



# The Anorexic Self: A Personal, Political Analysis of a Diagnostic Discourse

*Paula Saukko*

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*Critically examines diagnostic and popular discourses on eating disorders.*

Traditionally, women's eating disorders are thought to be strongly influenced by media images idealizing a normative thin female body. Taking a different approach, *The Anorexic Self* critically examines diagnostic and popular discourses on anorexia that construct narrow and ideal notions of the female self. Paula Saukko analyzes the personal and political implications of discourses on the anorexic self in multiple contexts, including her own experience of being diagnosed anorexic; psychiatrist Hilde Bruch's postwar research on anorexia; and media coverage of Karen Carpenter, Princess Diana, and other women with eating disorders. Saukko traces the history of the discourses from postwar idealization of masculine autonomy to postindustrial valorization of feminine flexibility, and also explores their politically progressive and psychologically healing—as well as sexist and humiliating—dimensions. Drawing on narrative therapy, dialogic theory, and multisited ethnography, *The Anorexic Self* cultivates a less judgmental and more self-reflexive way of relating to ourselves, others, and societies in which we live.

Paula Saukko is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Loughborough University and the author of *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*.

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