

## **“Ana” Online: Pro Anorexia Websites and the Ambivalence of Gluttony**

Paula Gardner, Ontario College of Art and Design

### INTRODUCTION

This generation of adolescents in North America, many of whom have easy access to the Internet and skills in web authoring, routinely employ mediated online environments to vet and experiment with identity and social interaction. These changes in adolescent and teen development have been tracked by researchers with particular attention to social networking environments such as FLICKR and Face Book, in practices of blogging and subcultural community development. One overlooked area is adolescents and teens with social, physical and mental disorders who employ their own on-line environments for social networking and support. Pro-anorexia and Pro-bulimia websites have been created by girls who live with acceptance and sometimes promote eating disorders, establishing unique on-line networks with controversial content. Through this mediated environment, the vision of “Ana” has been created—a representation poached from consumer and celebrity culture, celebrating the glamour and femininity attached to extreme thinness in contemporary western societies. Ana is also a creed derived from decidedly Protestant, neoliberal, distinctively North American ethics that expect good consumer/citizens to live a life of restraint and thrift, demonstrating the ability of will to overcome somatic needs and desires. In the case of Ana, power over one’s desire to eat is meant to represent an ethic of personal responsibility and a lifestyle built upon “will”-power and self-control. The contradiction between neoliberal tenets of restraint and thrift in behavior (illustrated by minimal female bodies) and consumer culture’s glamorization of gluttonous consumption is made all the more evident through the icon of Ana, especially in her practice of on-line self-representation that is both textual and visual.

This paper explores the Ana figure and her representation through Pro Ana websites, with a view to understanding how teen, female Ana webmasters, through these practices, work to

mediate conflicting representations of femininity and consumption in North American culture. Ana webmasters clearly intend these sites and particularly the linked blogs and chatrooms for insider anorexic culture. This is indicated by disclaimers asking voyeurs or non-anorexics to leave, and the use of teenage vernacular and references to teen practices that are not interpreted for readers outside this Ana group. As such, these sites should not be viewed as “acts” of communication for the larger public and this researcher is cognizant of my role as outsider viewing spaces wherein I may or may not be welcome. And yet, because these sites do in fact exist on the Internet, and most sites (and some blogs) are unlocked, public sites, I look at Ana websites as pieces of visual culture, or acts of self-representation that can aid an understanding of the culture of Anorexia subjects, especially in relation to their obvious glorification of consumer culture. I argue that Ana references anorexic girl culture in a desperate manner demanding not only voice but a recognition of identity that implores (all) readers to understand Ana beyond the level of surface, or connotative analysis. The figure of Ana represents, among Ana webmasters and the Ana user community, a deep ambivalence for the possibility of a “healthy,”—meaning “whole and coherent”—identity for girls growing up in the neoliberal and consumerist-saturated, mediated environment.

In the following, I will explicate this ambivalence through a review of the textual and visual discourses of these webpages and linked blogs and chatrooms. I then analyze and challenge popular journalism that shortsightedly reduce pro-Ana sites to mere mental health “deviance.” My interest here, as Susan Bordo argued in her seminal work on Anorexia Nervosa, is to view Pro-Ana as the ‘crystallization’ of culture... a symptom of the distresses of a culture.’ (1993) Ana webpage discourses can serve to reflect North American cultural pathologies back to readers, allowing us to reassess them in a broader framework. That frame, in this case, includes media reporting and representations of Ana as well as the constrained social roles and behavior required of adolescent girls in North America; consumer culture projections of normative girl images; and considerations of how technology and consumerism impact the

mediation of alternative (anorexic) identities. In addition, the paper considers the distinctive possibilities for self-expression and community building made possible through pro-Ana authoring. This line of analysis critiques the mainstream media's framing of Ana as an inherently deviant female who promotes mental disease as a lifestyle choice and thereby inculcates eating deviance in otherwise healthy girls.

I employ tenets of Foucaultian discourse analysis to understand the conditions by which Pro-Ana websites become possible, and to dissect the Ana's practice of representation in a broader cultural and what can be termed behavioral practices --anorexic practices that mimic normative cultural values. I choose this term to characterize the scope of affective/behavioral disorders that bridge major disorders (e.g. Depression, Eating disorders) to common disorders of everyday behavior such as body dysmorphia, eating dysfunction, menstrual blues, and low-grade depression. This trend, as I've argued elsewhere, (Gardner 2007) illustrates the ongoing reign of biopsychiatric logic over standards of normative cultural behaviors and practices, resulting in the pathologization everyday life.<sup>1</sup> In this context, I argue that Pro-Ana sites are distinctive in their ambivalence toward anorexic living and in their extreme neoliberalism that insists on self-determination and respect for individual expression (including near starvation and glorified thinness) deemed abnormal by mainstream culture.

Finally, I situate these discourses in broader questions of feminist (girl) identity and community politics and practices, particularly as articulated by third wave and postfeminism. This broad sphere of inquiry, while rife with dispute and contradiction, shares with Ana a rigorous defense of —and yet ambivalence toward —self-determination. In that sense, most strands of postfeminism are also, I believe, misunderstood (and sometimes berated) by mainstream media and second wave feminists. Additionally, both Ana cybermasters and post-feminists tend to view themselves as outsiders to major cultural trends, and as a result, have

---

<sup>1</sup> See the work of Nikolas Rose (2006), Toby Miller (1998), Jane Ussher (1997), and Elaine Showalter (1997) for elaborations of psychiatry into the practices of everyday life.

tended to vigorously protect and defend group members.

This paper, then, has three levels of analysis. First, it seeks to understand, from a cultural studies vantage point, the conditions that have made possible pro-anorexia websites and the cultural meanings inscribed in the practice of making and circulating these discourses. Second, the paper seeks to understand the media's narrow review of these sites as places breeding disorder and deviance at the expense of a broader investigation of what anorexia cybermasters are trying to convey through self-representation and on-line practices of social networking. Finally, it seeks to better contextualize the first two analyses through the benefit of post-feminist analyses that, after all, speak to the marginalized positions experienced by all types of girls and young women living in North American culture.

*From Whence She Came; the history of and response to Ana*

Anorexia Nervosa is self-induced starvation, overwhelmingly affecting four times as many girls and young women as men, whereby body weight is maintained under 15% of the norm.<sup>2</sup> *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* lists Anorexia Nervosa (AN), as an eating disorder, keeping company with Bulimia (purging), dual symptom and other eating illnesses. Those suffering often have body image distortion (viewing their emaciated bodies as overweight,) and meticulously create and follow rules regarding their food consumption. Health damage includes lost periods, hormonal disturbance, permanent damage to organs, bones, cardiovascular, immune and other biological systems and in extreme cases, death. Most health care researchers concur that while verifiable causes are unclear, social environment and biological factors both play a part in the formation of Anorexia. Psychologists and Social Workers have noted that over-achieving, "Type-A", "pleasing" girls acquire Anorexia Nervosa, which is, in part, a symptom of

<sup>2</sup> A National Comorbidity Replication Study (NCS-R) study conducted by Hudson et al (2007), representatively surveyed the US population for rates of eating disorders; it found roughly four times as many young women suffered from eating disorders, while .9% of women were at risk of anorexia specifically. The general risk of anyone acquiring an eating disorder in his/her lifetime was 4.5-6%. Importantly, eating disorders were found to often co-exist with other mental health disorders, though these are rarely diagnosed and treated.

the need for greater self-control. Conversely, contemporary biopsychiatric theory has claimed that Anorexia is, like Major Depression, caused by neurochemical disturbances in the brain and should therefore be treated with antidepressant medications. (Kaye et al 2005)<sup>3</sup> While the majority of researchers assume that both environment and biology are at play, no clear method of treatment (psychotherapy and/or drugs) has been found to be particularly successful in treating Anorexia Nervosa.

Finally, rates of recovery from Anorexia are extremely poor. A comprehensive review of studies of recovery from Anorexia over found poor overall prognosis; depending on the duration of follow-up care, a wide range of 33%–73% of sufferers recovered (meaning they had very limited residual or recurrent effects) over the past 50 years. More, one study notes that improved cases were not necessarily fully recovered but often incurred other psychiatric disorders, psychosocial problems, and needed further treatment. (Steinhausen 2002) For these reasons, Anorexia Nervosa has been, for medical and psychological experts, a thorn in the side, reminding us that full comprehension of this “disease” category eludes the boundaries of scientific knowledge practices. Responding to this problematic, critical theory and feminist researchers (i.e. Susan Bordo, feminist social workers, etc.) have suggested that Anorexia is a disease category better understood in the light of cultural practice, via theory that reads the disease *beyond* standard categories of mental illness, viewing symptoms as a broader reflection of values, habits and social dictums that make people, in this case, young females, sick.

### *Ana on-line*

It is difficult to date the earliest pro-Ana site. My research suggests that Ana arose alongside the

---

<sup>3</sup> In a recent article, for example, Kaye et al (2005) address serotonin (neurochemical) and genetic deviances that make individuals susceptible to developing an eating disorder; in a rare nod to social scientists, the team comments that individuals become susceptible, due to these biological issues, “perhaps in combination with environmental stressors.” (p. 575) Nevertheless, the study employs a single-cause paradigm, and does not test the role of environment in Anorexia.

mass availability of consumer-friendly webmastering programs, over the past 6 years, and have received mainstream media critique over the past few years. Conducting a comprehensive history of Ana sites is difficult because service providers routinely drop them because they violate hate language and health and wellness policies. To that end, a host of other (non-pro Ana) sites have arisen that appear to be pro-Ana, but in fact refuse the terms Ana (goddess anorexic) and Mia (bulimic) and insist on clinical terms that specify these states as disorders that individuals are trying to live with. Therein lies another controversy—Anorexic girls distinguishing themselves from “wannabees” those not diagnosed with AN and, who, scolds Ana, simply want attention, to be thin, and thus viewed as attractive. As such, Ana sites tend to vociferously reject any non-Ana visitors and chatrooms and Ana communities accept members only by scrutinized applications. These qualifications dovetail with the text of Ana websites, that religiously, preach the values of willfulness, sacrifice, self-control, paradoxically admire gluttonous consumption, glorifying thin images of celebrities and displaying themselves in fashions and accoutrement and aesthetics mimicking mainstream high fashion representations of beauty. Finally, Ana sites create adjunct spaces to communicate directly with other Ana girls. Ana sites allow anorexics to continue in their practices and glorify thinness even while despising their anorexic behaviors, all within a discourse aiming to keep each another alive.

*Moral Panics: Hysterical readings of Ana, in popular Media and Journalism*

While the traffic to these sites is heavy, researchers have only begun to study the apparent effect on anorexic-type behaviors. A Stanford study testing real-life use of sites found that 40% of anorexic girls have visited Pro-Ana sites, while 34% have visited recovery sites, while a quarter had visited neither. (Wilson et.al, 2006) While the analysis found that anorexic visitors to pro-Ana sites spent more time in the hospital (and less doing school work), their illness-related factors (weight change, medical effects, missed periods, etc.) did *not* become more severe due to

visits. Says co-author Wilson, “They didn’t seem to have a sicker health profile, which surprised us.” As well, Wilson comments that providers “worry” the sites are harmful and “feel that they must be.” (p2)

This feeling seems to invade the paradigm of other studies, which have also failed to bear out a documented effect of Ana upon Anorexics, or non-anorexics. One study, for example, tested the impact on self-esteem for non-Anorexics, and makes exaggerated claims for negative effects.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Norris’s 2006 content analysis study (to be discussed,) analyzed website content alone (and not effect,) and nevertheless makes an unsubstantiated claim for the content’s impact, suggesting it might have potential negative influences on adolescent health.

This sentiment is not lost on mainstream media reports that have provided voice to the health care professionals, advocacy groups, and anti-Ana anorexic girls who critique, often in isolation, *a single* element of the sites’ content—the celebration and glorification of the thin *effect* of anorexia via glamorous visual imagery of posed Ana bodies. Despite the lack of proof regarding negative effect, mainstream media is building a moral panic around Ana, dubbing Ana webmasters as dangerous, suggesting they lure unknowing girls into Anorexia. *Time Magazine* contributed to this hysteria in nonsensically stating that kids (non-Anorexics) are “susceptible to the proliferation of pro-Anorexia sites, but failed to back up this claim with data. (Reaves, 2001)

---

<sup>4</sup> . Researchers Bardone-Cone and O’Neil (2006), of the University of Missouri-Columbia, for example, conducted a review of sites via the “Stealth project” that problematically claimed effect, by testing the comments (regarding self-esteem) provided by *non*-Anorexic girls who viewed three groups of images from disparate websites: Pro-Ana, normal sized fashion models and a home decorating site. Having reviewed 300 pro Ana websites, they then added key elements to a test pro-Ana website, and asked 24 young women (not cited as Anorexic) to view this site, and a site with normal sized fashion models and a home decorating site. They found that users experienced lower self-esteem, and lower confidence in their appearance and perceived attractiveness after viewing the pro Ana sites, in contrast to viewing the models and home decorating sites-- which did not have similar affects. They problematically conclude that viewing these sites, generally, had ‘negative behavioral, cognitive and affective affects’ on women. These findings are uncontextualized and inflated, given that women who view thin models in fashion magazines have been shown to convey disenchantment with their body size, the comparison to the control (decorating websites,) is likely too obvious. More this reveals no knowledge about these sites causing an Anorexic effect.

In addition, in 2005, Holly Hoff, of the National Eating Disorders Association appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey* talk show claiming “With the pressures to be thin in our culture, [these websites are] like placing a loaded gun in the hands of someone who is feeling suicidal.”<sup>5</sup> *Time Magazine* covered the story (Song 2005) with testimony from an exiting anorexic stating she was “lured” in by the sites, and claiming “I can learn to be anorexic from the Internet.” (p1) Thus far there exist only anecdotal suggestions and hunches by researchers and advocates who fear the negative impact of Ana sites, which are nevertheless repeated in mainstream popular culture, with the impact of ascribing overdetermined power to Ana to induce Anorexia Nervosa. To be fair, there are some reports that show empathy and cast Ana in the light of compassionate adolescent. The same *Time* article noted above quotes an Ana webmaster admitting Anorexia is “a living hell” and stating she is trying to support girls who already live with anorexia. And yet, the predominant media message suggests a need to fear and mistrust these girls—an odd response, in my mind, one could suggest, to impressionable, self-loathing adolescents.

And so, it is unsurprising that many parents, researchers and advocates, including Holly Hoff, have taken aim at Yahoo and other free web-site hosts to remove these sites. Yahoo (which hosts the most pro-Ana sites) and other portals have responded defensively, insisting that Pro-Ana sites are routinely dumped, *not* due to public pressures, but for ethical reasons—that they violate their industry’s own “terms of service”, as the sole purpose of the content is “creating harm or inciting hate.” (Reaves, p3) On the other hand, other engines continue to violate statutes, allowing these sites to remain and new sites continue to resurface, making Ana sites difficult territory to track and requiring some concerted effort by Anorexics to maintain allegiance by site visitors.

Rather than the perpetuating ungrounded and unproven assumptions that pro-Ana sites are likely

---

<sup>5</sup> This quote comes from the Oprah show’s website:  
[http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/tows\\_past\\_20011004\\_c.jhtml](http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/tows_past_20011004_c.jhtml), accessed November 2007.

to cause ‘negative consequences’, or full-blown Anorexia, I advocate an effort that seeks to understand the communication of these girls, and that takes seriously the comment by (Stanford researcher) that these sites clearly “serve a need for our patients.” (Song, 2005) To that end, this paper calls more studies of the apparent effect of these sites, using an interdisciplinary approach combining content analysis and critical audience research. To that end, this paper will make the case for reading Ana in terms of her cultural communication. In the following, I provide a visual and textual reading of the tenets of pro-Ana sites that seeks to understand the cultural *meaning* of these behaviors and representations, in a context that considers that complex intersection of discursive social, health, biopsychiatric, and consumer norms that generate conflicting identity and social roles to girls.

### *Textual and Visual Trends of the Websites*

Past journalistic critiques that have focused on practices that allow anorexics to remain anorexic, and ignore the community building, glorification of thinness-glamour-consumerism triad, and the self-loathing that is unmistakable on these sites. Pro-Ana sites are better understood as filling in the void of knowledge regarding Anorexia around high rates and low recovery—a void where medication doesn’t work and girls routinely refuse the care of experts, and reject attempts to communicate, to the point of risking death. A formerly Anorexic student in my class enthused that, given the aggravation, social ostracism and isolation she experienced as an anorexic nudged into recovery (by family), she well understood the girls’ need for a website to communicate among peers. Through my own explorations and some comprehensive content analyses, it is clear that distinctive discourses and trends exist across Pro-Ana Websites.<sup>6</sup> I will provide a brief

---

<sup>6</sup> A content analysis study by Mark Norris (University of Ottawa, Children’s Hospital) et al (2006) looked at Internet websites via Ovid Medline and Pub Med .(They used both quantitative tools (acquired a theme that was saturated before listing it) and qualitative tools (focus groups and qualitative analysis—website content review and theme generation) to determine dominant content on Pro Ana sites. Norris et. al. found the key characteristics referenced in the following analysis, which I found to be verified in the random, non-scientific review of 10 pro-Ana sites that were elicited by searches on Google and Webcrawler, and links provided at the sites themselves.

overview of these sites and then a critique influenced by critical feminist theory. The methods I use are drawn from cultural studies, particularly Michel Foucault, addressing how social context, metaphor, repeating discursive patterns, and discursive absences create a text whereby we can better understand Ana as she mediates culture. The analysis is particularly interested in the role of power ascribed to girls in other media representations and discourses, the power Ana power ascribes to herself or believes she lacks, and the manners in which she attempts to take power. The analysis is informed by the feminist Foucaultian approaches of Susan Bordo and Emily Martin, that seek to understand how female power or absences of power are created in culture by subjects accepting limitations of female power as we enact and play out social roles, practices and discourses.

#### *Ana Stats*

Some statistics have been collected on the sites providing some context that could be useful for evaluation of the webmasters. According to Norris et. al. (2006), only 25% were updated each month, and 50% of websites were hosted by one or two free home page providers. Each of these violated provisions for non-inclusion of information on purging and requirements to provide disclaimers and warnings. 58% of sites had warning/disclaimers. This seems to suggest, unsurprisingly, that the girls do not predominantly come from wealthy families or the ability to support annual hosting fees. Researchers have suggested too that 75% of sites demonstrated a reading level above 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 67% included information about the webmaster, and *all* listed webmasters were female; 4 were adolescents. It is fair to presume, then, that Ana represents middle and lower-income teens, rather than younger girls, and chooses to reveal her self through and on her website.

#### *Reading Ana*

Pro-Ana sites routinely refer to Ana as “goddess”, and Mia as “gross”, referencing those

who purge. This dualist framing is directly linked to Ana's creed that blends willpower with thinness and beauty, and claims to abhor gluttony in all forms. And yet, paradoxically, Ana's figure is extreme, sensuous—gluttonous. She takes extravagant effort to dress herself in the guise of a high fashion model, replete with high end, revealing clothes, pouty expression, and photo-shoot aesthetic. She places her own image in the company of extremely thin celebrities (i.e. Kath Moss, Christina Aguilera, etc. Sites routinely house discourse such as the following: "This isn't a place for the weak. This site isn't looking to rescue you. This is a place for those who don't conform to the gluttonous world we live in. It's not our fault others have no control over their own bodies and live a fast-food, fat-soaked existence." (Ana's Black Rose, 2006) Ana's behavior however both rues and celebrates gluttony in her excessive consumption of glamour images, excessive starvation practices, bingeing, and fervent religiosity. In fact, Ana paradoxically disdains excess in the practice of celebrating it. This performed excess speaks to what Mady Schutztman (1999) refers to as a hysterical mimicking of pathological advertising images of women that are routinely replicated in popular culture. These images include women in violent frames, excessively thin, violated or battered, or presented as fragmented body parts. Even this year, popular primetime network TV Show, America's Next Top Model required contestants to pose for glamour photos in the aesthetic of murder, including beheading. (2007) Violent, degrading and excessive imagery is routine media diet for young American women.

Ana is not your common media consumer. She is an adolescent with predictable behavioral penchants—she is short-tempered, rudely willful, and alternatively self-reflective, wise beyond her age, defensive and blind to her own flaws. She desperately clings to her friendship group and builds community, forfeits family for friends, and engages in quaint behaviors, such as using trendy self-identifying lingo as illustrated in the names Ana and Mia. At the same time, Ana has an identity crisis, displayed in unbearable self-hate and lack of self-esteem. This package positions Ana as vulnerable, providing a logic for her attraction to the discipline required by extreme starvation practices. At the same time, the discourses of Ana must

be considered in terms of the *active* stance of agency she assumes in webmastering a controversial site, while living in the context of (what she defines as ) conflict with (concerned) friends and family, and within the vulnerable developmental period as adolescent or teen. This brazen attempt to articulate her anorexic behavior must be considered in both personal (developmental) and consumerist contexts, and how these intersect.

Though media routinely frames Ana as projecting her behavior as lifestyle choice, Norris et. al. (2006) found that only one stated Anorexia was a lifestyle; others made it clear they provided “support for people with anorexia.” (p 3) A closer look at the themes of the sites helps to reveal a more common theme: a distinctive, painful reluctance to live in ambivalence, coinciding with the hope that someone will really listen to Ana.

Most every Ana page (22% according to Norris), for example, provides a “Thinspiration” page, mixing religious metaphors with anorexic lifestyle descriptions. These include thinspirational photo galleries (thin celebrities), quotes and writing that serve to motivate and sustain anorexic behavior. Community.livejournal.com’s thinspiration page, for example asserts “Nothing tastes as good as thin feels.” “Thinspiration” across these sites includes tips and tricks to facilitate weight loss (such as using nail growth polish to keep nails from becoming brittle) and how to count calories. One of the most popular (and most available) sites, “Ana’s Black Rose,” (2006) lists “Thin Commandments” characterized by the need for self-control, glorifying near-starvation and a deep self-loathing. One commandment states “I believe in control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos that is my world.” While the next asserts: “I am the most vile, worthless, and useless person ever to have existed on this planet, and “I am totally unworthy of anyone’s time and attention.” A succeeding commandment claims a need for “oughts, musts and shoulds” to govern daily behavior, and “perfection” to achieve salvation, and that Ana should disregard comments challenging Ana’s right to self-hate, her wholly black and white perception of the world, and her “abnegation of the body.”

In typical adolescent form, Ana writes letters to her friends and posts them on her site.

One such letter bespeaks of a curious authoritarianism coupled with the theme of salvation: “I expect a lot from you. You are not allowed to eat too much. I expect you to drop your caloric intake and increase your exercise. I will push you to the limit. You must take it because you cannot defy me. Pretty soon, I am with you always.” This authoritarian discourse is meant as well as a voice Ana should take on as her own. Interestingly, this is a voice of God —“I am with you always”—a voice signifying a higher power that Ana is urged to take on in the practice of her own self-governance. This secularized, glamorized religiosity, while not bizarre in North America culture, is an aberration in its ubiquity across Ana sites. Ana needs her community and some exterior power, to a greater degree than even most teenagers do, as a stage of identity development and to boost her chance of survival.

Immersed in, absorbing and reproducing consumer culture, Ana replicates not only the behavioral practices associated with glamour culture, but media practices as well. Mimicking tactics of glamour magazines, Pro-Ana webmasters create “polls” asking visitors to check-off their favorite thing to do to avoid eating such exercising, binging on diet (with diet soda or gum). Pro-Ana sites also provides blogs, chatrooms or links to these, that are distinctly noted for an insider (pro-anorexic) community. In these spaces she engages in an acts trying to live with ambivalence in her willful-gluttonous lifestyle, again, with ambivalent results. The blogs are significant in their dual willful insistence on constraint, and active starvation—agency toward the end of remaining (barely) alive, and coveting extreme thinness as beauty. At the same time, they sound paternalistic in their self-recrimination for purging or even eating or feeling hunger. For example, Ana’s blogs also include excessive and tedious listings of caloric intake, followed by self-crimination, such as “Food is Evil” and “I am a big fat cow.”

On-line environments allow Ana’s self-surveillance to take on another form whereby fellow bloggers are positioned as the readers of Ana’s deviant caloric in-take. Because these are blogs, the visiting Ana readers rarely respond to other’s caloric intake or self-vision; on chat rooms, however, the same is the case. Surely others couldn’t care nearly as much as Ana about

her self-professed lack of willpower and insufficient body. Ana's adolescent need for approval and deep self-hate and need for perfection, however, makes these public forums irresistible venues to aid her mission. It seems likely in fact that the one-way communication structure of these blogs meet Ana's needs—avoiding the reprisal of those who would insist she is valuable, beautiful, self-destructive. Ana, one might say is seeking a revolution of the self—a type of reform that, requiring expert and tedious scrutiny and management (of calories, parents and expert concerns, etc) in order that she not be caught and not die—a feat that is achievable by few.

*Dualized mind and body in a postmodern venue*

A coherent pattern of dualizing body from self appears throughout these written discourses, particularly the recriminations. The body is viewed as enemy, something wanton, voracious, needing management. In their exchanges, the girls are typically adolescent in their fierce respect, protection and encouragement of one another. One interesting exchange on a blog of Ana fans of Ska music culture illustrated a rare confrontational exchange between two Anorexic girls, one—upping each other on whose identity was more authentic (in Ska culture.) But following two fierce exchanges, the girls apologized and uttered a deep respect for the other on the other, based on a stated respect to live out one's life in the manner in which one chooses. While the rejection of “wannabe” culture is common among pro-Ana girls, this longer exchange illustrates an important creed of Ana that rises above the others “Do What Thee Will.” For in the end, Ana is possessed by ambivalences she doesn't understand and cannot forgo the desire to starve. Ana allows herself to rely on few things: respect for self-determination and identity difference.

This brief sketch provides a number of references to broader themes of Ana's lifestyle supporting neoliberalist culture typified by self-responsibility, self-control, productivity at work and home that support the national economy, wrapped in a religious-type of fervor. Ana's call for will power and control over voraciousness has obvious Christian overtones referencing the

need to sacrifice in order to receive salvation. And at the same time, it references a western history that has framed women of excess need (that breach their social role parameters) of being hysterical, otherwise mentally ill, deficient mothers, and witches, among other things. Susan Bordo (1993) and Emily Martin (1994) have each referenced the “voracious feminine” as a figure deplored in western imagery, suggesting a monstrous and sickening type of femininity that has been socially unacceptable. As Bordo has argued, similar monstrous figures have been ascribed to the feminist in recent western history and women’s body images have tended, historically, to morph in direct proportion to the amount of social power women hold, and regress with backlashes against feminism. Consider, for example the thin, popular Twiggy figure during the 1960’s women’s movement, and the Kate Moss figure popularized during the Reagan backlashes against women concurrent with the vocal deploring of feminists (such as Candice Bergen’s single motherhood character on *Murphy Brown*.) Today, the monstrous feminine has transformed to the anorexic herself—a figure who loathes herself for her voraciousness, and literally sees herself as an obese and extreme figure in need of discipline by herself and others. Ana, in fact, assists others in recognizing and assailing her ills, in despising her and withholding edible and emotional sustenance. Ana is the web 2.0 anorexic’s version of ‘mutilating one’s self internally’ (as Bordo argued in regard to anorexics,) coupled with an intense religious hatred of the voracious, excessive feminine. But, as well, there is a neoliberal component to Ana.

Ana as webmaster, represents a monstrous and performative figure, requires total self-control in her black and white world in order to achieve “success.” The Ana figure who performs on-line then proscribes the rules and religiosity of anorexic behavior, revealing that success means excessive abidance of social and cultural norms, and simultaneous self-management of extreme behaviors that might cause prevent death. As required by western Protestant culture, the Anorexic must sacrifice, foregoing friends, school, and family relationships to foster continued success with her eating disorder. Ana sites facilitate these sacrifices by providing an alternative community of friends who won’t abandon Ana, given that they share the same ambivalences.

Laden with self-sacrifice, Ana bears burdens (sickness, sadness, self-hate, loneliness) and must cope. Here the websites provide a venue for Ana to engage with others, share tricks for starving and survival. Community networking and bonding is facilitated by bracelets (for sale) that identify Anorexics to one another, and signify alliances in fasting and actual person-to-person communication in blogs and chatrooms.

Ana's website, thinspiration, and blogging discourses suggest that she is conscious of the pathologization of her eating disorder by Psychiatry, and yet insists that Ana obtains an intoxicating power from fending off hunger and achieving the thin aesthetic (she deems glamorous). Ana seeks the web outlet for a number of reasons. This power is so narcotizing she wants to proclaim it and proselytize. Because Ana has opposition all around her, as an adolescent she needs the strength of community to reinforce her identity and to provide a silent audience also condemning her weight and self. And finally, Ana cannot resist the opportunity to place her own in anorexic, glamorized photographic image among celebrity images. For Ana, this collision of images rationalizes her chosen (emaciated) aesthetic as normal. Ana views herself as monstrous in her voraciousness, and yet in photographing herself and placing this image alongside published (accepted) images of beauty, Ana is attempting to see herself as beautiful—trying to accept herself at least for a moment. Yet on most days, as Ana's logs and chatrooms reveal, she sees herself as a monstrous image—the classic voracious female unable to control herself. Critical viewers, on the other hand experience this as the monstrous, excessive female in her inability to *stop* starving. In either case, Ana is performing personal reform and commitment in a *public* space, through a discourse meant to counter over-consumptive society.

### *Neoliberalism to Neoconsumption*

In keeping with Bordo's analytic model regarding the anorexic, Ana finds synchronicity with control, on the dualistic axis, distinguishing the voracious body from the willful mind. She works on this axis, seeking purity and self-control to attain order in the midst of a machinated

life. On the gender power axis, she is aligned with the “male” side of control and power, allied in her hatred and desire to extinguish the lines of the female body. And yet, as I have been suggesting, as new media anorexic, Ana is ambivalent in this virtual age, where complex and contradictory identities are allegedly commonplace, and still cause her pain—the pain of imperfections/contradictions. Ana is unsure how to manage her modernist mindset in the midst of a postmodern culture and indeed a (postmodern) virtual environment. Repelled by her voraciousness, but clinging to the new hyper thin feminine as appealing/sexual/desirable—the body without curves, the non-desiring body as the only desirous female body—Ana is both active and passive, self and other.

Self-representing, positioned in photos that replicate the male gaze and the stance (and emaciated bodies) of runway models, Ana is both male and female, willful and gluttonous. Presenting her self as object of the gaze, but actively starving, Ana in fact performs ambivalence—the activity of the self in her effort to disappear (vomiting, starving, checking meds, laxatives, exercise toward calorie-burning, rather than muscle-building) even while she idolizes and glorifies this monstrous image of the (female-male) self, she slowly, painstakingly mutilates the self in the presence of, indeed with in collusion with, her Ana sisters. Like the ambivalence of workers who continue to support their families with unfulfilling jobs, and consumers who continue to purchase goods meant to degrade, Ana troupes on, with what might appropriately be termed a conscious brand of false consciousness, support an unfulfilling neoliberalist lifestyle.

And despite this formed ambivalence Ana is perhaps the knowing medium, with more insight into, or least awareness of, her ambivalence, as evidenced by her histrionic, paradoxical claims to willpower, self-hate and hyper consumption. Ana offers her ambivalence honestly, as a lifestyle that doesn't dissipate for her with therapy provided by experts or the concern or condemnation of her family.

### *The Ambivalence of Neoconsumption*

Ana's ambivalent identity, projected with great adolescent clarity from these webpages and blogs makes it apparent that these girls are literally dying for coherence. Not expecting to achieve it, Ana is willing to pay the price of slow death apparently to simply communicate and carry on. This is no hunger strike. These girls are resigned to ambivalence, hopelessly attached to neoliberalist consumer culture, which is seeded by the same contradictions of gluttony and abstinence. So evident and obvious are these contrasts that it might be more accurate to suggest that Ana, with her paradoxical modernist insistence on the coherent, regulated, mechanized body (rejecting hunger) and her hyperconsumption (of starvation, glamour, binging, etc.), is in fact neoconsumptive. Ana is not trying to hide her ambivalences. Rather, she is splaying them out for all to see in what could easily be termed a call for help or at least a call for attention, and certainly for voice.

It is essential to understand Ana in terms of her embrace of the idealized glamorized female body, entirely constructed via western consumer culture. The value of this body, notably, is based on its ability to consumer expensive clothing items, to nearly starve and therefore become the ultimate representation for western male desire—passive availability that takes up as little space as possible, feeds fantasies of luxury and wealth, and asks nothing but that the viewer feels flattered. The exchange value of this idealized female subject, in other words, is excessive spoiling of the viewing subject. And yet, Ana is beyond satisfaction herself and distressed for it. Where idealized female figures simply offer her image to the viewer, Ana is a whole girl, offering a larger picture, replete with extreme forms of hunger and fat battering, personal issues and upfront, angry ambivalence. This subject comes, then, with a viewing price much higher than your standard western female glamour girl image.

### *Norms of health and the idealized gendered body*

So, if Ana's anger and ambivalence are unmistakable, why the moral media panic in response to Ana? And why have the mainstream media roundly suggested Ana and her webpages possess the ability to inspire deviant eating behavior in other girls? Why this level of public fear and outrage, in contrast to the decided lack of critique of consumer and celebrity culture, which has, in a replicated social science studies, been shown to produce low self-esteem? The answer, I believe rests in cultural dictates for both health and normative gender behavior, and the need to obfuscate the contradictory messages these media arenas promote to girls, in a repetitive daily diet. And finally, this mucky level of social awareness puts fear in moralistic, non-comprehending adults whose mental health advice goes unheeded as these girls toy with death.

#### *Biopsychiatry and Media Morality*

Emily Martin, in her book *Flexible Bodies*, argues that the cause/effect model of science remains predominant in western culture in immune discourses from the days of polio to the age of Aids. These simple system and the cause/effect models continue to be the foremost manner in which mental disorders are investigated, a particular problem now that issues once the purview of psychology (such as anorexia and depression) are now immersed in a research environment of biological psychiatry. Where social workers and therapists have since the 1980's been arguing that power is a key issue of anorexic girls, some psychiatrists are now looking internally at anorexics to understand their disorder as a possible neurotransmitter issue (as major depression is theorized.) Recently, for example, Walter Kayet et. al. conducted a study entitled the "neurobiology of anorexia" suggesting that the "disorder" is due to dysfunctioning 'serotonin and Other Neuronal Systems.' (2005 Kayet et al.) In fashion similar to depression research, this study suggests that "considerable physiologic and pharmacologic studies suggest that disturbances of 5-HT activity occur during the ill state and persist after recovery". (p1) This is intriguing, they suggest, because neural systems contribute to appetite and because drugs that act on this particular neural (5-HT) system have "some" efficacy. And yet, the authors bend to the complex

systems model briefly, qualifying that “brain neurotransmitter pathways do not work in isolation. Neurotransmitter systems have complex interactions, and so it is likely that multiple systems are involved.” (p.1) Admitting that “We have perhaps more tools for investigating 5-HT activity and more understanding of its function than of other neurotransmitter systems” and due to limited space, 5-HT is the focus of the paper, “although it is likely that other systems play a role.” (p.1)

Emily Martin makes it clear that simple models are rarely appropriate for understanding bodily illness, and they tend to be seeded with cultural assumptions (such as racism and sexism) that rarely get analyzed, seeming irrelevant to simple cause/effect models. Kayet et al’s finding that “individuals who are ill with AN have a significant reduction of cerebrospinal fluid concentrations of 5-HT metabolites compared to control women” (p. 2) could show biological reactions to psychic problematics. In this case, for example, Anorexia would be a cause rather than a symptom of a biological disorder.

To add to their “proof” the authors state that, “brain imaging has been used to characterize 5-HT1A and 5-HT2A receptors in ill and recovered AN participants, compared to age-matched control women.7,8 emotional valence to internal and external stimuli.” Following the questioning of Anthropologist Joe Dumit (2003), who argues against an absolute biologist approach to psychiatry and imaging technologies, one can legitimately pose the question: so what? One expects that psychological issues might indeed result in alterations to body chemistry. The more pressing question, made by Kayet et. al. themselves, is why a more complex model is not employed to understand the relationship between anorexia and hormonal and neurochemical changes. In not doing so, the relationship is reduced to the old modernist cause -effect scenario, leaving little role for culture in the calculation of what anorexia is and means, let alone thinking through the conditions that make possible anorexia nervosa. For example, according to Ana sites, anorexia is supported as a means of coping for girls who experience difficult life situations such as abuse, troubled relationships, death, and problematic feelings (sadness, loneliness). If these

particular populations are affected, it would seem crucial that researchers take social experience into account along with neurotransmitter activity.

### *The Contradiction of Fitness*

Ana is working to bring evidence to a complex model understanding of anorexia, citing with great clarity, through the thin-spiration tenets, exactly what anorexic girls are concerned about. We need to understand both soma and culture in order to understand the new realm of behavioral mental disorders, including Anorexia Nervosa. The ideal female, deeply embedded in the medical and therapy discourses of Anorexia Nervosa is not the consumer culture image of hyper-thinness, but a version of that—a healthy, woman, who is within normal weigh boundaries and somehow resists the desire to become that ideal thin girl on the cover of *Cosmo*, dating the most popular boys at school.

Emily Martin (1994) described the ideal subject in western society as “flexible”—adaptive to continually changing social values and technologies. This new elite of the healthy, and highly adaptive to change, however, represents only “superior individuals” (across ethnic, racial, gender, sexual identity or age group in the nation. Martin worried ]that inscribed standards of health differed across bodies, so that, in keeping with historic western biases, ‘certain’ bodies will be viewed as rigid, inflexible and non-ideal. Ideal girls in North American culture are indeed meant to be healthy—in body and mind. Anorexic girls violate both of these health mandates. In the context of neoliberalist culture, Anorexic girls are viewed as failing to resist the temptation of the glamorized hyperthin girls whose repetitive image in culture creates a mandate for girl’s behavior, appearance and weight. Hence, the contradiction of culture: healthy/normal girls must resist the (mandated) ideal of hyperthinness. In keeping with diagnostic trends over the past few centuries, young women who succumb to these image mandates are psychically affected by the contradictory message to be thin, but not too thin, and to be strong, self-actualized, and utterly competent, “fit” in the face of insult and objectification, are deemed mentally abnormal or

deviant. Ana spells out this contradiction for the dense among us, putting her body on the line to make the point—if only we were listening.

We can understand Anorexic girls and ourselves better if we consider the power ascribed to and denied girls in the context of contemporary media and culture—specifically the inherent insult of body objectification. Ana provides evidence that the power denied girls in idealized hyperthin consumer image commodifies identity possibilities in a way that starves girls—takes away something essential to the formation of self and character and allows for self-determination. Ana is victim to the power vacuum girls encounter in western culture, seeking the ideal body that is hyper thin, seeking to seduce, perform for, and please. Ana seeks perfection through self-control. She is competitive—egging on others like herself to achieve more than they thought possible, to starve to near death. And yet, Ana is appropriately saddened by her desire to nearly annihilate herself, and possesses a deep self-loathing. Paradoxically, Ana as webmaster *takes* power beyond self-starvation. She self-produces (webpage) and builds community. She nearly starves to make her point and then she prevents herself and her sisters from dying of starvation through vigilant watch/surveillance, partnerships and alliances, and through self-expression—via self-photography, and writing—namely, blogging, chatting. Ana is staying alive to make her case to culture, along with her (barely breathing) crew.

### *Ana and Performativity*

One gets a clearer view of these images of Ana girls in the context of the history of medicalized photography. Ana can be viewed as the latest mutation of gendered photography, in this case, *self-representative* (as opposed to expert-driven) photography meant for public consumption. Ana here is producer and consumer, which, again is indicative of post-modern person's ability to respond to media and culture by making media and art ourselves. Ana is consumer of idealized female images of consumer culture and producer of those images via her self-image. Ana also hyper non-consumes, starving herself for “perfection.” This tension— embracing and rejecting

neoliberal consumer culture —is neoconsumptive. Ana's consumption is deeply neoliberal in aspiring to idealized gender norms via thrift and containment, and yet her hyperconsumption of excessive thinness positions her as irresponsible and non-governing.

Uniquely, Ana performatively expresses this tension through her webmastering, self-photography, tinged by an ambivalence in regard to her self, her behavior and even her goods. Ana ultimately cares not about these commodities but instead seeks that the viewer understand. Where previously anorexics enacted their selves in everyday life, Ana now does so for a wider audience that is meant to be insider, but which she *knows* is expansive, ranging from those in the spectrum of the eating disordered, therapists, researchers, parents and curious outsiders, among others. These sites are instructive in their redundancy that seems a product of both adolescence and in a high melodrama, which delivers the simple message that Ana is starving herself for coherence, but can't identify the ideological conflict between her ill behaviors and neoliberal consumer culture.

Mentally ill/distressed individuals, particularly women, have been represented by medical experts whose images products have established a host of critical research revealing the cultural biases (sex, gender, race, etc) inscribed on the female body. Performatively, Ana self-photographs and self-represents what *she* generally acknowledges to be a mental disorder. Resisting the history of photographic subjection, Ana seeks to simply establish herself, through these performative representations that mimic (and arguably to critical eyes, ridicule, in their melodramatic context), popular consumer culture images of the ideal young woman. And yet this is the innocent parody born of adolescent pain, angst, confusion, knocking up against the contradictory call to be whole and thin beyond reasonable expectation. This conflict leads Ana to self-photograph in a gaudy celebrity culture motif and then note her starvation in search of perfection. These sites represent a glaringly clear *recognition* of the contradictory culture we live in, from the mouths of young girls who can't escape it or articulate it. And while the glamour images of fashion magazines and Ana sites are all surface, and external, Ana is not. Ana has the

intention to continue to self-represent, in some form—to preserve and to refuse to die.

Mady Schutzman, in her book, *the real thing* (1999), argued that victims of hysteria have been represented by the portrait as “proof”. Photos have historically been seen as representing an accurate self image – a seemingly timeless, essential, and irrefutable snapshot of the self. Ana creatively takes power in *owning* her photo. In this act, she confronts, probably unknowingly, the historic pathologization of the allegedly organically sick female. Like feminist historians who have suggested that hysterical women were acting out against unbearable gender role constraints, Ana’s self-image, albeit in the guise of consumer culture, can be seen as resistive. Ana is both presence in self-defining (via her webpage) and absence (in starving and thus succumbing to consumer culture/thrift/self-loathing). Ana is both exclusion (as member of a deviant health community violating essential standards for young female girls) and inclusion (as a member of her own self-created on line community of girls ill with anorexia, aware, ambivalent and determined to survive.) As such, she creates a different kind of proof in the portrait. Ana’s portrait, in appearing on her self-made webpage, also represents the process of becoming—a subjectivity in process. She is subject/ object; producer/consumer; presence/absence and the process of living in ambivalence. In this sense, Ana’s photos, as contextualized on her webpage, are perhaps one of the most deeply honest portraits of girls working to salvage an identity in the midst of personal trauma, eating disordered illness, paradoxical consumer-neoliberalist messages and a host of messages from those who continue to critique Ana’s response to these threats as, simply, sickness.

Jessica Dalloway writes of Sandra Bernhardt’s parody of whites imitating blacks in her 1990 film *Without You I’m Nothing*, noting that Bernhardt’s character slips between Jewish, Lesbian, white Gentile and black. Dalloway comments these are “such tenuous identities that they all remain simultaneously real and unreal, realized through performative acts and spectatorship.” (2003, p. 142) For Ana, it is the web, and its opportunity to create performance and social networking sites, that provide such a postmodern outlet to Ana allowing dual

performativity and spectatorship. Ana's world is as controversial as Bernhardt's and yet, Ana knows from experience to expect public condemnation at this excessive demonstration of contradiction, and female adolescent angst.

### *Ana and Post/Third Wave Feminism*

There are, improbably, important similarities in the writings of—a range of—postfeminists and Pro Ana Webmasters and web users. As well, similarities exist between the discourses that deride postfeminism and the miscommunications among second and third wave feminisms that can aid our understanding of Ana and help us to read her as a reflection of culture and cultural miscommunications that hinge on issues of gender and power.

Feminists often describe postfeminism as a backlash to feminism, which ignores continued social and economic gender-based inequities in North American society and thus encourages a path of greedy self-determination, that is not articulated in the context of a social movement. Amber Kinser (2004), for example, contends that third wave feminism has been co-opted by and depoliticized the central tenets of feminism and risks becoming a movement highlighting “personal journey and resistance that are devoid of politics, and weak feminism: working for only as much social change as a patriarchal social order can outrun.” (p. 124) Major leaders of the American women's movement from the mainstream and from the left worry that postfeminism has been co-opted by the right.

Susan Douglas (2002) has termed postfeminism an “invention” promoted most vigorously by the right, aided and abetted all along by the corporate media, deciding that feminism is irrelevant and undesirable, having made millions of women bitter. Douglas makes the links between consumer culture's creation of an impossible ideal female image and women's ongoing distresses. Douglas is responding in this brief article to media constructions of postfeminism. There is more to be said

here, regarding the large population of young people (who, for example, I encounter in my children's grammar schools and in my college classrooms across the United States and Canada) who have been weaned throughout their mainstream education and media diet, on a slew of anti-female discourses. Identity, after all, is negotiated as much against anti-feminist and anti-female institutional discourses, as from visual and consumer culture that reifies a normativized ideal female who is fragmented, external, pleasing, still largely passive and hyper consuming. It is within this context that young females grow up, embedded in the normative discourses of neoliberalism and capitalism. Consumption is a considerable venue through which postmodern individuals craft themselves.

*Third Waves Feminism meets Post feminism.*

By referencing a variety of postfeminisms, it is my intention to give space to the yearnings and distresses that reflect populations who have access to feminist therapists, psychiatrists, theorists, researchers and yet, who distinctively address us as those who have not heard their objections, which causes these girls increased pain. Many third wavers are irritated with second wavers for not understanding the context of their lives and their inability to launch a cohesive, coherent movement against this now culturally embedded normative representations. And conversely, Gloria Steinem, in the introduction to Rebecca Walker's anthology (1995) on third wave feminism, worries that third wavers are ignorant of the history of the second wave. Feminists clearly have communication problems based on generational status, not to mention race and ethnicity, class, and the media backlashes against both feminism and postfeminism.

To that end, Ana can be viewed at this communication crossroads, identifying with postfeminists and fearing the ignorance of second wavers. Ana, like many postfeminists, has abandoned a utopian vision of rescuing femininity through feminism, fearful that young feminists, having fought the good fight, would have, in the end, won nothing and instead forfeited personal

happiness and pleasure. There is certain amount of self-preservation in the discourses of third wave feminism and, though it sounds alarming, in self-representations of Ana.

Third wave feminism sees itself as a new approach to feminism that is deeply situated in the socio-political and economic environment of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has manifest girls who situate themselves *against* multitudinous feminist movements of past, for reasons that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wavers are still attempting to know. Third wave feminists have produced numerous anthologies, special journal issues, journalism reports, and conferences on the topic. The lack of understanding of third wave feminism is lamented on all sides of feminist divides. Third wavers are distressed that second wavers view them as self-centered, haven given up on personal politics garnered via social movement politics.<sup>7</sup>

Noting the problematics of splitting politics around age, many have articulated the need to move past generational conceptualizations of feminist movements, to a postfeminism that is dispersed, broad-scale and reflexive so that past and present are subject to critique. Jennifer Purvis (2004), writing on the topic of intergenerational feminism, argues that feminists of all waves deny allegiance with the third wave, conceiving it to be “apolitical and exclusively interested in the presumably narrow matters of sexuality and identity, oft conceived as strictly personal.” (p 94)

Space precludes an exhaustive detailing of the nuances across postfeminisms and third wavers. I want instead, to make the broad case that the tenets of postfeminism are very similar to what are dubbed “critiques” of third wave feminism. It seems to me that mainstream tenets of critique are driving our understandings of what young women encounter in terms of gender expectations, and that we, “older” allegedly second-wave feminists allow these tenets to muddy our readings and in turn, prohibit our deeper understanding of the cultures that these women inhabit. We need to get back to a vision of feminist diversity, but to also address the causes for

---

<sup>7</sup> This understanding is articulated across a range of articles of third wavers and postfeminists in Davis’ anthology and in Barbara Findlen’s book, *Listen up: voices of the next feminist generation*.

our divergences and inability to actually hear one another's problems grounded in gender issues. I suspect that this root is similar to the media backlashes against Ana and grounded in fear and self-pride. To this end, I wish to briefly articulate postfeminism to Ana, to suggest some overlapping communication problems between mainstream media and therapists, and Pro-Ana Webmasters.

To understand the context for writing and doing feminism, and for that matter, for being Pro-Ana, one must understand that context in which these girls find themselves negotiating their identities. So how can we define this context? It clearly depends on the impact that mainstream consumer culture has had on girls, and how feminist education and other alternative "knowledges" have worked to mediate that. Findlen's "Introduction" to her third wave anthology notes that third wavers have been weaned on HIV/Aids crisis, increased visibility of diverse forms of family and the rise of lesbian/gay/bi/trans movement, the advent of women's studies programs and a greater awareness of feminism. Clearly, the writers in this volume have experienced the politics of feminist movements.

And yet, there is another, I will argue, larger, well-documented group of students (whom I have encountered in State Colleges and Universities across the US and Canada), who have not experienced women's studies, and have little knowledge of what has or does constituted feminist theory or the movement. This group of students has been impacted strongly by mainstream media's depictions of gayness, feminism and femaleness and also gets counted by mainstream media in the post-feminist community. Their brand of feminism, learned via cultural practice rather than feminist theory, seems to seek personal peace -- to negotiate the ambivalent neoliberal/consumerist culture in which they live. This woman seeks to be liberated from the (impossible) task of trying to bring structural gender equity in culture where obtaining feminist education, even in higher education, requires personal seeking and dedication, and where otherwise, mainstream misogynist images of the female prevail, and where second wavers and

third wavers remain separated and miscommunicating. Ana is perhaps a more tragic version of this form of self-determination.

It seems to me that are significant themes shared between Anorexic girls with disorders and third wave/post-feminists. These include: an irritation with experts, parents, social workers and other feminists not exactly, and a desire to reveal the contradictions inherent in demanding conformity of young girls (in terms of bodies, pleasing behaviors, well-rounded personalities and talents) and in neoliberalist mandates to hyperconsume (products, images, standard femininity.) Third wave feminists are angry and annoyed at even second wave feminists' difficulty in hearing their concerns. But as well, third waves form their identities differently – they live in contradiction, and form identities that are multiple, and contradictory in the face of modernist calls for dualizing mind/body, women/men, active/passive. Anorexics, at a further extreme, can be said to embody this contradiction in the form of eating disorder.

Ana, improbably, rises up to the political level of third wave feminisms in *taking* space for her voice—in the midst of a hypersaturated mediated Internet environment that, notably, embraces multiple contradictory girl representations. In this space, Ana shares with third wave feminists a rejection of neoliberalist culture, and insists, perhaps barely audibly against the din of media outrage and expert confusion, that she simply *should* be heard. And while third wavers calmly battle for space amongst what they view as a feminist autocracy, Ana simply takes webspace amongst the commerce and representational chaos, and presents her self.

In the post-post world ten years since Emily Martin argued culture required that we inhabit flexible bodies, born of this society's conflicting calls for overindulgence, hyper willpower and gendered body norms, Ana has put her body on the line as spectacle of ambivalence, quietly hovering above death/defeat. Ana's message is that she is still alive—having voice and carrying on in her mediation of the contradictory messages culture sends to girls, in an extreme but altogether recognizable fashion reflecting consumer culture, and the problematics of feminist

communication. In an urgent way, Ana represents a sense of hope —that women in distress will continue to put their voices forward into culture, against the odds.

### Works Cited

- Ana's Black Rose. Personal Webpage. URL Anasblackrose.2ya.com [March 2, 2006]
- Bardone-Cone, Anna and Kamila O'Neil (2006). Stealth project tracks the Effects of Pro-anorexia websites." *Eating Disorders Review*. May/June 2005. P5.
- Bordo, Susan. (1993). *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dalloway, Jessica. (2003). "Rethinking Feminism and Visual Culture; book review essay." *National Women's Studies Journal*, VOL. 15 NO. 2, pp 135-143.
- Douglas, Susan. 2002. "Manufacturing Postfeminism", *In These Times*, URL. [Posted May 13, 2002.]
- Findlen, Barbara, (Ed.) 1995. *Listen Up; voices from the next feminist generation*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.
- Hudson, James I., Eva Hiripi, Jr., Harrison G. Pope, and Ronald C. Kessler. (2007). "The Prevalence and Correlates of Eating Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication," *Biological Psychiatry*, pages 348-358,
- Kaye, Walter, Guido Frank, Ursula Bailer and Shannan Henry. (2005). "Neurobiology of Anorexia Nervosa Clinical Implications of Alterations of Function of Serotonin and Other Neuronal Systems. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 37, 575-579.
- Kinser, Amber. (2004). "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism", *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 3: 124-153
- Martin, Emily. (1994). *Flexible Bodies; Tracking Immunity In American Culture From The Days of Polio To The Age Of AIDS*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Miller, Toby. (1998). *Technologies of truth: Cultural citizenship and the popular media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Norris, Mark, Katherine M. Boydell, Leora Pinhas, and Debra Katzman (2006.) "Ana and the Internet: A Review of Pro-Anorexia Websites," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 39:6 000-000 2006.
- Potter, Nancy. *Commodity/Body/Sign: Borderline Personality Disorder and The Signification of Self-Injurious Behavior*. Johns Hopkins University Press 2003, PPP Vol 10, No 1/ March 2003
- Purvis, Jennifer. (2004), "Grrrls and Women Together in the Third Wave: Embracing the Challenges of Intergenerational Feminism(s)," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 3: 93-123
- Reaves, Jessica. (2001.) *Anorexia Goes High Tech*, *Time Magazine*, July 31, 2001. Retrieved from the world wide web May 19, 2007.
- Roof, Judith (1997). "Generational Difficulties; or, The Fear of a Barren History", in D. Looser and E.A. Kaplan (Eds.) *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*. Minneapolis and

London: University of Minnesota Press, pp.69–87.

Rose, Nikolas. (2006). *The politics of life itself: Biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Schutzman, Mady. (1999.) "*the real thing: performance, hysteria and advertising*," Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Showalter, Elaine. (1997). *Hystories; Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Steinhausen Hans-Christoph. (2002). "The outcome of anorexia nervosa in the 20th century," *Am J Psychiatry* 2002; 159:1284–1293.

Song, Sora. "Starvation on the Web, *Time*, Vol 166, Issue 3, July 18, 2005. Database: Academic Search Premier.

Ussher, Jane. (Ed.) (1997). *Body Talk; The Material and Discursive Regulation of Sexuality, Madness and Reproduction*. New York: Routledge

Walker, Rebecca. (1995). *to be real; Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. New York: Anchor Books.

WebMD. 2005. "Pro-Anorexia Web-sites: The Thin Web Line," WebMD Information and Resources. Accessed from the World Wide Web March 16, 2007: [http: www.web/a-to-z/guideas/features/pro-anorexia-web-sitesmd.com](http://www.web/a-to-z/guideas/features/pro-anorexia-web-sitesmd.com).

Wilson JL, Peebles R, Hardy KK, Litt IF "Surfing for thinness: a pilot study of pro-eating disorder web site usage in adolescents with eating disorders." *Pediatrics*. 2006; 118: 6: e1635-43.