



Within the Naked Body: Phenomenological Perspectives on Women's Corporeality and Eating Disorders in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* and Elena and Clara B Dunkle's *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*

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Received: 21 Jan 2025; Received in revised form: 23 Feb 2025; Accepted: 28 Feb 2025; Available online: 06 Mar 2025

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Abstract— This research paper explores the experiences of women grappling with eating disorders through a phenomenological lens, concentrating on Leib and Körper as both are synonymous with 'body' - 'leib' from Latin generally refers to the 'body as a subject' (i.e.) the body that I am, 'körper' comes from Middle High German meaning 'body as an object' which also denotes the body that I have are utilized in this paper to exhibit the current condition of women's corporeality. Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* and Elena and Clara B Dunkle's *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* are the selected literary texts which showcase how beauty standards and internalized trauma shape self-perception and corporeality. Kim Chernin's *Feminist theories* enhance the study by revealing the intersection of body image, mental health and societal expectations. By engaging with medical humanities, this research offers valuable insights into the narrative and cultural dimensions of eating disorders, contributing to interdisciplinary conversations on mental health and identity.



Keywords— Corporeality, phenomenology, eating disorders, feminism, health humanities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Eating Disorders like Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge eating Disorders have seen an alarming rise globally. An updated report by the SingleCare Team was released on 24th January 2024 states that the statistics of eating disorders have increased from 3.4% to 7.8% globally. Harvard University, in collaboration with STRIPED (Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders), has produced a research report titled *The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders* (2020) has found out that 28.8 million (9%) Americans are diagnosed with

eating disorders for a lifetime. The report also states that the estimation of the overall lifetime prevalence of eating disorders among women is 8.60%. Beyond the physical and psychological harm, these disorders highlight a conflict between societal expectations of beauty and women's lived realities.

Health Humanities provides comprehensive ideas on merging literature, humanities and medicine and health. It enables the use of humanities to analyze the subjective experiences to detect the etiology of their illnesses, medical conditions that torment people with mental disputes which provides instability. Literature's venture into Health Humanities has provided narratives that elucidate illness narratives and health conversation globally. Through

literature, the liability of mankind is explored and understood. *Wintergirls* (novel) and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (memoir) present the fictional and realistic portrayal of women suffering from eating disorders like Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. This research paper explores the condition of women's corporeality in the current society where their bodies and selfhood are conditioned in an objective stance. Lia Overbrooke (*Wintergirls*) and Elena Dunkle (*Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*), protagonists of the selected literary texts offer poignant analysis on their intense alienation from their bodies due to their traumatic experiences and societal pressures. Utilizing phenomenology and Kim Chernin's Feminist ideas from her book *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, this paper investigates the transformation of women's corporeality, emphasizing the impact of eating disorders on selfhood.

'Within the Naked Body' exhibits the inhumane and lonely sufferings of women and adolescent girls with their bodies and flesh. These women and girls have perceived their bodies as disgusting entities and wish to erase all the ugly traces and fats their bodies behold. The emotional storm that every female character possesses in *Wintergirls* and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* presents their unspoken and hidden worries and traumas. The significant aspect of the research topic is that the human naked body's objectification is further analyzed with the phenomenological concept of Leib and Körper. This research proposes (1) how the corporeality of female characters experiences disastrous changes in their bodies and health caused by eating disorders which leads to the rejection of their biological anatomy and womanhood in the select works through the use of the phenomenological concept and (2) how eating disorders act as tyrants that heighten the self-objectification experienced by women's lived bodies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lopez-Gil et al. (2023), in their research article, *Global Proportion of Disordered Eating in Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*, they have concluded that among the 63,181 participants from 16 countries, 22% of children and adolescents exhibited eating disorders. The prevalence was even higher among the older adolescent girls and those with a higher body mass index. Eating disorders are one of the concerns of current society, as the predominant victims are the female community. Considering the vulnerability of women and adolescent girls, literary research proceeds with novels and memoirs' depictions of the threshold of eating disorders and body image issues among the female community.

The article, *The Shadow that Hovered Over: Gender Salience in Eating Disorder Recovery* by Connor B. S. Strobel, published in *Gender Issues* (2022), examines the impact of gender on the recovery process from eating disorders. Utilizing narrative and content analyses of online accounts from Tumblr and eating disorder support groups, the research identifies four distinct narrative types- Ecological, Sickened, Abused and Warrior- that individuals use to describe their experiences. These narratives are gendered, with men exclusively adopting the Warrior narrative, which is associated with higher rates of relapse.

Thomas Fuchs's article *The Disappearing Body: Anorexia as a Conflict of Embodiment*, published in *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity* (2021) states that Anorexia nervosa is primarily a conflict of self-alienation from the body, not just a body image disorder. This paper explores the duality of the lived body (subject) vs. the physical body (object).

Being a body and having a body: The twofold temporality of embodied intentionality by Maren Wehrle, published in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* (2019), explores the dual nature of human embodiment as both a subject and an object of experience, drawing on the phenomenological distinction between Leib (lived body) and Körper (physical body) as articulated by Helmuth Plessner and Edmund Husserl.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The foundation of this research paper is rooted in the phenomenology of the body, utilizing Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas. Through Husserl, one can explore how individuals, especially women and adolescent girls perceive their bodies through their subjective consciousness. Ponty's concept sheds light on the body as a fundamental component of experience and also emphasizes ideas such as body schema and the lived body (Leib) to delve into the body's internal experience and its interaction with the outer world. This research paper distinguishes 'Leib' (the body as a subject) and 'Körper' (the body as an object)- 'Leib' represents the body as experienced from within, integral to personal identity and 'Körper' refers to the body as an external object influenced by cultural and societal norms. Kim Chernin's feminist idea from her book *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, critiques how beauty standards commodify women's bodies, leading to self-objectification and alienation. By integrating phenomenology and feminism, this research bridges literary analysis with medical humanities, enriching our understanding of the

socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of eating disorders.

The research design is constructed by the integration of phenomenological concepts, Leib and Körper- the experience of the body both internally and externally. This would guide the analysis of how female characters in *Wintergirls* and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* view their bodies through society's beauty lens. Kim Chernin's involvement would further enhance and divulge the thresholds of women and adolescent girls struggling with body issues and eating disorders.

This research paper employs a qualitative research paradigm to delve deeper into the complex issues faced by the female characters dealing with eating disorders through the narratives of *Wintergirls* and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (fictional and real contexts).

Phenomenological Interpretation: Women's Corporeality and Eating Disorders in *Wintergirls* and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*

Eating Disorders are considered serious health deteriorating disorders where the individuals who are prone to such disorders-Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa-engage in 'disorderly eating' habits. The most common eating disorders found in this era are Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa are defined by Merriam-Webster as "a serious disorder in eating behaviour that is characterized especially by a pathological fear of weight gain leading to faulty eating patterns, malnutrition and usually excessive weight loss and that occurs most commonly in young women in their teens and early twenties" and "a serious eating disorder that occurs chiefly in females is characterized by compulsive overeating usually followed by self-induced vomiting laxative or diuretic abuse and is often accompanied by guilt and depression". Mostly, women's communities- girl children, adolescent girls, and women are the victims of eating disorders more than men.

One cannot neglect the disorderly eating habits of the individuals who are either affected or sooner be affected by eating disorders- as 'eat' is not just a verb in English but also an activity that symbolizes the act of living and sustenance. "*Manger est toujours bien plus que manger*" (Giard 279) ['Eating is always much more than eating']. To eat is not just to gobble up the food, but to eat mindfully and spiritually to enrich the livelihood of mankind. Such eating activity is at stake due to the unjust notions and expectations of society; trauma has also a role to play in disorderly eating behaviour of individuals. Female entities are always placed in the hot seat of society, regarding their body shape and beauty ideals than men. Being materialized for centuries, the subjective aspect of a

female body gradually modifies into an objective stature. This eventually exhibits the alienation from one's body, hatred towards their biological body and their changing body due to puberty.

Phenomenology is a philosophical field of study that focuses mainly on the study of experience and how things are evident to a conscious subject or mind. Husserl urged us to delve deeply into the things that appear as phenomena to understand the necessity. "Because in phenomenology the 'way of appearance' (*Erscheinungsweise*) is directly related to the meaning or sense (*Sinn*), we can also say that the Körper-Leib distinction refers to the fact

that the body can have different meanings" (Slatman 203). The concept of Leib and Körper emerged in the twentieth century by a group of German Philosophers- Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler and Helmuth Plessner. Jenny Slatman, in her research paper *The Körper-Leib Distinction* (2019) highlights that Körper is more instrumental in the contemporary world than Leib, as Körper- the objective body can be easily "manipulated, repaired and used" (Slatman 203) in the current society. This indicates the very modification of an individual from a subjective notion to an objective aspect.

Jenny Slatman further provides the etymology and semantics of Leib and Körper in her phenomenal article (2019),

Körper stems from the Latin *corpus* and refers to bodies as physical entities, including celestial bodies, geometrical entities, and dead bodies, corpses. *Leib*, by contrast, is related to the verbs *leben* (to live) and *erleben* (to experience, to go through) and the adjectives *lebendig* (in person, in the flesh). As such, *Leib* refers to the body as it is experienced or lived instead of the body as it can be measured or quantified... To define *Leib*, Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* uses the French terms *corps vécu* (lived body), *corps propre* (one's own body), and *corps sujet* (body as subject or subjective body). Current English translations of Körper-Leib distinction therefore include the following twin concepts: 'physical/material body' versus 'lived/animated body' or 'objective body' versus subjective body. (Slatman 204)

Edmund Husserl in his *Ideas II*, which was first written in 1912 but was posthumously published in 1952, describes how Leib's constitution differs from Körper's constitution. "They are both constituted by consciousness. Or, to put it differently, they involve two different ways in which the body appears to consciousness" (Slatman 204). Husserl gives an example of hands touching each other. When the left-hand touches the right hand, the left hand is experienced in two different manners. First, the left hand is

treated as a 'physical thing' which is composed of roughness or smoothness (deprived of any sensations)- the Körper. Secondly, when the left-hand touches the right hand, there are a series of sensations (*Tastempfindungen*) which causes the 'me-ness'- sense of ownership of the body- constituting the Leib.

The select literary works, *Wintergirls* (2009) by Laurie Halse Anderson and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (2015) by Elena and Clara B. Dunkle, are novel and memoir which present vulnerable female characters who are prey to eating disorders whose corporeality entirely transforms into materialistic entities. Laurie Halse Anderson's narrative, plot construction and character development are similar to Elena Dunkle's memoir. But Elena Dunkle being the victim of Anorexia Nervosa has delved deeper (emotionally but handled maturely) into her memoir's contents. Both the selected works narrate vividly the traumas of the female characters with eating disorders, the objectification of their bodies, the backstory to their threshold and how eating disorders evade their subjective consciousness and push them into the realm of materiality.

Lived vs. Objectified Bodies in Anderson's *Wintergirls*

Laurie Halse Anderson's *Wintergirls* (2009) illustrates the internal conflict of a seventeen-year-old, Lia Overbrooke. Having come from a dysfunctional family, her father, David Overbrooke, a History Professor, had extramarital affairs which led to his divorce from Lia's mother, Dr. Marrigan. Throughout the novel, Lia plainly addresses her mother as 'Dr. Marrigan', not with any specific endearment. Lia experiences the transformation of her lived body (Leib) into an objectified perception (Körper). Lia's childhood friend, Cassandra Jane Parrish (a.k.a Cassie) dies at the beginning of the novel due to her bulimic advancement. This news devastates Lia and she starts to feel an eerie and haunting presence in her room- who is none other than Cassie. Lia begins to unravel the reason for her friend's sudden demise and also presents how her body is perceived by herself as a commodity.

Growing up as a kid, Lia Overbrooke enjoyed eating her Nanna's home-cooked meals. Recalling such blissful moments of Lia, waiting for Thanksgiving day to have a joyous meal with her Nanna and her close family, reinforces her connection to her family and self. Such harmonious moments are disrupted by a chain of external and personal crises- her Nanna's sudden demise, her father's infidelity eventually leading to her parent's divorce. Later, Lia finds Cassie indulging in induced purging, arising perplexity and concerns in Lia at her friend's behaviour, she confides in Cassie. Cassie revealing her inability satiate her taste buds and her hunger, she mindlessly gobbles up the food and then is involved in self-

induced vomiting. One has to note that Cassie's disordered eating and purging are helping mechanisms for her to overcome or put a façade to her ongoing troubles with her family and her concerns about her body appearance.

Cassie realized that if she could take control over her body and sculpt her body to the norms of society's beauty standards, she could escape from her labyrinth of emotional breakdowns caused by her family as well as society. Her perspective of her lived body converted into a geometrical corporeality when she attained puberty. Lia recalls her fifth grade with Cassie- "...the boob fairy arrived with her new wand and smacked Cassie wicked hard" (Anderson 39). The boys in the class snickered at Cassie, even the girls whispered about Cassie's enlarged chest. Cassie, though she turned a deaf ear to their comments, she was deeply affected. This scar intensified when Thatcher Greyson drew a picture of Cassie with "watermelon-sized breasts" (Anderson 40) and passed the drawing around the class. This incident triggered body consciousness in Cassie and later, this led to the objectification of her growing feminine body.

The body holds meaning. A woman obsessed with the size of her body, wishing to make her breasts and thighs and hips and belly smaller and less apparent, may be expressing the fact that she feels uncomfortable being female in this culture....

A woman obsessed with the reduction of her flesh may be revealing the fact that she is alienated from a natural source of female power and has not been allowed to develop a reverential feeling for her body. (Chernin 02)

Lia's perception of her body begins to shift under the weight of societal beauty standards. The Leib (lived body) is demolished in Cassie's body and Körper's dictatorship rules over Cassie and Lia's bodies. Lia, having seen her friend's deadly appetite, food rituals

and her coping mechanism to avoid the thresholds, begins to restrict her food intake. She soon becomes anorexic and gets hospitalized at New Seasons.

Knowing Lia's internalization that thinness equates to control, worth and perfection, her attending doctor at New Seasons asks her to draw her body silhouette, as to know how she perceives her body. Lia epitomizes her body parts to inanimate objects: "I wanted to draw my thighs, each the size of a couch, on his carpet. The rolls on my butt and gut would rumble over the floor and splash up against the walls; my boobs, my arms, tubes of cookie dough oozing at the seams" (Anderson 82). Here, Lia places her body on a vantage point where she can go on to exteriorize her body with inanimate objects. Such metaphors exude self-dehumanization and also reflect the dominance of Körper over her cognition. Lia's body ceases

to be her own; instead, it becomes a site of scrutiny and manipulation dictated by societal ideals. Her mind was wrecked with false outlines of her body (fat, rolls of flesh) but in contradiction, her body is as thin as a skeleton.

Anderson elaborates elaborately about Lia's standpoints about her materialized body and her state of vulnerability through her detailed narration and sentence structure- Lia's body parts being apparently similar to that of an object. Anderson does not fail to highlight that Lia's anorectic condition strengthens due to her continuous alienation from her maturing body. Kim Chernin, a feminist critic concerned with eating disorders writes in her book, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*- "... anorexia reflects a girl's problem living, not merely in the body, but in a woman's body" (Chernin 63). Lia's description of her body as a couch or cookie dough is not just because of beauty stigmas, but also mainly due to her fight against her feminine body. This battle started ever since she felt abhorrence towards her menstruation. Hilde Bruch, in *The Golden Cage*, quotes that "... antagonism toward menstruation. Even though she had been menstruating for several years, she had never accepted it as a natural function" (80).

Puberty hits Lia, she sees visible changes in her body- both biologically and physically. She detests her new body where her arms and legs get bulky, her butt wiggle with extra flesh and she develops a double chin too. Rejection of her flesh is compounded by external pressures, for example, body shaming comments and criticisms from her ballet teacher regarding her biologically changing body. The teacher's comment, "My ballet teacher pinched the extra inches, took away my solo, and told me to stop eating maple-walnut ice cream" (Anderson 165). Thus further strengthening Lia's belief that an individual's worth is tied to how her body is closely attached to the ideals of slimness. The transition from a happy, food-loving child to an anorexic teenager encapsulates the destructive power of societal norms and personal trauma in reshaping one's relationship with the body.

For Lia, she became an ugly duckling from an elegant swan. Anorexia nervosa comes as a friend to the destitute who are unable to cope with their new profound construct. Anorexia or Bulimia or any eating disorder not only alienates women from their bodies but also ceases them from 'becoming women'. It propels them to remain like a child- flat chest, slim body, no curves and flat tummy. "For it seems evident that anorexia is afraid of becoming, not adults, not teenagers, but women" (Chernin 64).

"The human being is his body, and at the same time, in reflecting upon this body, he stands outside out it" (Jaspers 354). During the process of self-

objectification, female

individuals with eating disorders reject their bodies but focus on their bodies through external gaze. There were times when Lia felt about stepping out of her body and looking at her 'soulless' body from the outside- to see how her body looks. For her, a body is made up of bones, flesh and blood and nothing else. Labelling her body as just an earthly material, drove Lia to abuse her corporeality. She has the habit of cutting her skin using razors and knives, just as a punishment for not following her strict diet plans or her inability to succeed in achieving her ultimate weight-zero pounds.

The knife carves a path in the flesh between two ribs, then, between the two ribs below that. Fat drops of blood splash on the counter, ripe red seeds. I am so very. Very strong, so iron-boned and magic that the knife draws a third line between two ribs, straight and true. Blood pools in the bowls of my hips and drips to the tile floor. (Anderson 223).

Anderson presents recurring imagery of mirrors to showcase Lia's heightened estrangement from her lived body (Leib). Being dictated by anorexia and self-hatred, whenever Lia stares at the mirror, she does not see her real body but a grotesque distortion, a stranger who looks bony with a sharp jawline, extremely defined cheekbone, thin neck and a skeleton body. Kim Chernin asserts that women or adolescent girls with eating disorders often consider or write themselves in 'third person' perspective: "...she alienates herself from her body and becomes, as she stares at herself in the mirror, foreign to herself, a stranger" (Chernin 54). Lia resents the changes brought on by puberty, such as the development of curves and menstruation, viewing them as threats to her sense of control and identity.

Trauma and Embodiment in Dunkle's *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir*

Elena Dunkle's *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* (2015) is a cathartic memoir that provides a raw and deeply personal account of the trauma that altered the relationship between Leib and Körper. Unlike Lia Overbrooke, whose Anorexia Nervosa develops gradually from a mix of societal pressures and personal crisis, Elena's constant fights and struggles with her illness is deeply rooted in a history of sexual abuse. At the age of thirteen, Elena is sexually assaulted, an experience that she initially suppresses but which continues to haunt her in subtle yet profound ways. She, being an American, left for Germany when she was eleven years old. Later, she enrolls in a Boarding School, where she meets girls with eating disorder issues. Having not recovered from her sexual assault, she starts to worship disorderly eating to become

the perfect girl everyone wish to be. Later, she was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa at the age of seventeen. Being succumbed to such extreme measures, Elena continues to live with the perspectives of the outside world towards her body, but rather not on her sense of subjectivity.

A person as controlling and reclusive as Elena, cannot accept her body being trampled by someone out of her will. The trauma of the assault creates a rupture in Elena's perception of her body. She no longer sees it as a safe or integral part of herself but as a vulnerable object that others can violate. And anorexia lives off controlling people's minds and bodies, it cannot accept such trespassing on the area (body) that is under its control. Elena believed that no one could do something to her out of her will and if they do, it is because of Elena's affirmative acceptance, that means the rape could occur again. Her hatred for such incidents drove Elena

to build a wall around herself which would stop the entry of other people into her life. "The walls around me thicken and harden until it's not me I see anymore. I'm hidden inside a giant, cinder-gray skull" (Dunkle 245). This perspective aligns with Thomas Fuchs's description of anorexia as a conflict of embodiment, where the lived body becomes alien to itself. In Elena's case, her body becomes a battleground where she attempts to reclaim control by adhering to the rigid and destructive rules of anorexia.

Unresolved traumas and an anorexic voice caused Elena into the pits of agony, misery and pain. Her attempt to escape from the sexual assault, trying to be the perfect girl and covering up all her sadness, has caused great damage to her health. She suffered from costochondritis, bad acid reflux, unbearable pain in the chest area, damaged esophagus, insomnia, etc. She spent her teenage years in pain- physical pain and psychological disputes. Though Elena was an anorectic, she had bulimic symptoms too. Sometimes, guilt-driven, she eats junk food mindlessly and throws up everything, rupturing her esophagus. "Vomit splatters my face. My hands are smelly and slimy...I bend over the bag and expel the acidic stew until my throat is on fire. The fluid runs clear. Then spots of bright blood come up. Only then do I stop" (Dunkle 160).

The anorectic voice in Elena's head continues to whisper things which demotivates Elena and it also makes her incapable of protecting herself within the walls she has raised. Elena was nearly abused again at a Halloween Party when she was pursuing her college. A guy named Wayne kisses Elena forcefully and tries to molest her, but Elena being confident in not allowing such an incident to happen to her again, she fights back. After coming home from the party, almost drunk, Elena eats a hotdog. The monstrous

voice taunts her- "You ate a hot dog, says the voice in my head. You let yourself get forced into eating a hot dog, therefore you are a spineless, obese, out-of-control balloon" (Dunkle 117). The language here transforms Elena's body into an object of disgust, further entrenching her alienation. The body of Elena is marketed by anorexia as a 'balloon', an inanimate object which sells her body with ugly words like 'stupid', 'bitch', etc. "A material body is always marked, classed, and...marketed..." (Slatman 207) where the essence of 'my body' is replaced with 'having/owning a body'.

Before the rape, I'm a child. A ditzzy, bouncy, high-strung kid.

And after the rape...

I'm gone.

I'm just not there....

The rape hid me. I can't even remember who I was anymore. (Dunkle 244)

Chernin explains the transformation of a female's lived body (Leib) to an objective composition (Körper)- "...an object inspiring jealousy is converted into an object arousing disgust" (121) occurs mainly of the manipulation in the psyche. A woman's body is a sacred construct that has been a portal of man's existence. Such degrading marking of gaze and objectification on the bodies of women causes disgust and hatred on their bodies among the female community.

Series of mishaps happen to Elena which is left uncommunicated until her admission at Clove House (a treatment centre). She abreacts her traumatic sexual abuse to her therapist and unveils her hidden miscarriage when attending her college in America. The initial attack

on the violation of her body caused Elena to unwillingly retreat her memory about her assault. "I thought I'd hidden the rape deep inside myself where no one would ever find it" (Dunkle 244). Elena's miscarriage pushed her into the endless abyss of misery as she badly wanted the child whom she considered her very own.

What prompted Elena to confide in her therapist, Dr. Leben at Clove House was, she wants to be a good aunt to her newborn niece, Gemma who can rely on Elena in the future. Here, Elena's attempts to be cordial for Gemma indicates her suppressed motherly love. But Elena's recovery was critical because Elena convinced herself as she was not a victim of rape and that being a smart and good student has diminished the waves of the forced abuse on her. Thirteen old Elena and the Elena at Clove House believed that her thirteen-year-old body was found defenseless and easy to be attacked by the boys, mostly by the society; so, Elena begins to sculpt her body to conform

to societal standards of beauty, believing that achieving physical perfection will shield her from further harm. "I am *not* a victim! I'm smart, and I'm successful, and there are guys who would *kill* to go out with me. I know people who will *never* make my grades!" (Dunkle 189).

Dissociation can be considered as a natural response to traumas, stress and other emotional stuff that worries an individual. It plays a vital role in Elena's narrative, delivering the extent of her alienation from her Leib. Elena's dissociation indicates her emotional turmoil which she was facing alone rather than disclosing it to her parents or to the health professionals. One of the most poignant moments of dissociation occurs when Elena imagines herself floating through a dollhouse, detached from her physical body. She describes this experience as a retreat from the "awkward, ominous girl who haunts my mirror" (Dunkle 23). This imagery underscores how anorexia serves as both a coping mechanism and a destructive force, allowing Elena to escape her trauma temporarily while deepening her disconnection from reality.

Another prominent dissociation of Elena ensues when she is in her Mindfulness time where patients have to probe deeper into themselves and seek an answer to the unanswered questions. The therapist guides them to an imaginative yet experiencing beach where Elena could presume Gull's sounds, the wave's movement against the rocks and the serenity the beach holds. Elena notices cleaned and smooth pebbles, which she picks up as per her therapist's instruction. Elena's pebble is "...wet and deep eggplant-purple, with a pure white mark like the print of a baby's foot" (Dunkle 191). The therapist asked her to throw the pebble back into the ocean which she couldn't. Elena's dissociation reflects her traumas of miscarriage. She has loved the baby ever since she got to know about its existence and named her baby- Lilly Arabella. The touches of melancholy of Elena are stacked up one by one as she does not express them to anyone, claiming that her miseries are instigated from her body her body is the source of all of her memories.

"The same body which serves me as means for all my perception obstructs me in the perception of itself and is a remarkably imperfect construed thing" (Husserl 167). Husserl marks the double aspect of the human body; the body that perceives the senses of touch, feeling and localization of emotions, has now become an object with a sense of authority and no emotional integrity. Helmuth Plessner postulates that "[A] human being always and conjointly is a living body and has this living body as his physical thing" (Plessner 34). The female body has been synonymous with physical construction because it has been viewed as a

material that can be modified to the demands of the beauty industry and society. The inability to get modeled into the preferred figure causes the arrival of eating disorders, in extreme situations. Eating disorders also subjugate femaleness.

Elena's anorexia personifies her menstrual blood to her dead baby. Anorexia is a serious health disorder that also affects the psychological components of every anorectic. This also happens to bulimics. Elena has gotten her menstruation back after many days since her miscarriage. The voice inside Elena's head manipulates her cognition that with the flow of blood oozing out profusely from her vagina, Elena could see a chopped corpse with bloody limbs. This pulls her back to the day she delivered her dead daughter who was half-grown and covered in blood. The day Elena experienced and endured immense pain only to embrace her bloodied-dead-daughter. The voice screams at her, "*Dead baby! Dead baby! DEAD BABY!*" (Dunkle 223) and persuades her to believe that it was due to Elena's fault her baby died. But Elena calms herself by peeling off the flesh from her arm, with that the voice subsides.

The memoir highlights the cyclical nature of self-objectification. However, this pursuit only exacerbates her feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability. The anorexic voice in her head, personified as a relentless critic, reinforces her belief that she is never thin enough or in control enough.

Feminist Insights into Eating Disorders

"The anorexic body is by no means just the objectified body; it is also a visibly vulnerable, fragile and thus thoroughly expressive body" (Fuchs 115). Female individuals with eating disorders place their bodies on the objective notion where the real identity of the beholder is torn apart. The attributes of physicality like starvation, purging, self-harm and punishment are consistent in them. The phenomenology has elaborated the dual aspects of the human body and how that body can be decreased to a state of an item where the affected individuals are nothing but soulless bodies with eating disorders as their sole friends. For Lia Overbrooke and Elena Dunkle, eating disorders defined them; it was their identity. But realizing the extremities of eating disorders, they yield to treatment and get better to create an identity that syncs with their subjectivity.

Both *Wintergirls* and *Elena Vanishing: A Memoir* reveal how societal beauty standards disproportionately target women, fostering self-objectification and eating disorders. Kim Chernin's feminist criticism provides a critical framework for understanding the gendered dimensions of these narratives. According to Chernin,

women's bodies are often viewed as objects to be modified and controlled, a perspective that erases their individuality and agency.

In *Wintergirls*, Lia's anorexia reflects a broader societal rejection of femininity. Her struggle against her developing body mirrors a desire to return to a pre-pubescent state, free from the expectations and vulnerabilities associated with womanhood. Similarly, Elena's anorexia is deeply intertwined with her rejection of her identity as a woman, shaped by the trauma of her sexual assault. Both narratives highlight how societal pressures to conform to narrow ideals of beauty exacerbate these internal conflicts, perpetuating cycles of self-harm and alienation. The role of trauma is particularly significant in understanding these disorders. While societal pressures act as a catalyst, it is often personal trauma that drives the extreme behaviors associated with anorexia and bulimia. Elena's experience of sexual assault and Lia's unresolved grief over her friend's death are prime examples of how external events can intensify internal conflicts, transforming the body into a site of punishment and control.

Finally, the recurring imagery of mirrors in both texts underscores the centrality of self-objectification in eating disorders. Lia and Elena do not see their true reflections but distorted images shaped by societal and personal expectations. This act of viewing oneself as an object rather than a subject is a hallmark of the Körper mindset, illustrating the profound impact of societal norms on women's self-perception.

This research is grounded in the phenomenology of the body as articulated by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and feminist theory from Kim Chernin, explores how eating disorders impact the perception of the body among women and adolescent girls. However, it faces limitations of subjectivity inherent in phenomenological analysis among the female community and this paper might not fully account for cultural and societal diversity, only focusing on the female gender. This paper aims at the scope of offering a comprehensive examination of body perception through phenomenological perspectives and feminist ideas, providing insights into how societal expectations and cultural norms influence the experience of the body and contribute to eating disorders.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research paper made use of Husserl and Ponty's phenomenology of Leib and Körper in the lives of Lia Overbrooke and Elena Dunkle, the victims of Anorexia Nervosa. The paper has highlighted how and why these individuals are sunken into the cosmos of eating disorders.

Retreat from reality, rejection of femaleness, accumulation of objectivity (self-objectification), punishment regime and health issues are discussed. Kim Chernin's ideas on slenderness also support and explain the mindset of the select characters. Lia (fictional character) and Elena (realistic anorexic human), provide the vast notion of how women's bodies are trampled in society and then by themselves. 'Within the Naked Body' divulges the storms that occur within the naked body of every female individual.

Lia Overbrooke finally gets hospitalized to get treated and tries to get back into a normal teenage girl life. Lia accepts her body as it is and journeys to find her identity. Whereas, Elena gets treated after confessing all her traumas and begins to enroll in further studies. She has accomplished her dream to become a nurse. Towards the end of the memoir, Elena helps Dr. Leben cure eating disorders for adolescent girls and becomes a radiant hope for her patients. The realistic portrayal further provides hope for people with eating disorders that it is never too late to begin a new chapter.

This research significantly enhances the understanding of eating disorders by combining phenomenological and feminist ideologies to reveal how societal expectations impact body perception. By engaging with health humanities, this research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding mental health. Future studies could expand this framework to include diverse cultural perspectives and examine how men experience similar disorders under different societal pressures.

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