

ABSTRACT

This research focused primarily on exploring the talk of mothers of daughters with Anorexia Nervosa, paying specific attention to their emic perceptions of the underlying causes of Anorexia Nervosa. The research sought to reveal the discourses underpinning participants' talk. Further, the way in which these discourses serve to construct Anorexia Nervosa in particular ways as well as the function these discourses serve were explored. This study is qualitative and exploratory in design and provides a unique understanding of Anorexia Nervosa in the form of emic accounts gleaned from mothers' own experiences. The findings of this research suggest that mothers of daughters with Anorexia Nervosa primarily reproduce a discourse on the causality of Anorexia Nervosa that is family or biomedically focused. Through analysis of the discourses embedded in participants' talk, it became evident that participants reproduce discourses of gender and femininity and are influenced by societal pressure as well as the constructions of womanhood and motherhood. Insight into a side of the mother of the Anorectic, often concealed in the literature, was revealed through a semi-structured interview process with nine urban, middle-class, white South African mothers of daughters with Anorexia Nervosa. Interviews were then transcribed and analysed according to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Incorporating the silenced voices of mothers of daughters with Anorexia Nervosa appears to have allowed for the emergence of a more generous view of the mother and has contributed to a larger set of discursive repertoires through which to understand Anorexia Nervosa. This research further gave rise to the realisation of a need for a critical education program whereby taken-for-granted notions can be revealed and actively engaged. This program would ideally seek to free the anorexic woman as well as the mother from the constraints of the uncritically constructed conceptualisations of Anorexia Nervosa and femininity.

Keywords: Anorexia Nervosa; eating disorder; discourse; social constructionism; mother; daughter; gender; emic accounts; thematic analysis; mother-daughter relationship; qualitative design.

