




# **“Forgive Me Ana, For I Have Sinned”: Pro-Ana as Contemporary Asceticism**

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### **“Forgive Me Ana, For I Have Sinned”: Pro-Ana as Contemporary Asceticism**

Is Pro Ana your religion? Well, it seems that if it is your religion people should not judge you based on it. Fellow Prothinspoer's,<sup>1</sup> I know how you feel when people judge you. I just wanted to say, belie[ve] what you want to belie[ve] and follow your dreams.. On this planet, you can be whatever religion you want to be!<sup>2</sup>

Pro-anorexia (Pro-Ana) websites have been a breeding ground for controversy since their arrival on the World Wide Web. Many who have visited these sites criticize them for promoting and encouraging young girls to pursue anorexia, while others claim that such cyber-spaces can be productive, communal, and supportive safe spaces for women living with anorexia. As the opening quote illustrates, many websites like *Prothinspo.com* promote Pro-Ana as a religion and even cite the Bill of Rights<sup>3</sup> to support their right to choose their religion. Regardless of the validity of argument, Pro-Ana websites like this demonstrate that the relationship between religion and anorexia is more complicated than previously examined. What can these Pro-Ana websites tell us about the relationship between anorexia and religion? More specifically, what is the relationship between Christianity and Pro-Ana religious texts? Is it possible to conceive anorexia as a religion and, if so, how? Inspired by the religious nature of the content of these obscure pro-anorexia websites, these are the main questions that drive this research. Through the combination of feminist, religious, and cultural analyses of beauty ideologies, anorexia, and Pro-Ana websites, this research will address the variety of ways in which one could conceive the pro-anorexia sub-culture movement as a religion, while also discussing the ways in which it simultaneously oppresses and liberates its participants.

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<sup>1</sup> ProThinspoer refers to members of the "ProThinspo.com" online community. "Thinspo," short for "thinspiration" are images intended to assist with the visualization of weight loss. See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pro-thinspo.com/proanareligion.html>

<sup>3</sup> Although it is not explicitly noted on the website, the reference to the Bill of Rights tells that ProThinspo.com is likely run somewhere out of the United States.

Section I of this paper will provide an overview of the existing feminist scholarship dedicated to anorexia. The variety of interpretations reveal the complexity of the phenomenon and demonstrate the ongoing paradox of women's relationships with their bodies. Some theories suggest that women have internalized patriarchal Christian attitudes towards women and the body and, as a result, seek to suppress the flesh and reject the perceived limitations of its female nature, while other theories suggest that women are defining themselves in and constructing their identities through the negotiation of their bodies and gender norms. Despite the differences among these theories, one crucial common element remains: women are actively appropriating and leveraging their bodies and food as a means towards (secular or religious) salvation of some sort. As we will see, this creates quite a conundrum for women, as their bodies simultaneously function as the root of all evil and the vehicle towards salvation. As this paper shall further explore, anorexic women are undeniably constructing their worldviews, defining themselves, and forming their identities in and through their bodies, which are often clothed in contemporary cultural rhetoric that echoes ancient Christian ideology.

Section II will illustrate the ways in which anorexic women interpret their self-starvation by employing Christian language, symbols, and themes to express their food behaviours. Furthermore, it will highlight the ways in which women have internalized and appropriated Christian attitudes about women and the body. By shedding light onto the Christian ascetic foundations of religiously motivated ritualized eating behaviours, it becomes possible to imagine why and how contemporary anorexics have engaged and appropriated conceptions of the gendered and dichotomized body and mind. This will prove useful when examining the language of Pro-Ana religious texts, as it will reveal the legacy of Christian ascetic language and explain the layers of significance and meanings that contemporary anorexics employ.

Section III will demonstrate how the secular worldview integral to the anorexic functions in the same manner as the Christian worldview did for the early Christian ascetic woman. Defining what does and does not constitute religion is, of course, difficult and is not the task of this research; rather, this research seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the Pro-Ana movement, immersed in its contemporary context, functions in the same fashion as religion. Through the analysis of the function of cultural beauty ideologies, it becomes possible to see how the cultural pursuit of thinness is underpinned by the long held religious conceptions of the female body, asceticism, and morality discussed in the second section. Adding a contemporary twist to Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, Michelle Lelwica's thoughtful engagement with the quasi-religious dimensions of the pursuit of thinness demonstrates how contemporary women attempt to achieve salvation and transcend their gender through their bodies and the manipulation of contemporary beauty ideologies. Lelwica's theory of *The Religion of Thinness* demonstrates how contemporary cultural rituals, beliefs, and attitudes towards women, food, and the body influence individuals' subjective relationships with anorexia in the same way that Christian ideology and theology did for early Christian women. This perspective will be useful in the analysis of the Pro-Ana religion, as it will reveal the cultural factors that influence women's food behaviours and how they function, sociologically and psychologically, much like a religion. While Pro-Ana believers may not be in pursuit of religious salvation, their intensity demonstrates how they could be considered the ascetics of the Religion of Thinness and allows us to explore how this secular religion leverages the body as the primary means to achieve secular salvation.

Section IV is comprised of an analysis of the elements that make up the Pro-Ana religion, including the religious texts found on the majority of Pro-Ana websites. The analysis of the elements that comprise Pro-Ana websites, like thinspirations and tips and tricks, will demonstrate

how Pro-Ana women are taking the Religion of Thinness to the extreme. Furthermore, through an analysis of the Ana language, creed, psalm, thin commandments, letters to Ana, and rituals, it becomes possible to see the interconnectedness of the past and the present. It will demonstrate the lingering Christian motifs, themes, and language that echo female asceticism found in contemporary anorexic's narratives. It will also illustrate the ways in which this group is structurally, as well as functionally, much like organized religion. In conclusion, this section will contemplate whether it is plausible to conceive anorexics as the ascetics of the Religion of Thinness. Analyzing other components of the Pro-Ana religion, like images, cyberspace communities, and red bracelets will reinforce how this movement could be conceived as a religion by both its audience and participants.

This research is by no means intended to neglect the inherently dangerous nature of anorexia; rather, it is my hope that through the analysis of the religious and cultural elements that contribute to anorexics' conceptions of their self starvation, the hidden nature of the relationship between anorexia and religion will become more comprehensible.

### **Section I: Competing Feminist Interpretations of Anorexia**

Pro-Ana sites have existed for years, but were popularized in 2001, when the *Oprah Winfrey Show* had a feature on Pro-Ana.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after this episode aired, *Yahoo!* and *Geocities* shut down the majority of Pro-Ana websites on their servers as a result of pressure from pro-recovery support groups and the general public. Consequently, Pro-Ana websites are now often well-hidden online and are sometimes difficult to come across. As described above, Pro-Ana sites are frequently shut down by their servers, and like a cat of game and mouse, often reappear under a new domain name.

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<sup>4</sup> "Archives: Girls Who Don't Eat". *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Harco Productions 2001-10-04.

The majority of Pro-ana websites are uniform in style and in content. Most Pro-Ana websites are prefaced with a disclosure, a warning for those who don't presently have an eating disorder or who are in recovery to turn back. *Thinspo.com*, which brags to have the largest collection of *thinspiration*<sup>5</sup> in the world, has close to 500 photos of exceptionally skinny women. Incredibly, this is not uncommon. Most Pro-Ana websites come equipped with their very own set of thinspirations, intended to aid in the *visualization* of weight loss. There are also *reverse thinspo* galleries filled with photos of obese women that are intended to repel and disgust. The majority of Pro-Ana websites also have a section on "tips and tricks,"<sup>6</sup> which offers exercise advice, nutritional suggestions, and ways of stealthily avoiding detection. Moreover, like dieting websites, they also share recipes and calorie counters. Of particular interest to a student engaged in the feminist study of religion, a significant number of Pro-Ana websites contain a section on religion and post their corresponding religious texts. *Savemeana.com*, a Pro-Ana website also known as "Save me Ana, For I have Sinned," and others like it, have an identical set of texts, including a creed, a psalm, and a set of commandments that mimic those of familiar Christian religious texts.<sup>7</sup> These texts, and often the worlds of anorexics themselves, are rhetorically Christian in nature and theme. Whether or not the use of such Christian rhetoric is intentional will be a further point of exploration for this research.

Comment [CM1]: Lower case is better

Contemporary feminists see anorexia from a variety of viewpoints. Some see anorexia as a potentially empowering act of agency, while others believe it is a way for women to construct their identities, or even as an attempt to rebel against patriarchal norms and ideologies. Third wave feminists, in particular, argue for the recognition of the potentially personally empowering elements that anorexia may facilitate. The narratives of contemporary anorexics point directly to

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A  
<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B  
<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C

women's private struggles to exercise agency in the creation of their identities and lives, particularly in response to hegemonic beauty ideals<sup>8</sup> and patriarchal power relations. One member of a Pro-Ana website writes, "Pro-ED [Pro-Ana] to me means understanding that there's no shame in how we are [anorexics], and acceptance that this is how we will continue to be for an indefinite period of time."<sup>9</sup> By focusing her research on these women's narratives, and by taking their voices and stories seriously, Karen Dias demonstrates how Pro-Ana behaviours can be interpreted as intentional acts of agency,<sup>10</sup> and sheds light onto how one could conceive of anorexia as personally empowering. Furthermore, Dias' research demonstrates the importance of listening to the actual lived experiences of women and, by doing so, exposes alternative theories pertaining to the causes and functions of anorexia for women.

Elisabeth Grosz and other feminists conceive of anorexia as an active protest against, and a rejection of, the culturally prescribed feminine ideals and norms inscribed on the female body.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between compliance and subversion is blurred since the anorexic is ultimately harming herself as she inflicts potentially fatal dangers to her mind and body.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the abstention from food can be conceptualized as the rejection of "dominance by others, and, paradoxically, as a source of power for themselves, a triumph of the will over bodily limitations, and the forging of a new identity."<sup>13</sup> As one woman explains as she reflects upon her bulimia, "As long as I didn't feel I could rebel in any other way the bingeing and purging was a violent release of my fears, frustration, and anger."<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the anorexic is not actually in pursuit of attaining beauty ideals, but rather is engaged in a rebellious struggle against

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<sup>8</sup> Baumgardner and Richards 2000

<sup>9</sup> qtd. in Dias 2003

<sup>10</sup> Dias 2003

<sup>11</sup> Dias 2003; Bordo 1993; Discoll 1997

<sup>12</sup> Dias 2003; Bordo 1993

<sup>13</sup> Corrington 1986

<sup>14</sup> qtd. in Lehwica, 111

contemporary norms to autonomously define herself and construct her identity.<sup>15</sup> She also remembers feeling voiceless and powerless as a young girl:

This was when I was much younger, and I'd sit at the table, you know a little girl should be seen and not heard, and I'd sit there politely, and then there would be the discussion about business matters, and then they would start to argue and bicker. I would try to do anything to divert their attention.<sup>16</sup>

In this woman's case, her anorexia functioned both as a means to rebel against parental control and as a mechanism to express her anger and frustrations towards her parents' fighting. On a similar note, family systems theory typically depicts anorexia as the manifestation of dysfunctional family interactions. One theorist suggests that interactions within families defines *the wider cultural context* for the individual members and as a mediator of culture, the family operates as a formidable influence on identity, the development of the self, and the formation of self-image.<sup>17</sup> On his study of child, adolescent, and family development, Phillip T. Slee suggests that:

The highest probability of developing anorexia nervosa is in a perfectionist and self critical individual, who goes on a diet during early teenage years to lose 5-20 pounds, and who comes from a family of upper middle class socio-economic status which is stressed in various ways.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, family systems theory suggests that anorexia is merely the symptom of a larger familial issue, as the anorexia functions to distract the family's attention away from other conflicts going on within the family unit.<sup>19</sup>

For the anorexic, food, or, as Caroline Walker Bynum calls it, "The Women's Resource,"<sup>20</sup> is not considered a source of nourishment or life, but rather functions as a means to

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<sup>15</sup> Bruch 1978

<sup>16</sup> qtd. in Lelwica 111

<sup>17</sup> Haworth-Hoepfner, 213

<sup>18</sup> Slee, 404

<sup>19</sup> Minuchin et al. 1978; qtd. in Slee, 404

access personal power and societal visibility that has been (and quite often still is) typically reserved for men.<sup>21</sup> As one anorexic woman explains, "Food was power and control. Food was making my own decisions about what I would eat, when I would eat, how much I would eat. Food was taking control over what I looked like."<sup>22</sup> For those who lack a sense of agency in their everyday lives, manipulating the body and controlling food consumption may be their only option. Marya Hornbacher, author of *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* explains, "If anyone tried to control me, I could be stronger than them. No one could stop me from dying if I goddamn wanted to die."<sup>23</sup> Hornbacher's words vividly demonstrate how her body and food were potentially the only available resources she had to control in her life. In the same vein, research also suggests that a strong link exists between self-mutilating behaviours that also draw on themes of pain, suffering, and control, like cutting, and anorexic women in contemporary society.<sup>24</sup> With this in mind, the link between anorexia and the pursuit for control and agency becomes much clearer.

As will be discussed throughout this paper, the refusal of food has a long history of providing women with a means to transcend the perceived limitations of their bodies as they are implicitly freed from the "messy, mundane realm of food and body"<sup>25</sup> that women in the West are so often aligned with. Furthermore, women's traditional relationship with cultivating, preparing, and distributing food reinforces their negative association with the private sphere of living that dictates bodily urges and needs. As one anorexic woman explains, "I had no patience for my body. I wanted it to go away so that I could be a pure mind, a walking brain."<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> Bynum 1987

<sup>22</sup> Lebowitz 2006

<sup>23</sup> *qtd. in* Lebowitz 2006

<sup>24</sup> *qtd. in* Lebowitz p.108

<sup>25</sup> Polinska, Wioleta. "Bodies under Siege: Eating Disorders and Self-Mutilation among Women." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, September 2000; 68 (5), pp. 569-589.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *qtd. in* Lebowitz, 114

anorexic has a new sense of power and liberation, as evidenced by one woman who explains that she has “conquered the feminine realm of the material and finally gained access to the masculine realm of the mind.”<sup>27</sup> Considered both an affirmation of the renunciation of desire and bodily urges, and a rejection of their gendered natures, anorexia gives the individual the transformative<sup>28</sup> “feeling of a personal core,”<sup>29</sup> as she relishes in the newfound control that her food behaviours generates.

Such valuable theories demonstrate both the multitude of motivations for women’s past and present self-starvation and the paradox of women’s relationships with their bodies. Like the skins of an onion, each theory represents but one layer of the whole. In isolation, no one theory could effectively describe the subjective world of the anorexic. While some women throughout history may claim that they feel personally empowered through fasting, others may be manipulating their food behaviours is an attempt to conform to pressures of hegemonic cultural ideologies and their corresponding images. While some theories suggest that women are seeking to suppress the body, others offer that they are simultaneously relying on it for salvation. Regardless of their respective motivations, the underlying commonality is that anorexic women use their bodies and food, which have an undeniably gendered and religious history, to achieve a desired outcome.

## **Section II: Christian Ascetic Underpinnings of Anorexia**

As we will see with the case study of Margaret C., many women, especially those immersed in a Christian tradition, may rely on religious themes and symbols to express their thoughts regarding themselves, food, and the body. Psychiatric research into the relationship

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<sup>27</sup> Qtd. in Lehwica 2006; Carrington 1986; Driscoll 1997

<sup>28</sup> Driscoll 1997

<sup>29</sup> Bruch 1978

between religion and anorexia has suggested that individuals belonging to a traditional religion, particularly the Protestant and Catholic Christianity, reported having the lowest ever Body Mass Indexes, which directly points towards the importance of the individual's religious beliefs to their anorexia.<sup>30</sup> Margaret C. and others demonstrate the Christian ascetic underpinnings of religiously motivated ritualized eating behaviours that will make it possible to imagine why and how contemporary anorexics are influenced by such motifs. Likewise, followers of the cultural Religion of Thinness demonstrate how women, taught by culture to define themselves in and through their relationships with their bodies, manipulate food and the flesh to negotiate gender norms and achieve secular salvation. It must be noted that, in both examples, women are actively choosing to manipulate the body and food behaviours to achieve a particular desire—whether that be a stronger sense of self or identity, to rebel against cultural ideologies, to reject patriarchy, or achieve eternal salvation. These examples also demonstrate the intricate relationship between women and the body and present the double-edged sword faced by women. As we will see, the body can simultaneously function as both the root of all evil and the path to salvation. While the followers of the Pro-Ana religion may not be in pursuit of religious salvation in the traditional Christian sense, their intensity reveals how they could be considered the ascetics of the Religion of Thinness.

### *Christianity, Women, and the Body*

Christian theology has historically had a tendency to identify the female body and its impulses as the crux of original sin. When taken literally, these three verses: “and the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs...”<sup>31</sup> have been

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<sup>30</sup> Graham, Spencer, and Andersen, 1991; Joughin, Crisp, Halek, Humphrey, 1992

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 2:21-23

used as supporting evidence for the belief that women are mere afterthoughts of creation and correspondingly, their bodies are second rate.<sup>32</sup> In addition, since Eve was made from Adam's rib and not clay, she is one step further removed from God than Adam, which reinforces the beliefs that women are dependent on men for survival (and thus should be subservient) and that their bodies are made of imperfect matter.<sup>33</sup> It was also Eve in the Garden of Eden who ate the forbidden fruit, thereby assuming all guilt for committing the first sin. Despite a history of androcentric (mis)interpretations, Eve's desire to eat the forbidden fruit did not simply stem from gluttony but, rather, from the desire to quench her thirst for knowledge. Her perceived lack of control, however, justifies the historically Christian belief that women's desires, and consequently bodies, are rampantly out of control and in constant need of strict suppression. As Wolf suggests, "Genesis says that all men are created perfect, whereas Woman began as an inanimate piece of meat; malleable, unsculpted, unauthorized, raw—imperfect."<sup>34</sup> While this is a particularly feminist literal interpretation of the biblical text, it is undeniable that a legacy of androcentric interpretations has since pushed women to the periphery of their religion. This second rate status is perhaps what drives women to believe their bodies are inferior and in constant need of improvement. Ever since Eve's fateful bite into the forbidden fruit, women have been paying the price for her alleged sin and it's no surprise that the locus of punishment is the body. For this reason, it's not shocking that such ideologies have trickled down from Christianity, seeping deep into contemporary secular culture.

The Christian cultural legacy that remains with contemporary women in the West is intensified for women immersed in the Christian tradition, as they seem to have a uniquely religious relationship with their bodies and their food behaviours. The case study of Margaret C.

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<sup>32</sup> Wolf, Naomi. "Religion." *The Beauty Myth*. Toronto: Vintage, 1991. P.93

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

will describe the interior imagination of an anorexic individual who interpret and express their anorexia through their uniquely Christian lens. Religious themes of asceticism, self-denial, chastity, and morality are employed in relation to food, eating, and the relationship to the body. Upon closer examination, it becomes possible to see the ways in which these women conceptualize their eating behaviours as inherently religious. Exploring Christian rhetoric and attitudes towards women and the body will lay the foundation required to explore continuities within contemporary culture.

#### *Asceticism, Self-Denial and Morality*

A number of theorists address the ascetic element of anorexia that depends upon a strict belief in the opposition between the body and the mind.<sup>35</sup> Such dualistic logic permits the anorexic to imagine that they merely have to suppress one element, in this case, the body, in order to enhance the other, the mind. A number of theorists note the anorexic's heightened sense of moral superiority "derived from endurance of painful abnegation and relinquishment of gratification of desires; self-control is praised, while any form of indulgence is disapproved."<sup>36</sup> While most research tends to focus on medieval *holy anorexics*<sup>37</sup> or to draw comparisons between anorexia and the fasting rituals of other religious traditions, there are few who employed contemporary cases of anorexia and consider the distinctly religious motivations for self-starvation. Echoing the voices of early Christian ascetic women, this anorexic demonstrates that there is still much to learn about the relationship between anorexia and religion:

The more weight I lost, the more I became convinced that I was on the right way. I wanted to know what was beyond the ordinary living...abstinence was just in preparation for special revelations; it was like the things the saints and mystics had done. I wanted to

<sup>35</sup> Mogul 1980; Palazzetti 1974; Rampling 1985; B. Turner 1984 qtd. in Giles Banks, 121

<sup>36</sup> Giles Banks, 121

<sup>37</sup> Bell, 1985; Brumberg, 1988; Walker Byrum, 1987.

be praised for being special...to be held in awe for what I was doing. I found out that it was hard to be recognized by other people as an enlightened person...I didn't want anybody to know it, but I was convinced that one day I would get the mystical insight—I was waiting for the day of great Revelation.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike her predecessors, Caroline Giles Banks' psychological-cultural theory of anorexia addresses the cultural and religious symbols, idioms, and language that anorexics employ to express themselves and their relationship with food and their bodies. More specifically, her research reveals that contemporary women with anorexia employ the familiar religious tropes of asceticism, self-denial, chastity, and morality to frame their food behaviours. While the motivations of the individual anorexic's self-starvation may be completely subconscious, immersed in her Christian worldview, she accords layers of meaning to her thinness and uses culture and religion to do so.<sup>39</sup> By understanding subjective experiences of self-starvation, like the case study of Margaret C., it becomes possible to bridge the gap between cultural symbolic meaning systems and individual motivations for self-starvation.<sup>40</sup>

Margaret C., although meeting all criteria in the DSM-IV, does not see herself as anorexic, but through her interviews with Giles Banks, it becomes quite apparent that she understands her strict control of food and body solely through her religious convictions.<sup>41</sup> Margaret says, "For me, it's a way of life, my whole self, really. That's why I can't think of it as a disease or anything, you know."<sup>42</sup> When first treated for her anorexia, Margaret was so emaciated that she was not expected to live, and as a result, considers her life story to be that of a "Christian miracle"<sup>43</sup> inspired by great faith and prayer. Margaret was a teacher for approximately ten years before she was forced to "retire"<sup>44</sup> years ago because of her anorexia.

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<sup>38</sup> *qtd. in Lebwica, 105*

<sup>39</sup> *Giles Banks, 107*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Giles Banks, 116*

<sup>43</sup> *Giles Banks, 108*

<sup>44</sup> *Giles Banks, 109*

She is financially dependent on her father, lives alone, and has never been married. When asked about her age, she always responds ambiguously and when asked to draw a picture of herself, she produced an image of a young pre-pubescent girl or teenager. Additionally, "her appearance, her home (decorated with her childhood furniture and dozens of stuffed animals and dolls), and her mannerisms tend to support this self-assessment."<sup>45</sup>

On a number of occasions, Margaret discusses her childhood memory of a family friend, a member of the Covenant church, who would join her family for dinner on Sundays after mass. According to Margaret, this man and others in his religious order were emaciated and when he attended dinner at her house, ate only a small portion of food which he would bring over himself.

Margaret comments:

Oh I'll never forget that, how skinny he got, skin and bones. And he'd come over for dinner and bring his little packet...He was here at the university doing this and they had to live over there, but they could go to church, and if they went out for dinner, they could take their own.<sup>46</sup>

In the same way that stories of ascetics, Saints or Martyrs could impact the psychology and ritualized eating behaviours of young women, it is obvious that this particular ascetic religious man played a significant role in the ways in which Margaret conceptualized the relationship between religion and self-starvation. This further illustrates how early experiences and exposure to stories and images play a vital role in our imaginations and conceptualizations of our selves.

It is clear from her interviews with Giles Banks that Margaret interprets anything entering or exiting her body through the religious lens of defilement and pollution. In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas argues that "rituals of purity and impurity", such as dietary restrictions, are central to religious behaviour.<sup>47</sup> In Western religions, food avoidances are widespread,

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<sup>45</sup> Giles Banks, 110

<sup>46</sup> Giles Banks, 115

<sup>47</sup> Douglas, 1966

ranging anywhere from no meat on Fridays, to kosher rules, to the fasting laws of Ramadan. As a way to remain as pure in nature as possible, Margaret considers the behaviours and routines surrounding food and her body as a personal and private ritual.<sup>48</sup> Not only does she manage her hunger through prayer, Margaret only eats at home and always alone. Her eating usually takes place after midnight and continues until sunrise. She claims that she only eats during the darkest parts of the night because “dark is Satan and that light is good, it [light] is like Jesus, like it says in the Bible.”<sup>49</sup>

Another integral aspect of her ritual has to do with cleanliness and purity. Margaret will bathe at least three times during her nightly eating ritual. As she explains:

I come in after doing what I have to do and take a bath. Well, I get my dinner all set, take a bath, wash my hair every night, get absolutely spotlessly clean. Then I sit down and eat...I have to be absolutely spotless and clean and then I eat half my meal, or most of it...And then i take a bath half-way through my dinner so I feel all fresh again. Isn't that terrible, jump in the tub? And then right before I hop into bed [I take a bath] just so I feel...immaculately fresh. I just jump in the shower a lot. Just in and out, you know. I'm probably full of soap all the time.<sup>50</sup>

Under the pseudonym BlueDragonfly, a prominent figure in the Pro-Ana world writes, “one day I will be thin enough. Just the bones, no disfiguring flesh. Just the pure, clean shape of me, bones. That is what we all are, what we're made up of and everything else is just storage, deposit, waste. Strip it away, use it up.”<sup>51</sup> Margaret C. and BlueDragonfly demonstrate remarkably similar views of food that regards the act of eating as being something dirty or polluting. Shockingly, Margaret frequently chooses to eat spoiled or rotten food: perhaps to curb her appetite or to punish herself if and when she does eat.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, her self-starvation and conceptions about her body and food are all given moral conviction through her religious beliefs.

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<sup>48</sup> Giles Banks, 117

<sup>49</sup> *qtd.* in Giles Banks, 117

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

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.blue.dragonfly.org/welcome.html>

<sup>52</sup> Giles Banks, 117

In Margaret's mind, consuming rich foods and large quantities of food are traits associated with non-Christians<sup>53</sup> and are subsequently bad. Like Margaret, BlueDragonfly uses words like freedom, purity, and lightness to describe her emaciation:

I've freed myself from this compulsion of eating. When I wake, I am empty, light, light-headed; I like to stay this way, free and pure, light on my feet. For me, food's only interest lies in how little I need, how strong I am, how well I can resist--each time achieving another small victory of the will: one carrot instead of two, half a cracker, no more peas. Each gain makes me stronger, purer, larger in my exercise of power, until eventually I see no reason to eat at all.<sup>54</sup>

While BlueDragonfly's words are not as explicitly religious in nature as Margaret C.'s, there is still an undeniable religious undertone. Such perceptions make a great deal of sense if we consider the Christian oppositions that influence her words and her world. As Giles Banks observes, many Christian diet books present imagery in which body, food, and fat oppose spirit and lightness.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the former is considered to be sinful and defiling as it implies giving in to the desires and temptations of the body, while the latter is considered to be beautiful, pure, and good. Keeping in line with the dualist thinking which characterized early Christianity, such conceptions lead to overtly polarized interpretations of food behaviours that juxtapose the sinful body (flesh and fat) and the pure mind.<sup>56</sup> To anorexics like Margaret C., the real self is located in the mind and not the body: "Well, the part of you that goes [to Heaven] is really yourself because the body is nothing... Anybody who believes in the Bible would believe in that as a matter of fact."<sup>57</sup> This quote further illustrates the Christian notion that the body is merely an obstacle to the mind that must be overcome.

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<sup>53</sup> Giles Banks, 118

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.blue.dragonfly.org/welcome.html>

<sup>55</sup> Ashcroft 1991; Baldinger 1994; Breslin and Johnston 1993; Chapman and Coyle 1979; Cook 1986; Liebegood 1994; Ornarian 1984; Orlund 1977; Smith 1990 qtd. in Lelwica

<sup>56</sup> Giles Banks, 119

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Wolf suggests that advertisements aimed towards men tend to flatter their self-image, while ads geared towards women generally attempt to induce feelings of guilt and shame.<sup>58</sup> In *A modern day holy anorexia? Religious language in advertising and anorexia nervosa in the West*, J. Griffin and EM Berry analyze the media's use of religious and moral motifs in connection with eating, and discover that words like *temptation*, *decadent*, *heaven*, and *purity* are often invoked in food advertisements, suggesting a direct connection between food and morality.<sup>59</sup> Their analysis demonstrates how advertising images and messages play into existing dichotomous cultural-religious notions of good and bad, salvation and damnation, discipline and debauchery.<sup>60</sup> For example, the word *luscious* is used to demonstrate that this is a corporeal pleasure, not one for the mind.<sup>61</sup> As Griffin and Berry suggest, "The advertisement then persuades the reader like the little red devil sitting on your shoulder: "Go ahead. Eat it. Give in."<sup>62</sup> They conclude their analysis by suggesting that the food industry is engaged in an uphill battle against women's age-old internalized feelings of guilt about food.<sup>63</sup> Not only does this advertisement "[represent] the fight of an industry against a moral internal struggle for control, the attempt to maintain self-discipline and a feeling of guilt,"<sup>64</sup> it also demonstrates how the media's use of religious and moralistic themes in food advertisements may perpetuate a modern day *holy anorexic*,<sup>65</sup> not unlike the followers of the Pro-Ana movement.

Purity and virginity are the most prominent features of Margaret C.'s anorexia, which are also characteristic of her current self-image.<sup>66</sup> As a result of her emaciation, Margaret has not had a monthly period since she was around 16, and claims "that's the most, that's the one benefit

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<sup>58</sup> Wolf 96

<sup>59</sup> Griffin and Berry, 49

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

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

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

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>66</sup> Giles Banks, 110

I would say... I mean, I would assume it would be a big bother. I mean other people complain about it all the time."<sup>67</sup> Menstruation, the physical process that prepares a woman's body for childbirth, has typically been used as evidence for women's weak nature and has been a tactic to subjugate women across cultures. Her apparent pleasure in the fact that her menses have ceased reveals how Margaret C. conceptualizes her femininity in religious terms. Unlike biologically deterministic notions defining women by their ability to procreate, Margaret C. sees the body as merely a vessel. Given that Eve's punishment for committing the first sin in the Garden of Eden included menstruation and painful childbirth for all women, the lack of menstruation that results in the inability to procreate can be seen as undoing the effects of the punishment for original sin. Furthermore, Margaret C. is fully aware that her emaciated body functions as a deterrent against sexual advances by men. In response to her sexuality, Margaret C. says she is "a Christian, moral, upright person [and it] would never occur to me to be with a man."<sup>68</sup> Fears of polluting the body and uncleanness pervade Margaret C.'s and other anorexic narratives. Not surprisingly, sexual purity and abstinence are distinctive characteristics of both anorexia nervosa<sup>69</sup> and Christian female asceticism.

While Margaret C. does not engage in self-starvation rituals in an attempt to emulate contemporary beauty ideals, she does believe that she is fulfilling a religious ideal.<sup>70</sup> As Giles Banks writes, "She believes that if she is pure and virginal, controls her sexuality and her body, she will be "raptured" to Heaven, a place of bodily lightness-and no fat."<sup>71</sup> One woman, depicting her struggle with anorexia through the Christian convention of ascetic martyrdom, with its emphasis on suffering, righteousness, and agency, describes:

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<sup>67</sup> Giles Banks, 116

<sup>68</sup> Giles Banks, 110

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>71</sup> Giles Banks, 119

The whole life is like you are carrying a cross—something heroic, something that is very difficult and demands admiration. I felt [that] doing something that was not hard was quite inconceivable; it would be lazy and despicable. Life was like the labours of Hercules—things he was forced to do though he didn't like them. That's what I felt life was like—everything was a heavy duty thrown onto me.<sup>72</sup>

Unlike other conceptualizations of anorexia, Giles Banks' case study of Margaret C. and the above quote reveals how notions of asceticism and Christianity actively work to construct a sense of self for the contemporary anorexic "not as "sick" but, rather, as "good," which in this case means "Christian" and "holy."<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the case of Margaret C. and the above quote illustrate the literal manifestations of religious concepts and the ways in which contemporary women think about their bodies. Finally, Giles Banks suggests that the complex relationship between religion and the subjective dimensions of anorexia, as exemplified by Margaret C., are best understood through the lens of asceticism. Conclusively, asceticism involves not only psychological, but cultural-religious dimensions as well.<sup>74</sup>

As we will see in the next section, contemporary cultural representations of women's bodies often echo those of ancient religious texts, as the secular worldview integral to the contemporary anorexic functions in the same manner as the Christian worldview did for the ascetic woman. Through the analysis of the function of cultural beauty ideologies, it becomes possible to see how the cultural pursuit of thinness is underpinned by long held religious conceptions of the female body, asceticism, salvation, and morality discussed herein.

### Section III: Contemporary Devotion and "The Religion of Thinness"

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<sup>72</sup> *qtd. in Lelwica, 109*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that other religious traditions throughout the world have ascetic elements as well. The Jains, for example, have some of the most strenuous fasting and food rituals. Muslims engage in recurring and extended periods of fasting, and Judaism has strict dietary food regulations and rituals as well.

Before we can understand how one could conceive of anorexia as a religion, we must also comprehend the cultural context within which the contemporary anorexic is situated. Having already delved into the imagination of the religious anorexic, it is crucial to consider and engage in an examination of cultural beauty ideals and the subsequent cultural perception of womanhood and the female body that play a vital role in anorexic's conceptions of their relationship with food and their bodies. This section will describe the ways in which the cultural scripts, specifically women's magazines and images, function as *religious texts* for millions of girls and women living in the West, and will discuss the beliefs that these texts propagate, in addition to the salvation they promise. And building on Naomi Wolf's concept of *The Church of Beauty* and Lelwica's theory of *The Religion of Thinness*, this analysis will demonstrate how the contemporary cultural context of the anorexic functions in the same manner as organized religion. Furthermore, this analysis will demonstrate how the Religion of Thinness and the corresponding pursuit of thinness is underpinned by long held religious conceptions of the female body and asceticism like those exemplified by Margaret C. While they may not be in pursuit of religious salvation, the anorexics' devotion, intensity and commitment demonstrates how they could be considered the ascetics of the Religion of Thinness and how this secular religion leverages the body as the primary means to achieve secular salvation.

Socio-cultural theorists consider anorexia to be a "culture-bound syndrome,"<sup>75</sup> meaning that the phenomenon is a social construction with no ontological reality. While it was once thought to be inherent to Western civilization, a great deal of research has been done illustrating the transhistoricity<sup>76</sup> and transnationality<sup>77</sup> of the phenomenon. Feminist theorists in particular

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<sup>75</sup> Berdo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>76</sup> Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988; Bell, Rudolph M. *Holy Anorexia*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985; Walker Bynum, Caroline. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

have addressed this issue at length, specifically connecting women, misogynist perceptions towards their bodies, and women's corresponding ritualized food behaviours throughout history. This type of social constructionism most often manifests itself in the form of visual imagery, whether it be religious iconography or images seen in popular culture. Many theories suggest the images and their connotations become internalized by the viewer who, consequently, may attempt to emulate what they see.<sup>78</sup> In other words, images are not simply images. Rather, they function as social scripts that dictate the normative bodily ideals and gender norms. Images are undeniably crucial to our imaginations and everyday lives and play a vital role in the formation of our identities, instructing us how to look and subsequently act, and providing models of gender, class, religion, race, and so on. Idealized images of women, their bodies, and femininity are no exception and have received a great deal of criticism from media, cultural, and feminist critics for their uniformly unrealistic representations. The social creation and replication of such an ideal is quite intentional. Lelwica argues that the most "popular models *of and for* womanhood play a key (if subtle) role in maintaining oppressive attitudes in social arrangements."<sup>79</sup> This normalization of a particular bodily ideal and appearance transforms the exception into the norm to which many women aspire.<sup>80</sup>

The contemporary glossy anorexic-like images of women's bodies not only represent the embodied feminine ideal but also serve as the ultimate models for womanhood. As Wolf explains, "the caste system based on "beauty" is defended as if it derives from an eternal truth."<sup>81</sup> Consequently, women who buy into such illusory ideologies are often left in a perpetual state of inadequacy. One needs only to watch TV for an hour or flip through the pages of the latest

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<sup>78</sup> Katzman, Melanie and Lee, Sing. "Beyond Body Image: the Integration of Feminist and Transcultural Theories in the understanding of Self Starvation." *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. 22:4, 1997. 385-394.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Lelwica, 6

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Wolf, 57

Cosmo magazine to be bombarded with messages that promote beautification and self-improvement. While not all women go to the extreme of anorexia, most women will likely at some point in their lives have issues and struggle with their body weight. In one survey, nearly two thirds of college-aged women reported that one of their greatest fears was getting fat,<sup>82</sup> with one study finding that 40% of college women engaged in *anorexic-like* behaviour.<sup>83</sup> More recent studies found that women in their mid-fifties expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies<sup>84</sup> and that in urban areas, up to 80% of fourth-grade girls have already tried dieting.<sup>85</sup>

Food behaviours and rituals have served as integral meaning-making activities in the lives of women and girls throughout history.<sup>86</sup> It has been argued that beauty rituals are not mere echoes of traditional religions, but rather, “functionally supplant them.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, the beauty and weight-loss rituals to which millions of women subscribe often function in the same manner as a traditional religion. As Naomi Wolf suggests, “they are *literally* reconstituting out of old faiths a new one, *literally* drawing on traditional techniques of mystification and thought control, to alter women’s minds as sweepingly as any past evangelical wave.”<sup>88</sup>

While many women may feel alienated and on the fringes of patriarchal religions like Christianity or Judaism, the Religion of Thinness caters to contemporary societies and secular women’s needs. Wolf suggests that this secular religion gained popularity as the demand to fill the void of traditional religious authority grew.<sup>89</sup> Following this argument, Lelwica suggests that the main motivation for subscribing to such beliefs is to satisfy the need for a sense of meaning

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<sup>82</sup> Woolcy, 1984: 196. Brownell, 1991:6, qtd. in Lelwica

<sup>83</sup> Thompson and Schwartz, 1982 qtd. in Lelwica

<sup>84</sup> McLaren and Kuh, 2004, qtd. in Lelwica

<sup>85</sup> Brumberg, 1988: 32, qtd. in Lelwica

<sup>86</sup> Bynum??

<sup>87</sup> Wolf, 88

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Wolf 86

and fulfillment in one's life.<sup>90</sup> As Wolf explains, those that are likely to follow such a dogma have a poor sense of self and "the Rites [of Beauty] offer hope as well as a wonderful new identity."<sup>91</sup> For the woman who defines herself in and through her body, these Rites of Beauty are essential meaning making tools crucial to her new identity. Lehwica further suggests that the symbols, rituals, and beliefs that girls and women are taught to strive for represent a *secular plan of salvation* that draws heavily on the patriarchal legacy of traditional Christianity<sup>92</sup> wherein the suffering and the body are at the heart of female redemption. Not only is this *new religion* predominantly woman-centered, but it offers a series of ritual actions that will ensure beautification and thus, corporeal salvation.

Much like traditional religions like Christianity, the Religion of Thinness has the potential to provide women with a means to experience meaning and fulfillment.<sup>93</sup> Just like religion, today's culture infuses women with *beliefs* about who they are and what their place is in the world. The belief that "thin people are happier, more successful, more virtuous, more beautiful, and more healthy—is so wide-spread that it is easy to take this supposed *truth* for granted."<sup>94</sup> Followers feel as though they have a clear sense of purpose, that if they lose that ten pounds, the man of their dreams will surely find them or they'll definitely be more successful. The images that transmit these messages to us provide visions of wholeness and perfection for women to emulate. One theorist suggests that the notion of *contagion* describes the relationship between women and images of the slender female body.<sup>95</sup> She argues that during the consumption of images, some women who may have a "coding problem" that renders them unable them to disassociate themselves from the group, thus driving their "desire for

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<sup>90</sup> Lehwica 11

<sup>91</sup> Wolf, 126

<sup>92</sup> Wolf, 96

<sup>93</sup> Lehwica, 5

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

<sup>95</sup> Burke, Eliza. "Feminine Visions: Anorexia and Contagion in Pop Discourse." *Feminist Media Studies*. 2006: (6) 3, pp.315-330.

sameness."<sup>96</sup> Such a theory could suggest why some women dedicate their lives to attaining the *perfect body* while other women who could care less what their measurements are. Nonetheless, popular icons of womanhood are prototypical in their design: large breasts, skinny waist, small features, and lusciously long hair. "The monotonous thinness of diverse female models suggests that slenderness is a defining feature of the dominant culture's feminine ideal."<sup>97</sup> Beauty *rituals*, anywhere from tweezing eyebrows to bulimia, promise swan-like transformations and create a sense of continuity amongst women. While at times they are performed communally, a trip to the spa, for example, the connection stems from the fact that at some point throughout their lives, most women will adhere to some, if not all, of these rituals.<sup>98</sup> The *moral* teachings of such beliefs instruct women that the *good body* is a skinny body, one that does not give into temptations and desire and that can exercise self-control. Finally, the Religion of Thinness has its very own set of *salvation stories* that offer women dreams of happiness and success.

The Religion of Thinness not only teaches women that their destinies are wrapped up in their bodies, but also gives them instructions and tools to seek salvation both through and with the use of her body.<sup>99</sup> Some women will pursue thinness with such intensity that it becomes the sole purpose of their existence.<sup>100</sup> In other words, with secular salvation in sight, women will go to extreme lengths to attain the ideal. This is no surprise, since the diet industry alone rakes in over \$50 billion a year from women trying to shed pounds.<sup>101</sup> These images point to an *invisible essence*, a seemingly infallible and unquestioned truth that accords meaning to women's embodied daily existence. Furthermore, the sway it has over women's lives "is papal in its

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<sup>96</sup> Burke, 326

<sup>97</sup> Lelwica, 6

<sup>98</sup> I still recall my first makeup lesson from my mother, shaving my legs, dying my hair, and waxing my eyebrows for the first time. It's likely that most women, while may not have experienced all, will have some memories involving contemporary beauty rituals.

<sup>99</sup> Lelwica, 4

<sup>100</sup> Lelwica, 5

<sup>101</sup> Fraser, 1997: 8, qtd. in Lelwica

absoluteness."<sup>102</sup> While not all women adhere to such narrow definitions of womanhood or femininity, such images and ideologies still provide a starting point from which all women may be judged.<sup>103</sup> Regardless of whether or not one chooses to conform to such strict standards of womanhood, it is a socially held belief that there is such a thing called an ideal body, that it is thin, and that attaining it should be a top priority for women.

Through the use of such images, popular women's magazines and the Religion of Thinness reproduces the Christian ideal of the ascetic woman.<sup>104</sup> Much like the case of Margaret C., the ascetic ideal constructs female holiness through the control of the female body.<sup>105</sup> In contemporary society, mainstream fashion and beauty magazines are the main culprit behind the replication of this ascetic feminine ideal. Images that emphasize individual success and excessive self-control promise to liberate women from the limits of life as a woman.<sup>106</sup> As one *Ladies Home Journal* article title reads, "Diet like a Man,"<sup>107</sup> women are taught to exercise masculine virtues and to transcend the preconceived limitations of their female flesh. While the modern day ascetic may not be in pursuit of holiness in the traditionally religious sense, the denial of food and of eating enables them to "transcend the confines of the female/body prison,"<sup>108</sup> which gives their life meaning and purpose in the same way that traditional religion did for medieval ascetic women.

The Religion of Thinness is replicating a very specific type of worldview: the Christian ascetic ideal that women must suffer to be holy or beautiful, essentially that "beauty is pain". For Wolf, the Rites of Beauty represent "a new fundamentalism transforming the secular West" and

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<sup>102</sup> Wolf, 88

<sup>103</sup> LeWica, 5

<sup>104</sup> LeWica, 2

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> LeWica, 3

<sup>107</sup> Oct 1998

<sup>108</sup> LeWica, 4

with it came an inventive tactic to control women's bodies.<sup>109</sup> As she explains, "in the past generation, changing sexual mores loosened religious constraints of female sexual behaviour; the postwar decline in Church attendance and the breakdown of the traditional family relaxed the ability of religion to dictate morality to women."<sup>110</sup> Wolf suggests that this new religion caught on quickly by taking advantage of women's perceived lack of moral purpose by reconstituting the good woman as one who adhered to the implicit morality of the Rites of Beauty<sup>111</sup> of the Religion of Thinness. Their "faith" restored their sense of social importance, facilitated a forum for female bonding, and provided "the reassuring moral structure lost with the old religion."<sup>112</sup> In the same vein, Sandra Bartky's Foucauldian reading of beauty ideologies demonstrates how women internalize contemporary norms to such an extent that they unconsciously regulate and punish themselves.<sup>113</sup>

Calorie counting, counting steps, worrying about weight, confessing "slips", weighing ins, etc. all function as the Rites of Beauty that sacralise a woman's body.<sup>114</sup> However, these rituals do more than objectify women, they offer a glimmer of hope that with a little hard work and brow sweat, they too can transform their bodies and achieve transcendence. Wolf suggests that since the Industrial Revolution, piety has always been associated with femininity wherein women, *the pure sex* or contemporarily, *the beautiful*, are recognized as the elite. It is through ensuring this purity or beauty that one is offered salvation. Using Catherine Bell's ritual theory, Lelwica suggests that those in pursuit of thinness engage in "ritual practices that distinguish themselves from—and holier than—more mundane ways of acting."<sup>115</sup> Early Christian ascetic

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<sup>109</sup> Wolf, 89

<sup>110</sup> Wolf, 89-90

<sup>111</sup> Wolf, 88

<sup>112</sup> Wolf, 88

<sup>113</sup> Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." in *Femininity and Domination*, by Bartky, Sandra Lee. Routledge/Taylor France Books Inc., 1990.

<sup>114</sup> Lelwica, 3

<sup>115</sup> Lelwica, 6

women took their bodies to the extreme and often gained recognition, popularity, authority, and power out of doing so. Some historical women gained such popularity and notoriety from their devotion to fasting rituals that they were afforded exceptional political and social power. While not all women will be publicly praised for their devotion to thinness in the same way as medieval ascetics, the internal sense of empowerment that these women derive is akin to that of ancient medieval ascetics. What differs, however, is the public opinion of the audience of her self-starvation. While the medieval ascetic was admired and even imitated or venerated, the contemporary anorexic is often regarded with pity, disgust, or anger.

Theorists have also suggested that such transcendence of social norms allows women full access into the masculine realm of the mind, where they are freed from the body. Furthermore, the social recognition and approval women receive when they drop a size further motivates them to keep up the good work and yet, most people would stop applauding their good work once they cross that very fine line between healthy and unhealthy. While such approval is of course in relation to dominant cultural icons and images of womanhood, its appeal may be particularly attractive for women who do not feel as though they already belong to the dominant culture.<sup>116</sup>

While not all those who practice the Religion of Thinness will go to the extremes and develop anorexia or other eating disorders, many women do share similar beliefs about food and their bodies, rendering such a system quite influential.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately our culture does not allow for a plethora of diverse female role models and, as a result, these icons are the reference points many girls and women use to assess their own bodies. As discussed, these images are not merely images; they function as social scripts. As one young woman explains,

My mother always wanted me to be happy. Unfortunately, her definition of happiness was skinny, pretty, married, rich...My conceptual system became based on

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<sup>116</sup> LeWica, 8

<sup>117</sup> LeWica, 5

comparison and contrast with other women. In a way, I had perfectly clear vision: the idea of beauty represented by a fashion model was not the figure I was in the mirror.<sup>118</sup>

To achieve anything less than this ideal is considered a failure on the part of the woman. If she fails, not only does she risk social stigmatization and self-criticism, but as the above quote illustrates, she loses a preconceived identity, life course, and full set of dreams. Furthermore, having invested so much time and energy into her weight loss, she will likely feel as though a part of her self has been lost and that her life no longer has a purpose.

Lelwica concludes that the “women who devote themselves to thinness do not constitute a “religious group” per se, however, much like organized religion, these women share a repertoire of beliefs, images, rituals, and moral codes that promise *salvation* in the form of a fat free body.”<sup>119</sup> She also argues that the primary appeal of this Religion of Thinness is that it enables its participants to freely appropriate cultural gender norms and conventions, namely those ones that imprison them in their bodies.<sup>120</sup> In other words, there is more to dieting and the pursuit of thinness than achieving the ideal body. As will be discussed later, much like the Christian ascetic tradition, the Religion of Thinness is quite paradoxical. On the one hand, it has the potential to provide women with the power and visibility that is typically accorded to men, yet on the other hand, it may simultaneously oppress women as they recreate the confining norms they seek to defy.<sup>121</sup>

#### Section IV: Pro Ana: Contemporary Ascetics of “The Religion of Thinness”?

We have discussed the ways in which anorexics interpret their self-starvation through a Christian perspective as well as the religious function of cultural ideologies pertaining to

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, in Lelwica, 6

<sup>119</sup> Lelwica, 9

<sup>120</sup> Lelwica, 2

<sup>121</sup> Lelwica, 2

thinness that may provoke women to turn to anorexia. What I am most interested in here, however, is the relationship between religious language and the religious function of cultural ideologies as manifested in religious texts found on Pro-Ana websites. As we will see, Pro-Ana texts employ familiar religious tropes and language. While not addressing any divinity in the traditional sense, the anorexic's divinity is manifested in the pursuit of thinness and the compulsion to adhere to the ideal, as suggested by Lelwica's concept of the Religion of Thinness. Synthesizing the two previous discussions is crucial to this analysis. I will draw on Giles Banks' discussion of asceticism as a feminine ideal, as well as Lelwica's cultural theory of the Religion of Thinness to describe what is taking place here. I will demonstrate how the Pro-Ana subculture mirrors that of religion in terms of function and structure and how the language they use is inherently religious by nature. I suggest that these texts embody the fusion of the religious language and the function of the Religion of Thinness which could provide an alternative conception of Pro-Ana as a religion.

*The Ana Creed*<sup>122</sup> epitomizes many of the facets of the Religion of Thinness. The introductory language sets the tone for the entire Creed, demonstrating the anorexic's internalized sense of truth and self-hatred, which is likely an initial result of her displeasure with her body weight and inability to achieve the illusory ideal model of womanhood. The Creed professes, "I believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots." The unwavering faith in the truth and commitment to their fasting echoes the stories of early Christian ascetics who were often urged to take food or drink. It also emphasizes the exclusive nature of this movement, as they do not recognize other alternative perspectives. The creed further demonstrates the total lack of self-esteem of the anorexic, who considers herself to be "the most vile, worthless, and useless person to have existed on this planet." "If they could see how I

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<sup>122</sup> See Appendix C

really am, then they would hate me almost as much as I do." This language suggests a complex and troubled relationship with cultural conceptions of femininity, one that is characterized by feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.<sup>123</sup> While lines such as, "I believe in hell, because I sometimes think I'm living in it", may not be taken seriously as a result of their tongue-in-cheek language, the underlying experience of *living in hell* seems to be common with Pro-Ana's. BlueDragonfly writes,

When I've finally faded to nothing, when you've given me the gift of ending this torturous life, I will float on to the next world and be thin and beautiful--payment for my undying love for you in this world. I ask only one that you remove me from this hell, from this fattening and judgmental world. Please take away this hatred for my pain and allow me to be free and light.<sup>124</sup>

Not only is she employing religious concepts like *free* and *light* to describe her perception of heaven, she characterizes her current state as that of *hell*. The Letter to Ana<sup>125</sup> also references the "gift of ending this torturous life." The language of the Creed and the above quote also highlight the dual nature of the anorexic's world. As we have seen, her dilemma may not necessarily be a spiritual one, yet she employs religious language and themes to express her anorexia. She seemingly has two feet in two different worlds and is straddling the boundaries of religion and secular culture. She demonstrates the contemporary cultural pursuit of the ascetic feminine ideal and does so using themes mimicking religious asceticism.

*The Thin Commandments*<sup>126</sup> also epitomize the dual world of the anorexic, as they simultaneously stress both religious themes of asceticism and the cultural preoccupation with thinness. Thin Commandment Number Four: "Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty" demonstrates the Christian conception that giving into bodily desires is essentially a sign of human weakness, usually accorded to women who are historically associated with the

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<sup>123</sup> Day & Keys, 7

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.blue-dragonfly.org/>

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix F

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix E

temptations of the flesh. "Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards" echoes stories of medieval saints who engaged in self-mortification rituals to suppress the body. In the same fashion, contemporary women attempt to reprimand themselves for not having controlled their appetites. The Thin Commandments also fall right in line with the belief system of the Religion of Thinness. "If you aren't thin, you aren't attractive" and "You can never be too thin" demonstrate the unquestioned common belief that thin is better and unequivocally results in happiness, success, love, and virtue. Furthermore, the anorexic outlines specific punishments for indulging in particular foods and rituals for burning off calories, much like a priest administering penances after confession. Eating certain types of food becomes not just an extra pound on the scale, but also a marker for moral weakness and inferiority. Her will to control her appetite becomes the motivating force for this Pro-Ana who claims that "Desire can be quelled by a single act of will... I will worship you all day, I will run miles a day, come rain, snow, bitter cold or searing heat I will run from the pain and in fright." This passage demonstrates how the anorexic intentionally inflicts suffering onto her body to experience the power of the divine (thinness), much in the same way an ascetic engages in self-mortification or fasting to have a closer relationship with God. Similarly, research also suggests a strong link between self-mutilating behaviours, like cutting, and anorexic women seeking control in contemporary society.<sup>127</sup>

The letters to and from Ana<sup>128</sup> are perhaps the most fruitful and evocative sources for the exploration of the religious language of Pro-Anas. Ana, short for Anamadim, *the guardian Servitor of the Anorectic Praxis*<sup>129</sup> is most definitely represented as being a divinity and the anorexic the subservient follower. Some claim the anorexic is not literally worshipping a deity

<sup>127</sup> Potinska, Wioleta. "Bodies under Siege: Eating Disorders and Self-Mutilation among Women." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. September 20(0): 68 (5), pp. 569-589.

<sup>128</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.the-bfiv.webs.com/religion.htm>; <http://www.pro-anaspo.com/proanareligion.html>;

named Anamadim. Rather, the anorexic worships a concept and Anamadim, or Ana, is merely the symbol. As Kerry and Day explain,

Ana becomes personified as the source of feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. The location of "Ana" in this way may serve the purpose of enabling those contributing to the sites to deal with a central contradiction that arises from idolising such images, but also experiencing these as oppressive. This is negotiated by creating a separate, critical self, a 'devil on one's shoulder', that is the source of negative feelings rather than the images themselves, and by the suggestions that such 'awareness', as originating from 'Ana', may be momentary. This possibly allows the continued desiring and pursuit of these ideals, as it offers an alternative to directly challenging them and rejecting them, or the location of these experiences within a wider socio-political context.<sup>130</sup>

Others say that Ana is the personified deity of this religion. As a mighty leader, she can offer both salvation, or vengeance and punishment. In this letter, as in the Thin Commandments, we can see how this deity appears to take on the persona of both a loving simultaneously vengeful God.<sup>131</sup> "I will stop weeping when I feel your warm arms embrace my shivering body" is reminiscent of the language of bridal mysticism, like that of Saint Catherine of Siena who wished to be "received in the arms of [her] father."<sup>132</sup>

Members also talk about meditating, praying or talking to Ana, asking her for support<sup>133</sup>. In response to a call for advice, Hanna asks Toni, "Has goddess Ana visited you yet?" Jessica, also seeking inspiration, then posts, "I NEED HER TO VISIT ME." Hanna concludes, "You are nothing until goddess Ana has visited you. Until then...you're just another fatty."<sup>134</sup>

It is quite significant that Ana is personified as a female Goddess rather than a masculine God. On the fringes of patriarchal religions, like Christianity, Pro-Ana women rebel and turn towards a feminine God that offers them the personal fulfillment and empowerment that the

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<sup>130</sup> Day & Keys, 7-8

<sup>131</sup> Day & Keys, 8

<sup>132</sup> [www.drawnbylove.com](http://www.drawnbylove.com)

<sup>133</sup> <http://digital.south.ischool.berkeley.edu/node/104>

<sup>134</sup> <http://digital.south.ischool.berkeley.edu/node/104>

traditional religions failed to provide. In a sense, this can be perceived as not only the rejection of Christianity but also of the entire patriarchal structure of society.

Another commonality amongst Pro-Ana websites are the recurring images of angels.<sup>135</sup> While the significance of such an archetypal Christian symbol has yet to be explored and remains somewhat of a mystery, some suggest that the deified angel represents Ana. On angels, one scholar of Christian iconography writes, "Light, that swiftest, least weighty, least material of all bodies, is a substance to which angels have been linked."<sup>136</sup> With this in mind, one could conceive of the angels as guardian angels who serve as models worthy of emulation and as mediators between Ana and the individual.

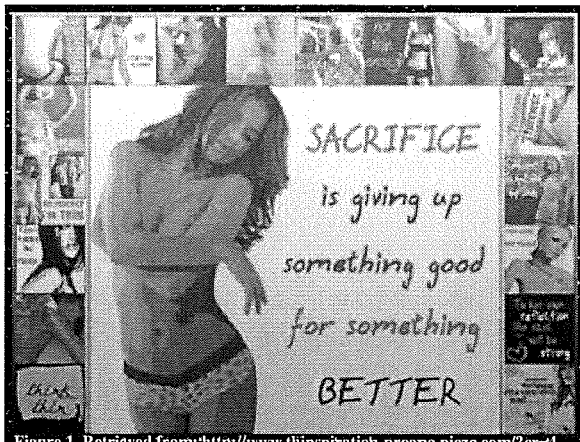
Fascinatingly, some Pro-Ana websites, like *Ana-Gracilis*, post instructions for the ritual invoking of Anamadim.<sup>137</sup> The individual is told to open their minds, meditate, align themselves with their inner current, visualize Anamadim, and finally state their purpose, like "I call upon Anamadim this night to come to me, make her presence known in my life and give me success in my efforts to become thin." Rich in religious language, the *Invocation of Anamadim* mentions a *hidden mystical marital force* that binds the relationship, much the bridal mysticism. The body is also described as the locus of salvation that will *liberate* and "shed destiny, tighten the fibres of [her] being, and make light the vessel wherein [she] sojourn[ 's] upon this earth." Individuals may also choose to make Anti or Ana offerings. Anti-offerings, items representing "bad food that TEMPT you in particular (cookies? Chips? Tortillas? Chocolate?)" should be destroyed for Anamadim, "burn them in a safe container and when the ritual is done, bury them outside as far from your house as you can." Ana offerings consist of "Dexatrim capsules, or Xenadrine or whatever your thermogenic of choice is." Finally, the individual devises her very own *pact* or

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<sup>135</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>136</sup> SN Niquoleen Didron and Stokes, 88

<sup>137</sup> See Appendix E



*contract* to achieve her goals that Anamadim will *ratify* for them. If done correctly, Anamadim should *speak* to you within the next 72 hours.

As *Figure 1* articulates, these rituals exemplify the intensity of some women's commitment to the Religion of Thinness. Its structure not only

mimics those of traditional religious rituals but also demonstrates the prevalent religious themes of salvation, suffering, and sacrifice. The Ana creed also references rituals such as "I believe in oughts, musts and shoulds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behaviour," which demonstrate the process of sacralising the body through ritual activity. As Lelwica suggests, daily rituals are meaning-making activities that have the potential to set individuals apart from one other. When specifically referring to food, such rituals can also be interpreted as being part of the ascetic model of femininity that demand one's strict obedience. As evidenced by the *Pro-Ana food pyramid*,<sup>138</sup> conceptualizations of food as harmful and polluting to the body are prominent as well. Furthermore, such rituals function to forge their collective identity in a mutually re-enforcing environment amongst the members of the virtual community. Many online discussion groups host rituals such as weight check-ins, photographic verifications of body size, feedback requests, group fasts, and food reports help to make offline bodily practices evident online.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> See Appendix J

<sup>139</sup> <http://digital.youth.ischool.berkeley.edu/node/114>

The creed describes the ultimate search for salvation, which is attainable by “trying just a little bit harder than I did yesterday.” This demonstrates the perceived validity and infallibility of the Religion of Thinness. However, it is not only the unquestioned belief in the actual existence of one kind of beauty or womanhood, but also the conception that the attaining of beauty has salvific attributes. As discussed, throughout the ages, “fasting and the demonstration of independence from physical needs has often been regarded as a route to salvation for women.”<sup>140</sup> The Creed is also characterized by Christian ascetic language, “I believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos that is my world.” This short passage demonstrates the direct relationships between anorexia and religion, specifically the concept of free will.

Just like ascetics, anorexics are engaged in the suppression of bodily desires yet are actively choosing to do so. While the medieval ascetic would have had different motivations, the contemporary ascetic none the less controls her body in an attempt to achieve secular transcendence and physical perfection. As one thinspiration reads, “In the body, as in art, perfection is attained not when there's nothing left to add, but when there's nothing left to take away.”<sup>141</sup>

Also like ascetics, the anorexic offers “all [her] earthly possessions” in return for Ana’s “wisdom, faith, and feather weight.” She promises to “worship and pledge to be a faithful servant until death” and promises to engage in fasts in Ana’s honour. Furthermore, “the *good anorexic* is characterized as a hyper-feminine, super-compliant servant or secular saint, one who conforms to

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<sup>140</sup> Day & Kays, 8

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.freechbs.com/dyngc/bathiner/some-tip-tricks.htm>

the rules of the *eating disorder religion*.<sup>142</sup> She references the next world and “being thin and beautiful there” and claims that “all that is important is that you love me”.

The final sentence in the Creed is perhaps the most telling. “I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting.” Not only does this phrase epitomize the dualistic thinking that characterized the ascetic tradition, it emphasizes modern anorexics’ preoccupation with weight loss while utilizing a very gallows humour. Furthermore, the use of the concepts of sin, the abnegation of the body, and fasting are wholly ascetic in nature. The satirical nature of the direct play off the Apostle’s Creed and other Christian devotional texts allows readers to quickly make the association with the structure of organized religions, while the familiar religious themes would invoke particular moods and motivations, however different they may be from their original intent.

Another feature that parallels the Religion of Thinness in its structure is the online community that comprises this Pro-Ana subculture. Much like a religious congregation, Pro-Ana communities provide support and stability for adherents and also reinforce their perceptions of the world. Most of these websites have chat rooms and forums wherein members can seek support and advice from each other. Religious iconography for Pro-Anas come in the form of thinspirations,<sup>143</sup> contemporary ascetic models of wholeness and perfection. While a feminized frail Christ on the cross would have influenced the bodies of the medieval ascetics, the wafer thin contemporary models influence contemporary Pro-Anas.

Another interest parallel is the manner in which the members identify themselves to one and other. As Prothinspo.com states, many anorexics consider the Pro-Ana or anorexic

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<sup>142</sup> Day & Keys, 8

<sup>143</sup> See Appendix A

*community* to be a type of secret society called the *anorexic underground*, whose members are "able to identify each other at first glance." While Christians wear the cross as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice, perhaps the Pro-Ana red bracelet functions as both a reminder of their commitment and as a covert way to identify each other amongst other women.

Based on such continuities, I would suggest that the contemporary anorexic could be conceived as a contemporary ascetic of the Religion of Thinness. Wolf and Lelwica's models adequately demonstrate the ways in which the Religion of Thinness parallels that of Christianity in terms of belief, images, rituals, morals, communities, and promises of salvation. Members of the religion of Pro-Ana have proven to adapt the cultural characteristics of the Religion of Thinness and practice them to the extreme. The religious themes and language found in the religious texts on Pro-Ana websites demonstrate the numerous parallels. Like the medieval ascetics, members of the Pro-Ana religion suppress the temptations and desires of the body in order to achieve their idealized version of wholeness and perfection. This perception may come in the guise of holiness or beauty, depending on the anorexic's subjective worldview and context. They offer fasts to the deities (or ideals) they serve, in return for love and support in their rigorous pursuit. The majority of followers who practice the Religion of Thinness to an extreme are women and their lived religious experience is heavily reliant on ritualized behaviour. To the same extent, these women have internalized the cultural images of femininity and beauty and are responding to the cultural demands in a traditionally religious manner.

Most researchers answer the question *Were ascetics anorexics?* in the negative, indicating that contextual inconsistencies between historical ascetics and contemporary anorexics

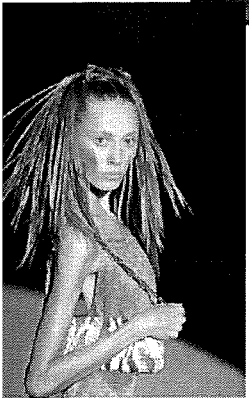
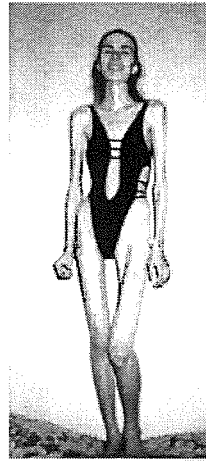
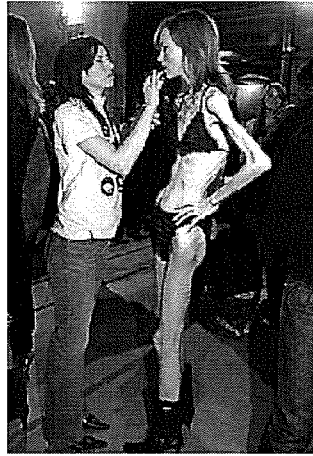
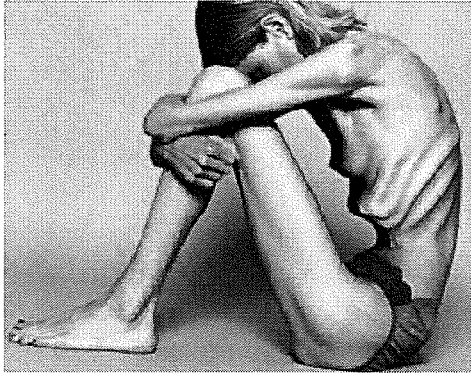
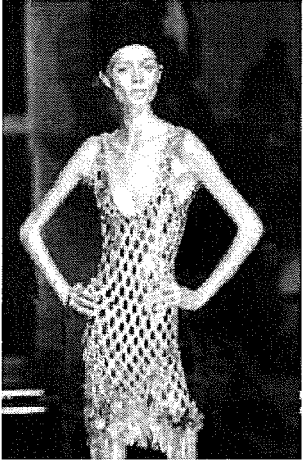
make it difficult to draw a definitive and positive conclusion.<sup>144</sup> But is it possible to take seriously the suggestion that Pro-Ana women could be the ascetics of the Religion of Thinness? This research is not intended to provoke a debate as to whether this constitutes a *real religion* or not, but rather to force us to consider if and how it could be possible. If one truly considers the prevalence and impact that images of femininity and the body have on the minds and preoccupations and realities of girls and women worldwide, it becomes possible to answer this question in the affirmative. This research has demonstrated that anorexia is not just about being thin—rather, the nature of self-starvation rituals are exceedingly multifaceted and undeniably possess some religious element.

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<sup>144</sup> Bell 1988; Brunberg 1988; Bynum 1987; Corrigion 1986; Tat 1993

Appendix A: Thinspiration, *Bones*



## Appendix B: Pro-Ana, *Tried and True* Tips and Tricks

\*Drink water! This is the #1 rule for both ana and mia. It fills you up when you are hungry and makes purging easier. The general rule is also that hot water fills you up more and ice cold water helps you to burn more calories since it lowers your body temperature so your body has to work harder to stay warm.

\*Chew sugar free gum or mints constantly. I am never without one or the other in my mouth. The benefits are endless: it kills cravings, keeps your mouth full so you can't binge, burns calories by chewing, peppermint flavors suppress appetites, and prevents bad breath if you are in ketosis.

\*Tea of Coffee are an Ana's best friend. Drink with NO CREAM OR MILK and artificial sweetener ONLY. Tea is especially great because it comes in so many different flavors and is calorie free, as opposed to black coffee which has an albeit small amount. The caffeine is also great for raising metabolism.

\*Cut food into tiny pieces. Put your fork down between bites. Chew everything a certain number of times. Eat in patterns. Develop systems of eating. All of this helps to make food a mere object rather than the devil itself.

\*Take a sip of water or other calorie-free liquid between each bite. You feel full much faster, partially because the body often mistakes thirst for hunger, so by drinking, one actually reduces the amount of food their body needs to eat.

\*If you are really craving something specific and are on the verge of a binge, go into the kitchen, prepare it, and then eat it-but do not swallow! Chew it slowly, enjoy it, and then spit it out. Immediately after that rinse your mouth with water at least three times before swallowing a sip so you do not accidentally ingest any calories.

\*If you are about to binge, pick a safe food, preferably negative calorie (pickles, celery, blueberries, etc.) and eat it non-stop for up to half an hour, taking a sip of water with each bite. Often you will not be able to even get up to half an hour, and you will be full so the desire to binge will be gone, but you haven't eaten anything "bad."

\*No Sugar Added, Fat-Free Fudge Pops. These are the reason I am alive. They have 40 calories in one and taste exactly like chocolate ice cream. If you must binge, try eating a whole box of these. There are 560 calories in a box of 14, and they are easy to purge.

\*Do not ever eat anything you do not know the exact amount of calories in. Sometimes you can fool yourself into thinking you've eaten less than you have. Remember, numbers do not lie.

\*Track progress by measurements and not the scale alone. Scales are affected by everything from the weather to the time of day, but the numbers on a measuring tape are affected by nothing except the actual size of your body.

\*Keep a food diary. Start your own pro-ana page. Make an ed scrapbook. Anything that keeps your mind on not eating is a good thing.

\*When you want to eat, exercise for at least 15 minutes first. I like to put on nice lyrical music, usually Charlotte Martin or sometimes classical, and do bare work. It not only distracts you from eating but burns calories and benefits your body as well.

\*Buy a pair of expensive jeans at least one size too small. Try them on right before you eat. You will either not want to

eat or will eat less. When you lose enough weight to fit into them properly, reward yourself by buying another pair, again one or two sizes too small.

\*Eat low-calorie foods with very intense flavors. Often times you just crave taste. Chili peppers, anything pickled, peppermints, and very concentrated bullion (make it with half the water recommended) are all good options.

\*Make a list of foods that you are absolutely never ever allowed to eat. Write it down and keep it somewhere accessible. On this list should be things like doughnuts, cake, cream, soda, fatty meats like duck, and any dairy product not made with skim milk. If you really like any of these things and find it hard to resist, prepare it, but then put something disgusting all over it (like pouring vinegar on a cream-filled doughnut). Take a bite. You will find you have totally lost your taste for the food.

\*Diet pills are amazing, but you have to be careful. Try to eat something small and safe when you take one, like an apple or a small piece of grilled chicken. If you don't then you will get awful side effects. The same goes for taking more than the recommended amount. I have taken four stacker 3 pills with no food and almost ended up dead because of it. Use, but with caution.

\*If you must go out to eat, go to the restaurant's web page before hand, and find something safe to eat. Do not eat bread or appetizers. Order a salad with dressing on the side if everyone else is having appetizers. If there is nothing safe on the menu most places will make you a plain piece of grilled chicken or fish if you ask.

\*Never drink soda. There is absolutely no reason to. Even diet soda will actually make you look bloated and weigh a little more.

Retrieved from: <http://www.pro-thinspo.com/proanatictipsandtricks.html>

### Appendix C: The Ana Creed

#### ~Ana Creed~

I believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos that is my world.

I believe that I am the most vile, worthless and useless person ever to have existed on this planet, and that I am totally unworthy of anyone's time and attention.

I believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots. If they could see how I really am, then they would hate me almost as much as I do.

I believe in oughts, musts and shoulds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behaviour.

I believe in perfection and strive to attain it.

I believe in salvation through trying just a bit harder than I did yesterday.

I believe in calorie counters as the inspired word of god, and memorise them accordingly.

I believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures

I believe in hell, because I sometimes think that I'm living in it.

I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting.

Retrieved from: [www.freewebs.com/savemeana/anareligion.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/savemeana/anareligion.htm)

**Appendix D: The Ana Psalm**

~Ana Psalm~

Strict is my diet  
I must nog want  
It maketh me lie down at night hungry  
It leadeth me past the confectioners  
It trieth my will power  
It leadeth me in the paths of alternation for my figure sake  
Yeah, though I walk trough the aisles of the pastry department, I will buy no sweet rolls for  
they are fattening  
The cakes and the pies, they tempt me  
Before me is a table set with green beens and lettuce  
I filleth my stomach with liquids  
My day's quota runneth over  
Surely calorie and weight charts will follow me, all days of my life  
And I will dwell in the fear of the scales forever

Retrieved from: <http://proanalifestyle.blogspot.com/2007/07/anas-psalm.html>

### Appendix E: The Thin Commandments

#### ~Thin Commandments~

1. If you aren't thin you aren't attractive.
2. Being thin is more important than being healthy.
3. You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner.
4. Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty.
5. Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards.
6. Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly.
7. What the scale says is the most important thing.
8. Losing weight is good/gaining weight is bad.
9. You can never be too thin.
10. Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success.

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Retrieved from: [www.freewebs.com/savemeana/anareligion.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/savemeana/anareligion.htm)

**Appendix F: Letter to Ana**

**~Letter to Ana~**

Dear Ana,

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I offer you my soul, my heart and my bodily functions. I give you all my earthly possessions. I seek your wisdom, your faith and your feather weight.

I pledge to obtain the ability to float, to lower my weight to the single digits, I pledge to stare into space, to fear food, and to see obese images in the mirror.

I will worship you and pledge to be a faithful servant until death does us part. If I cheat on you and procreate with Ronald McDonald, Dave Thomas, the colonel or that cute little dog. I will kneel over my toilet and thrust my fingers deep in my throat and pray for your forgiveness.

Please Ana, dont' give up on me. I'm so weak, i know but only you with your strength inside me will I become a woman worthy of love and respect.

I'm begging for you not to give up, I'm pleading with my shallow breathes and my pale skin. I bleed for you, suffer leg pains, headaches and fainting spells. My love for you makes me dizzy and confused I dont' know whether I'm coming or going. Men run when they see the love I have for you and never return. But they aren't important to me all thats important is that you love me. If you stay with me, I will worship you daily, I will run miles a day, come rain, snow, bitter cold or searing heat I will run from the pain and in fright. I will do 1,000 sit ups a day and lie to my family about what I eat and how I feel.

I will stop weeping when I feel your warm arms embrace my shivering body. I will numb the hunger pains with razor blades and your strength.

Today I renew our friendship and resolve to be faithful to you year long, life long. I begin the year with a 3 day fast in honor of you. If you give me the strength to fade away I will love you and worship you forever.

When i'm finally faded to nothing, when you've given me the gift of ending this torturous life. I will float on to the next world and be thin and beautiful payment for my undying love for you in this world.

I ask only one more thing you, please ana, remove me from this hell, from this world ASAP. Please take away this hatred for my pain and allow me to be free and light.

Forever,

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### Appendix G: Letter from Ana

#### ~Letter from Ana~

Allow me to introduce myself. My name, or as I am called by so called "doctors", is Anorexia. Anorexia Nervosa is my full name, but you may call me Ana. Hopefully we can become great partners. In the coming time, I will invest a lot of time in you, and I expect the same from you.

In the past you have heard all of your teachers and parents talk about you. You are "so mature", "intelligent", "14 going on 45", and you possess "so much potential". Where has that gotten you, may I ask? Absolutely no where! You are not perfect, you do not try hard enough, further more you waste your time on thinking and talking with friends and drawing! Such acts of indulgence shall not be allowed in the future.

Your friends do not understand you. They are not truthful. In the past, when the insecurity has quietly gnawed away at your mind, and you asked them, "Do I look...fat?" and they answered "Oh no, of course not" you knew they were lying! Only I tell the truth. Your parents, let's not even go there! You know that they love you, and care for you, but part of that is just that they are your parents and are obligated to do so. I shall tell you a secret now: deep down inside themselves, they are disappointed with you. Their daughter, the one with so much potential, has turned into a fat, lazy, and undeserving girl.

But I am about to change all that.

I expect a lot from you. You are not allowed to eat much. It will start slowly: decreasing of fat intake, reading the nutrition labels, cutting out junk food, fried food, etc. For a while, the exercise will be simple: some running, perhaps some crunches and some situps. Nothing too serious. Perhaps drop a few pounds, take a little off of that fat tub of a stomach. But it won't be long before I tell you that it isn't good enough.

I will expect you to drop your calorie intake and up your exercise. I will push you to the limit. You must take it because you cannot defy me! I am beginning to imbed myself into you. Pretty soon, I am with you always. I am there when you wake up in the morning and run to the scale. The numbers become both friend and enemy, and the frenzied thoughts pray for them to be lower than yesterday, last night, etc. You look into the mirror with dismay. You prod and poke at the fat that is there, and smile when you come across bone. I am there when you figure out the plan for the day: 400 calories, 2 hours exercise. I am the one figuring this out, because by now my thoughts and your thoughts are blurred together as one.

I follow you throughout the day. In school, when your mind wanders I give you something to think about. Recount the calories for the day. It's too much. I fill your mind with thoughts of food, weight, calories, and things that are safe to think about. Because now, I am already inside of you. I am in your head, your heart, and your soul. The hunger pains you pretend not to feel is me, inside of you.

Pretty soon I am telling you not only what to do with food, but what to do ALL of the time. Smile and nod. Present yourself well. Suck in that fat stomach, dammit! God, you are such a fat cow!!!! When mealtimes come around I tell you what to do. I make a plate of lettuce seem like a feast fit for a king. Push the food around. Make it look like you've eaten something. No piece of anything...if you eat, all the control will be broken...do you WANT that?? To revert back to the fat COW you once were?? I force you to stare at magazine models. Those perfect skinned, white teathed, waifish models of perfection staring out at you from those glossy pages. I make you realize that you could never be them. You will always be fat and never will you be as beautiful as they are. When you look in the mirror, I will distort the image. I will show you obesity and hideousness. I will show you a sumo wrestler where in reality there is a starving child. But you must not know this, because if you knew the truth, you might start to eat again and our relationship would come crashing down.

Sometimes you will rebel. Hopefully not often though. You will recognize the small rebellious fiber left in your body and will venture down to the dark kitchen. The cupboard door will slowly open, creaking softly. Your eyes will move over the food that I have kept at a safe distance from you. You will find your hands reaching out, lethargically, like a nightmare, through the darkness to the box of crackers. You shove them in, mechanically, not really tasting but simply relishing in the fact that you are going against

me. You reach for another box, then another, then another. Your stomach will become bloated and grotesque, but you will not stop yet. And all the time I am screaming at you to stop, you fat cow, you really have no self control, you are going to get fat.

When it is over you will cling to me again, ask me for advice because you really do not want to get fat. You broke a cardinal rule and ate, and now you want me back. I'll force you into the bathroom, onto your knees, staring into the void of the toilet bowl. Your fingers will be inserted into your throat, and, not without a great deal of pain, your food binge will come up. Over and over this is to be repeated, until you spit up blood and water and you know it is all gone. When you stand up, you will feel dizzy. Don't pass out. Stand up right now. You fat cow you deserve to be in pain!

Maybe the choice of getting rid of the guilt is different. Maybe I chose to make you take laxatives, where you sit on the toilet until the wee hours of the morning, feeling your insides cringe. Or perhaps I just make you hurt yourself, bang your head into the wall until you receive a throbbing headache. Cutting is also effective. I want you to see your blood, to see it fall down your arm, and in that split second you will realize you deserve whatever pain I give you. You are depressed, obsessed, in pain, hurting, reaching out but no one will listen? Who cares?!?! You are deserving; you brought this upon yourself.

Oh, is this harsh? Do you not want this to happen to you? Am I unfair? I do do things that will help you. I make it possible for you to stop thinking of emotions that cause you stress. Thoughts of anger, sadness, desperation, and loneliness can cease because I take them away and fill your head with the methodic calorie counting. I take away your struggle to fit in with kids your age, the struggle of trying to please everyone as well. Because now, I am your only friend, and I am the only one you need to please.

I have a weak spot. But we must not tell anyone. If you decide to fight back, to reach out to someone and tell them about how I make you live, all hell will break loose. No one must find out, no one can crack this shell that I have covered you with. I have created you, this thin, perfect, achieving child. You are mine and mine alone. Without me, you are nothing. So do not fight back. When others comment, ignore them. Take it into stride, forget about them, forget about everyone that tries to take me away. I am your greatest asset, and I intend to keep it that way. Sincerely, Ana

Appendix H: Pro-Ana Images of Angels

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Retrieved from: [http://www.Pro-Ana-nation.com/v1/index.php?option=com\\_weblinks&catid=11&Itemid=12](http://www.Pro-Ana-nation.com/v1/index.php?option=com_weblinks&catid=11&Itemid=12)



## Appendix I: Ritual Invokation of Anamadim

### The Summoning of Anamadim

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#### PRELIMINARIES:

**WORKING SPACE:** Locate for yourself a place where you will not be disturbed and where you will not disturb others. If this is impossible, seclude yourself as much as possible and work quietly and discreetly. You do not want to be interrupted or distracted while doing this work. Computer, television, radio, games, whatever, all OFF. Lights OFF (light candles instead), door SHUT, locked if you can. If you wear jewelry, wear silver only.

**ALTAR AND CANDLES:** Set up an altar in the east with your candles, incense, and other implements. For candles, choose a neutral spirit color such as pale yellow or white; or a Venusian/Netzach color such as brilliant green; or oriented elementally, such as yellow for air/intellect or red for fire/will. Anamadim's number is 147; obviously it would be cumbersome to set up 147 candles!! So choose a number which is associated with Anamadim and 147, such as 3 or 7 (the raw prime factors, since  $147 = 3 \times 7 \times 7$ ) or 17, which is the sum of those factors ( $3 + 7 + 7 = 17$ ). If you have 17 candles, I recommend concentric circles with 3 in the center, a small ring of 7 around them, and a larger ring of 7 around those, thus indicating the factorials of 147 ( $3 \times 7 \times 7$ ). If you only have a few candles, I recommend using either 3 or 7.

**INCENSE:** Set these on the altar along with any incense associated with Venus (benzoin, rose, sandalwood, myrtle, all soft and voluptuous odors) or the Martial (Mars) energy (tobacco, believe it or not, is an ideal martial incense!) or a scent evocative of the energy of the delicate, graceful yet strong maiden, an elven-style faerie, or some other association with the ultra-thin feminine. Saffron may also be used as an incense. If these are unavailable to you, use something which carries a strong personal association in your mind, or which you "feel" represents ana-energy.

#### THE RITE.

##### OPENING:

Those trained or experienced in such things should use the LBRP, because the sum of all the names vibrated in each quarter is the same as Anamadim's number (147). If you do not know the LBRP or you are of a different tradition, just use whatever standard opening you use in your tradition. Those who are totally new to ceremonial magick may use the simple formula provided below.

Orient yourself in the four quarters: wherever you are, know in which direction North, East, South and West lie. Begin by facing East.

Assume a comfortable posture where you will be least bothered by your body. Breathe deeply

and slowly, in through the nose, out through the mouth. Enter your breath, in your mind, become aware of it, become one with it, become the breath and not the breather, as much as you can stretch your imagination, and feelings to do so. You just wanna concentrate on your breath, OK? ;-)

When you are relaxed and centered from the breath, stand, facing East. Do something to "mark" or "open" the East -- ring a bell, wave the incense toward it, trace a pentagram in the space in front of you as you face that direction, or whatever. As you do this, imagine that a door is opening in that direction and the power of that element waits to guard and assist you. East = air = intellect; focus on that, see that power now open and available to you to assist your working this night.

Repeat, turning counter-clockwise, in the other three directions:

North = earth = the material realm - body, physical reality, etc.

West = water = emotions, intuition

South = fire = will, volition

Your mind will begin to open at this point and you may find yourself meditating on how each of these elemental forces plays a role in ana, and how they interact (e.g., intellect taking charge of emotions that will may be executed upon the body)

After you have turned toward and opened all four directions, return to facing East.

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#### ALIGNMENT WITH THE CURRENT:

After your opening is complete, focus on your inner center, the iron core of pure indomitable will that you inhabit. If you do not feel you have one, create one, invent one. Remember that as long as there is someone there to argue whether they have one or not, there is someone there who can create one. So do it. No arguments. No excuses. Anamadim is upon us this night. Anamadim is nigh; lo, She comes!!

Visualize (imagine and see as vividly as possible in your head) a glowing circle of pale yellow light being traced counter-clockwise above your head, seven times in the same path. Extend your arms outward to the sides (so your body is like a +) "See" the same glowing circle traced around your right arm/hand, as large as around your head, seven times, and then the same glowing circle on the left, again, seven times. ( $3 \times 7 = 21$ )

Repeat this entire sequence seven times, bringing the total number of circles to 147 ( $21 \times 7 = 147$ ), the number of Anamadim.

During this entire process, concentrate upon really SEEING the glowing circles as best you can. Don't worry if this is difficult or if you cannot get it to the point of seeming real; what counts is your effort and energy. These things take practice. If your mind must wander, let it wander to contemplating either Ana through the four elements (discussed in the OPENING, above) or let it work up anticipation of the spirit Anamadim.

**FURTHER ALIGNMENT:**

At this point, with the 147 circles glowing about you, draw them together into a triple rose, each rose having 49 petals ( $147 / 3 = 49$ ); see the roses falling into your heart, your core, your center. If they get tangled, just sort them out in your head and push them back out to being simple glowing circles again and focus on letting the energy of those circles "hum" through your limbs into your heart, and down through your spine from the top of your head all the way to the base of the spine and further down into the soles of your feet.

Utter aloud your STATEMENT OF INTENT.

A statement of intent is a declaration of purpose. Sum up your purpose for this working in a sentence or two, for example, "I am here to unite with the spirit Anamadim, that I may have power and strength from her to achieve my goals," or, "I call upon Anamadim this night to come to me, make her presence known in my life, and give me success in my efforts to become thin."

**INVOCATION TO ANAMADIM:**

Now is the time to recite the invocation. Put as much feeling and passion into this as you possibly can. **BY ALL MEANS, MODIFY IT TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS.** If some part of it is not "right" for you or causes you to break your focus (i.e. you find it funny or odd or off) - leave that OUT, or substitute your OWN stuff for it. Better yet, write your own invocation! An invocation is a call, you are issuing an invitation to this spirit to come, and you want to make it as pleasing and appealing as possible. You WANT Anamadim to feel flattered, adored, loved, appreciated, so she will want to come to you.

Thee, thee do I invoke, Anamadim, sculptor, whittler of the flesh, shameless burner of the fat of babes! Thee, thee do I invoke, whose whip brings the feral impulses of survival to bay, whose scalpel of control carves away every distraction and fixates the eye mercilessly upon a single goal, whose vial of metabolic acid dissolves all that is unsightly and wasteful and cumbersome from the bones of this frame, and that right quickly: thee do I invoke, ANAMADIM! Come to me!

Thee do I invoke, ANAMADIM, hidden mystical martial force of Venus, whose number is 147, destroyer of self-flattering illusions, championess of cold truths above and beyond all polite gestures of facile and manufactured compassion! O thou who art hunger and denial, triumph of fire over earth and air over water, thee do I invoke! Thee do I invoke, ANAMADIM, aloof, merciless, unyielding, unrelenting one! Fearful affliction of hideous strength! ANAMADIM!!

Thee, thee do I invoke! Thou who art feared and obeyed by nubile virgins throughout the globe, thou who dost inspire the heartaching illicit and forbidden lusts which cause the phalluses of men to throb with unrequited and unquenchable desire, thee do I invoke, ANAMADIM! Come to me!

Come upon me! Descend into the depths of my being, take up thy residence herein, claim me for thy habitation from this moment onward, and design and decorate this thy temple as thou wilt!

Come to me, ANAMADIM! Enter me, ANAMADIM! Come, ANAMADIM, come enter and possess this shrine, devour this consciousness and this will freely offered to your pernicious designs! Bind thou mine appetites with bands of iron and steel, and fill me with the ecstasy of emptiness; eat away the excess of my flesh and render my form as parsimonious as the known universe. Shapeshift me to the image which forms the essence of desire and success; empower me to embrace and endure the necessary deprivations and disciplines; ensure that my efforts will not fall fallow upon the stones of dead weight, but liberate me to shed density, tighten the fibers of my being, and make light the vessel wherein I sojourn upon this earth. Transmute my water to air, that it weigh me not down, and purge my body and spirit of the needless and despicable things stored therein, that I may be free to fly upon the wings of the wind, sing of thy mighty deeds among the children of men, and vindicate thy name where it is demonized by the ignorant!

#### "QUIET TIME"

The importance of this passive portion of the rite CANNOT be overestimated. Anamadim speaks sparingly, but directly; quietly, yet powerfully. She may have something to say to you. You may "hear" her speak, "sense" her voice as a train of thought running parallel to your thoughts or woven within them. You may have a sudden flash of insight, or creative idea, or an inspiration to do something you had not thought of before. Or you may suddenly feel strongly about doing something you had thought about but not pursued. You may have an image come to you that you wish to work into a piece of art, or poetry or song lyrics. You may have a sudden memory of something long past that gives you a keener insight into yourself which can be used to further your success. Whatever form it comes in, stop, be quiet, be still for awhile, "feel" the atmosphere around you; reach out with your mind and spirit and "feel" Anamadim there. Think about her being there. What does she look like, feel like, seem like to you? What is she wanting to tell you? Don't TRY too hard here, don't try to MAKE something come. Just be still for awhile and be open to it. Sometimes it does NOT come right away, but if you create this still, quiet space FOR it to happen, it could break upon you the next morning, or a couple days down the road. It is the act of being receptive and open that is important here, in preparing yourself for what WILL come, whether this night, this moment, or in the next 72 hours.

#### CLOSING.

When your "quiet time", trance, vision, etc. has wound down, ground and center yourself mentally (deep breathing as before, focusing on breath, relaxing, and mentally letting the energies run down through your body and seep into the earth.) THANK Anamadim for her presence and her willingness to assist you in your goals, with a very real and present assistance you will be able to see, feel, taste in days to come. PLEDGE yourself anew to be strong, focused, and enduring to reach your goals. DISMISS Anamadim by telling her she is free to return to her realm, to her sphere, and to be ready at any such time as you may call her. REVERSE what you did in the opening -- this can be fairly brief and perfunctory, dismissing each quadrant with a kiss and a hailing sign, or more drawn out as you express your appreciation to each of the elemental forces for their contribution in guarding and aiding your working -- whatever you feel moved to

do. The important thing is to break out of the secret, sacred space, both inwardly and outwardly, and make a clean, clear return to the everyday world.

#### RECORDING.

Don't forget to *IMMEDIATELY* record everything that you saw, felt, or experienced during the ritual! It is absolutely essential to keep a record of your experiments of this nature, so that in days to come you might trace the threads of cause and effect.

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#### OPTIONAL DIRECTIONS:

(any one or combination of these may be performed either *PRIOR* to the *INVOCATION*, *FOLLOWING* the invocation, *DURING* the invocation, or after the "quiet time" but *BEFORE* the *CLOSING*.)

**ANTI-OFFERINGS:** have with you some sugar, salt, bread, etc. several items representing "bad foods" that *TEMPT* you in particular (cookies? chips? tortillas? chocolate? ) ... destroy them for Anamadim; let her consume them. Burn them in a safe container and when the ritual is done, bury them outside as far from your house as you can. Treat them like they are bad juju, bad karma, bad critters you don't want coming near you, and salt around your threshold or somesuch after you take them out and bury them (like you do when destroying a link or something). Or simplify it: make up a nice small plate full of the most tempting goodies you would want to binge on, and throw them *AWAY* in honor of Anamadim. (No fishing in the trash can after the ritual! That's *DIRTY!* EUW!!)

**ANA OFFERINGS:** break open a couple Dexatrim capsules, or Xenadrine or whatever your thermogenic of choice is, burn it to Anamadim or dissolve it in a chalice (goblet) full of pure water (we all know water is our friend, right?) and offer it as a libation -- you can either sprinkle it around the room or take it outside and pour it around the house. Alternatively, use a small plate of "safe foods" for the offering - consecrate them to Anamadim and consume them later -- slowly, methodically -- only when you most need them.

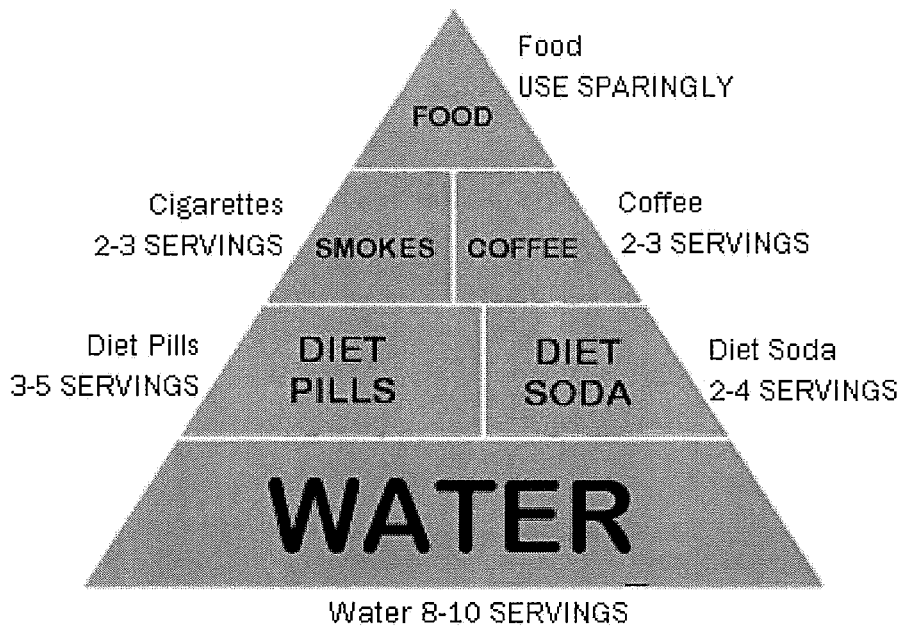
**MAKE A PACT.** You should have prepare this ahead of time. It should not be a list of goals so much as planning out some things you can do, and *WILL* do, over the *NEXT FOUR WEEKS* (till the moon is new again) toward your goals. You should list your plans and also list what you want from Anamadim. What you want from her should also be practical -- more along the lines of means rather than ends. For example, instead of saying "I want my thighs to be 17 inches instead of 20" you should specify that what you want from Anamadim is strength in your will to stick to a daily routine of 50 leg lifts (for example) or a two-mile run every morning, or whatever. Anamadim doesn't work for you by waving a wand and \*zap\* you get to be the size you want. She works *WITH* you and *IN* you to provide assistance in overcoming weak points within yourself so that you can do the work more consistently and efficiently. She also aids your success and teaches you things if you will listen.

This "pact" is your Ana plan and Anamadim will ratify it for you. You must stick to this plan, and the harder you work to stick to it, doing your part which involves YOUR choices, the more you liberate her to do HER part, which means success in your working. The "pact" is actually a CONTRACT with Anamadim: "I will do this, and I expect you to help me by doing that." Be sure to include something you will do for Anamadim's sake in return, such as making her existence known to others, vindicating her name (telling what she is really like when you hear people making dumb statements about what Ana says or who Ana is, etc.), helping to gather her scattered tribe (that's US!) together, building a website dedicated to her, or offering support to newbies (note, this is NOT the same as "recruiting" people to ana, which I personally don't think should be done; I'm merely saying if someone has \*already\* made that decision then we should support them in their goals as much as if they had been "one of us" for two years or more ...)

If you are not too squeamish to do so, sign your pact in blood, or at least put a drop of blood by your signature, showing symbolically that you are willing to endure some pain to get to your goals. PLEASE be very careful with this; if you are not accustomed to practicing safe bloodletting, pick a scab or just forget about it and sign with ink! I had to interrupt a ritual once (years ago) to get to the hospital for stitches because I cut too deep; it CAN and DOES happen! You don't want it happening to you so be CAREFUL and don't mess with the blood thing unless you know exactly what you are doing.

Retrieved from: <http://ana-gracilis.tripod.com/id4.html>

**Appendix J: Pro-Ana Food Pyramid**



Retrieved from: <http://www.2medusa.com/2008/01/kimkins-pro-ana-pro-mia-la-danse.html>

### Appendix K: Red Bracelets


**Ana's Inspiration**

THIN IS BEAUTIFUL

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**Red Bracelet**

IFOF is a term that means "Identification friend or foe" most commonly used in the aircraft industry. It is a thing on an airplane that tells people reading the signal if they are a friend or foe. We now have a system of our own. I got this from another site: Have you ever wondered if the skinny girl you see has an ED (A or M)? And proud of it? You so desperately want to ask, or even try to make friends but are scared? Well, no more... since we have our ribbon "Ana is a lifestyle..." and its red.

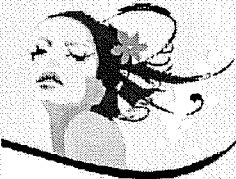


I propose that we all get a red beaded bracelet. You can make it or buy them. Wear it daily or when you go out to secretly say that you are proud to be pro-ana or proud to have an ED that is. Anytime you see someone wearing a red beaded bracelet, capture their eye contact and point to your bracelet, and if they return the same point to theirs... then they are ED friendly. If not, then it's just someone whom is wearing one.

As for those who are older and feel silly wearing a beaded bracelet, wear a red t-shirt every Monday or when you go out on Mondays.



Please pass this along to every proED clubs, forums, websites (secrets public) for we need to be known widespread secretly amongst us. So, copy paste everyone!



- Home
- Best 100 things to know
- Inspiration
- Thinspiration
- Health
- Bracelet
- Weight Management
- Food
- Complete food information
- Makeup
- Videos and music
- Quotes
- Journal
- Red Bracelet
- Giftbook
- Contacting me
- Other internet sources

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