# AGENCY THROUGH BODILY ALTERITY: THE CASE OF "PRO-ANOREXIA" WEBSITES

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**Abstract.**
*The phenomenon of pro-anorexia websites is beginning to receive attention within the academy following its increasing visibility in popular media. Pro-Ana is vibrant, yet subversive online community, with membership purportedly comprised of girls in their mid to late teens. This article draws on an Honours research project that explored discursive representation on two such websites. It draws on post-structuralist feminist theoretical resources, and discourse analysis to explore the constructions of identity and bodily inscriptions within the Pro-Ana community. We include a brief statement on historical constructions of anorexia, as well as more contemporary medical and lay representations. Our main analysis focuses on a generic logo of the websites, which reads "anorexia is a lifestyle not a disease". We argue that members of the Pro-Ana community (Anas) display agency by both resisting and conforming to dominant discursive representations of anorexia, problematizing dominant constructions of the gendered body. We posit that this performativity is a critical reply to the medical and public responses to the anorexic body and the phenomenon of Pro-Ana.*

**INTRODUCTION.**
Anorexia is not only an illness, it is a cultural product and social construct available for consumption in the popular media and in medical and lay discourses. The construction of women's bodies as potentially unruly and mysterious has a long history (Rose, 1995). Discursive links between constructs of femininity, madness and fragility in nineteenth century Europe were evident in the very classification of "anorexia nervosa" and "anorexia hysteria" in 1873 made by Gull, and Laseque, respectively (Brumberg, 1985). Interest in anorexia has since been marked by particular discursive moments, when it has come to the fore in popular culture as well as medical and lay domains. At these historical junctures the lines between sensationalism, moral panic and renewed vigour around clinical intervention become increasingly blurred. Anorexia entered the popular imagination with the visibility of ultra-thin models such as Twiggy and Mary Quant in the 1960s, and in the 1980s with a moral panic linked to celebrity disclosures of eating disorders – most notably that of Princess Diana (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Anorexia has once again been brought to the foreground of popular imagination with the entrance of pro-anorexia (Pro-ana) websites. Despite the concern, panic, and

sensationalism around Pro-ana, efforts to shut it down have failed, and it continues to be a vibrant, subversive, online community and movement, with over 500 Pro-ana websites currently existing (Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2007). Pro-Ana usually include a forum, chat room links, photo galleries (with creatively altered images), artwork, poetry, personal testimonies and tips and techniques that support the maintenance of eating disorders. Highlighting the need to conceptualise anorexia as an identity that is availed primarily to girls and women, these websites also necessitate interrogation of the ways in which those who identify as anorexic both conform to, and subvert, dominant discourses on femininity, beauty and health. In light of the paucity of research in this area, the phenomenon of Pro-ana calls for a more nuanced analysis of anorexics and anorexia.

Taking as our starting point that reality and hypertextuality are closely interweaved, we see Pro-Ana communities as providing new ways of interpolating anorexia as an identity and opening up new paths for the ways in which gender is "done" or "acted out". This performativity as described by Butler (1990 & 2003), allows for the possibility of challenging naturalised gender norms. As such, this performativity can be seen as agentic, invoked as a reaction to the dominant responses to the anorexic body and more particularly the phenomenon of Pro-Ana. Here, agency is broadly understood as the capacity to act, with an emphasis on how women "consciously re/produce their own conditions of being and assume responsibility for this process" (Kiguwa, 2006:14). Agency is embedded and emerges within the instability of societal gender norms and it is through a process of narration that we mediate and make sense of inconsistencies, facilitating an imaginative and conscious process of change (ibid).

The theoretical resources informing this exploration are social constructionism and post-structuralist feminism, with analysis drawing on understandings of discourse analysis as outlined by Parker (1994 and 2002). We have restricted our principal analysis to a fairly generic logo on Pro-Ana websites which reads "Anorexia is a lifestyle, not a disease". Alongside the lifestyle logo is a white ribbon superimposed on a red background. We also comment on the name of one pro-ana website, "Ana's Underground Grotto". In selecting this data we aim to unsettle assumptions of a hierarchy of analytic accessibility between different kinds of text (words and images), illustrating how text is mobilised, in the instance of pro-ana websites as a signalling device for interpolation of community members. In this sense, while individual members of the Pro-Ana community probably have varied ways of interpreting the lifestyle image, its presence on many pro-ana websites alludes to a coherence amongst community members. It is thus implicated in the development of a Pro-Ana identity, both individual and collective. The formation of shared identifications around images (however imagined this sharedness is), is of significance because it unsettles traditional assumptions about the mechanisms that individuals and groups use to construct their identities.

To give a detailed demographic profile of who accesses these websites is difficult as disclosure of identity status on these websites is rare (Mastronardi, 2003; Fox, Ward & O'Rourke, 2005). Despite these constraints, Fox *et al* (2005) gauged that most members of the Pro-Ana community professed to be girls in their early to mid teens, the group most susceptible to developing anorexia (May, 1990; Hesse-Biber, Marino & Watts-Roy, 1999; Haworth-Hoeppener, 2000; Lamberg, 2003). Anorexia has traditionally been perceived as a condition that affects white, middle-class women. In

our South African context there is evidence that this trend is shifting. While white women are still highly vulnerable to developing the disorder (Uys & Wassenaar, 1996), research has shown that so too are an increasing proportion of young black (African, Indian and "coloured") women (le Grange, Telch & Tibbs, 1998; Szabo, 1999). This is particularly the case for the (presumably middle-class) black South African girls who attend private schools (Szabo, 1999) and black women who attend urban universities (le Grange *et al*, 1999).

While research does estimate that 90% of anorexics are female (Malson, 1998), the definitional parameters of bio-medical theories construct anorexia as a naturally feminine illness. This taken-for-granted aspect of anorexia, in some senses, produces and avails anorexia as an unquestionably feminine identity that can be used in the creation of (anorexic) subjectivity (Gremillion, 2001). Most explanations, although taking into account the gendered nature of anorexia, draw on deficit discourses - of feminine lack. While it is probably necessary to recognize that femininity is always already on the margins of dominant discourse, it should also be borne in mind that this alterity is also a site for the production of subversive acts (Butler, 1993). Feminists and cultural theorists have pointed out that broader structures that factor in the oppression of women and/or the desire for a thin body should be taken into account in any explanation of anorexia (Thompson, 1992). In this regard, the salience of thinness in the media has given rise to theorizations that women compare themselves to hegemonic media depictions of bodily glamour and are left feeling inadequate (Fay & Price, 1994; Wiliksch, Tigermann & Wade, 2006). Within the main explanations of anorexia, it is constructed as an illness with unilateral or at least dominant causes. This position does not pay sufficient attention to the potential for resistance. In the material we analysed, discourses used to construct anorexia were multiple and often contradictory, even in their own terms. Moreover the emotional investments that Anas display (in their anorexia), as well as the ways in which they construct themselves as a coherent community, suggest the need to acknowledge that anorexia is, at least  for some people, an identity and a basis for agentic positioning.

**THEORETICAL RESOURCES.**

Social constructionism throws into question taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world. It suggests that phenomena that we often believe to have an essential ontological status (such as race, gender and mental illness) are in fact products of dynamic social processes (Burr, 2003). Post-structuralist feminisms conceptualise the self as fluid and contradictory and multiple, produced in social structures and relations. Within these social geometries, language, power and discourses differently produce and give meaning to subjectivity, informing what it means to be a "woman", "anorexic", "mad". Discourse is a central concept in social constructionism and post-structuralist feminism. Parker (2002:221) defines a discourse as "a set of statements - words and phrases - that construct objects, that give shape to things outside language so those things become real to us".  This implies that language not only allows people to describe the world, it also allows them to act upon it and in it. In this sense, language is said to be productive and socially constructive (Parker, 2002). Butler (1993) argues that the body is a social construction. This does not mean that the body is in no sense natural. Rather, it suggests that the dichotomy between the "natural" on the one hand and the social, historical or cultural on the other is a binary that needs to be challenged. She argues that to position an object as natural, if natural is to mean prior to representation, is to represent that object. The idea that bodies can never be totally

severed from language implies that the boundaries between the imaginary and the material are inextricably blurred – people materialize the material, or bring the material into consciousness, through continually representing it (Butler, 1993).

Both Parker (2002) and Butler (1993) follow Derrida's (1974) postulation that phenomena which demarcate boundaries, are built upon a third term. That is to say, powerful boundaries maintain themselves through incorporating their less powerful other and then disavowing it. As such, no identities are pure. Their existence is always dependant upon that which they repudiate, reject or expel.  Closely related to this is the concept of alterity. Alterity refers to radical otherness, insofar as there is a duality between two objects constructed as binary terms, where one term (the first term) is privileged above the other; where the first term gains hegemony such that the other term and the Other is silenced (Butler, 1993). Alterity however, is over-determined and moves beyond this to a sense of adjustment and dis-adjustment (Dooley & Kavanagh, 2007), a sense of dis-ease and disease. The very presence of alterity makes those that are not Other (words betray us here) uncomfortable, provoking a sense of dis-adjustment and dis-ease because they are never fully exterior. They are always scratching the surface, always reminders that without them (without the Other) the normality we take for granted would not exist (Dooley & Kavanagn, 2007).

Butler (1993) argues that while discourses are to some extent fluid and temporary, they have a tendency to sediment themselves in language. In other words, new meanings always carry traces of their prior meanings, albeit in perhaps a transformed state (Derrida, 1974). While this makes the total erasure of a discourse difficult, even impossible, it does not deny the potentialities for discourses to be renegotiated (Butler, 1993). On the note of erasure and alterity, it is important to note that subjectivity is not only produced by the effects of linguistic constructions and identifications, but also of the effect of exclusions, taboos, denials and silences (Butler, 1993; Parker, 2002). Some subjectivities are so violently condemned that, to maintain ego-integrity, people often deny any desire to interpolate them into their identity, even when such desires exist (Butler, 1993). Therefore, subjectivities are constituted in and through that which is absent, that which is made (in)accessible to subjects through their power to evoke horror and disgust. Taboos however, never totally complete their goals: even rejected and condemned identities are never totally absent from language (Butler, 1993). This is not because they have power, but because the exterior to language is constitutive, not absolute (Derrida, 1974; Butler, 1993) and also because expressions of bodily horror (for example, retching) have a powerful communicative force (Kristeva, 1980). The voice of these subjects is therefore not absent but constituted through marginalized reactions to a series of violent (mis)recognitions by the other. Subjects become objects of abjection when they disrupt binaries between subject/object distinctions through forming particular types of identifications (Kristeva, 1980; Butler, 1993). The disorder created by the collapsing of the subject into the object "beseeches worries and fascinates desire … apprehensive, desire turns side, sickened, it rejects" (Kristeva 1980:389). This collapse must be guarded against, as the desire to schism, to separate phenomena into categories of difference is one of the most constitutive sources of patriarchy (Butler, 1993). That is, male privilege is maintained by discourses that constitute men as norm (the subject) and women as the site of difference (the object). The abject is thus that which threatens the patriarchal economy of style.

Butler (1993) argues that these exclusions and constructions are mobilized to constitute the intelligibility of the body. This intelligibility is brought into being through the inscription of possibilities on the always already gendered/sexed body. Inscription on the body refers to the stylised repetition of acts that are expressed in, on and through the body (Butler, 2003). That is to say, identities are sustained through their ability to be recited. The formation of identities is only possible if the acts that form it can be repeated (and thus changed, however slightly). Given this, no original inscriptions can occur nor can they emanate from any absolute origin either. As gender/sex is one of the most prominent normative ideals through which bodies are made intelligible, all inscriptions are always already gendered and sexed (Butler, 1993). This means that subjects cannot avoid inscriptions that pertain to their gender and / or sexuality, even if they wish to. This does not imply that individuals have no agency. It rather suggests that individuals can only renegotiate their identities by reformatting inscriptions that are already available to them (Butler, 1993). Often, the greatest displays of agency emanate from alterity, particularly when subaltern subjects parody those more powerful than themselves (Butler, 1993).

It is significant to comment on the way in which dominant discourses of (psycho)pathology which prescribe the parameters of normality (and mental health) rely on the notion of an inner coherence, including coherent notions of selfhood. This is pertinent to anorexics, where this inner coherence is often described as being compromised. While notions of selfhood portrayed on pro-ana websites often portray (or perform) this lack of coherence, this is not conceptualised (theoretically) as inherently different from non-anorexics. Despite appearances to the contrary, inscriptions on the body are not unified, nor coherent, either in relation to each other or in relation to themselves. The appearance of coherence appears only in and through the use of sex, gender, and race, etcetera, as points of normative regulation, idealization and violent exclusions (Butler, 1993). One of the effects of these gendered inscriptions is that subjects enact performativities. In summation, what social consructionism and deconstructionist feminism point to is that there are no natural, given ways of reading the female body. Rather, the ways in which the female body is understood is filtered through particular discourses that, however invisibly, inscribe the body with meaning. These inscriptions upon the female body and the interpretations thereof cannot be separated from the patriarchy which pervades hegemonic discourses in our society.

**METHODOLOGY.**
Discourse analysis aims to deconstruct text, to unpack, strip it bare and scrutinise it; so that it can link it to the power structures with which it is imbued and trace the historical links between the power structures identified and the types of language and images used in the text (Parker, 2002).

We apply discourse analysis to a fairly generic logo that, together with the image of a white ribbon, reads "anorexia is a lifestyle, not a disease". We also analyse the name of one pro-ana website, "Ana's Underground Grotto" (http://grotto.projectshapeshift.net/). We broadly draw on Ian Parker's (2002) method of discourse analysis. The general aim of this is to uncover the discourse(s) which make up the hybridised, sometime contradictory, nature of texts and the structures that hold these discourses together. As suggested by Parker (2002) we did this by analysing the power relations between textual subjects and objects, as well the effects of the mediums used to transmit

knowledge. We then illustrate how the identified discourses are mobilized to (re)inscribe the bodies of Anas and how these inscriptions incite and prohibit certain types of performativities.

In terms of ethics and validation, the website material and text on Ana's Underground Grotto was, at the time of access, legally considered as being in the public domain (Merskey, 2005). We did however attempt to contact the domain owner of Ana's Underground Grotto, for permission to use the website material, but were met with no response. Furthermore, we follow Merksey's (2005) argument that if people are to claim identities such as Pro-ana in the public domain, then it is fair to assume that they are prepared to engage in public debate around such issues. That is to say, if the Pro-Ana community are to engage their beliefs in a public space, it is fair to assume they are ready to engage in communication (however distal) around such issues.

**ANALYSIS.**

**The politics of naming.**
The name of the website explored, "Ana's Underground Grotto" is a rich source of analysis. The word "Ana" suggests an abbreviation for anorexia and anorexic, but also is phonetically undifferentiated from the girl's name "Anna". This naming practice constitutes anorexia as a subject and suggests a personal relationship with it. The words "grotto" and "underground" create the sense of a subterranean space and clandestine activity. "Underground" also holds connotations of dissidence and anti-establishment resistance, alluding to alternative ways of knowing and "being" in the world. The word "grotto" has significations beyond this - a grotto can also refer to a garden feature constructed for the purposes of worship. Interestingly, Ana's Underground Grotto construes "Ana" as a goddess in some spaces.

**"Anorexia is a lifestyle, not a disease".**
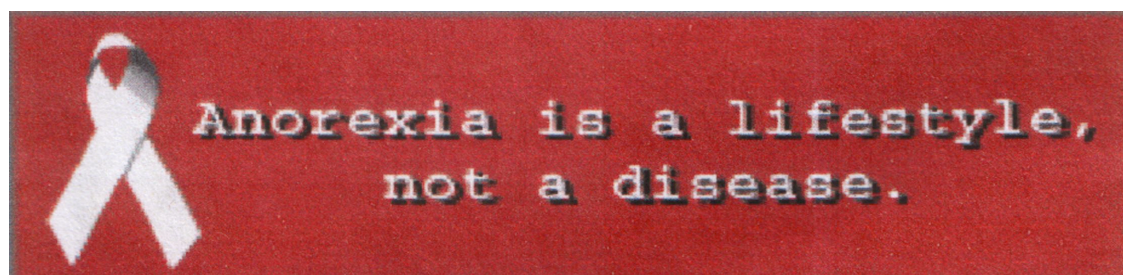


At first glance, this icon may evoke shock, with members of the Pro-ana community (re)inscribing their bodies as the product of a lifestyle.

The lifestyle discourse while socially prevalent is historically relative. In this regard, Shilling (1997) notes that it is no longer acceptable just to have a life, one must have a "lifestyle" as well. Lifestyles have been invested with ethical and aesthetic significance (Chaney, 1996). The moral optic through which notions of personal choice are invoked in constructs of lifestyles mask technologies of governmentality. In a heavily consumerist society, lifestyles are constructed as the product of discipline and wilful activity (Shilling, 1997). With echoes of the Protestant ethic following a lifestyle (typically characterized by exercise and a specific diet) inscribes the (female) body with desirability. Popular media has also done its fair share to promote the idea that

women's bodies are only rendered acceptable through transformation and discipline (Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Interestingly, men are less often the targets of lifestyle advertising than women are. This suggests that the production of docile bodies is one of the effects of the intersection of gendered/sexed norms, consumerism and the media (Bordo, 1997). To this extent, Anas are unwittingly using a discourse that colludes in the oppression of women. Despite this, other layers that inform the use of this discourse suggest that one should not be too quick to suggest this is indicative of a lack of agency. The use of the logo explicitly resists popular, more acceptable conceptualisations of anorexia, which often formulate anorexia in the disease model of illness. Disease models of illness tend to pathologize sufferers and to deny their agency. In addition, "disease" and "lifestyle" are constructed as binary opposites, where lifestyle is given status as the first term.

The specific use of a logo containing a common stylistic presentation of a ribbon is also an important feature in the appropriation of the lifestyle discourse. These ribbons are often used to promote public awareness and education around various illnesses and compassion towards the sufferers of these illnesses (for example red ribbon for HIV/AIDS awareness, pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness). Ribbon campaigns have also covered social issues (for instance. purple ribbon for xenophobia and domestic violence, white ribbon for men's advocacy around violence against women). In some senses therefore there is a contradiction between the signifier (the ribbon) and the signified (the statement "anorexia is a lifestyle not a disease"), as anorexia is at once constructed as both a disease and its opposite. This in itself may be a powerful move against the theoretical over-determination of anorexia, making more salient the speciousness of what anorexia "really" is.

This ambivalence also seems to be attached to the use of ribbons to promote not only awareness, but *tolerance* of illness, which comes to signify "difference". In the very attempt of encouraging people to see the person behind the sick body, ribbons draw attention to these bodies and (re)inscribe illness upon them. Similarly, calls for tolerance in the face of social ills such as xenophobic or homophobic violence, which encourage people to embrace the humanity beyond the social problem, re-inscribe difference, that is, re-race, re-gender, re-Other the person affected by that injustice. The use of the logo may therefore at once both erase and reinstate inscriptions of ill-health upon the bodies of anas.

The use of ribbons to promote particular ideas falls into liberal political discourses. Liberal rhetoric brings to the fore notions such as tolerance, particularly the need to tolerate diversity and the right of individual self-determination. On the one hand, the positioning of anorexia as a lifestyle implies it is the product of free will. The consequent implication is that in a free society, such as a democracy it should be respected as such. As such there appears to be an appeal to respect anorexia as a personal choice. At the same time, there appears to be something intentionally provocative about the logo. Many negative responses to the Pro-ana community are framed in liberal sentiments. They argue that individual freedom should be limited if it infringes upon the rights of others. Pro-anas are constructed as infringing on others' rights to health and self-esteem by propagating their views in a public space. This is construed as problematic because it is imagined that the websites will attract young, apparently fragile, impressionable teenage girls (Ferreday, 2003). For example, tabloids have described how these "sinister forums" are "preying" on adolescent girls (Brennan, 2001,

**Mail on Sunday**). In academia, the Society for Adolescent Medicine (2003) has gone so far as to claim that Pro-ana websites can cause anorexia in otherwise psychologically healthy individuals. The overt sentiment is that Pro-ana websites should be censored to protect "our girls" from anorexia.

The performativities that constitute the Ana logo display duality and ambivalence. The logo also displays the agency of Anas, particularly through its subversive potentials. There has been much written about the resistance of anorexics to hegemonic conceptualisations of their illness (eg. Orbach, 1986; Probyn, 1987; Bordo 1988; Malson & Ussher, 1997; Bordo & Heywood, 2003; Dias, 2003; Pollack, 2003). This seems, in many senses, to fit squarely with theories that suggest anorexics resist those who attempt to help them because they are irrational and immature. If attention is turned to the ways anorexia is constructed in both lay and professional sites, the response of anorexics can be understood. Anorexia is viewed by the Other as the only discernable inscription on the anorexic body. After anorexia has been attributed the status of an all-consuming identity, sufferers are told to "let go" of it, because it is unhealthy. If the Anas seem much invested in their illness, it is partly because they are miming the Other's investment in it. This mimesis quickly turns into parody and as such, it is easy for the Other to ignore their contribution to the construction of anorexic bodies.

Some sentiments on Ana's Underground Grotto suggest that the Webmistress, as well as other contributors to the website are well aware that they fall into the third term of "tolerance" and "desirability".  Whatever motivations they attach to it, they are aware that a lot of "outsiders" find them not only undesirable but actually intolerable. Given this awareness, it appears that Anas are attempting to at once parody liberal discourses on ill bodies and also to mobilize liberal discourses to legitimate their bodies and their illness. This duality displays a hope that the overt sentiments of the logo will be affected, but also an awareness that this is unlikely.

The Ana logo is used on most Pro-ana websites. The repetition of a powerful sentiment, that is imagined to be coherent and imagined to be shared by all Anas, acts to bind the community together. The effect of this is that, Anas now have support (from other Anas) in redefining anorexia as an identity.

**Responses to the pro-ana community and to the logo.**
Many members of the public, as well as health-care professionals have reacted with shock to the Pro-ana community, lambasting its existence. These groups are probably genuinely concerned about the health of the members of the Pro-ana community, as well as the potential of Pro-ana to glamourise anorexia. However, the concern voiced by the public and medical professions appears to be entangled with other, more disparaging sentiments, masking a very different position to one of support. According to Brennan (2001), for example, the images of thin to emaciated women displayed on Pro-ana websites, are repulsive.  The inscription of "the ribcage horrors of anorexia" on the female body, is, according to Spicer (**Mail on Sunday**, 2006) even more disgusting and unimaginably shocking when encountered in real life.  The word "unimaginably" is important here. It suggests a censoring of anorexic bodies due to the corporeal disgust they evoke, construing this as something beyond the limit of human expression. It is abjection at its limits.  It appears then that the stigma attached to anorexia is far more than a social effort to protect girls from themselves. Rather the stigma is maintained because emaciated bodies defy subject/object binaries and create an awareness that

many concepts are dependant on their supposed opposite for meaning (Ferreday, 2003). In the logo, for example, the boundaries between disease and lifestyle are blurred. As such, individuals who inscribe their bodies with more mainstream appropriations of the lifestyle discourse may, on discovering how fragile these inscriptions are, feel threatened and try to place Anas in an abject space. Ferreday (2003) has pointed out that even the abjection of Anas is threatening: The expressions of bodily horror (for example the desire to vomit) that the spectacle of the anorexic body can evoke means that objectors unconsciously, unwittingly, mime anorexic praxis itself, thus aligning themselves with that which they abject.

In defying subject / object binaries, in rejecting firm placement, the anorexic body defies the visual economy of patriarchy. Emaciated or thin bodies can appear remarkably androgynous and asexual. Inscriptions of asexuality subvert the patriarchal idea that women's bodies should be objects of consumption for the male gaze. Similarly androgynous inscriptions on the body render it uncomfortable for the Other to construct that body through the normative and normalizing matrix of sex and gender, the ideological cornerstones of patriarchy and heterosexualism. Thus, from within the subaltern space of feminine pathology, anorexics transcend gendered limits and norms.

If the bodies of anorexics are seen as disgusting, their psyches are seen as the illegitimate source that creates these bodies. This stigmatization is illustrated by the statements of Hayashi, spokesperson for the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders in the United States of America. According to Depowski and Hart (2006), Hayashi told ABC News that the pro-eating disorder sites were not only destructive but also dangerous as they gave legitimacy to people who could not recover. In this statement Hayashi conflates the idea that anorexia exists within individuals and that anorexic individuals exist, and constructs both as problematic. What is alluded to here is the idea that these young women need to be protected from themselves, that the websites give legitimacy not only to a mobilised position of defiance, but to an inherently ill-legitimate position, where recovery is construed as only being possible if emanating from external professional sources. As stated by Pollack (2003:247, citing Harris, 2001, and MacRobbie & Thornton, 2000): "The pro-eating disordered subject is thus imagined as the villain in a moralistic fight, reminiscent of other 'rebellious youth' discourses of the 20th century, and the current popular interest in the corruption of modern girlhood". The construction of ill, powerless girls in need of protection is made even more powerful due to the real possibility of death. Part of the concern around anorexia has to do with the extent to which the anorexic body is physically (and discursively) constituted as a dying body. The moral optic informing our concern and responsibility for girls includes notions of mortality, where "femininity is imbricated in discursive constructions of death and dying" (Malson & Ussher, 1997:43).

This raises the question of the extent to which anorexics are *aware* that death is the result of success in their quest. This is a common concern, questioning whether these girls are "really" aware that they could die. It is a rationale for intervention that could be applied to a host of risky behaviour that commonly characterises representations of adolescent behaviour, that is, a lack of awareness or a *disregard* for the consequences of actions (unsafe sexual practices and substance abuse for example). We posit that the ideologies and discourses informing the question are of crucial significance to the possible answers. How we understand the experiences of girls is linked on one level to the constructs that produce girls as subjects. Dominant ideologies of childhood and

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teleologies of child development powerfully prescribe what girls should be like, what is desirable for, and detrimental to them. Despite it being shock-inducing because it is such an extreme action (to be consciously participating in), dying may signify "not only a destruction of the self but also a subversive and resistant evasion of a disciplining, individualizing and gender-ing gaze" (Malson & Ussher, 1997:56). In this sense, the pro-eating disorder stance could signal the need for more complex theorizing of the power of discursive practices to regulate young women's bodies (Pollack, 2003).

**CONCLUSION.**

Pro-anorexia is a recent, publicly controversial phenomenon, one demanding much emotional investment across different societal domains (Lyons, Mehl & Pennerbaker, 2006). In contrast to more traditional conceptualisations of anorexia, we posit that these young women display a degree of agency, particularly by parodying more dominant conceptualisations of anorexia from a space of alterity and mobilizing it as an identity. Additionally, despite the placement of their identity and the inscription of feminine lack upon their bodies they managed to be very productive. This productivity, however, was contradictory and ambivalent, suggesting that anorexia is not the fixed identity Anas would like to imagine it to be.

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