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The Structure, State, and Stream of Mary Consciousness in the Quest for the Knowing Body

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Abstract: The science of consciousness has traditionally situated knowledge creation in the mind, and thus, marginalizes the knowing body. Returning to the body requires a decolonization of consciousness in Euro-Western research paradigms and in our bodies. This research is grounded in the spirituality indigenous to my Latinx matrilineage known as Mary consciousness, which frames the body as an epistemic pillar of knowledge creation. A feminist fleshing of the knowing body displaces the centrality of the mind by elevating indigenous ways of knowing. Material feminist worldviews contribute by expressing the degree to which the body has been marginalized as a valid source of knowledge creation and expanding the binary split of mind over body. The theoretical entanglement of ethics, being, and knowing in the coalescence of matter, spirit, and meaning illustrate that we cannot know where the body ends, and the mind begins. This threefold schema is delineated through the embodied experience of Mary consciousness as a structure, state, and stream of experience. Ultimately, this research reflects an offering of spiritual inquiry into the discursive practices that limit the body in the process of knowledge creation.

Keywords: consciousness, spirituality, material feminism, knowledge, embodiment, matter, meaning, epistemology, agential realism, ecological postmodernism

“The material body is center and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text.” (Gloria Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5)

More than 200 women have tuned in for a virtual ritual of feminine movement. Together, we are holding space for our shared intentions, both spoken and unspoken. My awareness has returned to a physical sense of place following the 60 minutes respite of trance induced by a moving meditation. My body acknowledges the steady surface of the floor as I relax back into the familiar comfort of my apartment. I lay on the yoga mat with one hand on my chest and one hand beneath

my belly button. The instructor invites us to feel the flickering of lights turn on beneath each hand. The light slowly expands within the deep well of our bodies. She invites us to dip our fingers into that well of divine feminine light and paint its illumination across our bodies with our fingertips. She asks, “Where does your body need to be acknowledged?” Likewise, Gloria Anzaldúa invites her readers to return to the body as a text. She invites us to read and rewrite the stories that live in our bodies. Anzaldúa’s

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Latinx feminist worldview is guided by indigenous spirituality and myth making. Latinx religiosity describes consciousness or *conocimiento* as spirit and insight that is alive in the body. The mythology of the spirit and flesh is centered in the body as a text, so that the body is retrieved as an undeniable source of knowledge creation.

For centuries, the knowing body, and notoriously the female body, have been subjugated by an inheritance of ancient Greek philosophy that elevates consciousness over corporeality. The science of consciousness has traditionally situated the knowledge interpretation in the mind, and thus, marginalizes the knowing body. In doing so, dominant discourse risks reductionism of the mind to the brain and further cements mind/body dualism. This fragmentation defines consciousness as separate from and superior to the human body. The discursive practices of Euro-Western epistemologies continue to define what counts as meaningful knowledge. A feminist fleshing of the knowing body displaces the centrality of consciousness in the mind by elevating indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous Latinx epistemologies recognize the body as a wellspring of knowledge creation through the mythologies of flesh and spirit. Dian Million (2014) articulates, “Indigenism is to define ourselves, rather than being defined” (p. 38). In this way, story and the meaning it creates is restorative of marginalized bodies. Contrary to the Cartesian separation of soul from nature this paper theorizes the body as an interweaving of matter, spirit, and meaning. This three-fold schema maps a blueprint for designing a feminist framework of the knowing body as the container and transformer of myths and meaning making. Engaging with myth means constructing and deconstructing the narratives that lead us back to wholeness in our bodies. Million

explains, “We engage in questioning and reformulating those stories that account for the relations of power in our present” (p. 33). Emphasizing the body as center helps to decolonize the discursive power practices that define what counts as meaningful knowledge. This process of making and unmaking weaves the fragments of a disjointed self into a transformed tapestry of full and creative becoming in the body.

Returning to the body requires a decolonization of consciousness in Euro-Western research paradigms and in our own bodies. A postmodern lens prioritizes the material body as center through a feminist interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist view holds that truth and meaning are co-created through the narratives of lived bodily experience. While interpretivist paradigms traditionally frame reality as a social construction, a postmodern feminist view advocates for a recognition of the body, nature, and place as real phenomena in the world. The contributions of Karen Barad (2007) and Charlene Spretnak (1999) will illustrate these guiding theoretical principles toward a feminist fleshing of the knowing body. Section I addresses the decolonization of consciousness in Euro-Western research and offers material feminist views to assist in this deconstruction. Section II offers a theoretical framework of matter, spirit, and meaning through a revival of the body, nature, and place. Section III returns to Euro-western epistemologies of consciousness to situate Mary consciousness as an embodied structure, state, and stream of experience. This research begins as an offering of spiritual inquiry into the knowledge making processes inherent to my Latinx matrilineage. Mary consciousness influences how I retrieve and interpret the embodied stories of my ancestral mother line. Reading and rewriting the mythologies of our spirit and flesh can heal and restore the knowledge within our

bodies. As we will see, Mary consciousness is radically manifest in the body. Concluding remarks will offer an invitation to the ritual of knowledge creation as an embodied process of spiritual inquiry.

Decolonizing Consciousness

Decolonizing consciousness requires a look into some of the key propositions that have shaped the mind and body in the study of consciousness. Western worldviews have made significant contributions to consciousness, psychology, and the mind. William James (1890) is notably recognized for theoretical propositions concerning personal consciousness and the Self. For James, the stream of conscious experience is a strictly subjective experience of the Self. The constituents of the Self are made of four components: the material Self, social Self, spiritual Self, and pure Ego. James (1890) says, “The body is the innermost part of *the material Self* in each of us; and certain parts of the body seem more intimately ours than the rest” (p. 293). He offers a glimpse into the potential of the material body as a source of knowing in the paradigm of consciousness studies. We will explore this potential through a deeper look into the structures of consciousness that influence how we interpret the experiential nature of the knowing body. A brief review of Gebser’s (1949) structures of consciousness will help to understand these influences.

Jean Gebser (1949) is notably acknowledged for his contributions to the structures of consciousness; they are known as archaic, magic, mythic, mental, and integral. Allan Combs (2009) states, “Each is a complete way of understanding and relating to the world” (p. 62). In other words, each structure is motivated by an axiological tendency to dominate value systems throughout history. Value systems include how we think about

and interpret the body in any given era. Firstly, the archaic structure is characterized as a deep dreamless sleep and represents the origin point of human being. The world is devoid of perspectivity and any sense of self, material or otherwise. The body is not yet a phenomenon of conscious awareness. Secondly, the magic structure reflects a progression away from the origin point toward an association with nature. A collective self or cosmic “we” emerges. The human body is not separate from nature, but a part of nature. Thirdly, the mythic structure is characterized as the emergence of the soul and imagination. This structure reflects a progression away from collective unity with nature toward individual association. Humankind begins to concretize the notion of “I”: The body is now separate from nature, and creation myths emerge as imagination begins to shape the dominant value system. Fourthly, the mental structure is characterized by humanity’s elevation of reason over soul and body. The discursive practices of knowledge making in the West are rooted in this turn to mental ratio. The emphasis of mind over matter marginalizes the body in philosophy, science, and religion. Indigenous ways of knowing inherent to magic and mythic structures are dismissed as emotional, invalid, and non-scientific. Prioritization of the mind in the mental structure subjugates the human body. Lastly, Gebser’s integral structure of consciousness reflects a transformative coalescing of all structures in the eternal now. The sense of time – past, present, and future – smoothly transform into one another. This structure is characterized by its spiritual capacity to render the world transparent. Gebser’s integral structure offers a fertile ground for interpreting the lucidity of the body as a valid source of knowing. However, decolonizing structures of consciousness means identifying the power structures and discursive practices that continue to

marginalize the body. If power structures within the dominant cultural mythology continue to neglect the body, can consciousness ever be truly integral? Thus, ethics and value systems are inseparable from the ontological and epistemological framework of consciousness in the knowing body.

Material feminist worldviews express the degree to which the body has been marginalized as a valid source of knowing through the complex intra-actions of ethics, being, and knowing. A key element of complexity is the notion of autopoiesis. Allan Combs (2002) explains that, “Autopoietic systems do not simply maintain stasis in the face of changing external conditions; they dynamically recreate themselves” (p. 15). Combs acknowledges that the mind itself is an autopoietic process. If mind and matter are inseparable, how do we differentiate between the autopoietic processes of the mind and the body? We cannot identify an objective boundary between knowing and being. Instead, decolonized views of consciousness recognize the complex coalescence of body and mind. Charlene Spretnak (1999) notes how alternative healing methodologies like Chinese medicine reveal the *bodymind* as a balanced system of energy (p. 18). The *bodymind* is a self-healing and self-correcting (autopoietic) energy system where the mind and body are not separate as in traditional dualism.

Just as the mind and body cannot be separated, neither are we outside researchers of the world, nor in the world. Instead, we recognize that we are part of the nature that we seek to understand. The idea of an integral philosophy-physics is paramount in Karen Barad’s (2007) revisioning of scientific knowledge production. The participation of the body in the world is entangled in a paradigm of *ethico-onto-epistem-ology*.

Barad points at the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology when engaging in scientific knowledge production, with scientific practices, and with the world itself and its inhabitants – human and non-human beings that intra-actively co-constitute the world (Barad, 2007, p. 90). Barad’s theory of agential realism and performativity provides a paradigmatic framework that recognizes matter as a justifiable source of knowing. She says, “An agential realist elaboration of performativity allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity” (Barad, 2007, p. 136). Later, Section II will further expand upon Barad’s notion of performativity, matter, and meaning. The purpose here is to introduce material feminist assumptions that can assist in decolonizing consciousness.

Material feminist philosophies aid the decolonization of Euro-Western assumptions through a retrieval of indigenous knowledge. Bagele Chilisa (2012) explains indigenous epistemologies as a “framework of belief systems that emanate from the lived experiences, values, and history of those marginalized by Euro-Western research paradigms (p. 19). Incubated from the century’s old mind/body split, the body is continuously subjugated in the West and is denied its claims as a phenomenon of matter, spirit, and myth making. If high complexity is a precursor for transformation, then a return to the body is necessary for the evolution of the knowing body in the study of consciousness. Decolonizing consciousness is a radical call to action that restores dignity to marginalized bodies. For example, news headlines today reflect the dominant cultural mythology’s inability to make meaning of dying bodies and the fragmentation of our complex collective grief. The isolation of quarantine deprives dying bodies of their dignity while loved ones are forced to make and unmake the ethics of mourning.

Indigenous ways of knowing recognize that the sacred life transitions of death and grief are not isolated in the mind but are profound processes of bodily experience and myth making. Our current social reality is evidence that a return to the material body is vital for the transformation and evolution of consciousness. Later, in Section III, we will dive a little deeper into this sacred life transition through my relationship as a healer in hospice care. Next, I will introduce material feminist propositions that address the relationship between the body and knowledge creation.

Agential Realism and Ecological Postmodernism

“Where there is a wound on the psyches and bodies of women, there is a corresponding wound at the same site in the culture itself, and finally on Nature herself.” (Estés, 1987, p. 218)

When the earth is colonized, the human body is colonized. Estés (1987) illuminates the communal web of body, culture, and nature within the larger social reality. While scientific theories seek to make sense of an objective reality, sociological theories investigate the phenomena of social life. A theoretical perspective might ask, where does the objective phenomenon of the body end and the social body begin? An efficient theory of the knowing body requires the transdisciplinary collaboration of nature, culture, and matter. A feminist fleshing of the knowing body recognizes the theoretical entanglement of matter, spirit, and meaning in the processes of social and scientific knowledge production. This section elaborates on key propositions of Karen Barad (2007) and Charlene Spretnak (1999) as decolonizing frameworks of the knowing body. Barad’s paradigmatic revisioning is

illustrated through Spretnak’s revival of the knowing body, nature, and place.

First, Karen Barad (2007) presents a theoretical revisioning of matter and meaning in scientific knowledge production. She argues,

To write matter and meaning into separate categories, to analyze them relative to separate disciplinary technologies, and to divide complex phenomena into one balkanized enclave or the other is to elide certain crucial aspects by design. On the other hand, considering them together does not mean forcing them together, collapsing important differences between them, or treating them in the same way, rather it means allowing any integral aspects to emerge (by not writing them out before we get started). (p. 25)

Barad points to an integral philosophy-physics that is grounded in the epistemological lineage of Niels Bohr [1885-1962] and calls into question the separation of knower and known. As noted earlier, Barad’s theory of agential realism and performativity provides a paradigmatic framework that recognizes matter as a valid source of knowing. The notion of performativity situates matter as an active participant in the intra-actions of the world’s becoming. Intra-action refers to mattered bodies that participate in action with each other, both human and non-human. Intra-action illustrates the performance of phenomena in the world since reality is comprised of phenomena and phenomena are patterns of mattering. Barad’s agential realism helps to displace and decentralize the elevation of consciousness over corporeality. From this perspective, reality is an ethico-onto-epistem-ological entanglement of mind,

matter, and meaning. Just as the mind and body cannot be separated, neither are we outside researchers of the world nor in the world. We are the world in its unique expression of creative becoming. For Barad, knowing is a scientific practice of articulation about the differential world. Therefore, knowing is a performance of intra-activity in the world. According to Barad, meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential becoming (Barad, 2007, p. 149). Likewise, the entanglement of mind, matter, and meaning reveal that ethics, being, and knowing can no longer be separated. This three-fold schema is further illustrated through Charlene Spretnak's resurgence of the real, discussed below.

Body, Nature, and Place

Charlene Spretnak's (1999) ecological postmodernism illustrates the intra-activity of matter, spirit, and meaning in the phenomena of body, nature, and place. Spretnak's theory liberates socially constructed theories that reject the real. Such discursive practices "uphold the body-mind split by asserting an inner version of social construction whereby culture (mind) projects assumptions on the body (matter)" (Spretnak, 1999, p. 66). Discursive practices of social construction perpetuate the fragmentation of human bodies from nature, self, and knowledge creation. On the contrary, ecological postmodernism offers a theoretical framework in which the body is a source of knowing because it creates meaning. Spretnak elaborates, "The bodymind is knowing, for it creates meaning. It is sensitive to an enormous range of subtle dynamics in and around it and from which it perceives, selects, and organizes information. It makes sense of this information – its own sense" (Spretnak, 1999, p. 21). This means that knowing is an act of bodily participation

in nature and not outside of nature; knowing is not centralized in the mind.

In addition to the knowing body, ecological postmodernism points to nature as a resurgence of the real. The earth is an autopoietic process of becoming, and we are part of the nature that we seek to understand. For example, climate change is a real phenomenon in nature and not an isolated social construction. However, climate change is not separate from the complex intra-actions of human bodies, nature, and place. Lastly, Spretnak calls for a return to the bodily experience of eco-social place. Modern worldviews have reduced the concept of place to a measure of economic progress in the abuse of political power. Doing so has neglected the embodied knowledge of indigenous peoples who experience a very real sense of place in nature and social community. Spretnak argues, "A plurality of peoples now inhabit most places on this earth. A peaceful future requires honoring that diversity, both culturally and legally, as the new orientation for the continuing unfolding eco-social communities in millions of places worldwide" (p. 32). Indigenous ways of knowing teach us about the living presence of place through their connection to the natural world. Spretnak's insights elevate Dian Million's framing of story as restorative. Such stories are powerful because they allow the indigenous and marginalized to make sense of who they are within the discursive processes of meaningful knowledge creation. Indigenous knowledge reveals that body, nature, and place are paradigmatically intertwined in a web of communal being.

In summary, Karen Barad (2007) highlights that reality is the patterning of matter, where knowing, being, and meaning reflect differential performativity in the world. Likewise, Spretnak's conceptions of the

body, nature, and place reflect differential possibilities through each intra-action in the world. This plurality recognizes that there cannot be one kind of body, one kind of tree, one kind of land, or one kind of knowledge. The body and the world reflect a creative coalescence of ethics, being and knowing. Barad's agential realism prioritizes differential performativity while Spretnak's ecological postmodernism seeks to alleviate the inherited subjugation of the real from hypermodernity. Meaning as performance and participation remains a common thread among both theorists. Barad's entanglement of matter and meaning scaffolded with Spretnak's ecological postmodernism offers a decolonized paradigmatic framework that supports a feminist fleshing of the knowing body. Moreover, the theoretical framings of agential realism and ecological postmodernism provide a blueprint for Mary consciousness as an indigenous source of knowledge creation. Section III considers this embodied experience of Mary consciousness inherent to my ancestral mother line. Mary consciousness is interpreted as a structure, state, and stream of experience in the entanglement of matter, spirit, and meaning.

Mary Consciousness

Section I addressed the philosophical assumptions that have traditionally marginalized the knowing body in Euro-Western epistemologies of consciousness. Section II introduced material feminist principles of matter, spirit, and meaning through the phenomena of body, nature, and place. Section III now contextualizes my experience of embodied spirituality in the structure, state, and stream of Mary consciousness indigenous to the matrilineage of my Latinx heritage. I will return to Euro-western epistemologies of consciousness to assist in the fleshing of this hermeneutic.

Latinx religiosity is ripe with indigenous mythologies of the body and spirit. Dia de los Muertos is a widely recognized tradition that honors the spirits of our ancestors who have passed. During this time, it is said that the veil is thinned between the living and the dead, and that spirits can return to earth and be reunited with their loved ones. Devotion to our ancestors is a key element of spiritual practice.

I descend from a lineage of *curanderas* on my mother's side and was raised by my grandmother, Maria de las Mercedes (Mary of Mercy). A *curandera* is a local medicine woman and healer. My ancestry is vibrant with mythologies of spiritual mediumship and psychic states grounded in the love of divine mother. My grandmother, like her mother, took a vow to serve the poor and vulnerable in the name of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Guadalupe is the divine mother as experienced in indigenous Mexican religiosity. She is known in the West as the Virgin Mary. Women missionaries of this devotion are known as Guadalupanas. For this reason, Mary consciousness is deeply rooted in our ancestral connection to the divine mother.

As *curanderas*, the women in my lineage share the gift of spiritual mediumship. This gift taps into to a source of consciousness that allows one to communicate between the worlds of spirit and flesh. Our bodies are libraries of spiritual wisdom and gateways to liminal worlds. Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) acknowledges that, "Chamanas, *curanderas*, *artistas*, and spiritual activists, like *nepantleras*, are liminal people, at the thresholds of form, forever betwixt and between. They move among different realities and psychic states, journeying beyond the natural order or status quo and into other worlds" (p. 31). From this

perspective, Mary consciousness is more than an archetype. It is a structure for interpreting values, a state that moves between realities, and a stream of personal spiritual experience.

Allan Combs (2009) explains structure of consciousness as “the way in which the mind takes hold of an experience and makes it its own” (p. 58). Structures of consciousness explain how we go about perceiving reality. A mental structure may interpret the body as an object to be observed while an integral structure will support a more translucent reality of the bodily experience. The obvious states of consciousness in human experience are waking and dreaming. Others include chemically induced states, meditative states, mystical states, and out of body states.

The stream of consciousness is most notably ascertained by William James (1890) who described thought as a sensible continuous stream of personal experience. He illustrates, “Whether anywhere in the room there be a mere thought, which is nobody's thought, we have no means of ascertaining, for we have no experience of its like” (James, 1890, p. 226). For James, our thoughts are purely subjective and can only be discerned through introspection. These ideas are further illustrated in the context of Mary consciousness as a structure, state, and stream of experience.

Structure of Mary Consciousness

Mary consciousness is an inherited structure of behaviors and components that motivate decisions and values in our social reality. Grounded in the mythologies of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the primary values of Mary consciousness are compassion, service, and

bodily knowing. These values are rooted in the Guadalupana mission of service to the poor and vulnerable. My grandmother was a gifted psychic and energy healer, but her greatest gift was a vast capacity for compassion. Mary of Mercy held space for all the planet's suffering in the comfort of her heart. She never spoke an ill word and never passed judgement on the transgressions of others. She accepted you and loved you as you were. She saw you the way Nuestra Madre (Our Mother) sees you.

In addition to the values of compassion and service, Mary consciousness supports the body as an undeniable source of knowing. We honor this embodied knowledge through our service to dying bodies. The gift of spiritual mediumship has always guided the women in my lineage to serve patients in hospice care. I am reminded of Ram Dass who said, We're all just walking each other home. I remember one of my first visits at the home of a hospice patient that I had been assigned to. Bob suffered from Parkinson's Disease and his mental cognition was quickly diminishing. I was asked to provide Reiki energy healing, guided meditation, and aromatherapy for comfort. When I entered Bob's room, the light grew increasingly bright and I had to shield my eyes.

Bob and I felt an immediate connection. Before I could introduce myself and explain why I was there, Bob said with a smile, “I have been waiting for you.” Indeed, the end of life transition is fertile with bodily knowing. As Bob's spirit anticipated my arrival, I felt my heart had been waiting for him too. Our visits turned into hours of sharing music, poetry, prayer, and reflection. Time stopped when Bob and I were together as we played in the liminal ethers of flesh and spirit. Within 60 seconds of every healing session, Bob disappeared into a deep trance,

and I with him. Bob passed away after seven weeks of visits, and I was able to help him walk back home, so to speak. I learned more about the mysteries of life and death during my visits with Bob than any formal training could provide. The death process is a profound rite of passage, and indigenous mythologies reveal how these rites lead to a transition from an old identity to a new way of being. I remember the transitional moment when I understood that my body was a source of knowing during another encounter with the sacred mystery of death. My body was filled with anxious anticipation as my 19th birthday approached. Traditionally, my mother would wake me up on the mornings of my birthdays and sing *Las Mañanitas* (morning song), a customary birthday song in Mexican culture. However, the morning of my 19th birthday was not so bright. Instead of the familiar tune, I awoke to the sound of my mother weeping with sorrow. I immediately felt my body contract as my heart sank to my stomach. My grandmother, our matriarch, had died. She suffered from dementia and for the last years of her life she remained in a catatonic state, which cause me to feel anger that her capacity for conscious awareness had been taken away by the disease. Sadly, by the time I entered high school, she no longer recognized my face.

When I arrived at the hospital, my relatives greeted me with a somber, "Happy birthday, mijita." Mijita can mean my honey or my darling one. I nodded in acknowledgement as my eyes welled with grief. I followed my mother through a giant corridor to a hospital bed covered by a drawn curtain. Behind the curtain, my grandmother lay motionless and at peace. Tears flushed from the deep wells behind my eyes as my breath halted in my chest. It felt as though the entire history of my ancestors was flooding through me, the beginning and ending of time. I took my

grandmother's hand one last time and rested my head upon her chest. In that moment, I understood that my grandmother had given me the greatest gift I had ever received.

She had offered me her spirit and flesh on the altar of unconditional love. She had returned to the womb of our first mother, our earth mother, and our divine mother. My grandmother and I are bound to one another by the sacred coalescence of matter, spirit, and meaning. The memorial of my birth and her death is a symbol of the great Mystery in our bodies. The stories of my mother, my grandmother, and all the mothers before us, are alive in my body. The structure of Mary consciousness motivates a retrieval of indigenous knowledge that liberates marginalized ways of knowing and returns us to our source, so that we may begin to heal the mother line in our bodies and the bodies of those we love. In summary, the structure of Mary consciousness deals with questions such as these:

1. What is my relationship with my body?
2. What is my relationship to other bodies?
3. What does it mean to have a body?
4. What mythologies of the flesh are alive in my body?

Now let us explore states of Mary consciousness through the modes of channeling and perpetual waiting.

Mary Consciousness

Imants Baruss (2003) interprets states of consciousness by changes to the ordinary waking state along any number of dimensions. He says that the term "altered state" is not an explanation for psychological events. Instead, it describes the complexity of psychological processes during the altered

state (Baruss, 2003). Likewise, Mary consciousness reflects changes to the ordinary waking state. States of Mary consciousness reflect radical manifestation in the body and are grounded in a spiritual connection to the divine mother. As the mother of God, La Virgen or the Virgin Mary represents the theological aspects of these states. Mary's womb is the channel for God's incarnation, and her "yes" to God illustrates the grace of letting go in a state of perpetual waiting. Channeling as an umbrella term has been defined as the communication of information to or through a physically embodied human being from a source on some other level of reality than the physical as we know it. Channeling is a type of trance state and a form of mediumship. While trance states are often discussed in the context of dissociative disorders, research on channeling has not yet concluded whether channeling is a unique state of consciousness. However, recent scientific studies are moving channeling research forward. Dr. Julie Beischel (2007) is recognized for contemporary methods in laboratory-based mediumship research. Beischel's research team at the Windbridge Institute employs a quintuple-blind protocol for analyzing after death communications during a mediumship reading. This research method is focused on the process of mediumship versus traditional proof-focused research. In another study, channeling research is expanded by evaluating physiological measure differences between the channeling and no-channeling states using rigorous controlled methods (Wahbeh et al., 2019). This research team emphasized a systematic review of published and unpublished literature to bring channeling studies up to date. A comprehensive review requires the inclusion of indigenous and non-traditional sources.

The information passed down from our ancestors is a sacred source of knowledge

and offers alternative ways of interpreting the world. The ancestral lineage of channelers in my mother line has helped me to articulate the role of Mary consciousness in liberating my body and the bodies of others. The channeling state can be induced, or arise, unexpectedly as in the case of my great grandmother, Protectora Madam Isabel. Her name means "protector." For Isabel, *automatism* or automatic writing was the primary indicator of a channeling state. Channeling enables the healer to receive information beyond our normal physical sources. Isabel was known to sit in a chair while engaged in normal conversation, and suddenly her eyes would close, and her head would drop to her chest. During this altered state of consciousness, Isabel would transcribe prayers and insights from spirit. Automatism illustrates how this state of Mary consciousness is radically manifest in the body.

Other states of Mary consciousness are less visible to the outside observer, such as the mode of perpetual waiting. Lex Hixon (1978) describes waiting as, "The way and the goal: a waiting that never ends, a perpetual inbreath" (p. 30). This state is characterized by complete surrender or letting go. The Marian archetype represents the perpetual waiting of our divine mother's surrender to the unknown. For this reason, Mary consciousness is a valuable source when working with hospice patients. The end of life transition is both a psychospiritual and physical process.

The death process is also an altered state of perpetual waiting as the patient strives to make meaning of their final and perpetual inbreath. According to Pearson (2017), it is common for dying people to let you know the date and hour that they will die. It is unknown as to why they have an embodied sense of awareness, so we must listen

compassionately to what the mythology of their flesh is trying to say. By doing so, the curandera opens a door between the realities of spirit and flesh. This allows the healer to remain betwixt and between liminal realities, and to help walk the patient home, so to speak. Dying people may see or sense others in the room and often engage in conversation with these invisible presences. While caregivers may try to accord these visions to hallucinations or side effects of medication, it is important to allow those who are undergoing the process of death to die with meaningful experiences – in a loving and non-judgmental way. The perpetual waiting of Mary consciousness exudes an energy of comfort and relief that is felt by the dying. In this relationship, the patient does not feel alone or judged and can openly express what they are feeling, seeing, and experiencing in their dying body. This was also the case with my patient and friend, Bob, whom I shared about earlier.

During one of my last visits with Bob, he was very concerned. He asked me to check on an order he had placed for an escalator. It was very important that the escalator arrive on time so that he could get up to the next level. I assured Bob that I would check on his order and see that it arrives on time. A look of relief came over his face as he smiled with gratitude. I was honored to witness Bob's meaning making as his death transition neared. States of Mary consciousness facilitate this sacred rite of passage by helping the dying to liberate the myth making in their bodies. Lastly, we will explore the subjective spiritual experience in the stream of Mary consciousness.

Stream of Mary Consciousness

As discussed above, certain states can be observed by external cues. The stream of

personal consciousness, however, is only accessible via subjective introspection. William James (1890) posited five characteristics of consciousness, the first of which concerns us here. For James, every thought belongs to a personal consciousness and cannot be known by outside streams of consciousness. Thus, introspection is the necessary mode for retrieving the experience of personal consciousness. He says, "Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always. The word introspection need hardly be defined – it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover (William James, 1890, p.186).

Introspection as a valid source of scientific knowledge creation has seen much debate. Imants Baruss (2003) summarizes how introspection as epistemology has been widely subjugated by the scientific research paradigm. Computational models of the psyche assume that what we are introspecting is not actual knowledge. It is a psychic reconstruction based on perceptions of our own and others' behavior (Baruss, 2003). Nevertheless, James (1890) argues that we are all conscious of our individual identity and can never truly know what substance accounts for this sense of selfhood, but that we can engage it through introspection.

While James' (1890) proposition emphasizes mental events, Mary consciousness retrieves bodily introspection as a process of knowledge creation. Whereas bodily introspection allows us to reclaim the suppressed mythologies of our flesh, neglecting the subjective body as a source of knowledge creation has cultivated a structure of body shame in the dominant cultural mythology of our time. For example, the mental health crisis surrounding body image among young adults is evidence of this disease. Body image is produced from our intra-actions with other bodies, nature, and

the world. Body image illustrates how we think, feel, and make meaning in our bodies. The images, thoughts, and stories that we tell about our bodies directly impact our mental health. According to a study, one in eight adults experienced suicidal thoughts or feelings because of concerns about their body image (Mental Health Foundation London, 2019). A retrieval of bodily introspection liberates the shameful stories in our flesh and invites us to rewrite the knowledge in our bones. Our personal stories are restored through the construction and deconstruction of the narratives that lead us back to wholeness in our bodies.

The personal stream of Mary consciousness supports this process that I call *bodytelling*, which assists in deconstructing the culturally conditioned mythologies in our own bodies. Bodytelling interprets personal experience through the consciousness and corporeality of one's body. We can read and rewrite the stories of our flesh through bodytelling, a form of spiritual inquiry, that invites opportunities for healing, reconstruction, and the formulation of new knowledge. This process allows the inquirer to return to the body as a source of matter, spirit, and meaning within the larger social reality. I will return to my body on the yoga mat to illustrate.

I lie on the yoga mat with one hand on my chest and one hand beneath my belly button. The instructor invites us to feel the flicker of lights turn on beneath each hand. The light slowly expands within the deep well of our bodies. She invites us to dip our fingers into that well of divine feminine light and paint its illumination across our bodies with our fingertips. She asks, "Where does your body need to be acknowledged?" I let my hands trace over my neck and the dip of my collar bone. I surrender to the motion as my palms open and hover above my face. Slowly, they move over my eyes, lips, and throat. I

acknowledge the wisdom of my vision, my voice, and my truth. Next, one hand gently grips the top of my head and the other on the back of my neck. I feel the support of my hands holding me and cradling my head. I begin to weep. An insight arises, and I understand how the elevation of mind over body has fragmented my feminine creature from her source of bodily knowing. A voice inside my body says, "I am here, and I know." And the wisdom in my bones assures me that this is her time.

Invitation

This research began as a quest of self-discovery to liberate my body as a valid source of knowing. Tracing the lineage of knowledge creation in Euro-Western epistemologies of consciousness inspired me to question the role of consciousness in my own body. I now understand that knowledge creation is a sacred rite of passage and a creative act of discovery. The gift of knowledge production has been diminished by an overemphasis of the mind and dismissal of the body. Western philosophical assumptions have relegated the body as a danger or opposition to reason. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues, "Philosophy as we know it has established itself as a form of knowing, a form of rationality, only through the disavowal of the body, specifically the male body, and the corresponding elevation of mind as a disembodied term" (p. 4). A feminist fleshing of the knowing body requires that we retheorize the mind and body in the process of knowledge creation (Author, xxxx). We can nourish an inclusive experience of consciousness by returning to a state of spiritual inquiry and discovery in the body. We can reframe knowledge creation as an embodied practice of spiritual inquiry in the process of creative becoming. Returning to the body as a source of knowing in the

study of consciousness offers the following questions for reflection:

1. Can we know where the body ends, and the mind begins?
2. Is knowledge creation isolated in the mind?
3. Who decides what counts as meaningful and valid knowledge?
4. How might the stories in our bodies help restore the imbalance of power in the process of knowledge creation?

The stories in my body reveal a creative reality in which mind, body, and spirit smoothly transform into one another. The mythologies of my spirit and flesh illuminate the knowledge of my ancestors and their aliveness in my breath. The compassion of divine mother inspires me to question the practices that continue to neglect and marginalize the body. Mary consciousness teaches us to read the body as an ongoing coalescence of matter, spirit, and meaning. Whether or not our bodies are grounded in a tradition of indigenous spirituality, all bodies are restorative sources of myth making. Each body holds a library of ancient knowledge with the history of the cosmos flowing through one's veins and the soul of the planet in one's breath. Each body is a sacred text. This is an invitation to open the book and turn the page.

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