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The Double-Bind of Female Desire: On the Mysteries of Hysteria and Anorexia Nervosa

Summary:

Hysteria has been always connected to the problems of femininity both in professional and lay discourses. The Freudian discovery of the role of unconscious psychological conflicts in the etiology of the disease made hysteria a celebrated and thoroughly studied concept. The author suggests that ambivalences surrounding the meaning of gender and the interrelationships of the functioning of body and mind were all reflected in the conceptualization of hysteria in Freud&Mac226;s time as well as in contemporary psychoanalytic understandings of the disease. The latter theories are influenced by poststructuralist and feminist critiques. It is argued that anorexia, a very fashionable disease of our times, is a successor to hysteria not only in diagnostic terms but in its psychological mechanisms and role as a specific channel to articulate the tensions young women have related to their bodies and to desire in Western consumer societies.