

## DECIPHERING THE FEMALE PSYCHIC DISORDER: ANOREXIA NERVOSA

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**Abstract:** Women face a lot of challenges in the patriarchal society. One such major problem at hand is the 'identity' associated with the female body. General social presumptions associate the female beauty with the body image. Hence, the 'thin' is beautiful and 'fat' is ugly. These associations with binary oppositions of the body image, in turn, affect the female psyche and conditions it to 'perform' according to the societal norms. This psychic conditioning slowly develops in women, a serious disorder called 'Anorexia'. It projects the female body and their unspoken conversation with starvation behavior. This study explores the issues of control and starvation in a female body in a mind-body perspective. It throws light on the idea that the emotional and social body can impact the female physical body and force the female to succumb to Anorexia nervosa.

**Keywords:** Anorexia nervosa; behavioural psychology; eating disorder; female psyche; disorder.

### INTRODUCTION

The intellectual traditions in the field of behavioral psychology have been studying the role of need, in determining human behavior. Need-based studies have helped behavioral psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Henry Murray, and others to establish a correlation between needs, drives, and motivation in an individual. Human needs can be physiological or psychological. Needs gives rise to motives and influence behavior. The behavioral psychologists confirm that any behavior is motive-oriented. In the work, *Explorations in Personality*, Murray (1938) defines need as a:

Construct (a convenient fiction or hypothetical concept) that stands for a force (the physic-chemical nature of which is unknown) in the brain region, a force that organizes perception, apperception, intellection, conation and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction an existing unsatisfying situation. (pp. 123-124)

This definition emphasizes that individual's perceptive, apperceptive, and conative skills are influenced by the human needs. Murray's definition of human needs connotes an association with a mass of energy that transforms the environmental stimulus into a goal-directed behavior. Further, this definition also emphasizes the role played by human body in transforming the perceived thoughts or ideas into action. Maslow, in "A Theory of Human Motivation", has extensively

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studied about individual's needs that give rise to motives. Accordingly, Maslow's need theory is categorized into two levels: lower level and higher level needs. The lower level needs include physiological (hunger, thirst, and sex), safety (home, shelter, and clothes) and affiliation or belongingness needs. The higher level needs include self-esteem and self-actualization needs. Maslow believes that these needs emerge in a hierarchical fashion. Of these needs, the physiological needs fall in the lowest rung of the ladder and the self-actualization need is located on the top. The individual will be able to achieve self-actualization only after achieving the needs in the lower level (Maslow, 1943).

Psychoanalytic theory studies the human behavior with a special focus on the id, ego, and super ego. Much before the motive-oriented behavioral theory rose to popularity, Sigmund Freud, the father of Psychoanalysis, explained the intrapsychic conflict by taking into consideration the plethora of desires or motives an individual develops. The intra-psychic conflict ensues as a result of the antagonistic motives between the tri-partite divisions of the psyche. The ego follows the societal norms and is constantly monitored by the seat of conscience, the super ego. Thus, desires of the id are most often repressed into the unconscious and the needs remain unfulfilled. Sengupta (2011), in the essay, "Growth in Human Motivation: Beyond Maslow" defines need as "a condition of deficit" (p. 102). The deficit can also be called a lack. Lack and/or need result in a common activity. The lack/need is overcome/fulfilled respectively by transforming the bodily energy into actions. This behavior as Murray (1938) states helps "transform in a certain direction an existing unsatisfying situation" (p. 124). This paper examines the female lack/needs.

Sigmund Freud, the renowned psychoanalyst, analyzes the state of lack in a gendered fashion and believes that this lack prevails constantly in the girl child. Accordingly, Freud (2001b) declares that the girl believes she has been castrated and has lost her penis; thus she develops penis-envy. Based on this notion, he propounded the theory of female clitoral inferiority (pp. 243-248). The girl child overcomes this envy/inferiority by developing a wish for the same object and desires to be like the boys. This brings about an immutable biological lack. While hunger could be identified as a bodily lack, it also universally qualifies to be a basic human need too. Hunger, needless to say, is overcome by consuming food. Food, with its ample varieties, also enforces certain discipline in the woman. In an article titled "The Global Politics of Food: A Critical Overview", feminist legal theorist Ehrenreich and clinical professor of law Lyon (2011) empirically discuss the consumptive and productive nuances associated with food. They reckon:

Like many other arenas of life, the world of food is a world of politics and power. Inequalities of power and privilege across the globe affect who has access to food and who does not, who controls its production and who is harmed by that production, how consumptive choices are constructed and constrained. (pp. 1-2)

Therefore, hunger and the need to satisfy it remains as a complex activity. Similarly, the female body develops multifaceted needs each day which are equally or more complex. While the task of understanding the human needs becomes a complex process, comprehending the needs of the woman takes on a larger connotation. This paper discusses hunger and starvation, with respect to femininity and disorder.

Grammatically, disorder is the antonym to order. Order or disorder is often used with reference to things, events, situations or people. When the term 'disorder' is used with reference to women, it can be broadly categorized into two types: physiological or psychological. Physiological disorders have a biological basis and it prevents the normal functioning of one or more organs of the body. Psychological disorders are rooted in the mind or the psyche. In the vein of psychological disorders, disorder is a denotative term for 'away from norm' or non-normative or abnormal. The female psyche can endure pain, stress, fear, anxiety, and other feelings in varied intensity. These feelings, when endured for a longer time and beyond tolerable limits, can instigate a psychic disorder in the individual. Society terms such psychic disorders as madness. Eminent French philosopher, social theorist and literary critic Foucault (2006) discusses madness extensively in the work, *History of Madness*. In the "Preface to the 1961 Edition" of this book, Foucault (2006) describes that madness and non-madness, are existing "for each other, in relation to each other" (p. xxviii). Madness and non-madness is categorized based on the explicit and implicit social norms. Sociologist Cockerham (2003), in the text *Sociology of Mental Disorder*, defines norms as, "expectations of behavior shared by people in specific groups or in certain social settings" (p. 96). Normality and/or abnormality therefore are societal labels attributed to order and disorder. This paper discusses one such disorder which remains relevant in the current context too and it is termed as Eating disorder.

### **A. Analysis of Eating Disorder**

Eating disorder (in this context, Anorexia nervosa) is categorized as one of the types of Mental disorders, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*. The *DSM-5* defined Mental disorders as:

A clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 20)

Thus, an individual is diagnosed of a mental disorder if "the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual" (APA, 2013, p. 20). A disordered

individual will be unable to function normally in the society. The tenets of abnormality and disorder are determined in relation to the social and cultural factors. Some of the Mental disorders include Anxiety disorders, Obsessive Compulsive disorder, Panic disorders, Sleep disorders, Personality disorders, Mood disorders, and Eating disorders. Of these, Eating disorders are of two types: Bulimia nervosa (characterized by binge eating) and Anorexia nervosa (characterized by starvation) (APA, 2013). This paper would discuss Anorexia nervosa in women.

Eating disorder has been attributed as a disorder of the “female” by various psychologists. The eminent American author and feminist, Wolf (2002), in her work *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* states, “Anorexia and bulimia are female maladies: From 90 to 95 percent of anorexics and bulimics are women” (p. 181). The severity and prevalence of Anorexia is studied extensively even in the present. Bordo (1992), a popular feminist philosopher, known for her works in “body studies”, in her work *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* affirms:

The continuum between female disorder and “normal” feminine practice is sharply revealed through a close reading of those disorders to which women have been particularly vulnerable. These, of course, have varied historically: neurasthenia and hysteria in the second half of the nineteenth century; agoraphobia and, most dramatically, anorexia nervosa and bulimia in the second half of the twentieth century. (p. 168)

Bordo affirms that the pandemic presence of Anorexia nervosa as the female psychic disorder continues in the recent century too. Orbach (2005), an eminent British psychotherapist, in her work *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor of our age* defines Anorexia as a condition of the individuals who are “invested in not eating and have become scared of food and what it can do to them” (p. xi).

### **B. Correlation Between Women's Needs, Body and the Mind**

For the anorectic female, the body becomes the battlefield through which the female psyche attempts to establish a control. Body, as defined by the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* is, “The physical structure, including the bones, flesh, and organs, of a person or an animal” (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006, p. 153). The physical structure of the body assumes multitudinous metaphors and significations in the society. For the female, her body defines her identity because it is the ‘persona’ that faces the external reality. While height, weight, strength, skin color, hair color, and other biological factors qualify for the physical aspects of the body, the body can also be entitled with a psychic dimension. The physical and psychic bodily dimensions vary for males and females. These dimensions are strongly influenced by the social norms. Various studies have revealed a high correlation between body

dissatisfaction and internalization of socio-cultural norms (Bergerson & Senn, 1998; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Stormer & Thompson, 1996). This study attempts an intrasubjective psychological analysis of Anorexia nervosa in the female population with a critical psychological and anthropological approach.

According to Maslow's need theory, the human body that has achieved the basic human needs such as hunger and thirst progresses towards the higher level needs such as need for affiliation. This need for affiliation (need to belong) sets the woman into a disciplinary mode and forces her to curb their inner most desires. The disciplining mode induces, in the woman, an aversion to eating. Her hunger is curtailed and food does not satiate her anymore. Moreover, the female psyche is socially conditioned to associate food in a negative light. In the words of Wolf (2002) the woman is giving in to the "Beauty myth" (p. 1). Regarding the brutal methods of conditioning the female over the ideal body image, Wolf (2002) exclaims, "A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience" (p. 187). The female is trained to be terrorized over the idea of becoming fat. Thus, the female body is unconsciously disciplined to achieve the ideal body image as dictated by the patriarchy. Bartky, a feminist and phenomenologist, comments on this kind of disciplining of the female body. She asserts:

The disciplinary project of femininity is a "setup". It requires such radical and extensive measures of bodily transformation that virtually every woman who gives herself to it is destined in some degree to fail. Thus, a measure of shame is added to a woman's sense that the body she inhabits is deficient: she ought to take better care of herself. (Bartky, 1997, p. 139)

The word 'deficient' is called as "lack" by French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan where he connects the human desires with the feeling of lack (as cited in Rabaté, 2003, p. 102). Lacan believed that desire is the "lack of being" (as cited in Rabaté, 2003, p. 102). In the context of a woman, the cultural norms and expectations associated with her body is unattainable and unachievable. The patriarchal discourses such as media and society succeed in inflicting a physical atrocity on the woman at an unconscious level. Regarding the unattainable expectations, Orbach (2011) in her work "Losing Bodies" states, "Health economics has been captured and captivated by a measure of weight and height ... they decree what is an acceptable body and they then provide contracts to diet companies to regulate the unacceptable" (pp. 289-290). Yet women's need, to belong to the society, forces them to follow these norms and challenge the deficient.

Douglas (1996), a British cultural anthropologist, who contributed massively to the study of human culture, in her work *Natural Symbols*, studies the human body and mentions, "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (p. 69). The body

becomes a socially relative being where the social norms that are internalized by the social body radiates its impact on the physical body. Additionally, the body becomes a sign which acts as a medium of signification of the various cultural and social values. While the social and physical body respond to the environmental stimulus, the individual expresses his/her emotional side too. In this vein, Peter Freund, a well known sociology theorist, proposed the concept of emotional body. Freund (1990) believed, "human body should be regarded as acting mind-body unities" (p. 457). The physical, social and emotional bodies are interconnected with each other and the changes in one dimension influence the other. Susan Bordo (1992) comments on the socio-cultural nature of the female physical body and asserts:

The body is ... a practical, direct locus of social control ... Our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies - not the craving, instinctual body ... but what Foucault calls the 'docile body,' regulated by the norms of cultural life. (p. 165)

The disciplining norms, for the female, are determined by the social body, which is in turn controlled by the patriarchy. Influenced by the social norms, while the physical body is on a disciplinary spree, the female emotional body craves for good food. The different social categories such as office, marriage, home, and so on modify the female in various ways that affects her basic bodily need (hunger). Women are always in the process of 'becoming' something or fulfilling the lack in order to attain the unattainable. The 'becoming' could include social, emotional, or physical needs.

## RESULTS

The study analyzes the prevalence and impact of Anorexia nervosa among women. This disorder carries relevance even in the current times. The current study suggests that Anorexia nervosa, which is a disorder of the female body can impact the mind too. Moreover, the disorder affects the physical, social, and emotional bodily dimensions. The only way to sort the dilemma is when the female body is allowed the free will to control her body with less or no interference of the Significant Others and other powerful patriarchal discourses.

## DISCUSSION

### A. Women's Object-related Needs

Sociologists, anthropologists and behavioral psychologists have been studying the female body extensively. Bartky (1997) comments, "Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other" (p. 140). The female body which is endomorphic, mesomorphic, or ectomorphic by physical appearance has been construed in various perspectives by the media and society at large. This construing

of fat/lean body with various negative/positive signifiers prevails predominantly even in the recent times owing to the notions of the 'ideal' female body as dictated by patriarchy. Regarding this, Orbach (2011) affirms that the females, "perceived the way they were to be radically out of date and in need of upgrade. *The site of modernity for them became the reconstruction of their bodies*" (p. 389, author's emphasis). The desire to be desired by others forces the female psyche to upgrade themselves to suit the needs of the Significant Others. The social pressure that burdens the female body is explicitly stated by Hesse-Biber and Carter (2000) in an interview with a White, middle class college woman. Accordingly, the interviewee confesses, "I think I have to please men if I want to get a date, if I want to be married, if I want anything, and so how I appear to men is really my final (weight) goal" (as cited in Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, Zoino, 2006, p. 208). The female response to her various bodily needs isn't intersubjective, rather it is intrasubjective. Accordingly, the female starvation syndrome seems to be more object-related; the object is the anonymous patriarchal Other who could be eliciting signals related to an ideal body image through media, Significant Others, and the like. The unattainable patriarchal norms make it a rough path for the female body to attain perfection. Bordo (1992) highlighted that on an average one in every 200-250 women "between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two suffer from Anorexia, and that anywhere from 12-33 percent of college women control their weight through vomiting, diuretics, and laxatives" (p. 140). The condition could be life threatening if the victim suffering from this Eating disorder is diagnosed to have "persistent energy intake restriction; intense fear of gaining weight, or of becoming fat; or persistent behavior that interferes with weight gain; and a disturbance in self perceived weight or shape" (APA, 2013, p. 339). Various emotional, physical, and psychological reasons play a role in instilling fear over eating or becoming fat. This idea has been affirmed by Orbach (2005), in the work, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor of our age*. Orbach (2005) articulates, "To see the anorectic's food refusal as a hunger strike is to begin the process of humanizing her actions" (p. 83).

## INTERPRETATIONS

### A. The Gynocentric Language of Food and Hunger

Eating is a drive-based activity. At birth, the infant caters to hunger needs by demanding immediate gratification. Canadian novelist and gender critic, Atwood (1988) in "Introducing *The CanLit Foodbook*" adds that "Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality, and language. We eat before we talk" (p. 53). However, with talk (language) and socialization, the act of eating transforms into a controlled social activity. Lacan (2006), in his theory of psychosexual stages, terms this phase as the "Symbolic Order" (p. 7). The child is socialized to understand the symbols and follow a social

order. Consuming the right food is rewarded and the wrong one is punished. Thus, hunger and eating have a social connection. In the work, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing & Imprisonment*, literary critic Ellmann (1993) mentions: "Eating is the prototype of all transactions with the other, and food is the prototype of every object of exchange" (p. 53). Women barter 'food' in exchange for their need for belongingness from the patriarchal Other. The process of barter locates the women in a vulnerable position. Irrespective of their efforts to resist the domination they are deemed powerless. Bordo (1992) posits that "the social manipulation of the female body emerged as an absolutely central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes over the past hundred years" (p. 143).

The societal conditioning strongly determines what one wants to eat. Repression is one of the many ways that the female body adopts to overcome the inner desires related to food. In this vein, Bordo (1992) exclaims nowhere is the "collaboration with repression more clear than in the case of anorexia" (p. 144). In this process, old acquired behaviors are unlearned or repressed to simultaneously learn new socially acceptable behavior. With regard to the role played by the external forces, Freud (2001a) in his article "Negation" states:

Expressed in the language of the oldest—the oral—instinctual impulses, the judgement is: 'I should like to eat this', or 'I should like to spit it out'; and, put more generally: 'I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out'. That is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me'. As I have shown elsewhere, the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical. (p. 237)

Thus, the body is an amalgamation of good and bad, like and dislike. Yet, in a female psyche this amalgamation results in an intra-psychic conflict. The emergence of conflicted desires within the female psyche is a significant feature of Anorexia nervosa. The body desires to eat as well as not eat. The intra-psychic conflict is manifested in a conflict amidst the social, emotional, and physical body too. In the work "*You Look Delicious*" *Food, Eating and Hunger in Margaret Atwood's Novels*, researcher Lahikainen (2007) documents her analysis and states, "In Anorexia the true self is filled with hatred, which it directs to her body. In women this split between mind and body is often a usual and culturally approved of thing" (p. 64). With these conflicted interests lurking in the female psyche, her identity is threatened and consumed. Her mind (psyche) too has been consumed and what remains is "their mind" that is dictated by patriarchy.

### **B. Disorder of the Body and Mind**

Eating, for the civilized humans, becomes a social activity. While hunger is a need that is common to all individuals, how, where and what one eats when one is hungry



is subjective. Yet, for the woman, this subjective nature of hunger is object-related; it is influenced by the societal norms designed by the patriarchal Other. Eminent gender critic, Sceats (2000), in the work, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, propounds:

Encoded in appetite, taste, ritual and ingestive etiquettes are unwritten rules and meanings, through which people communicate and are categorized within particular cultural contexts ... The essential and necessary qualities of eating invest its surrounding activities with value, whether psychological, moral or affective. (p. 1)

When the cultural norms and the woman's taste buds differ greatly, it leads to repression. Constant repression can adversely affect the female body. Her emotional body is in a desperate need to fulfill the deficit or lack. The inability to fulfill this lack displaces the control over any other element in the body. The only controllable element will be the body's appetite. In order to achieve this end, starvation becomes the mode of control. Liu (1979), one of the anorectic women, in her confessional text, *Solitaire: The Compelling Story of a Young Woman Growing up in America and her Triumph Over Anorexia* expresses her displaced desire for control as she confesses: "I will be the master of my own body, if nothing else, I vow" (p. 123). The female is deemed incapable to control anything, including herself. She desires to protest this powerlessness. The feminist literary critic, Waugh (1989), in her work *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* states that "female protests can only be through the body itself" (p. 180). Starvation helps the human body to gain mastery over the Self and disregard consumption of the food that fulfills the societal norms. The state of vulnerability and powerlessness deems women to displace their control over food and body image.

Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, and Zoino (2006) have outlined the link between control and female starvation behavior:

As women monitor their bodies and their eating, they continue to concentrate on their physical selves to the exclusion of other things (e.g. social change; resistance; education; political action, etc.) – despite increased educational and economical opportunities. In other words, body obsession becomes an effective measure of gendered social control, self-imposed, yet congruent with the ideological and financial dictates of patriarchal capitalism. (p. 214)

Feminist psychologist McKinley (2002) examines the mind-body duality with regard to the female body image in her work, "Feminist Perspectives and Objectified Body Consciousness". She states, "Western societies construct a duality between mind and body, and women are associated with the body and men with the mind" (McKinley, 2002, p. 55). Thus, while women become obsessed with the ideal body image, their minds are consumed by the patriarchal power.

The act of being 'consumed' by someone could threaten the woman of her existence. The word 'consume', according to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* means to "use up" or "completely destroy" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006, p. 307). Moreover, to eat is 'to consume'. On another level, 'being consumed' determines the power relations shared between people and with that understanding one can determine who consumes whom. The patriarchal power that is more powerful determines and dictates the 'norms' to the female body. The female body suppresses her inner most desires and cravings and feels threatened. With reference to the execution of power over the body, Foucault (1977) in his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* posits that, "power relations has an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out the tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (p. 25). The societal conditioning and socialization that emerge with the emergence of "Symbolic Order" (Lacan, 2006, p.7), seizes the freedom of mind and body from the women. Moreover, the mind-body consumption leaves them powerless to respond or negotiate or retaliate.

### C. Women's Body Politics and Intra-psycho Conflict

Orbach (2005) says the anorectic person "is driven by the need to control her body, which is, for her, a symbol of emotional needs ... The anorectic cannot tolerate feelings ... she gathers strength from the knowledge that she can ignore her needs and appetite" (p. xii). Eating disorder is seen most often in the female gender and socialization could be one of the reasons. Socialization is a gendering process that dictates the shape, size, and weight of the female and the male body. Women are conditioned to think that thin is beautiful and fat is ugly. In this regard, Bordo (1992) found during her survey that "getting fat" was one of the worst fears in the world that women have (pp. 140-141). This fear has been referred to as 'fat phobia' in layman terms. Women's obsession with their body image and weight is relative to the Significant Others who influence it. In a semi-structured interview conducted by Paquette and Raine (2004) one of the anorectic college-going woman responds to the interviewer in the following manner:

Interviewer: Does anything make you feel bad about your body?

Hannah: Yeah, I guess, you know in relationships. You're in your room and you've got a man there, and it's like, ahh. I think about my cellulite. I am really self-conscious about it. (Hannah, 47 year old, retired, vigilant about her weight). (p. 1051)

Hannah, the anorectic woman, could be unconsciously expressing her fear of "getting fat" (Bordo, 1992, pp. 140-141). The fat phobia prevents her from eating food. She has, like other anorectics, developed mental images of a good body and a bad body for women. Douglas (2001), in her work, *Purity and Danger*, states "It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created"

(p. 4). Accordingly, for majority of women thin is beautiful. Everything that is not thin is categorized as fat and fat is connoted as ugly. Being thin becomes the signifier for many other positive metaphors such as beautiful, attractive, modern, well groomed, in-shape. On the other hand, being fat symbolizes disorganization and undisciplined Self. Women, therefore, strive to achieve this thin body all through their life starting from adolescence. To have a thin body, says Benson (1997), in “The Body, Health and Eating Disorders”, “is to project to those around you – as well as to yourself – that you are morally as well as physically ‘in shape’” (p. 123). While the anorectic woman is obsessed with the thought of growing fat, her psyche develops an irrational fear of being ungrouped or being unloved by the Significant Others. Hite (1988) in her work, “Writing-and Reading-the Body: Female Sexuality and Recent Feminist Fiction” argues that “sexuality is not the same as being sexy, desire is not the same as being desirable, and what women want is not entirely reducible to what men want in women” (p. 123). For the male, ‘sexuality’ and ‘desire’ is eventually hinted at the female body. In order to achieve their desires, the patriarchy enforces various norms over the female body which consequently results in repression of female desires. The female body with the constant repression of her desires feels ‘threatened’ and ‘deconstructed’.

With regard to repression of the desires, psychologists Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) in their work *Frustration and Aggression*, stated that, “these reactions may be temporarily compressed, delayed, disguised, or otherwise deflected from their immediate and logical goal, they are not destroyed” (pp. 1-2). An anorectic woman, therefore, displaces her repressed feelings on her appetite. Fat phobia could accumulate the woman’s mind to the extent of intruding in her daily needs and motives. Bartky in her essay, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” mentions the UCLA survey that was published in *USA Today* in the year 1985. This survey clearly proves the obsession of women with becoming fat. In this study, a sum total of 260 students were interviewed and the results were astonishing. It showed that 27.3 percent of women and only 5.8 percent of men said they were “terrified” of getting fat; also 28.7 percent of women but only 7.5 percent of men said they were obsessed or “totally preoccupied” with food (as cited in Bartky, 1997, p. 133). Further, Bartky (1997) adds:

Today massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman’s body is met with distaste. The current body of fashion is taut, small-breasted, narrow hiped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation; it is a silhouette that seems more appropriate to an adolescent boy or newly pubescent girl than to Adult woman. Since ordinary women have normally quite different dimensions, they much of course diet. (p. 132)

An individual’s identity is closely linked with the physical features of the body. It is more predominant in the case of the female. Therefore, for the woman, her body being consumed, connotes the consumption of her “identity”. Hence, the woman’s

identity is repressed, threatened, consumed, and deconstructed constantly. American psychoanalyst, Szasz (1973), in the work *The Second Sin* asserts, "Addiction, obesity, starvation (anorexia nervosa) are political problems, not psychiatric; each condenses and expresses a contest between the individual and some other person or persons in his environment over the control of the individual's body" (p. 45). The female body image becomes a political battlefield for the patriarchy to exert its control and power.

#### **D. Anorexia as a Double Edged Sword**

Wolf (2002) proclaims, "Ideal beauty is ideal because it does not exist" (p. 176). For many women across different cultures, the thin-body obsession, is an 'ideal' aim they strive to achieve even though it seems impossible. This cult for thin-body obsession persists as a global phenomenon. The desire to control something and the loss of control over the Self, no doubt, forces the women develop Eating disorders. Studies show a correlation between goals related to thin-body images and feeling of power (Goodman, 2002). In this regard, Goodman (2002) comments "Bodily self-control was their primary means to exert control in the social world" (p. 722). The dilemma occurs when women are conditioned to be compliant to patriarchy and simultaneously trained to be independent, successful, and healthy. Unfortunately, for the women, both the categories are pre-determined by the patriarchy. This results in a feeling of split or division inside the female mind.

Drawing on these lines, Wolf (2002) affirms, "culture stereotypes women to fit the myth by flattening the feminine into beauty without intelligence or intelligence without beauty; women are allowed a mind or body but not both" (p. 59). Consequently, the woman is split between her body that is explicitly absorbing the patriarchal norms and her psyche that is implicitly supporting her unconscious and repressed desires. The consumerist culture encourages women to make their own decisions regarding a lipstick, a dress, footwear or a hair-do. But, subliminally the decisions that the women take align with the desires pre-determined by the patriarchy. The female body is constantly watched, judged, and punished in newer and subliminal ways. Sanger (1973), an American activist and educator, in her essay titled, "Birth Control a Parents' Problem or a Woman's?" propounds: "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body ... It is for women the key to liberty" (p. 533). Paquette and Raine (2004) in their studies on Eating disorders examined that women's Eating disorders are strongly influenced by "socio-cultural environment", "social ties" and "women themselves" (p. 1056). Change in the norms regarding an ideal body image can happen when the issue is addressed in a multi-dimensional pattern (Paquette & Raine, 2004). The juggle between compliance and independence as well as the fear of punishments constantly instills an anxiety in the female body. The fear can cease to exist only when 'Fat' can be deduced as beautiful too.

## CONCLUSIONS

The female body has social, emotional, and physical dimensions to it. Each dimension is interdependent on the other. All three dimensions combine to determine the female identity. Sociologist Epstein (1991) in his work, "Sexuality and Identity: The Contribution of Object Relations Theory to a Constructionist Sociology" defines "identity has been conceptualized as a problem that the individual must "solve" through active negotiation" (p. 832). The woman needs to learn the skill of negotiating with patriarchy in order to uphold her true Self. This change is highly challenging. The female body is like the prisoner in the Panopticon prison as proposed by Jeremy Bentham (as cited in Foucault, 1977, p. 200). She is perpetually under the radar without her being aware of who is watching her. Her body is persistently threatened to remain beautiful and the norms of beauty are unattainable. For her, the social bodily dimension overpowers the emotional and the physical one. In response to this Anorexia nervosa or starvation is one of the typical reactions that the female physical body succumbs to, in order to "belong" to the society. Chernin (1994), a feminist philosopher who wrote extensively on the "tyranny of slenderness" and the female Eating disorders believes a woman will "continue to behave in an erratic manner until she acknowledges and integrates them" (p. 67). The only way to sort the dilemma is when the female body is allowed the free will to control her body. This change could be a slow evolution; hence a victory also would approach slowly. Wolf (2002) states, "The woman wins who calls herself beautiful and challenges the world to change to truly see her" (p. 290). This study affirms that emotional and social body can impact the physical body and force the physical body to succumb to disorders such as Anorexia. Patriarchy has created a double edged sword at the female body by conditioning the female towards compliance as well as independence. The unnatural and unattainable body images further adversely hamper the mental health and strength of the female. The double edged sword can be less threatening if the female body is accepted as a body, which is devoid of any categorizations such as 'thin', 'fat', 'ugly' or 'beautiful' that are based on physical appearance that defines the notion of beauty.

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