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Eating Lolly – The exegesis

Corrie Hosking MA BA (Hons)

Department of English

University of Adelaide

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Abstract

There is an overwhelming archive of literature written on so-called 'eating disorders' and the social and cultural contexts that shape these 'conditions'. Theories framed by psychiatry, feminism, psychoanalysis and sociology have each presented insights and specific understandings of the causes of the 'disorders' anorexia and bulimia nervosa and the 'type' of people they affect. Although such theories are often presented as objective 'truths', their meanings are constructed in a cultural context. They are often contradictory, frequently ambiguous and regularly paradoxical. Despite the wealth of research being done on 'eating disorders', we are still most likely to read particular and specific explanations that are mostly informed by the psycho-medical discourses, that are preoccupied with anorexia over other forms of eating distress and that neglect the thoughts, theories, language and voices of women with lived experience.

My research explores the opposing cultural constructions of anorexia and bulimia against women's personal narratives of life with bulimia. My specific interest in bulimia contests the focus on anorexia in the medical, academic and popular spheres. I address this imbalance, and speculate on why there is such a preoccupation with anorexia over other eating issues in our culture. I believe that this is not a coincidence, for there are deep seated, cultural and historical reasons why our culture demonstrates a fascination with, even admiration for, anorexia.

Research into the socio-cultural construction of 'eating disorders' provided a rich and complex resource for developing my novel: *Eating Lolly*. *Eating Lolly* follows the developing relationship between Mumma and her daughter, Lolly. It explores the mother-daughter bond, love, family and food. It deals with the experience of pregnancy and motherhood, representing developmental stages, through childhood, adolescence and the forging of identity as a woman in a western cultural context. I explore women's hunger, metaphors of cooking, eating, feeding and being fed. I examine our culture's perceived separation between mind and body. I consider the power of medical discourses in shaping how we think and feel about our health and well-being and our experience with illness. *Eating Lolly* is about female identity, the right to self-determination and the power of reclaiming story. It is a celebration of difference, of family, community and landscape and the impact of these factors on identity formation.