skin; and permanently deformed posture.<sup>166</sup>

By the time the 'flappers' arrived in the 1920's the new look laughed at corsets, but the androgenous body shape required the breasts to be bound. "Ironically, women's new freedom bound their breasts."<sup>167</sup> In 1913 Mary Phelps Jacob, invented the first brassiere, in order to dispense with a boned bodice. In 1913 France, Paul Poivet, claimed to have invented the first brassiere.<sup>168</sup> But the name seems to be a bit of bungled French. Brassiere means an infant's undershirt, and the garment in question is called a *soutien-gorge*. Literally translated, this means "a garment to hold up the throat."<sup>169</sup> Looking at the brassieres (bras) of today, and still questioning their purpose, I think the name suits perfectly.

During the 1950's women wore bras shaped like torpedoes. Breasts were encased in whirlpool-stitched cones, which gave the bust a sharp pointed shape.<sup>170</sup> (See Appendix 1 Fig.42 for my favorite advertisement from that era.) Note the gloved hand on the bull's horn; no subtle phallic image here. (Cindy Sherman parodies this image of the *Maidenform* bra in her self photograph in Appendix 1 fig.43) This bra created those types of problems for me as a young woman, and I resorted to filling the pointed tips with cotton baton. (See Appendix 1 fig.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>166</sup> Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny. A Cultural History of the Human Body*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co.,Inc., 1975) 14-15

<sup>167</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 37

<sup>168</sup> Maggie Pexton Murray, *Changing Styles in Fashion. Who, What, Why*. (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1990) 125

<sup>169</sup> Carilyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 37

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 38

44 for one artist's recreation of her young self while trying to produce the acceptable, full bra look.)

## BEAUTY UNDER SEIGE

The 1960's brought a radical new change to clothing, politics, (Black, gay and women's liberation movements), and to world culture. While Rudi Gernreich was designing the 'topless' bathing suit and the 'no-bra' bra in France, women in America were protesting the Miss America beauty pageant of 1968. Although a trashcan was filled with items that fueled the patriarchal image of femininity, no fire was ever lit. The protesters could not obtain a fire permit from the Atlantic City fire department. Items such as make-up, a *Chatalaine* magazine and bras were thrown into the 'freedom trashcan'. The 'bra-burners' were a fabrication. However, good copy overrode accuracy, for the *New York Post*.<sup>171</sup>

According to Candace Savage, breasts of pageant winners were used to sell bras and these perfect women in their perfect bras were used to support the national war effort by visiting wounded soldiers in 1944. She connects the 1968 Feminist Manifesto with identifying this misappropriation of our bodies by stating: 'The living bra and the dead Soldier: We refuse to be used as mascots for murder.'<sup>172</sup> However, the assistance of the bra to help us measure up, is not always enough. Sometimes specific bras with specific abilities to change our natural inferior shape to more a commercially and culturally perfect version of femininity are needed. Bra companies with their sales teams have come to our rescue.

## MEDIA INTERVENTION

Advertising takes away our natural body, re-packages it and sells it back to us. (See Appendix 1 fig. 44). A natural (naked) body does not come with a bra. Exercise tones the female bodies into a tight, slight body, but breasts do not cooperate. (See Appendix 1 fig.45 to show advertising

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>172</sup> Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens, A Playful History*(Vancouver:Greystone Books, 1998) 5

that feeds directly into that fear. Look again at Appendix 1 fig, 46 to see how women are advised to adjust their 'weapons' for a good, better and best presentation.) Germain Greer summarizes the control of uniformity fostered by the bra industry:

About 50 per cent of women have the left breast larger than the right, and 45 per cent of women have the right larger than the left, and about 5 percent have exactly equal breasts. Even breasts that are equal in size do not necessarily sit at the same angle on the rib cage. None of this is important, except to women who, when they see in the mirror that their breasts are not perfectly symmetrical, feel that they are deformed. The straightjacket of the brassiere equalizes, uplifts, pads out and separates breasts into rigidifies pairs.<sup>173</sup>

The bra industry has devised a bra for all occasions, the sports bra (to reduce bounce and jiggle while at play), the decollage push-up bra (for that special occasion), and of course, the training bra. When I questioned young girls about the purpose of a training bra they were unsure. They said: "they are special because nobody else has a bra. You get a bra [and it] makes you feel better. Less like a little kid."<sup>174</sup> Both of them laughed when I asked them why they were in training. Their statements seemed to reflect that a step towards adulthood had been taken.

This notion is supported by Joan Bromberg when she states that "the training that a training bra was supposed to accomplish was the first step toward motherhood and a sexually alluring figure, as it was defined in the 1950s."<sup>175</sup> It seems to still be the "occasion on which a girl acquire the trappings of womanhood."<sup>176</sup>

## BRAS AND BREAST CANCER

The underwire bra, however, has been blamed for blocking the return flow of lymphatic fluid from the breast. Painful, cystic breasts are becoming common, and many women believe that the underwire bra is the culprit. There is an interesting book that links the bra with increased breast cancer incidence, and I would certainly recommend reading this semi-scientific participatory

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<sup>173</sup> Germain Greer. *The Whole Woman*. (London: Anchor Publishing, 2000) 57

<sup>174</sup> Artemis, interviewed by author, June 15,2000

<sup>175</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg. *The Body Project. An Intimate History of American Girls*. (New York: Random House Publishing Inc., 1998) 112

thesis to all women.<sup>177</sup> The perfect breast is for sale though, and will be examined as part of the medical gaze.

Breast adornment however, has always been an option for the innovative. Most people today believe that the 'nipple ring' worn by both men and women, is a new idea. Actually, in the late 1890's, in Paris, the 'bosom ring' was briefly fashionable. The rings were sometimes linked by a small golden chain and kept the nipples in a state of constant erection. It was more common for women to pad their bras in those days, but a foolish few actually inserted rubber under their skin. The medical establishment of that time was outraged, because the true purpose of the breast was being obscured.<sup>178</sup> The opinions of the medical establishment in our own era will be examined during the following examination of medical imaging. Needless to say, their opinions and subsequent definition/ acceptance of the 'medical need' for these types of cosmetic procedures has complied with the commercially viable requests/needs of their female patients.

Marilyn Yalom offers this comment on nipple rings: "Many observers see the nipple ring less as a sign of a stage of life or an erotic adornment, than as a form of bodily mutilation."<sup>179</sup> Women have used the nipple ring to make many statements, from marking a transition from one stage of life to another, to distinguishing themselves from others, to signal sexual availability (but not for procreation at the moment), to including a desire to make the statement of breast ownership. (Appendix 1 fig. 47 images a nipple ring.)

Joan Brumberg has revealed in her research that piercing

"signals your personal politics". If you become an "urban aboriginal" at the end of the twentieth century, it is usually a sign of two things: sexual liberalism (because piercing symbolizes opposition to conventional sexual norms) and cultural relativism (because it evokes the primitive and exotic).<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 22

<sup>177</sup> Sydney Singer, and Soma Gresmaier. *Dressed to Kill. The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras*. (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1995) passim

<sup>178</sup> Stephen Kern, *Anatomy and Destiny*, 97

<sup>179</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *The History of the Breast*, 203

<sup>180</sup> Joan Bromberg, *The Body Project*, 134

When Demeter was interviewed about her nipple ring she said:

I had my nipple pierced when I was twenty. I had it done because I like piercings. The procedure hurt me at the time but healed quickly and I seldom have any trouble with it. I continue to wear it. [three years later] I have never encountered a lover who wasn't enthusiastic or turned on by the ring. The most common comment from friends is usually related to pain-did it hurt? (As they cringe in imaginary pain and hold their breast.)<sup>181</sup>

Although Demeter mentions her age, she does not say it was a transition time for her. She explains her desire to acquire a nipple ring as part of her pattern of multiple piercing and not as being site specific. She also does not say what it does for her erotic feelings, but perhaps pleasing her lovers is inherent in her expression of her sexuality. Demeter also has adorned her breast with a tattoo and tells me about it in these words:

The tattoo on my breast is only visible if I wear a low cut shirt. I liked the femininity of the ladybug and decided that was a good place to have it. I am still happy about this decision.<sup>182</sup>

I have heard women say 'it is my breast and I will do what I like with it' and I have to concur with the ownership issue. However, for me, the issue of medical problems arising during pregnancy as a result of torn milk ducts, seems horrendous. My age and professional concerns have placed me in a gray area for understanding this phenomenon.

### MEDICAL GAZE

My profession as a mammographer has caused me to study the female breast in anatomical and radiographic detail. The medical gaze or medical imaging continues the traditional fragmentation of body parts, and provides a site for the ongoing discourse of recognition of the whole person. It can also be said of the invention of x-ray in particular (W.C.Roentgen 1895), that this diagnostic tool caused doctors to depend more on the information gained from the sense of sight

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<sup>181</sup> Demeter, interviewed by author, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2000

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

rather than from the traditional sense of touch.<sup>183</sup> The medical gaze has been granted access to the interior of the body without surgical intervention. This access brought the codification, objectification and quantification of the body into parts or fragments.<sup>184</sup>

The content of this last part of chapter three, the medical gaze, will include the anatomy of the breast, images generated by mammography, computerized tomography and ultrasound, along with a brief comparison of these imaging methods. Discussion around surgical interventions such as reduction, and augmentation mammoplasty, post mastectomy breast reconstruction will be presented, as well as the words of women who have engaged with these procedures.

Medical staff see the breasts as two glands located on the anterior chest wall, at the level of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> rib extending to the level of the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> rib. These glands are composed of fat, skin, connective tissue and glandular tissue. They have an arterial and venous blood supply, and are liberally supplied with a lymphatic drainage system. The breasts are covered with skin with a nipple and areola, and extend from the medial margin of the sternum to the midaxillary line. (Appendix 1 fig.49) For the purposes of localizing and mapping areas of breast tissue, the breast is divided into four quadrants and an axillary tail, which extends into the armpit. These glands are modified sweat glands that secrete a thin white substance when stimulated (by hormones), called milk. The glands arise along a 'milk line' or ridge during embryonic life that extends from the axilla to the groin. (See Appendix 1 fig. 50 for the illustration of the milk line.<sup>185</sup>) Usually only two papillae develop at the level of the 5<sup>th</sup> intercostal space. It is possible for nipples to be found anywhere along this line, and are not cause for execution of the patient as a witch. In my practice as a mammographer, I have seen these extra nipples, usually around the base of the breast, and have heard from patients that during lactation (milk-production) they may leak or

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<sup>183</sup> William A. Ewing, *The Body. Photographs of the Human Form*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994) 18

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>185</sup> H. Stephen Gallagher et al, *The Breast* (Saint Louis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1978) 3



become distended. The breasts of the newborn may be swollen at this time and leak milk due to the absorption of placental prolactin. This is still called witch's milk.<sup>186</sup>

The pattern for identifying a normal growth pattern was established by a M.D called J.M.Tanner.<sup>187</sup> Tanner linked age and weight to the status of menstruation and breast growth and formed a reference tool for assessing pubertal changes in relation to the development of secondary sexual characteristics. Although he states that variance is normal, and that irregular growth can be expected, medicine has created a language around breasts that medicalises breast experiences. When combined with our cultural fixation with breasts, trouble soon arises. If your large breasts are called macromastica, or your small breasts are called micromastica, it then seems permissible to correct the 'defect' by surgery. However, before getting into cosmetic surgery, I would like to examine the process of mammography.

## MEDICAL IMAGING

### MAMMOGRAPHY

Mammography is the production of breast images using ionizing radiation. This is done either as a screening or diagnostic service; both being part of a standard breast cancer detection program. As women age, their breast tissue is replaced from front to back with fat. This breast tissue appears white on the film, fat appears black and cancers or benign growths appear white. Microcalcifications (suspicious small bits of calcium) and their relative, macrocalcifications (non-suspicious larger bits of calcium) appear white as well. It makes differentiation of these areas difficult or impossible when the breast tissue is still present as in the breasts of a young (under 40) woman. The inability of the mammogram to distinguish between two areas of tissue

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<sup>186</sup> Ruth A. Lawrence, *Breastfeeding A Guide for the Medical Profession*, (St.Lewis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1994) 267

<sup>187</sup> Henry M. Seidel et al, *Mosby's Guide to Physical Examination*, (St.Lewis: C.V.Mosby Co., 1987) 79

because of their similar densities results in the statistics of 10-20% of breast cancers being missed by mammography.

The images of each breast are read together, back to back, because although breast tissue patterns are individual, they are like each other. Changes in breast architecture are compared this way, and are also reviewed every year looking for interval changes.<sup>188</sup> (See Appendix 1 figs 51 and 52 for normal radiographic breast images. See Appendix 1 fig.53 for a white cancer visible in the breast and see fig.54 for a needle that has been placed within the breast to act as a marker for the surgeon.) This is the pre-operative localization of a non-palpable mammographic lesion.

Breast images in the Diagnostic Medical Imaging Department are not erotic, and are sometimes heartbreaking. As a woman, the mammographer brings a personal perspective into her work. The words of mammographic technologists will be reviewed in the next chapter on survey and interview results.

## ULTRASOUND

An ultrasound of the breast is another imaging modality using sound waves rather than ionizing radiation. The sound waves are sent out from a hand held device called a transducer, which also receives the waves being returned or 'bounced back' from the internal structures. The ability to distinguish between a cyst and a solid lesion is vital to the patient as surgical intervention can then usually be avoided. Mammography may not be able to make that determination and the aspiration of the cyst can be performed under ultrasound guidance. There is no compression required or any radiation exposure so investigations on young women are usually initiated this way. (See Appendix 1 fig. 55 for the ultrasound image of a breast cyst.) The cyst is the black area within the gray tissue. Pain and cyclic swelling of the breast(s) may

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<sup>188</sup> Interval changes occur between screenings. e.g. one to two years

indicate cysts and other benign fibrocystic changes such as adenosis and other inflammatory processes.<sup>189</sup>

Microcalcifications are not demonstrated using this technique, nor is "it reliable in detecting occult, nonpalpable breast carcinoma."<sup>190</sup> Microcalcifications are suspicious for breast cancer because they are often in, or near, a lesion. Their shape, size, number and location are of importance when attempting to make this determination.

## COMPUTERIZED AXIAL TOMOGRAPHY

Computerized axial tomography, (CT) is the use of a focused beam of x-radiation delivered by a rotating tube that produces images in slices. A computer can reassemble these slices, and the cross-section images are very distinct for location. CT, at this time, is too slow and costly to be used as a screening tool, and is reserved for demonstrating lesions located posteriorly and peripherally in the breast. CT can determine staging of the breast cancer, as it is able to identify metastatic disease in the thorax and axilla.<sup>191</sup> See (Appendix 1 fig. 56 for two CT cross-sectional images of a thorax. The breasts show silicone implants, which are starting to lose their integrity and leak into the breast tissue.

## MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING

The imaging modality called magnetic resonance (MR) is the use of an extremely strong magnet, which produces the most detailed cross-sectional image produced to date. This new modality is not accessible to everyone, is very expensive, and still not as good as mammography for the detection of cancer. MR has a sensitivity that is too high for the breast, and too low a specificity, possibly resulting in an increased biopsy rate. The image shows too much without

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<sup>189</sup> Carole M. Rumack, and Stephen Wilson, et al, *Diagnostic Ultrasound* Vol. 1 (St.Louis: Mosby Yearbook, 1991) 541

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 541

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 541

being able to differentiate between normal and malignant areas of tissue. It also is not able, at this time, to visualize microcalcifications.

## FROM DIAGNOSIS TO TREATMENT

Taken in 1908, this photograph, (Appendix 1. Fig.57) captures one of the first x-ray treatments being given to the female breast for breast cancer. This is not diagnostic radiology but rather the use of radiation as a treatment method. The patient is horizontal which seems to emphasize her vulnerability, his vertical stance combined with his high hat, seems to re-inforce this image of control versus submission.<sup>192</sup> According to Sigmund Freud, the horizontal plane indicates an animalistic or genital focus, while the vertical indicates beauty, a departure from the earth towards the light. When you can introduce the element of distance into looking, then the carnal desires become sublimated.<sup>193</sup> This photograph illustrates for me the historical power imbalance inherent in the medical system, even today.

A painting called *The Giantess*, by Rene Magritte offers us a fairly recent image to compare with the medical man and his patient. The female image in *The Giantess* towers over the man, and it is his image that seems out of proportion with the accouterments of their setting. (Examine Appendix 1 fig. 58.) The woman is seemingly unconcerned with the tiny male who is looking at her, and control of her body seems to be hers alone. In this case, the vertical woman seems to require a great height to be in control. In contrast, the horizontal position of the woman receiving therapy seems passive and submissive. Struggles for equality are still being made and the history of our images once again establishes this fact. Did I uncover any other images that may have been produced in resistance to the penetrating gaze of the x-ray beam?

(Look at Appendix 1 fig. 59 to see the work of Meret Oppenheim.) This x-ray image has earrings, and other jewelry, which seem to declare the subject female. The issue here seems to be

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<sup>192</sup> Yalom, *The History of the The Breast*, 230

that if no feminine constructs were present, could you tell if this person was male or female? As a radiographer, I know the density and configuration of the skull can determine the sex of a patient and can always be determined by the bones of the pelvis. However, the superficiality of our masculine/feminine constructions is shown with great drama in this image.

Alison Watt has painted a triptych, within which she is comparing her hospital experience with that of a pig in a slaughterhouse. (See Appendix 1 fig. 60.) Both are pink, and hairless. The pig drips into a bowl and the female patient has her head bandaged. She holds an x-ray of her abdomen in front of her body, not hiding behind it, but rather as an offering. She has become a number, a nameless image of her body part. The sheet meant to cover her winds around her ankles, imprisoning her in the medical system. Her reduction to a piece of meat grieves me. As a healthcare worker, this is what I work against. Images need to be shown to the 'imager' as well. Professionals need to be constantly reminded that their 'patient' is a human being.

#### COSMETIC OR CORRECTIVE SURGERY

Cosmetic surgery is considered either an accessible option for many women, or as the frivolous pursuit of a 'perfect' body. If exercise or body shaping bras do not secure the desired shape for you, then the molded or sculpted body is for sale. Plastic surgery represents the branch of medicine that corrects defects and promises to make your dreams a reality. The ability to make breasts larger, smaller or to make corrections in shape and of placement on the chest wall is now a reality.

Breast implants became the most common procedure in cosmetic surgery by the 1980s.<sup>194</sup> Several reasons are identified for this increased demand. First, an excess of plastic surgeons graduated in the United States resulted in an advertising campaign designed to promote easy, accessible and affordable access to their services. This no-money down easy-credit solution to

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<sup>193</sup> as quoted in Rosalind Krauss. *Cindy Sherman: 1975-1993*. (New York: Rizzoli international publications, inc. 1993) 90

the problem of imperfection resulted in the doubling of patients in the five years between 1983 and 1988.

Also, a new generation of professional and working women now had the wealth available to spend. The concept of 'choice' was utilized to reflect their desire to buy perfection as a reward for working hard and taking care of themselves. The strange thing is that often these women keep their implants a secret. By having larger breasts a woman becomes more acceptable to the cultural ideals of beauty, but the flesh changing ritual must remain a secret.<sup>195</sup> I was unaware of this truth until I tried to research this topic. Women were reluctant to talk, or be taped and insisted on strict confidentiality.

The analysis of the breast augmentation phenomena tells us that form becomes more important than function. Looks take priority over feeling. These implants can feel hard to the touch, and may interfere with breastfeeding and mammography. (See Appendix 1 fig.61 for the mammographic image of silicone implants.) The breast tissue is compressed and hidden behind the opaque mass of the implant. Breast cancer detection becomes much more difficult due to the severe discomfort of the examination, and will probably be either neglected or performed improperly. The little publicized complications of pain, hardness, postoperative infection, and decreased sensation as well as the health risks of silicone, do not seem affect the request rate for this procedure. (See Appendix 1 fig. 62 presenting an advertisement for augmentation presently found on the Internet.)

Breast reconstruction using implants after the amputation of a cancerous breast (20% of surgeries) is usually seen as medically necessary for the patient, but the underlying reason of returning 'the appearance of normalcy' can still be questioned. Many women feel that one breast is natural, no breasts can be natural, and it is women dead from breast cancer that is

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<sup>194</sup> Carolyn Lattier, *Breasts*, 44

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

unnatural, yet the proper fitting of garments, the heavy alternative of a prosthesis, and the desire to resume a pre-cancerous appearance and existence, all qualify as medical need. These patients are not considered frivolous or as being the stereotypical vain female.<sup>196</sup>

Breast implants are given as graduation gifts as well as prizes. A pub in Vancouver BC ran a contest that featured a \$3,000.00 in plastic surgery prize. At the time of the article, 2,000 entries had been received.<sup>197</sup> I also feel that the allocation of medical terms that signify a 'disease' condition in reference to the growth, size, shape or placement of women's breasts opens the door for 'corrective' surgical intervention. Reduction mammoplasty or the removal of breast tissue is another choice for many women.

Women with large heavy breasts speak of shoulder pain from bra straps, back pain from the weight, poor posture and pain when attempting sports, heat rashes under the breasts and the inability to find clothes that fit properly. The medical insurance plans of all provinces recognize that this is a quality of life issue and cover the surgical costs for breast reductions.

Does the image of a slim female with large breasts reassure these women that what they have been given is wonderful? The reality of excess amounts of breast tissue is not as pleasant as you might expect. Although the surgery is painful, any woman that I have spoken to about this surgery believes she made the right choice, and indeed, would make the same decision again. I am one of those women, and would consider having it done again due to the additional accumulation of breast fat after my mid-life weight gain.

This surgery leaves scars, bruises, sometimes desensitizes the nipple area, and creates an unnaturally round areola. (View Appendix 1 fig. 63 for 'before and after' reduction images obtained from the Internet.) Most women are thrilled with the results, and apparently fondle their

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<sup>196</sup> For an interesting study, I recommend reading: Linda Cook et al, "Characteristics of Women With and Without Breast Augmentation" in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, May 28, 1997-Vol.277, No.20 1612-1617

<sup>197</sup> Southam Newspapers, "Bar's Breast Surgery Contest Drawing Plenty of Attention."

breasts frequently after healing, as part of the assimilation of the new breast into their sense of self and body- image.<sup>198</sup> Even though I would not have verbalized this behavior, I recognize it as my own, both after my surgery and today.

The adjustment to a smaller size and shape is sometimes reflected through feelings of grief and loss. The large breast is sometimes used as a buffer between the woman and her world, and this requires some psychological shifts.<sup>199</sup> Most women, however, are satisfied by their surgery and feel that the post surgical effects are a small price to pay for either reduction or augmentation mammoplasty.

The commercial use of breasts in advertising and sales is a direct appropriation of our bodies for the use of others. Sex stars and cultural icons such as Madonna and Marilyn Munroe have capitalized on this obsession with the female body, especially breasts, to create a successful career for themselves. The question here is why does our society have this obsession? Does the obsession create the consumerist society, or do the commercial productions of our society create the obsession? I believe that the images shown to date have demonstrated that the fascination with breasts is historical and not related to female self-perception.

Images created during the 1950s certainly exploited breasts: the post card pin-up girls were blatantly sexist. The nostalgic remembrance of times past, of *Leave it to Beaver*, June Cleaver and other family sit-coms, neglect the true position of women during those times. Women of all colors, ethnic and economic groups felt the pressure to be the model mother and housewife, while the economic realities were quite different.

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*The Prince George Citizen* Friday September 1, 2000, 5

<sup>198</sup> Marcia Kraft Goin, "Psychological Reactions to Surgery of the Breast" in *Clinics in Plastic Surgery* July 1982 Vol. 9, No.3. 349

<sup>199</sup> Marcia Goin, et al "The Psychic Consequences of a Reduction Mammoplasty." In *Plastic Reconstructive Surgery* , April 19 1977 530-534



Images generated by fashion called for restricting and uncomfortable undergarments. Bra manufacturers promoted styles to create the perfect shape while creating a cultural imperative that bras were essential for breast health. Support was deemed essential for all breasts, and no indication of maturity, imperfection or natural movement was allowed.

This insistence on the current definition of breast perfection leads not only to the use of restrictive garments, but to the perceived need for plastic surgery. Women feel that they do not measure up, and follow through on this misconception by availing themselves of bust enhancing products, bust reducing and reshaping bras and finally, by feeling abnormal after surgical mastectomy for breast cancer. The use of a breast prosthesis, reconstructive surgery and feelings of shame have been created and supported by this cultural obsession. I don't believe that we are ready to abandon the bra, but perhaps we can insist on a more comfortable garment designed for our bodies, rather than for cultural fads generated by society.

Medical imaging is intrusive, fragmenting and codifying, but the personnel responsible for ordering and performing these tests need not be part of this system. Care, empathy, and complete explanations given in an understanding manner would do a lot to reduce this negative effect. Medical personnel are most often dedicated individuals who are subject to extraordinary pressures. Time to reconnect with our primary function of patient care is becoming a luxury. It is time for women to not only participate in their own healthcare and decision making, but to insist that everyone involved in their care behave in a caring ethical and professional manner.

Looking at all the images in the thesis so far has shown us that historically our images were not generated by, nor were they intended for, women themselves. Surrounded by our history, we realize that we have a rich heritage on which to draw for help. "Help to work through the

variations on naturalness and artificiality, sensuality and discipline, and power and dependency."<sup>200</sup> The words of women and their analysis move us to chapter five.

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<sup>200</sup> Lattier, *Breasts*, 39

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VOICES, REFLECTIONS, AND SURVEYS

In this chapter, I will give voice to the women who consented to be interviewed as part of my research.<sup>201</sup> The interviews cover breast augmentation<sup>202</sup> and reconstruction; reduction; growth patterns and the reactions and feelings of these women as they grew; and the effects their breasts had on their lives or sexuality. I also looked for the results of external forces on self-perception. Their remarks will be integrated and compared with existing literature. The women vary in age from 13 to mid-fifties, were mostly white, (one First Nations woman), heterosexual, except for one self-identified lesbian, and middle class.

My survey forms have been analyzed for content, and any interesting or unusual findings illuminated and discussed. My pet kittens 'helped' by damaging my box of survey forms, so my husband and I had a great afternoon separating and recording the data. We both felt that the surveys came close to being thrown out, but I felt determined to rescue the information. We found that this form of research allows people to write comments without being identified, and this was both astounding and enlightening.

Throughout this chapter I will continue to use images that help demonstrate my points and support the voices of women. Women themselves do not always generate these images, but they reflect the purposes of their creation as defined by their male creators.

#### VOICES

#### REDUCTION MAMMOPLASTY

In initiating my research on breast surgery, I interviewed a plastic surgeon. He gave me a lot of printed material on the different procedures available, and was very willing to discuss his

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<sup>201</sup> All names given are pseudonyms, picked by the researcher and sometimes by the women, and bear no relationship or association with real women.

<sup>202</sup> Augmentation means to make larger, hence implants.

work from my psychosocial perspective. When asked about the reasons women give for a reduction mammoplasty, he said:

The reasons are almost universal and health is quite significant. [They suffer from] quite significant upper neck and back pain; reduced shoulder movement from the bra straps; inability to practice bathing activities; important stuff because of the breast weight. Rashes on the undersurface of the breast mostly in the summertime, but it can happen anytime and a lot of them have headaches, and that is pretty much it.<sup>203</sup>

This is substantiated by the literature, which confirms the chronic effects of *gigantomastica*,<sup>204</sup> and that surgery for these patients “restores . . . a semblance of normalcy.”<sup>205</sup> The objectives of reduction mammoplasty are:

1. To relieve symptoms caused by heavy breasts;
2. To improve aesthetic conical appearance of the breasts; and
3. To preserve projection sensation and erectile function of the nipple.<sup>206</sup>

Ages of the women will vary. In addition to physical symptoms, many women are self-conscious and have been sensitized by casual and thoughtless remarks about their large breasts. The elderly who ‘survived’ the mockery simply seek the operation to relieve the symptoms.<sup>207</sup>

This article by Charlene DiNobile continues by giving indications and contraindications for this type of surgery. She discusses how to determine resulting size (“patient’s own view rather than the surgeon”), the presence of stretch marks, and the requirement of ideal weight. She stresses emotional support, both during the administration of pre-operative medication, and later during the post-operative recovery period. Her contraindications include: motivation from external sources, expectations that the surgery will produce immediate change in attitude others may have towards the patient, a vagueness in the patient describing what she expects and a history of severe mental illness.

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<sup>203</sup> Zeus, interviewed by the author, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000

<sup>204</sup> Italics by author, medicalization of breasts to justify correction of a fault.

<sup>205</sup> Charlene DiNobile, “Reconstructing a self-image Reduction Mammoplasty” in *Today’s O.R.Nurse* vol.7, No.11. 18

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 18