



A SHAMANIC PERSPECTIVE ON EATING DISORDERS

Recently in Mullumbimby, NSW, Australia, we held a **Project Pomegranate** community gathering dedicated to contributing healing energy, as a group, to one of the faces of the wounded feminine and wounded masculine of our culture – **Eating Disorders**.

Eating disorders are classified as mental illnesses. There are a lot of **scary statistics** about eating disorders. And a lot of ways to treat eating disorders including mental health management, nutritional counselling, psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, group therapy, family-based therapy, drug treatment, hypnosis, self education, support groups and others, including alternative therapies.

As a midwife (now former) and the founder of the [School of Shamanic Womancraft](#) (formerly the School of Shamanic Midwifery) I have learned a lot over the years – from the women who's births I have attended, and the women who have come to the School whose stories I hold in my heart – about an individual's spiritual journey of life and the use and value of the shamanic perspective.

It has been said that we are **spiritual beings having a human experience**, that everyone is on their journey, and everything that occurs, or doesn't occur, is the soul-crafting and the point. So, like everything else, Eating Disorders take one on their spiritual journey.

The shamanic perspective of life is the interconnectedness of everything, including that 'illness' can result from **Power or Soul Loss or Intrusions** by foreign entities.

And, **using the wisdom of the cycles as a map** of process, and the mythopoetic story of the s/hero's journey, we can locate what lies beneath a situation and therefore get clues for how to be with it in a healed way.

What this means for the modern day, and for women and men with eating disorders, is the opportunity to see **what lies beneath** their illness, what the deeper causes are, personal and collective, and therefore what can be done to address those.

Soul, or Power, Loss can occur during trauma – from abuse or accidents from in utero to current day, and during rites of passage. And Intrusions can occur anytime the individual is **open or vulnerable and without the strength of discernment**.

Helpful ways to deal with previous Soul Loss that results in, in this case an eating disorder, can include finding and connecting with one's **Power Animal**, whose qualities, or medicine, represent the attributes of the individual that were lost either during the trauma or as a result of it. And, shamanic journeying to the event or events where the Soul Loss occurred to **rewrite the story**.

Intrusions result when a foreign entity lodges onto one's being. A foreign entity could also be seen as a **belief system** that is not in alignment with what is good for life. For example, cultural perspectives on body image such as *'One has to look a certain way to be accepted and even normal'* that is then internalised and becomes a 'being' in it's own right that criticises, judges and is basically in control of the individual.

*For these foreign entities,
extractions can be performed.*

Firstly the individual needs to **identify the belief system that is causing their illness** as an entity and then perhaps describe the being that needs to be extracted.

Extractions can include **letting-go rituals** and belief system updates.

Other ideas for extractions: qigong style extraction, movement, dance and sound to shift held energy and **regular/extended periods in Nature to recalibrate.**

Basically it's about focusing on helping the individual **heal the cause** rather than focus on symptoms.

So, 'what caused the eating disorder?' is the question!

We can use the iceberg metaphor to help here. What we see is the tip of the iceberg and we know that it is 'just' the tip, because we know that there is a lot more iceberg under the water.

This 'tip' that we can see are the behaviours. What sits at the waterline are the thoughts that create the behaviours. Under the waterline, at the bottom of the iceberg are the **needs that are not being met** that actually create everything else and especially the current thoughts, and therefore, behaviour.

The most basic need a human has is to **belong**, in order to be safe, in order to secure one's survival. And humans do all manner of things to make sure they fit in, belong, even when it's not actually healthy or good for life.

The most often cited causes for eating disorders are low self-esteem and poor body image. Where does this come from?

Our culture is fixated on youth and beauty.

The media, and social media, portrays an ideal life and body that is totally unachievable by most women and men. Entire industries are set up to ensure that people can have this unachievable body or life. People in general suffer from a **loss of connection with Nature**, the role of Nature in their lives, their own nature and their miraculous bodies.

Women and our bodies are seen as unpredictable, and our **normal physiological workings are often controlled** eg menstrual cycle, birthing, perimenopause, contraception.

One of the more obvious reasons for low self esteem and a negative body image for women, is the way our culture perceives and treats the **menstrual cycle.**

We know that when a girl's menarche is not honoured, and when her menstrual cycle is seen and felt as shameful, that this leads to **menstrual shame**, which leads to **body shame** which leads to **low self-esteem** and **dangerous sexual decision-making.**

There are many reasons why people feel low self esteem and poor body image besides menstrual shame, however I would suggest that menstrual shame, which is simply a face of the **wounded feminine and wounded masculine** of our culture, is at the root of most, if not all, the other factors.

It is a big job to heal the wounded feminine and wounded masculine of our culture, within and without, and we have to start somewhere. Many of us have been working on this forever and on this night recently, as community, we took this into the **ceremonial realm** to do what we could right here right now for all our relations. We created altars to each element with instructions for a specific ritual task at each one. Working together to extract the Intrusion of the **unhealthy mindset** from our culture that contributes to the shame associated with Eating Disorders.

Processes at each altar:

Water – cleansing, washing away of negative beliefs and patterns

Earth – seed planting (sunflower seeds planted in earth), seeding new beliefs and ways of being

Air – sending prayers, intentions for ourselves and all our relations, lighting incense

Fire – burning away fears and negative beliefs, letting go

The 30-40 women who participated were deeply moved by the process. This is some of what they said:

“The Project Pomegranate evening revealed to me my maternal grandmother’s eating disorder.. I saw her often as a child and she was just...’normal’! She didn’t even come to my mind till after we went around the circle. And then...my God! It just opened up to me! ... I look forward to rewriting stories. And extracting at least one critical judge.”

~ Erika

“Thank you so much for this special evening. It’s such essential work for healing wounds within our culture. How I speak to myself has gotten another layer cleaner. My daughter loves what she sees in the mirror, and now I play with her there too. Here’s to holding more of these evenings for all our relations and for all of us!”

~ Tanya

“Beautifully held space for recognition and release at the individual level and collectively.”

~ Ayme

“So many of us have ‘normalised’ experiences of eating disorders both personally and collectively growing up. The magic of sharing the ‘raw data’ and these stories is that we truly begin to embody an understanding of the cascade of consequences, such as poor body image leading to poor sexual choices etc.”

~ Akhalita

“Whilst we sat in circle sharing, my grandmother came through very clearly. A memory of her doing her hair in the bathroom mirror with me as a young child, about 9 maybe, watching on. The shock and confusion of witnessing her talk about herself in such a self-loathing and hateful way. When through my eyes she was my beautiful Nana.

She was quite present throughout the ceremony and when we gathered in circle again for sharing at the end an image came through of her lovingly adoring herself and her hair with a happy little twirling dance. I can feel the healing that has taken place in the cells of my body... for all my relations.

And this is just one ceremony. Imagine what could happen if...!”

~ Melissa

Blessed Be and Blessed Do

Jane Hardwicke Collings