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'That perfect girl is gone': Pro-ana, anorexia and *Frozen* (2013) as an 'eating disorder' film

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Abstract:
The study of pro-anorexia (pro-ana) sites occupies a significant place in critical feminist work on eating disorders. But pro-ana sites have been studied as particular subcultural spaces which function to produce communities, identity positions and modes of subversive/ conformist femininities. Although anorexia might often be experienced as all-encompassing, people who are anorexic/ pro-anorexic don't just 'do' anorexia. They also participate in everyday activities like engaging with media and as with 'normal' audiences, such encounters provide important resources for identity construction. In drawing on the feminist bid to challenge the conception of anorexic voices as pathological and 'sick', existing only 'outside of the true' (Saukko 2008, 77), this article explores a sample of pro-ana responses to *Frozen,* undertaking an analysis of the ways in which *Frozen* has been understood as an 'eating disorder' film and used in relation to pro-anorexic/ anorexic identities.

Keywords: Anorexia, Pro-ana, *Frozen*, Elsa, Audience, Disney princess, Femininity

On the 14th November, 2014, I had my first McDonalds. As I was driving home I leant forward and instinctively clicked on the CD containing 'Let it Go' from *Frozen.* Purchased for my 3 year old daughter, this was not a song that I usually listened to alone, and it was normally the context for a rousing duet, belted out between us in the car. But as I listened and sang, the words began to get stuck in my throat and I felt tears streaming down my face. *What was going on?* I had listened to this song at least 100 times before. I mulled over the experience for a couple of days before typing the words 'Elsa/ anorexia/ Frozen' into Google, and felt a mixture of surprise and recognition as the search returned a sizable number of results. As one blogger wrote, 'To me, the whole story seemed to accurately parallel the path I and many others have taken to suffering and recovering from an eating

disorder' (peaceloveandsmoothies, 2014). Having suffered from anorexia for 20 years and after being recovered for five (it just took me a while to tackle a McDonalds), I felt that I was responding to a personal and affective connection with *Frozen*.

I decided to write a blog about this experience (Holmes, 2014) and this briefly detailed how *Frozen* had been interpreted in relation to discourses of anorexia on the web, coupled with my own interpretations of the film. In focusing in particular on how the sentiment and lyrics of 'Let it Go' resonated with a rejection of repressive anorexic rules and regimes, my blog privileged discourses of anorexic recovery. But as I later analyzed the internet interpretations in more detail, I was confronted with a more politically ambivalent construction of the relationship between *Frozen/ '*Let it Go' and anorexic subjectivities: the most pervasive discussion of *Frozen* as 'ED' film ('eating disorder' film) took place in online spaces which house, produce and exchange 'pro-ana' (pro-anorexic) identities and experiences.

In this article, I focus on the site My Pro-Ana (MPA) and undertake an analysis of the ways in which 'Let it Go' and/or *Frozen* was understood and used in relation to pro-anorexic/ anorexic identities (on MPA) in 2013-14. In contributing to the feminist bid to challenge the conception of anorexic voices as pathological and 'sick', existing only 'outside of the true' (Saukko 2008, 77), I position the MPA responses as a case study in female responses to *Frozen,* Disney's most commercially successful film of all time. In doing so, the article seeks to make three key interventions.

First, in engendering communities that 'would be highly unlikely to be visible in the offline, or pre-Internet, environment' (Yeshua-Katz and Martins, 2013: 501), the study of pro-ana sites has come occupy a significant place in critical feminist work on eating disorders (e.g. Dias 2003, Ferreday 2003, Day and Keys 2008, Boero and Pascoe 2012). Although conceptualised variously as a form of community, identity, lifestyle or movement, most scholars agree that 'pro-ana' refers to a way of representing and articulating the self which promotes and endorses self-starvation in such a way that is opposed to discursive constructions of anorexia as a psychiatric disorder. That is not to obscure the ways in which pro-ana discourse may also display real ambivalence about anorexia (including its physical dangers and health implications), nor the ways in which the possibilities of recovery may also be discussed. But it is to suggest that – although the concepts of 'anorexic' and 'pro-anorexic' identities exist on a continuum – users who identify as pro-ana are more likely to articulate the pursuit of self-starvation as a conscious choice which is recognised and valued within a community setting. But within critical feminist work on eating disorders, pro-ana sites have largely been studied as particular subcultural spaces which, in relation to practices of self-starvation, function to produce communities, identity positions and modes of conformist/ subversive femininities. Although anorexia might often be experienced as all-encompassing, people who are anorexic/ pro-anorexic don't just 'do' anorexia. They also engage in everyday activities like listening to songs and watching films, videos and programmes and - although the relationship between media consumption and anorexia is often pathologised (see Bray, 2005) - as with 'normal' audiences, these media encounters

provide important resources for identity construction. Although *Frozen* might well be positioned as something *out* of the 'ordinary' (both in terms of its 'event' status and its special significance for the community I discuss) it indicates the importance of exploring how anorexic/pro-anorexic identities cannot only be approached in terms of practices directly intended to support self-starvation.

Second, this article seeks to contribute to understandings of how the representation of the Disney princess is negotiated at the level of reception. There is a considerable body of feminist literature on the Disney princess films (Henke et al 1996, Do Rozario 2004, Davis 2006, Stover 2013, Wilde 2014). Yet although studies of how Disney princess culture is complexly negotiated (rather than 'passively' consumed) exist (Baker-Sperry, 2007, Wohlwend, 2009), textual analyses of the films have been prioritised over studies of audience or reception: explorations of how particular narratives or characters are consumed, used and understood. Furthermore, this existing research - which concentrates more on practices of 'princess play' around the Disney films than on responses to the films themselves - focuses on young girls, thus neglecting the large adult audiences for these texts, of which *Frozen*'s appeal to pro-ana discussants offers a specific example.

Finally, this article seeks to raise questions about the critical and methodological relationships at work in feminist work on eating disorders, and their articulation of anorexic subjectivities and experiences. In addition to offering a discursive analysis of the responses on MPA, I draw upon what Brita Ytre-Arne conceptualises as 'reader-guided' textual analysis, an approach which questions the conventional polarisation of audience studies, reception contexts and textual analysis. Rather 'than taking the researcher's interests or assumptions as the starting point for textual analysis, this method aims to focus on the dimensions that readers define as important to their experiences' (2011, 214). Arne's intervention speaks to a wider history of anxiety about the power relationship between 'expert' academic and research subject in much audience work in Media and Cultural Studies. But I want to suggest that these debates are also crucially relevant (and worth re-visiting) with regard to critical feminist work on eating disorders, particularly when it seeks to give voice to the political significance of self-starvation for those who endure it.

Feminist approaches to anorexia and pro-ana communities

Loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* (1844), *Frozen* tells the story of two sisters, Elsa and Anna, the former of which was born with magical powers to create ice and snow. Haunted by the moment that her magic nearly killed her younger sister, Elsa is encouraged to isolate herself in a bid to suppress her apparently dangerous powers. But when required to emerge from her sequestered life on her coronation day, Elsa's emotions accidently trigger her magic, and her powers set off an eternal winter. Fleeing the city of Arendelle, Elsa is pursued by her sister Anna (and Kristoff, the mountain ice man, who ultimately emerges as Anna's love interest), who is desperate to understand Elsa's remote and secluded lifestyle and to re-kindle her relationship with her older sibling.

Frozen has popularly been debated as Disney's 'first foray into feminism' (Rodriguez 2013) in so far as it appears to marginalise the emphasis on heterosexual courtship in favour of the powerful love between the two sisters. But popular readings also quickly debated the film as a 'queer' text (Ibid), or likened the construction and treatment of Elsa to cultural responses to mental illness (e.g. Petersen 2014). The interpretations which made specific links with anorexia were less likely to appear in professional reviews but – in addition to pro-ana sites - could be found in personal blogs as well as fan fiction. So in stories such as 'Insecurities of the Queen' or 'Elsa's Teenage Years' for example, Elsa is quite literally anorexic, vomiting in the toilet as she tells herself 'you eat like a pig' ('Obsessed with Elsa').

There is now a long and rich heritage of feminist writing on eating disorders, and in seeking to contest the medical and psychiatric construction of anorexia in particular, this has explored such problems in relation to the socially constructed nature of female identity. The role of the media in perpetuating 'idealised image[s] of thinness as beauty' (Malson 1998, 138) was recognised here. But critical feminist work has often sought to move beyond this, situating anorexia as a 'graphic cultural statement' about 'the "conditions of being a woman" in contemporary western cultures… and …. as expressive of a diverse range of sometimes contradictory societal values' which work to map out the normative parameters of the feminine (Ibid, 137). The emphasis on contradiction is crucial, in so far as much feminist research, particularly that influenced by post-structuralism, has foregrounded the anorexic female body as paradoxical and polysemic. The attempt to render the self tiny, disappearing and fragile might be seen as a dangerous 'hyper-conformity' to a cultural ideal of thin femininity, also adhering to traditional cultural scripts of gender in which women should take up less (masculine) space (Malson 1998, 136, Orbach 1986, Wolf 1991, Bordo 1993). Yet starvation can also be interpreted as a form of corporeal resistance, a rejection of traditional heterosexual femininity and feminine subjectivity in the pursuit of a sexless/ childlike or defeminised form (Bordo 1993, Malson 2009, Saukko 2008).

The extent to which post-structuralist work on anorexia focused attention on self-starvation as a 'complex practice of embodied communication and active identity construction' (Eckermann 2009, 13) is especially clear in the work on pro-ana communities. In positioning anorexia ('ana') as a lifestyle choice rather than an illness or disease, pro-ana sites have been read as rejecting the medical discourses which seek to discipline and often isolate the anorexic subject (Day and Keys, 2008, 5, Ferreday, 2003, 284). Furthermore, and as developed in more detail below, such sites have been understood as undertaking some counter-hegemonic work with regard to the interpretation and negotiation of the slender media ideal (Dias 2003, Ferreday 2003). In this respect, in rejecting the often pathologising discourses of (historically male) medicine, as well as seeking to reclaim control over the female body (Day and Keys 2008, 11), these discourses appear to have considerable congruence with the feminist approaches to eating disorders.

Yet as Debra Ferreday acknowledges, it would 'be absurd to claim that websites celebrating anorexia are subversive' (2003, 262), even if they can be seen as subverting particular 'sets of values' (Ibid). Feminists recognize anorexia as a self-destructive and

potentially fatal mode of existence, but the need to offer this qualification, with regard to pro-ana sites or otherwise, arguably points to a tension between the appropriation of anorexia as an object of critical feminist enquiry and the realities of anorexic experiences. Elspeth Probyn cautioned early on in the field that 'instead of exploiting the anorexic as metaphor [for the political struggles of women] I suggest we look closely at the specificity of her situation…' (1988, 210). After all, whilst anorexia may provide a rich and ripe cultural site for the analysis of female conformity/ subversion for academics and scholars, it is widely known as having the highest mortality rate of any (so-called) 'mental illness' (Gremillion, 2008). This is not to ignore the fact that feminist writing on anorexia has often laid claim to personal experience of the problem, particularly in the early period of writing when such stories emerged as part of the second wave (e.g. Chernin, 1983; 1985; MacLeod, 1983; Probyn, 1988, Wolf, 1991). However, in reflecting wider critiques of the second wave, such work could be seen as using personal experience to insist upon a *particular* political interpretation of anorexia, whilst generalizing this outwards to speak for *all* women (Houston Grey, 2011, Holmes, 2015). Furthermore, accounts of anorexia *by* anorexics have increasingly figured prominently in later feminist research (MacSween 1995, Eckermann 1997, Malson 1998, Saukko, 2008). Yet the words of the anorexic are still then deciphered by an 'expert' critic who appears to *know more* about the anorexic's anorexia than the anorexic herself (see also Saukko 2008, 77).

This dichotomy between feminist researcher and anorexic subject was entrenched quite early in the field in Susan Bordo's assertion that 'the anorectic, of course, is unaware that she is making a political statement', so we must not see her practices 'as reflecting any social or *political understanding at all* [my emphasis]' (1993: 159). Such a perspective highlights a key problematic in critical feminist work on anorexia: the more resistant readings of anorexia have positioned women and girls as social protesters and defiant rebels, with the work on pro-ana sites reigniting these debates and making their relevance more urgent and explicit. Yet such examples of 'doing politics' can apparently only be decoded by the *enlightened* feminist, thus positioning the anorexic as perpetually under (the more unfashionable) conception of 'false consciousness'. Explaining this disparity in relation to the assumed generational differences between second and 'third wave' feminism (Dias, 2003) (and the notion that young women today may be less inclined to invest overtly in feminist politics) does not solve the fact that it is feminist scholars, and *not* anorexic/ pro-anorexics, who explicitly understand the problem in terms of the conflicting ideologies of the feminine.

I *do* want to take up a critical feminist approach to anorexia in this piece, adopting a discursive approach to analysing the MPA responses to *Frozen* and the ways in which they intersect with and reflect on, the visual and narrative construction of femininity in the film. But I also want to use this approach to reflect on the epistemological problem outlined above, and the questions and challenges it poses for research in the field. I cannot solve the problematic of the power relationship between feminist researcher and anorexic subject nor – given my identity as both a former anorexic *and* a feminist - the political tensions

which might arise *between* these subject positions in relation to my own sense of self as author. What I can do is to actively reflect on these issues, and consider their implications for how feminist work seeks to give 'voice' to anorexic and pro-anorexic subjects, and how the MPA responses to *Frozen* may throw these issues into sharper relief.

Approaching MPA: Method and Media

In line with ethical guidelines on internet research, I wanted to use publicly accessible forums and avoid 'locked' sites or discussions where greater levels of privacy may be assumed (Day and Keys, 2008: 6). When searching google for publicly accessible discourses on 'Anorexia/ Frozen', My Pro Ana was not the only pro-ana site to be returned as a result. But it emerged as the most frequent and high-traffic site (it has over 23,000 members), offering discussions of 'Let it Go' and the film over a period of months (December 2013-October 2014). I collected the material in December 2014 – when the relevant threads were no longer active – and I gathered all the MPA threads that were returned as a result of the google search above. This produced 8 discussion threads in total which included over 90 posts, and although this comprises a much smaller scale sample than others used in pro-ana research, I am not exploring the phenomenon of pro-ana per se, but am focusing on a purposive sample of pro-anorexic responses to 'Let it Go' and/or *Frozen.*

I did not post, sign-up, nor intervene in the debates, but rather took on the role of a 'lurker' in reading and downloading the responses, and spent time on the site to gain a sense of its wider workings and functions. As the word itself suggests, 'lurking' is very far from obtaining informed consent (Dias, 2003, 33), and given my interest in the power relations between feminist researcher and anorexic subject, as well as my own connection with anorexia, I found 'lurking' on MPA to be an ambivalent experience. On the one hand it evoked feelings of guilt (both in terms of 'peeping in' on a 'private' public space, *and* for breaking free of anorexia). Yet on the other, I found myself oscillating between intense empathy yet also shock and distress: although I have certainly been diagnosed as anorexic, I have never participated in any of the on-line spaces in which pro-ana discourse thrives. Indeed, I spent two years slavishly pursuing self-starvation, and the next 18 trying to break free from it. In this regard, some of the perspectives on self-starvation articulated on MPA were deeply unfamiliar (and alarming) to me.

In recognition of the grey area in which 'lurking' resides, I have chosen to anonymise the responses, and have omitted the usernames and the web links for each post (only numbering them to distinguish one member from another). After collecting the responses, I read each thread through in its entirety to get a sense of the trajectory of the conversations. I then re-read these in order to code the material according to the dominant themes that emerged, as based on recurrent words used by the community in discussing both the song and the film. This led me to categorise responses under the themes of 'recovery', 'identification', 'trigger' and/or 'thinspiration'.[1] In order to contextualise the *Frozen* threads within the wider dynamics of site use, I looked at the format and functions of MPA more generally. Like other pro-ana sites, MPA offers a means of sharing weight-loss tips and

strategies for starvation; details of personal 'triumphs' and 'failures' (information about calorie intake and current weight (CW) versus goal weight (GW)); discussions of the physical and mental horrors of self-starvation, images of 'thinspirational' celebrities, and conversations about media texts (some related to EDs, some not) (see below). The pages also contain flashing emoticons, pulsating GIFs and isolated quotes from a range of media texts which may, or may not, relate to discourses of starvation, eating or body.

A key limitation with this sort of research is that it is difficult to ascertain markers of personal characteristics or background, and I was only able to discern a partial and tentative picture in this regard. If based on the choice of user-name, profile picture or the detail of the exchanges themselves (references to the female body for example), the majority of users appeared to identify as female, and spanned an age range which moved from teenagers to women in their 30s. Some presented themselves as college students and others mothers, and they occupied geographical contexts which included the UK, Ireland, Germany, France, Norway to North and South America (so there is a clear Anglophone bias to the sample). The members also professed to occupy sexual orientations which ranged from heterosexual, lesbian to bisexual in their profiles and/or posts.

Overall, at least two significant patterns of response emerged in the evidence, as the article explores in detail below. The first positioned 'Let it Go' and/or *Frozen* as a significant source of anorexic identification, and a subgroup within this theme also explored how it prompted thoughts about recovery (a topic that makes an often ambivalent, although not uncommon, appearance on pro-ana sites). The second group positioned the song and/ or the film as a cultural text that confirmed or celebrated the subjectivities of the pro-anorexic subject, and/or triggered further pro-anorexic thinking. But both groups positioned *Frozen* as an 'ED' film, a term which suggests an existing and shared understanding of how media texts might speak to anorexic or pro-anorexic subjectivities. As such, it is crucial to acknowledge this discursive context before looking at the specificity of the *Frozen*-related responses below.

Existing work on pro-ana communities has mentioned the use of 'thinspirational' images of celebrities and models (e.g Ferreday, 2003), but the discussion of media on pro-ana sites often goes well beyond the inclusion of static images, and this is especially so on MPA. There is a whole forum section devoted to 'Media and Art', and this then breaks down into the subsections of 'Movies and TV shows', 'Music and Lyrics', 'Books and Poems', and 'Art'. These forums include discussions of media fandoms that are unrelated to eating disorders, as well as exchanges about 'ED' films, shows and songs. In this regard, the concept of 'ED' media appeared was used in essentially three ways on the site. First, it was used to describe texts that were explicitly about eating disorders (e.g a TV series which features a character who develops an eating disorder, films about real life cases such as *The Karen Carpenter Story* (1989) or *For the Love of Nancy* (1994) and TV coverage or songs about anorexia). Second, the idea of 'ED media' was used to describe texts which were 'thinspiring' or triggering, whether this was due to content (so programmes about obesity, dieting or eating such as *Supersize versus Superskinny* (2008-), or *My Big Fat Diet* (2010-)), or

simply the aesthetics of the bodies on display (which takes in a great deal of mainstream media). Finally, the term was used to describe media which somehow *resonated with the experience* of having an eating disorder. So for example one member described how the song ''Everybody's Fool' by Evanessence [is]… stuck in my head - it makes me think of ana' (MPA 1).

The discussion of *Frozen* crossed the second two categories: it was seen as symbolically evocative of anorexic sensibilities, whilst it was also perceived to be triggering and 'thinspiring' with regard to the female bodies on display. But in this regard, although the discussion of 'Let it Go' and/or *Frozen* related to the wider ways in which media texts were made sense of and appropriated on MPA (and on other pro-ana sites), it also stood out as unusual. Individual texts that were *not* ostensibly about eating disorders, but which resonated with the experience of having one, were not usually debated, nor dissected, for their symbolism in the manner that characterised the discussion of *Frozen.* Indeed, both 'Let it Go' and the film were seen as especially resonant of 'ana', and in a way that was seen as *a*typical for 'mainstream' media. As one member explained to another (who was new to the site and searching for ED-related media): 'I doubt you're going to find anything "pro" anorexia [by]… any big public media companies...' (MPA 2). Yet media companies do not come much 'bigger' than Disney. Although not all the members agreed that the song and/or the film were *pro*-ana in stance, this comment encapsulates the ways in which its affective and personal significance for MPA members was something of an unexpected surprise (as indeed it was for me).

'Only an anorexic girl could understand the correlation': Identifying with Elsa

In the first group of responses, *Frozen* and/or 'Let it Go' appeared to offer a potent source of anorexic identification. I acknowledge here that the concept of audience 'identification' is complex and empirically ambiguous, and whilst a full discussion of this is outside the scope of this article (see Barker, 2005), the MPA members broadly used it to mean 'feeling engaged' (Ibid, 358) with a song or character, or to describe a sense of connection with a character who reflected back something from their own lives. Interestingly, however, those that said the film offered identification as *well* as inspiration for recovery were more likely to privilege 'Let it Go' as the primary source of meaning (as I did in my blog), the song which Elsa sings after her magic ice powers have been revealed to the shocked citizens of Arendelle. After losing control of her powers on coronation day, Elsa flees the town and journeys up the mountain in an act of determined self-realisation. Recalling this moment, one member asked:

> Am I the only one who cried during this movie? Particularly during this song? When I heard it I felt a large burst of energy and like I could do ANYTHING. I guess I could relate completely with the song because all of my life I've tried SO HARD to be perfect and it made me think, "Why am I doing this to myself?" "I'm

> a great person, who cares about how I look?" Then all of a sudden I wanted to cry (MPA 3).

Another confided: 'Like seriously ... a cartoon made me feel this way. I honestly thought about attempting recovery again solely because of this song' (MPA 4), whilst still another agreed, 'Love love love this song... though I barely ever cry, I did feel like crying. I think if I ever were to try recovering, this would be my anthem to live by …' (MPA 5).

In speaking to the ways in which popular music lyrics can trigger feelings of emotional agency (Belcher and Denora, 2000), members foregrounded refrains such as 'No right, no wrong, no rules for me' – responses which rallied against the repressive, rigid and demanding nature of anorexic rituals (such as punishing food and exercise routines). In 'Let it Go', Elsa appears to equate society and social rules with the suppression of her true self, and the song seems to offer a fantasy of living outside of such parameters. Yet in comparison, the MPA members who spoke about the recovery often located their entrapment less in societal than individual terms ('Why am *I* doing this…?'), although the rhetorical question in MPA 3's response above ('who cares about..?') does suggest a belief that 'external' structures may help to produce and maintain an anorexic identity. The extent to which gender featured in the responses as part of this social/ cultural context was complex, as discussed in more detail below.

The members that offered stories of identification with the song and the film, and Elsa's narrative trajectory in particular, tended to focus on the concept of the 'perfect girl' (also mentioned by MPA 3 above), which is articulated explicitly in the lyrics of 'Let it Go':

> … Don't let them in, don't let them see
> Be the good girl you always have to be
> … Let it go, let it go
> That perfect girl is gone!

The extent to which the reference to the 'perfect girl' was a key trigger for identification is clearly suggested by the responses below:

> … it was impossible to me [sic] not to link Elsa's personality with the stereotypical personality of anorexic girls. I mean, I related SO MUCH to her in the sense that she's always supressing [sic] her desires to be "the good girl she always has to be" and is like a control freak. She has a really strong sense of guilty and responsability [sic] and because of that, she withdraws from her sister and from everyone else, afraid that her own feelings could hurt them… I brought this idea out to my sister… and she was like "NO SENSE!", but I think only an anorexic girl could understand the correlation (MPA 6).

> Her character just hit close to home for me and my problems of perfectionism and being the perfect girl all the time and hiding the struggles I have and the dangers I do to myself to make everyone else happy (MPA 7).

The idea of being the 'perfect' girl who simply wants to 'make everyone else happy' resonates with what was once seen as the stereotype of the textbook anorexic: a white middle-class girl with perfectionist tendencies who is terrified of not living up to parental expectations. Such a stereotype emerged in the post-war period in both Britain and America (see Bruch, 1978, Saukko, 2008), and was indicative of the move toward biopsychosocial models[2] in the conception of 'mental illness', often locating what was seen to be a rising epidemic of anorexia in 'faulty' suburban, middle-class families. The ostensible demography of the anorexic subject may have changed - at the level of class or ethnicity for example (see Bordo, 2009).[3] But it is clear that aspects of this popular image retain a currency, as suggested by MPA 6's comment above which refers to the 'stereotypical personality of anorexic girls'. As Paula Saukko observes in ways which resonate with the comments on MPA, anorexia has been seen as 'the final rebellion of … women who ha[d]… never before caused any trouble' (2008, 27).

Given the extent to which *Frozen* has popularly been debated as more 'feminist' than its predecessors, Elsa's later refusal to be the 'perfect girl' – an identity that is defiantly cast off as she absconds to the ice palace - may make sense in terms of the film's relationship with previous Disney princess films. A key focus in the feminist scholarship has been their diachronic evolution: how, why and to what extent the Disney princess has changed over time in relation to the shifting rhythms of gender politics (Henke et al, 1996, Do Rozario, 2004, Davis, 2006, Stover, 2013, Wilde, 2014). Perspectives differ in this regard, although there is some agreement with the suggestion that the films from the *Little Mermaid* (1989) onwards marked a representational shift, insofar as the 'damsel' was seemingly transformed into a proactive, ambitious 'heroine of sorts with both a voice and a desire for adventure' (Stover, 2012, 3). This was in comparison with the previous representations of the Disney princess, such as Snow White, Cinderella or Aurora, who were 'simply gentle, kind and lovely' (Henke et al, 1996, 234), what Jill Birnie Henke et al notably conceptualise as the 'perfect girl' (Ibid).

Although it is arguably Anna rather than Elsa who plays the role of the spirited, ambitious heroine in *Frozen*, this context is important in approaching the ways in which the film (and certainly a number of its predecessors, from *Mulan* (1998) to *Brave* (2012)), is textually conscious of its own representational history. So when Elsa sings 'that perfect girl is gone!', she is apparently aware of the history, and limitations, of her own Disney archetype. That said, Elsa's trajectory is also illustrative of the ways in which the post-feminist Disney princess is often trapped in what is effectively a 'pre-feminist' world, 'constrained by society through marriage pressure, royal status' (Stover, 2012: 4). In line with wider figurations of postfeminism in popular media, this then enables the emphasis on

a hyperbolic 'break-out' image ('I'm freeeeee!') which may suggest a greater level of agency and choice than is actually on offer.

The extent to which there is a great deal of commonality between the discussions of the 'perfect girl' in the Disney princess films and the critical feminist work on anorexia, as well as the fact that the MPA members found Elsa (rather than Anna) to be so resonant, adds weight to the feminist claim that anorexia should be understood in relation to pressure of *normative* ideologies of femininity. In this regard, although the 'perfect girl' may have a particular currency in relation to psychiatric and cultural understandings of anorexia, feminist work would argue that this is merely a hyperbolic dramatisation of the expectations surrounding femininity as socially *pleasing*, and its association with restraint, obedience and self-denial (Day and Keys 2008, 2). Indeed, in feminist work on anorexia, contradictory messages surrounding the legitimacy of female desire and sexuality are seen as key to the anorexic bid to construct the body 'as desireless and inviolate': feeling, needing and taking in 'nothing' (MacSween, 1995, 194). If considered in relation to Elsa's plight near the start of the film, we might note that the mantra of 'conceal it, don't feel it' is handed down via the patriarchal lineage of her father in such a way that suggests a traditionally protectionist discourse surrounding female purity and chastity.

It is important to observe however, that whilst the pressures to be the perfect girl may be understood as fundamentally gendered from a feminist standpoint, the members of MPA did *not* generally link this discourse to gender (and in fact only *one* mused that 'many people (especially girls) can relate to the pressure to be "perfect" that is put on Elsa' (MPA 8)). With regard to anorexia, they attributed 'the perfect girl' connection to either parental pressure or something 'within' themselves. As one explained:

> I've been in therapy for 3 years or so, and what I learned from it is that my eating disorder is linked to my sense of guilty [sic] and the need I feel to be always in control, always the good and perfect girl who cannot show her desires or make any mistake (MPA 4).

In understanding the responses, and the epistemological gap which exists between feminist approaches to anorexia and the explanations given by anorexics themselves, an acknowledgement of treatment discourses seems crucial. Many of the members had been in, or were in, various forms of treatment for anorexia: counselling or therapy were mentioned frequently for example. Yet although anorexia is now often conceived as a biopsychosocial 'illness', the social element of the equation is often given limited attention in diagnosis and treatment (or is reduced to environmental factors such as 'individualized' family histories). Despite considerable evidence regarding the gendered nature of anorexia, and the fact that gender remains the most important predictor of risk when it comes to developing an eating disorder, mainstream treatments do not foreground gender politics, nor integrate the perspectives offered by the feminist critiques, thus often replicating and reinforcing the individualizing effects of anorexia itself (see Gremillion, 2008). In this regard,

we need to take seriously how Elsa was seen as speaking to the members' experiences of anorexia. Yet it is interesting that their discussion of the song and the film actually attests to the dominance of psychiatric models in the treatment of anorexia (in which it is conceptualized as an individualized mental illness – another 'voice within *your* head'), even though pro-ana sites are often represented as having hostile relations with these discourses.

Equally, and to return to the feminist debates about the relationship between anorexia and the contradictory messages surrounding normative femininity, in discussions about what exactly Elsa was repressing, sexuality *was* sometimes seen as key. But if sexuality was discussed on MPA, it was interpreted - notably by members who identified as lesbian or bisexual - as gay sexuality, and something entirely separate from Elsa's 'ana' connotations. 'Let it Go', for example, was interpreted as a 'coming out' anthem (an interpretation not specific to MPA (e.g see Petersen, 2014)), whilst Elsa's character trajectory was seen as narrating the importance of self-love and acceptance. So as one member explained: 'I took it more like this: deal with it and except it because you are what you are' (MPA11), or 'I can relate Elsa a lot more to my closeted bisexuality more than I do my disordered eating' (MPA 10). Although such responses prompt us to question the traditionally heterosexist bias of both psychiatric and feminist work on anorexia (see Jones and Malson, 2013), they do not point to an agreement that anorexia, in *Frozen* or otherwise, is a response to the condition of being feminine.

'The cold never bothered me anyway': Confirming and Triggering Pro-ana Subjectivities

In comparison to those who identified strongly with the song and the character of Elsa, other members identified in ways which were 'triggering', discussing the texts as affirming their pro-anorexic identities and inspiring them to greater feats of starvation. The idea of the 'good' or 'perfect' girl continued to be a crucial concept, but it was evoked in ways which spoke to pro-ana as a deliberately resistant and rebellious identity:

> [The words in 'Let it Go' remind me of] when my partner found out [about my anorexia] and mum noticed and stuff. It was kind of like, fuck it, I'm not hiding this shit. See? I'm not perfect. I'm not the "good girl" you wanted me to be, so fuck off…(MPA 12).

> i totally relate this to my ED... Like I'm breaking free from all the rules and control my mother put on me in 'recovery' and just do what I want and not always be the perfect daughter (MPA 13).

> .. [I]t makes me think about moving out of home and having nobody to watch my eating habits. Yes. A thousand times yes. I love that song (MPA 14).

Although members in the first group found the lyrics and sentiment of 'Let it Go' to be evocative of an imagined liberation from the prison-house of anorexia, the responses in the second group are in many ways more congruent with the role that the song plays in the film itself. After all, Elsa sings the song as she determinedly moves into isolation and self-exile – not dissimilar to the existence often demanded or produced by anorexia. Whilst 'Let it Go' is recognised as expressing a rebellious tone in both groups, in the second, the members imagine escaping *into* the eating disorder and not *from* it, thus using the same lyrics in completely contrary ways.

In this regard, the responses in the second group evocatively speak to the sense of power that appears to come with starvation, even though it is customary in medical and psychiatric discussions of anorexia to position this power/ freedom as 'false' (the product of distortion or illusion). Such a refutation does little to understand why and how the song was meaningful for these particular members. But it is notable that Elsa's trajectory certainly mirrors Liz Eckermann's description of how the anorexic's body 'turns nasty' on them when they feel they are at the 'zenith of their power' (2009: 15) – when feelings of triumph, autonomy and agency are suddenly replaced by the feeling of a 'loss of control' given that the 'physiological [experience]… of self-starvation' is often terrifying (Ibid). Elsa's body also 'turns nasty' on her, functioning in both unpredictable and uncontrollable ways. Not only does her power accidentally reveal itself on coronation day (to catastrophic effect), but Elsa later nearly kills her sister Anna – freezing her heart in the ice palace - in a spectacular recreation of the childhood event that prompted the repression of her magic in the first place.

Elsa's repeated insistence in 'Let it Go' that 'the cold never bothered me anyway' equally suggests a reading in which an anorexic identity is defiantly *celebrated* – as is common in pro-ana discourse - although it is clear that the affective and literal relationships between anorexia and 'wintriness' is complex. On a physical level, anorexics are often literally cold: the absence of fat makes it hard for the body to insulate itself, and circulation slows in order to conserve energy. (Interestingly, heat is often associated with the opposite of starvation: so we talk of 'burning' fat). This slide into an 'icy' physicality is also seen to be replicated in the emotional isolation that the anorexic may desire or endure. A number of MPA members referred to Elsa, and in this instance, notably Anna, as the 'perfect wintergirl', or made such comments as:

> OHMYGOD. I just thought of this now: so her name is Ana [sic], they're thin, they don't eat... does it remind you at all of Wintergirls? (MPA 15).

As this quote suggests, the concept of the 'wintergirl' has a referent, and this can be located in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Wintergirls* (2009). As Andersen says of Lia and Cassie, the two anorexic girls at the centre of her novel, they 'were best friends, wintergirls frozen in matchstick bodies' ('Wintergirl'). The idea of the anorexic body as 'frozen' may also be read as referring to temporality rather than physicality: anorexic bodies are sometimes described

as being 'frozen in time' in their apparent delaying of normal female maturation (e.g. Smith-Squire, nd). Indeed, as also indicated by discussion on the site, 'wintergirl' has now become a colloquial term for a 'an anorexic and/or bulimic identity' ('Wintergirl').

It was in the responses to *Frozen* as affirming or further inspiring a pro-anorexic identity that the bodies in the film began to move centre stage. Existing work on pro-ana sites has explored the extent to which pro-ana members navigate and use the 'thinspirational' images of women in the media as part of their claim to a pro-ana identity. As Ferreday argues for example, rather than simply slavishly conforming to media ideals, in claiming that celebrities often display bodies that are *like* an anorexic form (positioned next to pictures of the members' own bodies), the girls/ women 'claim famous women as members' (2003, 287), effectively highlighting the hypocrisy of a media industry that trades on the bodies of underweight women whilst 'othering' anorexia as a mental illness. After all, 'when thin does become "too thin", anorexia is there to take the blame' (Whitehead and Kurz 2008, 351).

The extent to which this framework might elucidate the discursive production on MPA surrounding *Frozen* is complex. The Disney princess films have long since come under scrutiny for unrealistic female body ideals and *Frozen,* which seemed to accelerate the trend of exaggerated eyes, tiny waists and 'lollipop' heads, received particular criticism in this regard (e.g. Smith, 2013). In this respect, it was clear that many members indeed found the film to be very thinspirational:

> Is it werid [sic] that I find Anna and Elsa thinspiring? (MPA 16).
> I think my weirdest thinspo has to be Disney films. Most recently Elsa in Frozen, especially during Let it Go (MPA 17).

The use of the term 'weird' appears to refer to the animated form of the film, despite the fact that pro-ana discourse often recognises the extent to celebrity images are far from 'real', having been air-brushed or 'enhanced' in some way. The aspirational nature of Elsa and Anna's bodies is also interesting in the context of the psychiatric and feminist suggestion that anorexia is often about the pursuit of a de-sexualised, unwomanly form: although stick thin, the women in the Disney films have hourglass figures, and in the transformational sequence in 'Let it Go', Elsa is sexualised, complete with a tight-fitting high-fashion dress, falling tresses and a confident 'come hither' glance over her shoulder. But she is still presented as the ultimate 'thinspo' in the threads – especially during the 'Let it Go' sequence - attracting such comments as 'See what I mean? That waist! It's unrealistic, but I can dream' (MPA 19). The reference to 'unrealistic' is entirely accurate (Elsa's waist size looks technically anorexic, so the simultaneous retention of curves would be unlikely), but this comment does not seem to be intended as a critique. In fact, statements such as 'I want to be as pretty and perfect as a Disney princess' (MPA 21) clearly diverge from the previous responses which spoke to the *pressures* of trying to be the 'perfect' girl, even if a minority offered what could be read as a critique of this fantasy:

> … To me all Disney princesses come to mind. They are all tiny and perfect with perfect hair that as little girls we long to be and sometimes when we are adults we can't let go of the idea of becoming perfect and loved by everyone. And really why should we? (MPA 17),

Anorexia is effectively presented here as a *response* to a culture which builds up, from an early age, an idealised image of femininity that, precisely because of its mythical quality, will always elude one's grasp.

These comments were in response to a discussion about undertaking what one member posted as the 'Disney princess diet', and dietary recommendations are a regular feature on pro-ana sites. The daily intake on the diet either reflected what the princesses actually ate in the relevant film, or was inspired by the film's narrative, as in the case of Snow White or Elsa:

> ***Aurora:*** After being cursed, you will have to sleep today, without anything to eat.
>
> ***Snow White:*** You may eat up to 5 [apples]…, but be careful to avoid the poisoned one.
>
> ***Belle:*** In order to get Belle's beautiful figure, sip rose tea throughout the day, eating only 1c. of broccoli soup, as she did with the Beast…
>
> ***Elsa:*** … [O]ut in the cold, she hasn't much to eat. Therefore, this day, eat only ice and frozen berries (MPA 18).

Given that this menu was drawn up by a pro-ana discussant for pro-ana circulation, it highlights the impossibility of living on what the women appear to eat in the films. Unless they are evil or bad, such as the fat and grotesque Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*, women rarely eat in the Disney princess films, and deviations from this, such as Merrida's apparently lusty appetite in *Brave,* are marked as 'strange' anomalies (Merrida is told by her mother as she hungrily seizes a chicken leg that 'a lady doesn't stuff her gob'). As discussed, the apparently unfeminine nature of appetite, and its relationship with attitudes toward female desire, has been noted in much feminist work on anorexia (Chernin, 1985, Orbach, 1986). According to Naomi Wolf, despite often being presented as the opposite of sexual desirability, fat 'is sexual in women. Fat is also desire' (1991: 192).

A number of MPA members asked such questions as 'what did [Elsa] eat in the ice castle, snow cones?' (MPA 19), or observed how the film did not depict the sisters eating. This is not strictly true where Anna is concerned, and as one member recalled, 'In [the song] For The First Time In Forever Anna talks about stuffing chocolate in her face and does so' (MPA 23). In fact, the sequence is quite explicit about the correlation between a woman's

sexual and eating appetite. As she leaps exuberantly around the corridors on coronation day (bursting into a garden which signifies Spring, as opposed as Elsa's eternal winter), Anna dreams with yearning of the things the day may bring, including a potential male partner. Overcome with excitement and anticipation, she sings:

> I suddenly see him standing there,
> A beautiful stranger tall and fair [shot of a male bust made of chocolate].
> I want to stuff some chocolate in my facccccccccccceeeeeee

The last line is muffled as she gorges on handfuls of chocolates, although she partially hides her face behind a fan which offers a more delicate and traditionally 'feminine' signifier than eating. The equation of carnal/ food appetites is explicit, in so far as the mountain of chocolates appears as an answer to her desire for a partner (she has not met him yet). To be sure, this care-free eating is presented as a moment of 'madness' which takes place in a flurry of excitement about coronation day – the day that Anna will be 'released' (in her eyes) into the proximity of potential male suitors. Furthermore, her 'excessive', naive and clearly unguarded desire for Prince Hans is later punished in the film's narrative when he is revealed to be a villain -only interested in her for access to status and wealth. Nevertheless, and as played out through her more egalitarian relationship with Kristoff, Anna perhaps ultimately shows just the right level of *measured* desire. In comparison, Elsa is presented as the locus of enormous suppression, and all hell breaks loose when this restraint is released. At the coronation dance, during which Anna wears an off-the-shoulder gown in comparison with Elsa's high-collared attire (which some MPA members interpreted as a perfect 'SH [self-harm] cover-up'), Anna even seems to acknowledge that this containment relates to physical appetite when she clumsily tells her sister that 'you look beautifuller…[than me]. I mean not fuller. You don't look fuller, but… more, more beautiful…'. This not only makes literal reference to the ideological norms through which the female body (and certainly the body of the Disney princess) is policed and produced. It also makes explicit the ways in the repression of female appetite /desire is that which cannot be explicitly spoken in the film: Anna is flustered, embarrassed, and stumbles over her words as a red blush creeps up her face.

If Elsa's sexual identity is primarily symbolised by magic and repression, its absence at the level of characterisation or narrative suggests further connections with an anorexic reading. Although Elsa *is* sexualised during 'Let it Go' and as discussed, some MPA members did attribute a sexual orientation to Elsa (positioning her as gay), she can also be read as essentially '*a*sexual', in so far as she expresses *no interest at all* in romance, partnership or sexual desire. Prince Hans says disparagingly of Elsa that no man 'was getting anywhere with her', which is why he chose Anna as a means to gain access to the family's royal status and wealth. This ambiguous reference to Elsa's apparently unobtainable status (further invoked through her identity as the 'ice queen', a term often unkindly used to signal frigidity in popular parlance), is never expanded upon nor explained. But it offers another point of

potential connection with the anorexic self /body which is often seen as signifying, or is intended to signify, sexual *un*availability (MacSween, 1995).

But the MPA members did not simply discuss the eating habits (or lack thereof) of the women in *Frozen*: some of them also created and or re-used[4] GIFs (Graphic Interchange Format) which actualised, and brought into being, the eating that largely *wasn't there.* As a now popular form of fan/ audience produced popular culture, GIFs might be seen to operate, like earlier fan-produced texts, at the levels of interpretation, appropriation or reconstruction (Jenkins, 1992: 162). The *Frozen* GIFs on the site certainly moved beyond mirroring the narrative or character construction in the film itself and primarily focused on Elsa, the locus of the film's interest in female repression, release and control. They included, for example, a young Elsa producing a magic burrito for Anna; Elsa eating cookies; and Elsa eating popcorn with the tagline 'what elsa does when she thinks no one is looking… watch elsa eat, Forever and ever, and ever….' (MPA 21). Such ambivalent attitudes toward the eating habits of famous figures are not uncommon on pro-ana sites in so far as, whilst exulting female celebrities as images of aspiration and perfection, members are also often sceptical that the women eat the 'healthy diets' they say they do (given their very low or often anorexic weights). These GIFs are certainly ambivalent, and there perhaps emerges a kind of punishing desire to *make* the women eat, exercising a kind of punitive control which, in anorexia, can only come from self-starvation. But the reference to when 'no one is looking' also suggests that part of the pleasure comes from creating and witnessing the *taboo*. In this regard, these GIFs pivot on a recognition of the cultural prohibitions surrounding the skinny woman gorging herself: Elsa eats not just once, but in the unending and repetitious world of the GIF, 'forever and ever'.

It is in this second category of responses, which positioned the film as triggering and thinspirational, that the political significance of gender has the potential to emerge as the most complex. On one level, the responses offered some of the most apparently conformist attitudes ('I want to be as perfect as a Disney princess') which give credence to the popular and feminist concern surrounding the Disney princess and its portrayal of physically and socially repressive scripts of femininity. But the MPA conversations about eating in the film, and the desire to *make* Elsa eat, seem to call out a more explicitly defiant comment on some of the contradictory messages which women receive about their physical and sexual appetites, and how these relate to producing socially acceptable versions of the female self.

Conclusion: 'Well, now they know...'

Prompted by my own long history of anorexia, this article set out to explore why and how *Frozen* might have been a significant media experience for those who identify as anorexic. In doing so, it sought to make three key interventions relating to 1) methodological approaches to pro-ana identities 2) audience responses to the Disney princess 3) and ethical, critical and epistemological issues in critical feminist work on anorexia, and its bid to give voice to what it positions as an embodied and political struggle of the feminine.

First, this study of how *Frozen* and its associated texts were negotiated on MPA suggests the importance of examining how pro-ana/ anorexic identity positions are articulated in ways that require us to move beyond the focus on pro-ana as *the* object of focus in its own right. The discussion often prompted debates that were intimately bound up with the pursuit of starvation and the regulation of the body. But it also did more than this, meeting a hunger (and I use that term deliberately) for recognition, inclusion and connection, whilst also offering a site for marginalised identities to reflect on, or jubilantly confirm, their relationship with their embodied selves. Notably, the hunger to find oneself reflected in the text – a sentiment which cropped up repeatedly in the responses - also questions the emphasis on pro-ana sites as defiantly and proudly isolationist.

To be sure, suggesting that we pay more attention to how pro-ana sites mediate 'media' is a complex and risky suggestion given that 'media consumption' has an already loaded and problematic place in both popular and feminist conceptions of anorexia. As Abigail Bray has argued, popular and sometimes feminist understandings of anorexia effectively position it as a 'reading disorder' in which 'excessive media consumption [i.e the slavish devotion to the thin ideal] is perceived to activate a pathological fear of corporeal consumption: over-reading produces under-eating' (2005: 116). This viewpoint, *apparently* endorsed by the logic of 'thinspo' images on pro-ana sites, then perpetuates long-standing and reductive conceptions of the female audience as quintessentially irrational and vulnerable (Ibid) - a perspective which feminist audience research has long since sought to critique. Indeed, entirely in keeping with a long heritage of work on media/audiences in Media and Cultural Studies, the MPA members were complexly using *Frozen* as a material resource for identity construction. If part of the impetus of the feminist work on anorexia is to resist the pathologization of anorexic/pro-ana identities, then it is important to explore connections with other fields such as Audience Studies, and to consider how 'anorexic' subjectivities are enmeshed with, and articulated through, more 'everyday' fields such as media consumption.[5] MPA exhibits a very lively strand of debate on media forms, but the site is not unique in this regard, and my suggestion is in any case hardly radical in an environment in which media encounters are deeply fused within everyday life.

Second, this article has aimed to contribute to work on the reception of the Disney princess which has often been marginalised in feminist work in favour of textual analysis (whilst existing studies have focused on young girls). The responses to Elsa, the primary locus of discussion, suggests an audience identification with the struggle to balance self-autonomy and agency with the repressive cultural script of the 'perfect girl'. Given that *Frozen* has been popularly debated as more 'feminist' than its predecessors, there is no easy way to compare this to previous films in the Disney princess franchise (upon which little or no audience research exists). But it seems significant that Anna, the feisty spirited heroine who has more in common with Disney predecessors such as Mulan, Rapunzel or Merrida, is all but ignored by the respondents on MPA, who instead focus more on the character who faces the

greatest obstacles to her freedom, autonomy and existence. Whether this identification is specific to pro-ana respondents remains to be seen, but even the most cursory survey of the cultural circulation of *Frozen* suggests the centrality of Elsa to the fascination with the film and its typologies of femininity. That said, the extent to which the responses in both groups are seen as 'resistant' or conformist at the level of gender politics depends on the political interpretation of both anorexia and pro-ana, about which there is no clear agreement in critical feminist work. At the level of Audience Studies at least, the responses to *Frozen* on MPA add weight to the need to question the perennial binary of 'active'/ passive consumption in the researching of media encounters.

If critical feminist work on anorexia insists on the importance of gender, and *also* seeks to position anorexia on a continuum with 'normal' femininity, then these the readings explored here are female responses to *Frozen*, and they should not be sectioned off or ghettoised (i.e. treated only as relevant to pro-ana research). Yet in foregrounding their status as 'female' responses, I do not want to imply a simplistic homogeneity: this would only reduplicate the problematic generalisations and assumptions evident in the early work feminist work on anorexia, as well as ignore the significance of intersectionality for feminist work on audiences (especially when important information about identity, such as that pertaining to ethnicity or 'class', is missing from the MPA site). There is no reason why the media responses of 'pro-ana subjects' should be any more homogenous than other social groups, and the article has explored how the song/ film was understood and used in different and often contrary ways.

Finally, this article has also sought to use the responses on MPA to raise questions about feminist approaches to anorexia, and the relationship between anorexic subjectivities, scholars and 'voice'. I maintain here that the epistemological gap between how feminists and anorexics understand the significance of self-starvation *matters*, and I have also aimed to ask why this gap might exist. Medical/ psychiatric understandings enjoy a hegemonic reign in the definition and treatment of anorexia, consistently redirecting attention from cultural oppressions to 'those of biology and illness' (Pollack, 2003:247). Pro-ana sites have often been seen as subverting this hegemonic definition - rejecting the definition of anorexia as an illness or a disease (Ibid). Yet as I have explored, they arguably do so in very individualized ways, giving them no clear affinity with the feminist approaches which persistently foreground the culture-bound nature of eating disorders.

Critical feminist approaches to anorexia have had remarkable success as an object of scholarly enquiry, in so far as they represent a large and thriving area of scholarship. But this success has been represented in terms of its value as an *analytic* paradigm rather than a treatment intervention, which is not how its political significance was originally (or only) envisaged (i.e. Orbach, 1986, Lawrence, 1984). In asking in 2003 'What should be the feminist response' to 'pro-eating disorder websites?', Griselda Pollack clearly articulated a renewed 'call to action' when she said that we should 'try to understand these women and with them develop strong and collaborative voices while maintaining healthy bodies' (2003:

250). Yet as also suggested by my article here, the primary feminist engagement with pro-ana has been in the form of 'lurking' online. This strategy has been powerful and useful in questioning the popular and medical pathologization of pro-ana voices, whilst it has also sensitively and carefully respected the autonomy of these voices. But 'lurking' clearly has its limitations, even if there is no easy way to close this gap and bring theory and action together:

> A pedagogical solution of 'enlightening' these women about the oppressive nature of their embodied protest implicitly undermines their agency and thus perpetuates the current interplay of dominant cultural discourses that enticed the anorexic to take a pro-eating disorder stance in the first place. Yet I believe it is imperative for feminists to address the problem, if only because their choice of medium for protest is one that has a 20 percent long term mortality rate (Pollack: 2003: 249).

Pollack's point about the political and methodological problematic of 'enlightenment' here is well made. Yet adopting a mode of analysis which ultimately implies the existence of false consciousness (you might not recognise your predicament as a political statement about gender, but it *is*), surely also 'undermines… agency', and equally reproduces the lack of autonomy which the anorexic is seen to be fighting against. Perhaps entering into a dialogue with anorexics about the resonant experience of 'ED' media texts might be a way to begin to bridge this gap…

One MPA member said of *Frozen* that 'I'm not saying it is anorexic. But it can be twisted to resemble anorexia' (MPA 4). The use of the word 'twisted' here may suggest the extent to which the pro-ana members – no doubt aware of their social stigma and pathologization – present themselves as having a 'warped' or deviant world view. In fact however, given the extent to which anorexic readings of *Frozen* were far from confined to MPA, and the degree to which these readings foregrounded discourses that have long been central to feminist scholarship on the Disney princess, they in fact seemed to require very little 'twisting' at all.

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Notes:

[1] Images of thinness on pro-ana sites that are used to encourage starvation and weight loss are referred to as 'thinspiring'.

[2] The term biopsychosocial refers to an approach which understands health and illness through biological, psychological, as well as social factors.

[3] I was not able to discern the ethnic identities of the discussants on MPA, but there was clearly an acknowledgement of the currency of this stereotype, at least with regard to personality traits and what were perceived as parental pressures.

[4] It wasn't always possible to tell when the GIFs were self-created or not, but some were certainly taken from sites such as tumblr.

[5] During the course of this study, for example, it became evident that the boyband One Direction are a particularly active resource for interaction within and across pro-ana communities.