5-1-2013

Truce with Food: A Heroine’s Journey

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics in the Graduate Division of the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania
Advisor: Charline Russo

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Abstract
This Capstone is a theoretical analysis of the factors involved in what has become a pervasive yet ineffective North American food story, a battle with food. With the battle metaphor as a guide, more people are dieting and failing. This is escalating health-care costs and decreasing quality of life. By applying my Organizational Dynamics graduate studies program at the University of Pennsylvania with concentrations in Coaching and Change Management, this paper proposes a health-coaching model that is holistic, focusing on the physiology and emotional factors involved in changing the war with food mentality to one of a truce with food.

Keywords
Coaching, food, health

Comments
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by

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2013
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This Capstone is a theoretical analysis of the factors involved in what has become a pervasive yet ineffective North American food story, a battle with food. With the battle metaphor as a guide, more people are dieting and failing. This is escalating health-care costs and decreasing quality of life. By applying my Organizational Dynamics graduate studies program at the University of Pennsylvania with concentrations in Coaching and Change Management, this paper proposes a health-coaching model that is holistic, focusing on the physiology and emotional factors involved in changing the war with food mentality to one of a truce with food.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Appreciation and admiration is extended first and foremost to Dr. Charline Russo, my capstone course advisor and influential program professor and to Linda Pennington and Kristin Dawson, my capstone readers, for their interest, support and guidance during the preparation of this document. Linda has also been present in two of my most significant program courses and has served as role model coach.

I would also like to thank the following people for their support, advice and encouragement throughout my tenure in the Organizational Dynamics program: Dr. Bill Wilkinsky, Dr. Janet Greco, Dr. Ruth Ornstein, and Dr. Alan Barstow. I was fortunate enough to work with these professors, and they have been formative in shaping my health-coaching model. I also want to express my appreciation to Dr. Larry Starr for leading such a dynamic program that enables higher education to bridge the gap between theory and reality, making the Organizational Dynamics more relevant than ever in a rapidly changing world. The entire faculty and fellow students were instrumental in enriching my experience and allowing me to learn from those who are also curious about the world.

Next I’d like to acknowledge the clients of my health-coaching practice over the past six years. I have learned as much about coaching from their curiosity, bravery and desire to grow as I have gleaned from my studies. They have been a source of inspiration and also some of my best teachers.

Finally, I will forever be grateful to my wonderful family. First, my maternal Grandmother who was insatiably curious, progressive and believed in nutrition way
before the New York Times thought it was newsworthy, was the creator of a family
culture where learning was its own reward. Without that, I would have never made it this
far into academia, nor would my life be as rich with wonder. Next, I acknowledge my
parents, who to this day, are the greatest teachers of a lifetime. My Dad was my first and
best coach who always told me I could do anything. And if I could not, he supported and
looked after me until I could. My Mom gave me the unconditional positive attitude and
deep empathy I needed to try out new ideas and find my own way, even when I failed.
Her assistance included multiple city moves, completing complicated tax returns and
attending to other annoying life necessities that only someone who really believes in you
and your vision will do. I am grateful for my sister who taught me how to write well and
has continuously cheered me along. Finally, I extend my appreciation to my husband and
best friend, Carlos, for his attentive listening and the lending of his intellectual and
editorial mind to my process as he assisted in the evolution of my ideas, making them,
and consequently me, exponentially better.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

According to Marketdata Enterprises (2011), in 2010, $60.9 billion was spent on dieting (para. 3). Yet in 1991, in the *Clinical Psychology Review*, David Garner and Susan Wooley, concluded that when it comes to dieting, “It is only the rate of weight regain, not the fact of weight regain, that appears open to debate” (p.740). This reality is reflected in the United States Center for Disease Control 2010 Fast Stats and their state-colored maps highlighting that 33.3% and 35.9% of adults over the age of 20 are overweight and obese respectively.

What is curious is the considerable effort channeled into weight loss. Aside from the financial investments, the same Marketdata report (2011) showed the average dieter in 2010 tried four times, the highest number of tries in 15 years (para. 9). People appear to genuinely and persistently make these attempts. The great divide appears to be in the biological understanding of weight-loss and how one believes one should proceed in achieving that goal. What many weight-loss experts leave out of the food and weight-loss conversation is that the change process, particularly around something with such deep meaning as food, is not a linear or logical process of simply counting calories.

According to Marc David (personal communication, May 17, 2011), a pioneering practitioner who focuses on the psychology of eating, the 1% of people who keep weight off all have one thing in common: a major lifestyle change. About ten years ago, I became aware of this need for in my own life. I had been conscious of my weight since I was eight years old. On my way to adulthood, I always wanted to lose about 20-30
pounds. Yet despite having a considerable amount of discipline, persistence and work ethic, I was on the weight roller coaster much of the American dieting public experiences. So when I made a series of lifestyle changes that included switching careers, getting involved in a deeply satisfying partnership with my now husband and learning about the internal value of food, my weight stabilized. I was perplexed. The normal battle and hyper-vigilance around food and the formula of calories in, calories out that I repeatedly tried for decades not only did not improve my life, but made it worse. Yet the emotional changes, which actually made life easier, seemed somehow to be inner-connected to my food choices and my body’s physiology.

While I knew I had a series of deep shifts in my life, I wasn’t sure what was happening in my development that produced these changes. Having shifted to a holistic health counseling career, I started to see other people, without “diagnosed” eating disorders, having this same battle with food. I knew that the changes I had made in my own life would not necessarily be the same changes my clients needed to make. Yet, when I hear weight-loss success stories, almost everyone agrees with language such as, “I stopped beating myself up for slip-ups”, or “I finally got that it was not just about food.” What they are not saying is how they arrived there. “There” being how the meaning of food changed, including “how” they saw themselves in their relationship to food. I was witnessing with many of my clients that they knew what to eat, but they did not know how to make the emotional transition to there.

People knighted by the media as health experts often do not realize that everyone arrives how and there in a different way. They are experts in health but not change. I wanted a precise skill-set to help people navigate not just the change of their diets but
also the path to a healthy relationship with food. Food is tricky, because our physiology influences our emotions and our emotions influence our physiology. So both ends must be understood. I enrolled in the Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania in order to better understand the “what” and the “how” of adult development and help give my clients not just static nutritional information for their current state of health but a dynamic skill-set to help them continuously develop along the spiral staircase of well being.

The purpose of this capstone is to explore how one can change an individual food story from the dominant battle and fighting stories saturating the mainstream weight-loss conversation to a personal one that shows how food and our metaphoric relationship to it can be a positive, constructive path. The goal is to create a narrative that can reverse the dismal numbers of obese and overweight individuals and, in addition, help those who would like to use food to help heal their bodies.

The audience for this Capstone is adult women who desire to use food to heal their bodies and lose weight by engaging in the coaching work necessary to explore their relationship with food. As taught throughout my Organizational Dynamics courses, not everyone can be coached. It requires someone who wants to take responsibility for his or her health.

In Chapter 2, I review literature on how metaphors, stories, archetypes and Immunity to Change theory can help explain the food battle story. I explore the meaning of metaphors, how a masculine ideology forms American stories and one’s overarching personal myth, the yin and yang archetypes, and the theory of Immunity to Change’s
view of how adult mental development determines which information we include and seek for our stories.

In Chapter 3, I propose the narrative archetype, the Heroine’s Journey, for the framework of a holistic health coaching model which I label, “Truce with Food” to help change the food battle story contributing to America’s weight and emotional issues around food. I will be drawing upon the storytelling strategy introduced in the graduate course, DYNM 673: Story Telling in Organizations. My proposed model uses the feminine archetype, yin, to neutralize the excessively masculine battle story. This framework will be strategically wrapped like a double-helix in Rogerian Coaching learned in the course, DYNM 641: The Art and Science of Coaching and from experiential learning theory learned in DYNM 602: Leader-Manager as Coach.

In Chapter 4, I identify the first two stages of this model. The first integrates my holistic health background to use food as a healing tool to improve the health and well being of the heroine as she begins to positively shift her relationship toward food. The second stage uses the framework of positive psychology and the concept of creative flow which was part of the course DYNM 542: Theories and Models That Inform Coaching to create a bridge between one’s emotional state and food choices.

In Chapter 5, I summarize my next steps including suggestions for further research and training in the Immunity to Change theory to help identify coaching opportunities in the last two stages of the holistic health model. In Chapter 6, I offer personal and professional conclusions having completed this Capstone process.
CHAPTER 2
DECONSTRUCTING THE NORTH AMERICAN ADULT FOOD STORY

What Language Reveals

In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors, which Dr. Janet Greco in DYNM 673: Story Telling in Organizations taught is a form of story, are integral to the way people think and act. The problem according to the authors however, is that people generally assume a metaphor is merely “a matter of words,” not a story guiding their “thought or actions” (p.3). The first step is to recognize that an “ordinary conceptual system” is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 3). The authors have found “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (p. 3). In practical terms, this means a metaphor—while often employed to better explain something unknown—cannot be fully understood in isolation. When choosing a metaphor, one is also revealing how one conceives, interprets and acts in the world.

There are several pervasive and dominant metaphors forming the popular culture food and weight-loss narrative in the United States. A random sampling of mainstream health magazine article titles, for instance, reveals battle-like metaphors in word choice: How to *Fight* Fat, How to *Resist* Dessert, Five Tips to *Plan* for Temptation, Better Ways to *Track* Calories, *Triple Threat* Brownies, 20 Appetite *Suppressing* Foods, and Sneaky Winter Weight *Traps*. Book titles are similar and include *Weightloss Warrior: How to Win the Battle Within*. At first, this title may simply seem descriptive, but upon further reflection, the implication reveals a “conceptual system” that is governed by thoughts that
will lead to specific courses of actions and feelings about those actions. For example, if weight-loss is understood within the metaphor of a battle, it follows that food is likely to be closely monitored within the framework defined by the authority leading the war. If the authority says, “calories in, calories out” or “fat makes you fat,” then that will become the focus of the governing metaphor. As a consequence, food is often labeled “good” if it promotes weight loss—which in the prevailing and scientifically incorrect understanding often translates to low calories and fat—and “bad” if it has considerable calories and is enjoyable to eat, which foods with fat physiologically tend to be. The eater, of course, then has feelings about this decision. In identifying with these feelings, they themselves feel good or bad, based on the original battle metaphor. Johnson and Lakoff (1980) explain:

The concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details (p.3).

In other words, metaphors are not simply intellectual exercises but systems of thought whose output are actions and feelings about those actions.

To further extend this analysis, it is important to realize that once someone subscribes to a prevailing food metaphor (often unconsciously) the tendency then is that this metaphor acts as a filtering mechanism for everyday reality. Johnson and Lakoff (1980) interpret this as,

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities (p.3).

In the case of the battle metaphor, it follows that if one feels one must fight food, then this would necessitate being “on guard” all day as food is everywhere—from gas
stations to bookstores—in North American culture. In my practice, clients often tell me they awake in the morning, get on the scale, and then determine how “good” of a soldier they will have to be that day. The food and weight battle metaphor have also created the workout “boot camp” concept, and grueling race training like the 10-plus mile Tough Mudder (designed by British Special Forces), where participants crawl through mud and obstacles mimicking military training. Because battles are tough and really never ending, the logic extends to weight loss being tough and never ending (even when active battle ends, troops continue to occupy). Garner and Wooley (1991) provide further evidence of this.

A metaphor often functions as a filtering mechanism. This filtering in turn tends to makes life easier by organizing otherwise difficult and nuanced concepts into a framework that reinforces the initial metaphor. Any suggestion of simplicity is alluring for those frustrated with their weight and thus many will gladly subscribe to battle metaphors even with their implied difficulty, struggle, and call to arms. Without such governing metaphors, every decision and its implications would take considerable time and involve large degrees of uncertainty. This decision to subscribe to such metaphors is often, however, unconscious. As Johnson and Lakoff (1980) acknowledge, “Our conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of” (p.3). In other words, the ideas and feelings metaphors evoke can direct one’s life like software that has been installed without one’s knowledge while browsing the internet.

The trade-off for this filtering, however, is that contradictory or incongruent information is often ignored to preserve the integrity of the metaphor (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980). That the language of weight-loss metaphors is steeped in excessive force that
leaves little to no interpretive space only further reinforces their ability to block out conflicting information. In this extreme cultural climate, metaphors emphasizing balance aren’t nearly as omnipresent. They also tend to be less compelling, because even a metaphorical balance implies an ability to weigh pros and cons, to invite nuance. Nuance is often greeted with mistrust and skepticism in a climate that emphasizes the binary thinking of good and bad food, winners and losers. A more balanced metaphor such as “food is medicine” or concepts like evaluating foods by gauging how one’s individual body reacts to nutrients seems too messy for many (even if they sense an underlying truth value beyond a metaphor). The problem on some level is that individuals confuse the omnipresence of such battle metaphors not as metaphors, but as truth. Our investigation will now turn to the fertile ground that allowed these prevailing metaphors of weight-loss battles to take root. The story literally begins at birth for many of us and continues through our development.

Stories That Confirm Metaphors

In *The stories We Live By*, Dan McAdams (1993) echoes the same importance of stories Johnson and Lakoff (1980) stress, but adds an existential element. That is, for people to understand themselves, their story, or “personal myth,” must be understood. As he explains, a story “defines who I am” (p.11). Just like a play, a personal myth is organized into a beginning, middle, and end, with plot and characters. In stating life can be understood as a personal myth with a narrative structure, McAdams is suggesting that humans order life in a manner that creates a unifying way of seeing oneself. Once this unification or story is established it likewise acts as a filter for what one sees and how one ultimately interprets a given experience. For example, a female client in my coaching
practice felt unattractive to men because in her mind, she was overweight. At that stage in our work together, I clearly understood she was stuck in a story that dictated that being “overweight” meant she would stay single even if she wanted to be coupled. In order to maintain the reliability of this myth, she consistently pursued men who were not interested in her and then proceeded to conclude that their non-interest could only be interpreted as rejection based solely on her weight. Other considerations, like whether these men were genuine matches for what she was looking for or if maybe they weren’t attracted to her for other reasons, were never considered. To invite a more holistic consideration of her stated dilemma would threaten a revision of her personal myth.

Akin to the Johnson and Lakoff (1980) position on metaphors, McAdams (1993) sees stories as revealing a person to themselves once they become aware of these narratives. In the client case above, she came to realize she was more invested in being right about her personal myth than in being happy. For her, having power, or agency as McAdams describes it (2003), was a dominant theme in her personal myth. Once she became aware of her personal myth, once she was revealed to herself as a character in a story she had created, she realized that she had ultimately been feeling powerless. This recognition in turn opened up a space for a personal myth revision that allowed her to invite in new “characters,” i.e., date men that in the past she would not have considered, perhaps sensing they would threaten or contradict her personal myth.

If a metaphor reveals a worldview and actions around a concept like outlined in Johnson and Lakoff (1980), one’s personal myth is a worldview based on the amalgam of imagery, tone themes, setting and characters (McAdams, 1993). Infancy and childhood significantly influence one’s story structure (McAdams, 1993). In the adult battle with
food metaphor and story, infancy and childhood may at a first glance appear insignificant
to the conversation. Yet as McAdams explains, this period is when “we gather material
for our personal myths” and for the most part it occurs “spontaneously and
unconsciously” (p.35). The infancy and early childhood stage (before the age of two) is
largely guided by senses and emotions with experiences apparently accumulating
randomly (McAdams, 1993). Shortly thereafter, however, one begins to organize these
raw materials into a narrative.

In the first year of life, infants develop a bond of love, called “attachment” by
development psychologists (McAdams, 1993). Attachment involves an emotional
connection to the caregivers. Eating is a central focus during the attachment period as the
infant grows into a baby. McAdams (1993) points to research that shows that the majority
of one-year olds experience secure attachment or a sense of safety in being protected,
which leads to trust and confidence. As Marc David (1991), a pioneer in the psychology
of eating, postulates,

> It can be argued that the way we learn about life from our earliest moments
centers around eating. The child learns about pleasure when it receives milk, and
pain when milk is absent (p.96).

Because most infants and children stop eating when they feel full, the association
with pain when milk is absent can be assumed to be associated with the uncomfortable
feeling of hunger; then food alleviates this lack of comfort or this feeling of pain. It can
be suggested that in healthfully attached children, food ultimately will not be equated
with pain during the attachment period. The “pleasure” could also be about the ease of
safety. As McAdams (1993) suggests an “infant is so dependent and helpless for so long”
that some sort of “system like attachment must be part of nature” or else no one would
survive at “very early ages” (p. 42). An infant cries and is fed; the ease of the nutritional
inputs for growth and comfort makes an infant feel safe. As McAdams suggests, the
dominant filters for experiences during this age are senses and emotions, not narrative. In
these initial stages of development, food can be unconsciously connected with the
emotions of pleasure, safety, and love. Some dieters may be aware food evokes these
positive feelings and yet be unconscious of how this connects with their current eating or
lifestyle. This would be one explanation of why the majority of dieters can
simultaneously love food (based on early attachment experiences) and hate food (based
on the perception of its blocking weight-loss goals). It becomes easy to see how this
internal battle can make an external metaphor like going to battle compelling.

Beyond the newborn stage, children begin to learn about autonomy and control
through food. David (1991) notes that a child “struggles for autonomy as it learns to
handle a spoon and demand the food it wants” (p.96). As children mature, many children
are bribed to be “good” with sugary food or a trip to McDonalds as a reward. Food
companies recognize this and set their targets on children. As Marion Nestle, formerly
affiliated with the Food and Drug Administration explained at the Institute for Integrative
Nutrition (personal communication, October 2006), companies rely on the “nag factor,” a
child nagging at a parent to buy junk food. Companies fight for prime shelf real estate—
at children’s eye level—hoping to create an emotional attachment that will ensure a
lifetime consumer through brand loyalty. This is an element of child psychology that has
not been lost on food companies. In The New York Times Magazine “The Extraordinary
Science of Addictive Junk Food” (Moss, 2013), the success of Kraft’s Lunchables was
found to be largely a product of understanding child psychology and had very little to do
with the actual food. This was best expressed in comments by Bob Eckert, CEO of Kraft, when he stated, “Lunchables aren’t about lunch. It’s about kids being able to put together what they want to eat, anytime, anywhere.” Erik Erikson (1963) observed that American identity formation supports successful ego development “as long as he [the individual] can preserve a certain element of deliberate tentativeness of autonomous choice” (p. 286). Given children don’t have much control in other areas of their lives, food would provide a release valve for the control American children crave. It can be concluded then that two deep emotional connections around food become one of love (through the attachment stage discussed above) and control; these two themes in turn become incorporated into the food battle metaphor.

That, as adults, we have an emotional attachment to food has only been recently acknowledged in a growing trend of “emotional eating” articles and research focused on such topics (although few cite the developmental origins above). However, because metaphors have such deep meaning (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980), other considered emotional realizations are still understood primarily within the battle-conceptual system. This takes the form of emotions becoming yet another enemy in the food battle. A recent sampling of magazines article titles on emotional eating includes: “Control Emotional Eating,” “Conquer Food Cravings,” and “Tame the Emotional Eating Beast for Good.” Like the stories and metaphors described, cultural ideology powerfully influences one’s personal food story and can unknowingly be of influence. McAdams explains that ideology is “the systematic body of values and beliefs” (p. 67). “Systematic” in this sense implies pervasiveness throughout a culture, a set of beliefs whose origin is difficult to locate because it is so widespread; this same omnipresence also makes it incredibly
difficult for those embedded in a system to realize they are clinging to a story. Rather than exploring or understanding significant emotional connections that may contradict a dearly held narrative of self, one is encouraged to “tame the emotional eating beast for good.”

I argue that the language North American culture uses to describe food in relation to weight loss has become an artificially yet habitual battle of approaching the growing problem of obesity. Despite its ineffectiveness, the battle story gets repeated because people are simultaneously trying to fight food, while a deeper, often unconscious emotional connection with food exists. It starts at birth and develops throughout childhood. However, rather than trying to understand how to work with these emotions, they are placed into the existing battle story. This next section will explain why this is happening based upon a North American ideology steeped in patriarchal thought.

The Cultural Ideology Framing the North American Adult Dieters Food Story

Murdock (1990) notes that patriarchal religions replaced matriarchal religions roughly 6500 years ago. While conclusive evidence is difficult because of the time lapse, there is archeological evidence that when matriarchal religions existed, harmony and peace pervaded cultures (Murdock, 1990). Patriarchal religions partly ushered in patriarchal systems of masculine-dominant values and beliefs. To help explain how a masculine culture can be systematic or an ideology, it's important to define and understand masculine and feminine in the context of archetypes (defined briefly as primordial and universal patterns not open to subjectivity). Carl Jung—a psychologist who recognized and offered a definitive explanation of the way archetypes influence
human behavior—was not alone in recognizing these patterns. Mythologists refer to archetypes as motifs, and comparative religion has referred to them as “categories of imagination” (p. 60). Jung organized a person’s psyche into three parts: the conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious (Campbell, 1971). The collective unconscious is a “second psychic system,” one that’s "collective," "universal" and "impersonal" and is "identical in all individuals” (Campbell, 1971, p. 60). It is in this collective unconscious (according to Jung) that archetypes come preinstalled, likely "inherited" from primordial times. To contrast, the personal unconscious is subjective and likely where one’s personal emotional food story (beginning as early as childhood) resides.

Regardless if one is aware of them or not, the masculine and feminine are "the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere” (p.60). The definitive characteristics of the masculine and feminine exist within each person and culture. One cannot choose the contents of the masculine and feminine, they are a shared experience. Daoists call these masculine and feminine archetypes yin and yang. While these concepts first developed out of observing nature’s patterns, they were soon identified in other areas such as health, emotions and life (De La Vallée, 2006). In *Yin Yang in Classical Texts* (2006), scholar Elisabeth Rochat De La Vallée explains the qualities of the yin and the yang. She translates ancient oriental texts and explains contexts where yin and yang are present. The various texts use examples from nature, objects, and the body to show the pervasiveness and characteristics of the yin and yang.

Because they are archetypes or patterns, the yin and yang whether discussed
individually or as a joined whole are an amalgam of qualities and thus cannot be defined simply by one characteristic. The yin or feminine (used interchangeably in this paper is associated with the Earth and “not only the cool felt in the shade” but the very "principle of cool" (p.5). Yin is also used to describe “a cover or lid of a ritual vessel” (p.2). De La Vallée explains the yin "closes and contains,” which simultaneously creates safety and space. She adds the yin is associated with "death, burial and decay" and is also “used in ritual” for “the name of the little hut” whose purpose is “built for mourning” (p. 31). The yin represents the internal, including wisdom as it "is stored deep within” (p.31). The yang, or masculine (also used interchangeably here) is generally associated with the opposite qualities described above. Associated with heaven and "the sun rising above the horizon" (p. 2-3), it becomes associated with the warmth and light, including the "ascending" direction and the process of thinking. Yang "exhibits at the exterior” (p. 3) and is the "dynamism of life" or action with its "motion" and "unfurling and waving of a banner” (p.3).

De La Vallée stresses that the yin and yang cannot be separated and that both are necessary to understand the forces governing nature:

A tree comes from a seed which has been hidden in the depths of the earth. It is the nourishment below the surface that allows it to spring up and display. The yang is always surging from the yin in one way or the other” (p.34).

In order for things to grow externally (yang), the soil (yin) must nurture the potential in the seed (yin/yang). While nature most often provides De La Vallée with the clearest illustrations of these admittedly abstract concepts, she applies these concepts to the domains of weather, emotions, and health. She explains the yin-yang balance will “always” be “the same reversion” and that “we”, society, “have to understand that”
Regardless of a patriarchal or yang agenda, the yin yang will find a balance for the yin. Ultimately, the author concludes that “there is no choice within the logic of life” (p.113). This will be explained further in how the repressed feminine is finding its place in U.S. ideology.

I argue that the U.S. culture is predominantly influenced by patriarchal religions and the elevation of masculine qualities resulting in an excessively masculine dominant ideology. I hold that it’s important to note masculine and feminine are not a gender-based definition, although women tend to embody feminine energy more than men. De La Vallée acknowledges a very clear translation to this point in the Mawangdui Manuscripts, one of the ancient oriental texts where the yin yang is described: “Men are yang, woman are yin” (p. 40). She notes, however, they are “complementary opposites” and not inferior to each other.

In Story Re-visions, a therapy book illustrating the power of story, Doan and Parry (1994) suggest a trickle-down effect of patriarchy, which didn't just attempt to exalt men, but all things associated with the masculine archetype. Plato pursued truth as “humankind’s highest achievement”, and thus, the “single-vision” of truth as described by poet William Blake, was also the “same drive towards understanding all things ultimately as the same” (p.20). This edged out the more mysterious and nuanced nature of the yin, and paradox soon became dormant in theory. Absolutes on the other hand, became “a central force in Western thought since Plato” (p. 20). In the case of a society’s ecology or McAdams (1993) defined systemic ideology, the "Same" or absolutes came to dominate the "Other" or anything that didn’t fit into the absolute masculine way of being and doing. Knowing yang is a more active pattern than the yin, this development is
logical. The Other again represented not just women, but also global entities of a feminine nature, like the Earth itself. Doan and Parry (1994) cite, a “central patriarchal drive to minimize humans’ dependency upon their mortal bodies and upon their mothers, the earth, and hence the male dependency upon women” (p. 20). Dominant or active yang energy was trying to control the more unpredictable nature of the yin, as identified in Earth’s patterns and the human body. Luce Irigarary (1974) in *Speculum of the Other Woman* draws the parallel that the drive for the Same was a feedback-loop for the domination of the male and the subordination of the female. In doing so, she was banished from membership in the École freudienne de Paris, a French psychoanalytic professional body (Doan & Parry, 1994). As noted by Doan and Parry, in her work she stated:

> The universal truth of the spirit as aspiration involved the subordination and escape from matter, the dark realm of the mother/woman. Women henceforth were denied the status of subjects and became instead the objects of male exchange, just as the material, feminine earth became a commodity available for exploitation and domination of (the) man (p. 32).

Irigarary illustrates the dynamics of the yin and yang archetypes and the detrimental effects when they become imbalanced (women lose power when they become subjects and consequently are only objects to be acted upon or controlled). “The spirit as aspiration” or the action and production of thought tried to get away from “matter” or the body and the “dark realm” or the emotions and mystery of life. The interior (yin or feminine), or how one arose at thought became less important and with it women and the Earth. De La Vallée brings to our attention that “each human being has the ability to maintain or to destroy this,” “this” being the yin-yang balance or “harmonious composition” (p. 73).
The implications for this in U.S. culture are hinted at in the quotation above with its focus on “the feminine earth” becoming a “commodity.” This imbalance is reflected in many facets of our present-day culture. For example, it can be seen in today’s industrial food system which attempts to work against nature's patterns. It technically can produce great quantities of food; the nourishment quality of this food, however, decreases because the Earth's soil cultivation requires certain nutrients (ranging from bacteria to nitrogen) and periods of dormancy. For Irigarary (1974), the “primordial crime” was “matricide” (in Doan & Parry, 1994, p. 32). The use here of “primordial” implies a killing of the feminine that can be traced back to ancient times, most clearly demonstrated in patriarchal religions with their emphasis on women and sin. Extrapolating this yang domination model to weight loss would mean fighting (yang) one’s body into submission instead of listening (yin) to why the body won’t lose weight. Fighting one’s own body will only get someone so far as this action (yang) must be balanced with rest (yin). The longevity of patriarchal religions and thought explains how an extreme masculine culture pervades the U.S. and enables food battle metaphors to reign. It’s easy to accept these imbalanced ways of acting in the world without the feminine being consciously integrated. Thus, a masculine ideology permeates American culture and influences the personal myth as shown by McAdams (1993).

Ancient oriental archetypal patterns suggest paradox or both archetypes exist, regardless if acknowledged—they are primordial. So the questions become what happens to the “reversion” of the yin yang when half of it is denied? What happens when the way around complexity is a battle? What happens when that battle replaces embracing the feminine quality present in food and emotions? One answer may be found in Jung’s
identification of a container for these denied parts that he calls the “shadow.” This shadow container is of an “emotional nature” and is governed by its own agenda and fueled by an “obsessive” or “possessive quality” that creates a “moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality” (p. 145). In other words, the shadow conflicts with the ego’s conscious agenda in an unconscious way. These emotions find themselves in the container of the shadow because they are denied or neglected. They become “inferior” or feel more primitive than the ego’s calculated ability to control. As Jung describes, these emotions are “not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him” (p. 145).

Through the yin-yang framework, the yang’s desire fuels action and can become extreme in attempts to correct itself. This is most often seen when this sort of battling energy (yang) leads to a desire to compensate by discarding all restrictions and boundaries (which can be translated to the feminine quality of space). Related to the food battle, I often hear clients experience this when they say, “I know I should not be eating sugar but something came over me, and I ate an entire box of oreos.” The yin-yang explanation is the balance through the extremes. De La Vallée describes a text translation where “there is an excess of yang” (or burst of action) that causes “all living beings to be in a state of imbalance” or off-kilter as a result of the force, which causes an “impending death” or the extreme opposite of excess action (p. 8). One yin-yang text translation suggests “an apparent disorder in nature” like an earthquake is “actually part of the greater order” or way to balance the yin yang (p 13). Going “off-track” or abandoning the rigidity of a diet for no restriction at all is often the predictable response to an extreme calculation and monitoring of the food battle.
Yin yang represents opposites or a paradoxical truth: “what one resists, persists” or “what one embraces, dissolves”. Jung (Campbell, 1976) suggests that “with insight and good will,” or embracing the shadow, it can be “assimilated” in the “conscious personality” (p.146). In other words, doing the work to understand shadow emotions and behaviors leads to the dissipation of the unconscious power over one’s action’s. One apt comparison for beginning to identify these shadow parts is engaging in diplomacy versus taking up arms for battle. The question remains: How one can bring these hidden aspects of one’s personality out of the shadows? Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey’s Immunity to Change Theory (2009) begins to shed light on how one can approach making the personal unconscious, conscious.

**Bringing the Unconscious Conscious to Form New Stories**

While parts of the personal myth (or one’s overall constructed narrative) may be conscious, as described previously, the structural framework and nesting narratives that led one to arrive at this story about themselves most often is not. Carl Jung’s “shadow” on the other hand, with its own will, has the potential to inaccurately confirm negative aspects of one’s personal myth story. While these shadow beliefs sit in the background, they can determine what information one seeks out and how they feel about that information. For example, a client of mine is a doctor, who works in a very hierarchal and masculine industry. She found herself overeating and feeling “out of control” around her food choices. This “lack of discipline” as she described, made her feel less capable and unsure of herself. After some investigation, it was clear that her anxious eating was from not having the confidence to voice her more collective and contrary opinions and perspectives in a new job role. We worked on her reaching out for help to develop her
project ideas with supportive team members so she would feel more safe challenging the
status quo. As she began to honor her internal feelings, ideas and need to feel she had
allies within her organization, her “out of control” eating at work suddenly disappeared.
She saw the interconnected nature of needing to feel safe and valued for her ideas and
numbing out with food. In doing this, she felt more in control of food, because she now
consciously understood why she was previously unconsciously anxiously eating and had
then made the necessary changes to provide the emotional support she was projecting
onto food.

Kegan and Lahey’s (2009) Immunity to Change theory works to reveal aspects of
the structural framework in one’s personal myth identified as “big assumptions” (shadow
contents) by attempting to alter how one sends and receives information and the feelings
resulting from this information. It does this by tapping into “the most powerful source of
ability” in adults, which Kegan and Lahey (2009) suggest is “our capacity” or potential to
“overcome,” or learn, “at any age”, beyond the young adult years, “the limitations and
blind spots”, which includes information one doesn’t seek, “of current ways of making
meaning” or the metaphors and stories people tell to themselves about themselves and the
world around them” (p.5). In doing this, one doesn’t just “hope for little adjustments
around the margins” (p.2) or more tactical, incremental change but has the kind of
“qualitative expansions of mind that significantly increase human capability to work”
(p.6). In other words, beliefs and feelings shift like tectonic plates to make someone more
resourceful as they continue to learn how to learn about themselves. Kegan and Lahey
(2009) use the metaphor of not just adding “new files and programs” to an existing
“operating system” but about “transforming the operating system itself” (p.6).
For example, discussed above is the saturation of a masculine ideology in the American food and weight culture. In theory, Immunity to Change would provide people with a way to seek out a more integrated ideology that would lead to a complete shifting in how one understands food and the connection to their emotions. For example, a client of mine realized she was constantly eating sugar at work. We worked to get her blood sugar balanced, which included not working through lunch as she had previously been doing. While this physically helped balance her, she noticed that the accompanying pleasure from new scenery and laughing with co-workers nourished her emotionally. This then enabled her to begin questioning where else in her life she was overriding this “faster, more is better, sacrifice yourself for rewards” type of mentality. Her work-outs, being close in consideration to food, were where she focused. She shifted her focus on aspects of working out she enjoyed, like being in class with others, being outside and replacing the treadmill with dance work-outs, as she had previously enjoyed her role as a dancer. This proved to get better quantitative and qualitative results in the form of five more pounds lost and looking forward to working out versus dreading it. Eventually, she came to question the decision-making process of her entire career path. She decided to make a career change into the fitness industry. She lost 10 pounds, and her sugar cravings disappeared the more she focused on adding more meaning in her life. In effect, while she started working on her food story, it was the tip of a big iceberg assumption of “no pain, no gain”, which had influenced significant decisions in her life. But once one thread of that big assumption came into question, experiencing pleasure rather than pain, led to other positives in her life. She began to process step-by-step other other challenging aspects of her life with her new-found skills.
Kegan and Lahey (2009) provide an updated view of how they believe the adult mind develops cognitively. They categorize three “plateaus” or stages of mental complexity (Figure 1).
Three plateaus in adult mental development

The socialized mind
- We are shaped by the definitions and expectations of our personal environment.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with, and identity to, that with which it identifies.
- This can express itself primarily in our relationships with people, with "schools of thought" (our ideas and beliefs) or both.

The self-authoring mind
- We are able to step back enough from the social environment to generate an internal "seat of judgment" or personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations.
- Our self coheres by its alignment with its own belief system/ideology/personal code; by its ability to self-direct, take stands, set limits, and create and regulate its boundaries on behalf of its own voice.

The self-transforming mind
- We can step back from and reflect on the limits of our own ideology or personal authority; see that any one system or self-organization is in some way partial or incomplete; be friendlier toward contradiction and opposition; seek to hold on to multiple systems rather than projecting all but one onto the other.
- Our self coheres through its ability not to confuse internal consistency with wholeness or completeness, and through its alignment with the dialectic rather than either pole.

It is important to note that mental complexity and its evolution is “not about how smart you are in the ordinary sense of the word” (p.15). It is not about IQ or being able to understand abstract concepts but instead it’s more about learning how to identify one’s
blind spots.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) believe one seeks out and sends information in a way that conforms to one of three levels of mental complexity that correspond to making meaning in different ways. Meaning is how one makes “sense of the world”, or organizes it and “operate within it, in profoundly different ways” (p.16). In other words, three people in the three different stages could each tell themselves a different story about the same experience based on the information on which they choose to focus and how they chose to organize that information. For example, one of my clients, a woman in her late 20’s, has about 50 pounds to lose. She also has several food allergies. When out with a group of friends, the group decides to stop at a tapas bar, even though because of said food allergies, she needs her own meal. She continuously goes with the group in situations like these. When I asked her why, she said, “I did not want to be that girl. The one who is high-maintenance and everyone has to accommodate when we are just out to have fun.” When working with the Immunity to Change X-ray on her, it was clear she is in the socialized mind stage, sending and receiving information based on aligning with the group, despite having very real physical needs that require a more self-authoring mind stage of development. Kegan and Lahey (2009) explain the socialized mind assumes, “what I think to send” or offer, will “be strongly influenced by what I believe others want to hear” (p.17). Another characteristic of the socialized mind is it “strongly influences how information is received and attended to” by explaining that what it picks up “often runs far beyond the explicit message” (p.18). It is often looking for the subtext in interactions as was the case of my client. She was among friends and knew they would likely say they did not care if she got her own meal but she also said she felt they would
feel and think differently to themselves.

In the self-authoring mind, what one “sends” or how they behave is more a function of how to further their own agenda. This also includes what one “receives” or how one filters information. In the case of seeking information for different stories or meaning, this can be quite difficult. Kegan and Lahey (2009) theorize that the self-authoring mind “places a priority on receiving the information it has sought” and that data that this person “hasn’t asked for” and appears incongruent to “my own design for action” has a harder time making it through their “filter” (p.19). With food, this can look like adopting a vegan or paleolithic diet and then only seeking out the nutritional science that confirms a view of a healing diet despite omnipresent contradictory evidence. Many times, this also means joining vegan or paleolithic support groups or communities that maintain this insularity, thus ensuring a strengthening of this filter. Kegan and Lahey (2009) consider the self-authoring mind more advanced in its learning ability than the socialized mind because it can curate information for relevancy. The self-authoring mind is described as having “an admirable capacity” for “distinguishing the important from the urgent” and “making the best use of one’s limited time” by having the ability to “cut through the unending and ever-mounting claims on one’s attention” (p.19). In the case of food, if one has a certain condition like hypothyroid and they didn’t want to be on a lifetime of medication, they’d be more likely to know and explore options other than the popular course of treatment of synthroid. This individual would more likely know to seek out people or experts who have been able to use food or find modalities to reverse this condition versus a socialized mind would more likely stick with the standard protocol based as a “faithful follower” of the mainstream approach to disease, which is to try to
dominate the body through medication versus seeking to understand the root cause.

After the self-authoring mind comes the third stage of mental complexity and development: the self-transforming mind. The self-transforming mind still has a filter but “it’s not fused with it” (p.19) and thus allows one to “stand back” from the filter it created and “look at it”, not just “through it” (p.19). The self-transforming mind, according to Kegan and Lahey (2009), is a more active process because this type of mind “both values and is wary about any one stance, analysis or agenda” (p.19). In other words, it understand its own design has inherent limitations but also “it lives in a time and that the world is in motion” and what might be true today, “may not make as much sense tomorrow” (p.20). As a result, self-transforming minds “place a higher priority on information that may also alert them to the limits of their current design or frame” (p. 20). The self-transforming mind actively seeks out other ways of viewing a problem. When it comes to food, for instance, this type of mind might have a particular way of eating but also work to be on alert when that diet stops working. For example, often people will feel great on a vegan diet for a few months as their body is detoxifying from its previous less clean input. Over time, however, that same diet will cause exhaustion and intense sugar cravings. Rather than “resisting the cravings” which many lifelong vegans encourage, the self-transforming mind will find a “new design” or way of eating that supports the body’s changed physiology at the time, and, most likely, one that pulls from multiple designs or nutritional theories and makes it their own.

Ultimately, the more one advances along the mental complexity continuum, the more one is able to alter the stories within a personal myth; this is due, in part, to not only how one organizes information but also how one seeks information to inform a new story.
While each mental complexity level has its blind spots, each "successive level" is able to "perform the mental functions of the prior level as well as additional functions" (p. 21). It’s as if at each plateau, one becomes a bigger nesting doll for various types of stories. Kegan and Lahey (2009) outline an immunity “x-ray” process to identify various blind spots, which involve both beliefs and feelings. These blind spots are like “a page from the top-secret playbook of a personal national defense system” (p.50). They use the term, defense, because on some level, the person’s big assumptions have protected them in the past and might be currently doing so. However, while they are unconscious to the person, they are also producing an "emotional ecology” that prevents goals from being realized—much like Jung’s shadow—which challenges the “whole ego-personality” described above. The emotional ecology involves connecting the "head and heart” or “thinking and feeling” (p.47). Whereas traditional adult change often focuses on the surface of measurable behaviors. Kegan and Lahey (2009) are approaching this unconscious as a "hidden dimension" which "resides at the level of feelings rather than cognitive thought” (p.48) which must be brought to the surface for regenerative and transformational change.

To surface these blind spots, an X-ray map is processed as seen in Figure 2.
By walking a client through previously unexplainable behaviors or the unconscious competing commitments, Big Assumptions or unconscious stories preventing one's goal from being realized, are given the opportunity to surface. It takes "the contradiction he is" or conflict in achieving one's goal based on a systemic way of seeing the world and "converts it into a contradiction he has" or one way of knowing the world which can potentially be changed by seeking out different information” (p.55). While not explicitly stated in the x-ray process, it is designed to strategically make one’s “limits" or filters of their "current way of knowing" known. In other words, it is bringing large story narratives, which frames the contents of various smaller stories like that of food, into focus and question. It does this by methodically running tests on one's big assumptions.

In Table 1 Figure 3 below, the parameters of a good test are illustrated.
Table 1. Criteria for Effective Big Assumption Test (from Kegan and Lahey (2009), p. 262)

Guide sheet for designing a good test of the big assumption

1a. Write below what you are going to do. (Make sure you are doing something different from what your big assumption would normally have you do.)

1b. Jot down how you think your test (1a) will get you information about your big assumption.

2a. Next, what data do you want to collect? In addition to how people react to you, your feelings can be a very rich data source.

2b. How will that data help you to confirm or disconfirm your big assumption (BA)? (What results would lead you to believe your BA is correct? What results would lead you to question the validity of your BA?)

2c. Is there anyone you’d like to give a “heads-up” to or ask to serve as an observer who can give you feedback after the fact?

3. Finally, review your test on these criteria:
   - Is it safe? (If the worst case were to happen, you could live with the results.)
   - Is the data relevant to your BA? (See question 2b.)
   - Is it valid? (The test actually tests your big assumption; see question 1b.)
   - Are the data sources valid? (Choose sources who are neither out to get you nor trying to protect or save you.)
   - Might it actually reinforce your big assumption? (Is it designed so that it surely will lead to bad consequences, just as your BA tells you? Are you setting yourself up to fail? Is there any data you could collect that could disconfirm your BA?)
   - Can it be done soon? (The person or situation you need in order to enact the test is available, you are reasonably certain you know how to do what you plan, and you can run the test within the next week or so.)

A theme to a quality big assumption test encourages people to "anticipate how your typical ways of saying things” or how you are going to send information based on your beliefs, “might lead to a foregone conclusion" or impact the receiving of the information which guarantees an automatic conclusion. They caution that the more a person is
convinced their big assumption is absolutely true, "the less skillful he is at observing other people (their behavior and inner states)" (p.264). The idea with quality tests is to not only observe oneself in the process but also look for more objective versus subjective data, to avoid selecting information that will confirm the big assumption. In my previous example of a client needing to order her own meal when out to eat tapas with friends, objective data would be if people physically rolled their eyes when she ordered her own dish or said they were annoyed versus an assumption of "they were annoyed at me."

While the big assumption might not be true, Kegan and Lahey (2009) stress it isn't the behavior or outcome that is to be measured. But rather, "to use the test results to reconsider your big assumption” or mental filter to realize that it isn't "always and completely right” (p.266). The big assumption test is asking the client to look for inconsistencies in their metaphors and stories or at the very least, nuanced views of previously generalized ways of interpreting the world. The big assumption test is therefore more about testing the sourcing of information, which can shift the thinking and feeling of a person. Big assumptions might sometimes be true; the goal is “rather to help sharpen its contours” or avoid black and white thinking, as to “have a realistic, data-based version” or clearly subjective evaluation of “when, where, and with whom your big assumption is relevant” (p. 268). This helps development along the mental complexity continuum and offers a useful frame of reference for one’s previous ways of knowing. Immunity to Change theory suggests that “even relatively modest changes to a big assumption can overturn an immunity to change” (p. 268). The big assumption tests are outlined to continue successive runs of more types of tests. What differs is “the players, circumstance, or level of risk” (p.269). In the client example of going out to eat
with her friends, a different level of test would be to apply this at work, where she is working through lunch, because that is the norm of the veterinarian hospital where she is doing her rotations as a veterinarian student. The goal is “to overturn the person’s immunity to change”, which they conclude is “the whole purpose” of the big assumption exercises” (p. 269). This understanding in turn can be applied to Jung's identified unconscious shadow by helping one see the shadow and battle food story rather than see through it. Eventually, these big assumptions can be “consciously released” or behavior changes intentionally corrected and eventually “unconsciously released” or become a more integrated and automatic way of being in the world. For example, the client learns to ask for a lunch break without monitoring people’s reactions. The big assumption is dissolved and no longer in the background.

Conclusion

I posit that metaphors are symptoms of a food and weight story in American culture that involves the conflicting emotions of safety and nurturance on one end and fear and aggression on the opposite end; this in turn allowed us to understand how the yin and yang archetypal dynamic has created an excessively-masculine American story ideology where the feminine nature comes out in repressed or shadow ways. Immunity to Change theory provides an avenue for bringing these big assumptions, or unconscious, often excessively-masculine stories conscious in order to integrate the feminine archetype. This produces a more nuanced understanding of the binary thinking necessary when the balance of yin and yang are absent.
CHAPTER 3

FACILITATING STORY REVISIONS IN ADULTHOOD

In the six years I have been health coaching, I have found most people do not realize they are in a “battle with food” metaphor and story. They do not remember ever not struggling with food, and this story is reinforced through U.S. culture, portraying it as the masculine or hero’s journey. While my experience points to clients realizing this battle doesn’t work long-term, they are not sure what will prove effective. Therefore, I am proposing a health-coaching model that enables people who are battling food to see it as a story, not the story; it is an invitation to re-author one’s own story. This model, called Truce with Food, is a six-session program designed for the client to begin to develop an intimate relationship and communication with her body so she feels empowered to make the nutritional choices that will support her goals.

Each person’s food story has its own memories, characters, metaphors and resulting health. This model must begin with one’s own personal myth and health. It must offer a way to revise the story according to one’s unique body and relationship to food. This chapter will explain why the heroine’s journey is more appropriate than the hero’s journey as a path to healing from the food battle metaphor. Given the heroine’s journey is largely internal, I will explain the intricacies of applying David Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning theory and infusing Carl Roger’s (1961) client-centered approach into accomplishing this story revision. The resulting goal of my health-coaching model is to integrate the feminine, to neutralize the battle food story, resulting in a truce with food.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff (1980) propose that once one realizes a certain metaphor or story is driving one’s life, the power to create a
new reality exists. As outlined in Chapter 2, food is biologically and often unconsciously wired to be represented as symbols for safety, love and nurturance. Having a healthy relationship to food, including respecting its power, is required for health and to live well. In tandem, society, families and friends by in large connect over food because of its deep emotional meaning. It can be concluded then that changing the idea of food as a battle, which is a culturally and more artificially constructed story, has the most potential for healing. The battle story’s ineffectiveness alone is not enough to change this story. Metaphors are not just language but a way of conceiving life (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980). To shift the deep meaning of a story, it is necessary to address one’s feelings and thoughts. Given the battle story is an excessively masculine metaphor, drawing upon the yin and yang archetypes, neutralizing an excessively masculine battle metaphor requires the balance of the feminine, which includes feelings and nurturing. Integrating the feminine into this process is the proposed solution to heal the overly masculine battle metaphor.

The Heroine’s Journey

By integrating the feminine or yin archetype qualities of honoring the internal nature of the body and feelings, these normally judgmental areas can become explored and open to revision. This internal focus accomplishes two goals. First, it helps bring the physiological elements of the bodies’ systems, such as digestion and blood sugar, into awareness. I believe that becoming aware of one’s placement on this continuum can bring clarity to healing food choices based on the individual’s experience and success. This can lead to more authority or control of food and body. Second, I believe that the nurturing quality of the feminine brings empathy to the process. This can help constructively bring
the identified shadow contents, as suggested by Jung (see Campbell, 1976) into the light. This “goodwill” according to Jung, can bring awareness to the “autonomy” of the unconscious “emotional nature” of the shadow (Campbell, 1976). In the food and dieting lexicon, this shadow is often referred to as “self-sabotage.” Thus, food should become a healing agent and a muse, not the enemy that appears when empathy is out of balance.

If food is not the enemy, it can no longer sit in the archetypal Hero’s Journey story replayed in transformation stories and on the television “reality” game show, the “Biggest Loser” (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0429318/). Based upon mythologist Joseph Campbell’s decades of studying different cultures and historic periods, each culture’s storied hero followed a similar pattern,

> Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the charter roles involved, the victories gained. (Campbell, 1968, p.38).

At best, the hero’s journey concludes with the hero being recognized as someone with “exceptional gifts.” American society has made the exceptional person the thin person who has slain their food demons, received a makeover, and wears a size 4 dress that is not black. However, because it is not an authentic hero’s journey, since food which provides health cannot be a battle, most people regain their weight as noted in the introduction. I have a friend who was on the Biggest Loser show who told me that she believed that more than half of the people gain all their weight back and more, and many have become addicted to drugs or alcohol after the shame of gaining all the weight back and/or not being extrinsically rewarded for their weight loss. I have had clients tell me
they know intellectually losing weight will not change things that much but they cannot help “feel” it will. Archetypal stories pull emotions along for the ride. And personal myths center on love and power themes (McAdams, 1993), two things weight loss as a hero’s journey is marketed to provide.

While the sponsors of the media continue to benefit from the climate and its narrative creations, many others are not. The problem as I present it here is an absent and often, wounded feminine, not more masculinity. If integrating the feminine is the process and destination to ending the battle with food, then a truce with food becomes a heroine’s journey, not the hero’s journey. Therapist and Jungian analyst Maureen Murdock (1990) outlines the archetypal story of healing the feminine in her book, *The Heroine’s Journey*. While she describes its being influenced by the hero’s quest, it is different as it focuses on the feminine versus the external nature of the hero’s journey. See Figure 3 for the heroine’s journey narrative sequence.
After separating from the feminine, beginning in the “Descent of the Goddess” phase, Murdock’s heroine’s journey serves to have a woman become her own authority. If this is done related to the best foods for one’s body, the opportunity exists to re-story the powerlessness many feel around food. In narrative as therapy, Robert Doan and Alan Parry (1994) explain that for a story to heal, the author of the story must become the expert making this new narrative an effective starting point for a coaching model. As Murdock (1990) explains,

Women do have a quest at this time in our culture. It is the quest to fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as
women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine. It is a very important inner journey toward being a fully, integrated, balance and whole human being (p.3).

She does note that men can take this heroine’s journey as they too have a feminine nature within.

Murdock’s heroine’s journey heals the feminine by integrating the feminine qualities outlined as the yin in the literature review to experience the value of the feminine. As Murdock’s quote notes above, it also provides a wholeness that many of my clients thought would be found in weight loss. The internal focus, a hallmark of the yin, in the second half of the heroine’s journey makes it an ideal pathway to healing one’s individual physical and emotional health. The focus on one’s internal compass and feelings during the second half of the journey is crucial to discovering the relevant emotional connection of food for each woman. By its nature, it is interconnected but not a linear 1:1 correlation. For example, a client of mine was teaching and going to graduate school full-time and adjusting to living with her boyfriend. On the weekends, she ran all the errands she could not get to during the week. On Saturdays, in between errands, she and her boyfriend went to Wawa, a convenience store with ready-made sandwiches. She continued to get the hoagie and potato chips there even though it wasn’t at all satisfying. “I’m so good during the week and then the weekends, I just go crazy,” she said, frustrated in one of our sessions. I asked her if she wanted the hoagie or what the hoagie represented-- being served and having some room for ebb in her routine rigidity. She saw it was the latter. We experimented with Saturdays being a day of spontaneity and asking her boyfriend to cook a few of the weekend meals. Wawa hoagies lost their allure and her food story began a new chapter, one that included the emotional, non-linear but
interconnected nature of food. At first she felt the connection hard to believe, because it was not an immediate cause and effect. But she started to notice a pattern between being run down and the random-eating opportunities, taking the path of least resistance, which was often unhealthy. She eventually made the space in her schedule and asking for help a consistent habit. For those on the heroine’s journey, their “task” is to heal the internal split that tells us to override the feelings, intuition, and dream images that inform us of the truth of life,” (Murdock, 1990, p.11). My client felt an intuitive connection between this positive pattern; she learned to trust it, because it was her truth.

With the path outlined, the question becomes how to adapt this heroine’s journey to one’s particular food story. The Truce with Food model is designed to meet people in the “Awakening to Feelings of Spiritual Aridity: Death” phase. Many are fatigued, depressed and struggling with their weight. They feel their weight is the source of this emptiness, or they are eating to fill the void in this phase, as one client told me she was doing as her last child left for college. While the following chapters will provide the strategy for the coaching content for the first two phases and next steps for the last two phases, it’s important to first describe how to approach teaching this narrative.

Most dieting and nutrition advice is given as instructive training. “Eat this, not that”, “Eat this many calories, burn this much at the gym,” Yet adults, the target audience for this model, don’t change their deeply entrenched stories by being trained. In addition, an overall theme of the feminine archetype is the internal and more mysterious or ebb and flow nature of life (De La Vallée, 2006). Thus, honoring one’s own experiences and the continual learning nature of life will help validate and reinforce the feminine archetype which, as explained in the literature review, has unjustly been devalued. Experiential
Learning and Carl Roger’s Client-Centered Approach are two learning theories that integrate the benefit of the feminine and will help shift a frustrated dieter’s food story.

**Experiential Learning**

Experiential Learning is an appropriate and elegant learning method to accomplish the underlying strategy of Truce with Food. It helps to honor the integrity of a food and weight-loss story that is anything but absolute because of its emphasis on the continual nature of learning. In the Experiential Learning model (Kolb, 1984) ideas are not fixed or permanently formed. Rather, they are reformed through experience, accommodating the dynamic nature of health. This helps people discover how to learn by trusting their own experiences, and developing necessary skills in managing the dynamic nature of nutritional needs. With the skills gained from Experiential Learning, a client can adjust more readily to the relative nature of food and emotions. For example, the field of functional medicine led by those holding PhD’s and MD’s, which includes research on the gut biome, are just a few scientific areas tearing holes in the linear, calories-in, calories-out model.

Functional medicine illustrates that absolutes are being replaced by bio-individuality when it comes to food, health and weight loss. For example, a recent study reported on by Stanford Medicine (Conger, 2011) linked type II diabetes to deep autoimmune conditions in the body. With functional medicine practitioners understanding that at least 70% of the immune system is in the digestive system (Lipski, 2005), it is clear that different foods, particularly food allergies, can contribute to this condition. There are many food allergy theories, but it is still unclear how people develop different allergies. However, once someone’s gut is healed, previously dangerous foods
may then be tolerated. Knowing how to know one’s body such as the way food allergies personally affect one’s system, becomes more critical than one answer at one point in time. Or consider fetal culture studies such as the one by Coyle and Tsai (2009), which observed that obese people have different bacteria present in their digestive tracts than thin or normal weight individuals. When these obese people received a fecal transplant with bacteria from normal weight individuals, they lose weight. Functional medicine practitioners in this field acknowledge there are more questions than answers involving the gut biome, making Experiential Learning and people’s personal experiences even more relevant to helping discoveries in this important field of health. Consider also the cyclical nature of one’s physical and emotional state. One day, it might be healthy to go outside for a hike. However, if the client did not get any sleep the night before, the better choice is to go home and nap. Knowing what questions to ask and learning how to trust one’s self is foundational to feeling like an authority and thus, healing one’s food story.

Another reason Experiential Learning is appropriate is that validating one’s internal experience becomes more important as we discover that everyone has different nutritional needs. There is no right diet for everyone. And the right diet for someone now will not be the right diet in a couple of years. In continually learning to trust one’s experiences and internal guide, a new food story becomes authentic. Experiential Learning also explains that the space between the expectation and the realization of something happening, the discovering of new ideas or stories, such as food’s healing power, can arise. In this process, not only does a new story begin to be told, but also simultaneously, one is able to unlearn or modify old ones because one’s own experiences
help to soften the conflicting belief about food as the enemy. As Kolb points out, “most of learning is relearning” (Kolb, 1984, p. 28).

Truce with Food involves weekly food experiments. For example, experimenting with different breakfasts is one topic. In essence, participants are brought through Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Cycle of Experiential Learning (graphic from Robert Farrow’s Theories of Reflective Learning blog )

After the concrete experience (CE) or experimentation of different types of breakfasts, food diaries and questions that prompt reflection (RO) on one’s own hunger, energy and satiation are done. Clients and group members come to the next class that involves a more theoretical discussion (AC) of blood sugar to help internalize these physiological concepts. This then allows them to look with with even more subtlety (AE) or outside of the original experiment design, at their blood sugar throughout their days, not just at
breakfast. For example, in the experiment described above, a client noticed on stressful work days, she needed a heavier protein like eggs versus on non-work days when she felt just as great eating an apple and peanut butter. She did not have to adhere to only the breakfasts assigned in the original experiment but was able to pivot with what worked for her because she was taken through Kolb’s learning cycle with the key concept of blood sugar that influences hunger and cravings. Blood sugar is one of the most misunderstood bodily reactions that leads to the false notion that food is the enemy.

I also chose Experiential Learning because it emphasizes that outcomes are often non-learning and maladaptive. This is important when focusing on the emotional and metaphorical nature of food. Unfortunately, most food, diet and health advice is rational and analytical, mirroring traditional, patriarchal learning settings (Kolb, 1984). The focus is on counting the calories, eating this not that, and checking the box at the gym. When focusing just on tactical behaviors, learning about why one is not consistent with healthy choices or opts out of the gym is not explored. Without inquiry, the battle story and being weak and ashamed gets reinforced. Experiential Learning helps counter-balance and cope when the inevitable holes in the hyper-rationale world of absolutes arise. Focusing on the holistic picture of an eater, including their lifestyle and accompanying emotions, the space between active experimentation and reflective observation helps one see the immediate and bigger themes, including the unconscious life choices affecting food choices.

Carl Rogers Client-Centered Approach

Experiential Learning delivers the content for how people can effectively re-author their food story. Along with the Experiential Learning theory, people experiment
rather than judge themselves, Truce with Food is infusing Carl Rogers (1961) Client Centered Approach (CCA) described in On Becoming a Person. Rogers, a psychologist whose approach has been seminal to the field of coaching, was part of the humanist tradition in psychotherapy that viewed themselves and patients as collaborators. Rogers noticed the paradox or yin-yang dynamic that acceptance rather than fixing someone is the path for change.

To help facilitate this acceptance, rather than judging a feeling or belief, Rogers sought to understand the meaning beneath his patients’ troubling statements. To help him do this, he brought deep empathy and unconditional positive regard to his relationship with clients. Unconditional Positive Regard is seeing the clients with “a warm, positive and acceptant attitude,” (Roger, 1961, p.62) regardless of what the client says or does. In doing this, it helped the client bring that same grace to themselves. In other words, he was bringing more of the yin essence of nurturance to the therapeutic relationship. Rogers’ experience in bringing Unconditional Positive Regard and space to talk out answers to the right questions showed that patients were more likely to generate the necessary changes on their own. Rogers was helping people learn how to learn about themselves.

Because food is such an emotional story, a deep empathy and acceptance to one’s food story must be brought to the process. Unconditional Positive Regard can help someone re-friend their body and embrace the shadow contents as acceptance allows for exploration rather than judgment. One is not good, bad or weak with food. One has a weak moment whose circumstances must be understood. That opening is where transformational change can happen. For example, in one study (Rogers, 1961, p.46-47)
researchers tried three different types of psychotherapy on described, “hardened chronic hospitalized alcoholics.” Roger’s CCA surprised everyone by having the greatest gains in the short and long-term, over analytical and learning theory. Learning theory, where alcoholics and their habits were labeled in absolute terms of good and bad, proved worse than a control group who got no therapy. This illustrates EL’s idea that non-learning can set people back in their goals. With alcoholics being told they were bad, there was no understanding as to the why behind their drinking. From a narrative therapy lens, labeling someone’s habits as bad is likely to confirm the story that had caused the addiction in the first place. The labeling prevented them from being able to externalize the story, a key healing technique in narrative therapy (Doan & Parry, 1994). This type of “good” and “bad” labeling is rampant in the nutrition and dieting industry. By bringing the element of experimentation, empathy and Unconditional Positive Regard, learning, change and personal growth can occur. Furthermore, because it is effective, it has a compounding effect, bringing exponential change.

Rogers' influence was a paradigm shift and helped to usher in a new era in therapy called Humanistic Psychology. This idea that patients or clients, as they are called in coaching, had the innate desire to grow and self-actualize laid the foundation for the field of coaching. This assumption, which in essence shifts the question from, “How do I not lose” to “How do I play to win?” is built into the Truce with Food model. Each stage of the process assumes the body and participants want to heal and emotionally mature. It assumes perceived weaknesses of the body – fatigue, cravings and moodiness – are symptoms that can be corrected and not problems in and of themselves. Emotional eating is a clue that more emotional nourishment is required, and not a sign of lack of discipline.
The experiential and reflective nature of Truce with Food attempts to provide the space and acceptance Rogers provided his clients on his couch. The nature of the material helps to externalize and learn from cravings, off-track moments and bingeing. For example, one week is spent on the yin and yang dynamics of food. Sugar, most eaters’ greatest “nemesis”, is yin. Once the emotional nature of one’s life has more yin incorporated, participants see their cravings decrease. They are able to see they are not weak around sugar but rather, they have an understanding of weak moments. I also set the expectation that they will go off-track and that it is not something to judge, but a very powerful learning opportunity. In other words, it is research, not a conclusion. With the Experiential Learning experience, they get progressively better at learning from this research.

With Carl Roger’s Client-Centered Approach and Experiential Learning forming an empathetic and dynamic structure for change, it is now time to explain what fills the content in the food version of the heroine’s journey.
CHAPTER 4

THE FIRST TWO STAGES OF A TRUCE WITH FOOD

In this chapter, I take the qualities of the second half of the heroine’s journey and adapting the content to one’s relationship to food. I have implemented this first half of my model for the past several years as I have taken various Organizational Dynamics classes and share stories of this application.

Stage 1: Replacing the Food Police with “Wise Council”

The turning point of beginning to reunite and integrate with the feminine in the heroine’s journey is what Murdock (1990) calls the initiation and descent to the Goddess. This is where my Truce with Food model begins. It is essentially a time when a woman casts off many of the trappings of an overly masculine life. In North American culture, this is known as mainstream. She discovers lost parts of herself and becomes her own authority in her life. A hallmark characteristic of this stage is developing an internal authority. Murdock describes this phase where a woman will “acquaint herself, perhaps for the first time, with her body, her emotions, her sexuality, her intuition, her images, her values, and her mind” (p. 90). Applying this to the Truce with Food model, it is a time for clients to focus on their bodies and what foods their bodies need for health versus the external and often conflicting claims made by food industry and scientists who are limited to a reductionist model of the body. It is also a time to prioritize getting their relationship to food finessed versus focusing solely on weight loss. It is doing this work for oneself versus the perceived external validation.

To learn how to listen the body’s language, I start by introducing a new food group each week for a total of five sessions of food groups. They start with healthy fats in
the pre-work of the program, leafy greens in session one, proteins in session two, carbohydrates in session four (session three and six they are divided into smaller groups for individual questions), and natural sweeteners in session five. These foods are discussed in relation to the two foundational biological processes of functional medicine: digestion and blood sugar control. These two systems are the body’s physical wise council, hence the name of the stage being Replacing the Food Police with a Wise Council. In Truce with Food, the real foods are introduced in a way that addresses the four types of adult learners. David Kolb (1984) believed adults would learn the most effectively if regardless of their learning type, all four learning styles were experienced, as outlined in his Experiential Learning model referenced in Chapter 3.

In the Replacing the Food Police with Wise Council phase, the food groups are leafy greens and proteins as these foods correspond to the effects on the digestive system and blood sugar respectively. Carbohydrates and natural sweeteners are addressed during the second phase I will discuss in Chapter 5 as I have found these food choices to be largely emotional in nature. I begin with the theory of the food and its impact on the body related to functional medicine research for the assimilator learners, who prefer abstract conceptualization and also to reinforce this Experiential Learning phase. When introducing the leafy greens, I explain the following surprising reality to help clients understand the internal workings of the body: at least seventy percent of the immune system resides in the gut, about 3.3 pounds of bacteria, which influence weight and the quality of health-fostering nutrients that get absorbed, and that their gastrointestinal tract is a GPS for moods, producing about 90% of the body’s serotonin and containing more nerve endings then the brain.
I also spend time discussing the emerging research field of the gut biome. This is important to help unlearn the calories-in, calories-out story, including the fallacy that all calories are the same. For example, Harvard Medical School and Public School of Health found (as cited in Boyles, 2012) that children who are born via C-section, bypassing exposure to the bacteria in the vaginal canal, and aren’t breast-fed were more susceptible to childhood obesity. Disruption of the gut microbiota is also linked to a range of diseases, such as inflammatory bowel disease, allergies, asthma and cancer. This is not to judge women’s birthing choices or realities, but it is more of a statement on how important food, inflammation and a healthy gastrointestinal tract are in creating a working relationship with your body.

Several of my clients, when mapping their food stories, realize their weight jumped considerably after rounds of antibiotics or steroid medication, two classes of medications that disrupt the gastrointestinal bacteria ecosystem. One client was on steroids for an extended period in attempts to get pregnant. She experienced significant weight gain afterwards. As we put her on a quality probiotic and leafy greens to cool off her system, along with removing gluten, which was causing the fire, the redness in her skin made way to a gorgeous skin glow. Her joint pain disappeared and most of her blood work normalized. The design of her evaluation on food shifted from measuring calories to what would internally heal her gut or prevent its reverting to the previous conditions, which immediately produced pain and exhaustion. I share stories like this as they bring the data to life and provide a way to externalize the shame, guilt and frustration because the dieting model, not the dieter, is flawed.
When the gut is on edge, which most North Americans are experiencing, it overreacts to food, straining one’s relationship to food. In the same way a warmer Earth isn’t able to kill as many bacteria and viruses making cold and flu season worse, the heating of one’s own digestive system, the foundation of nourishment and protection, inflames one’s relationship with food because it feels like one’s stomach shows immediate signs of “cheating” in the form of bloating. However, as the client experiments with probiotics, leafy greens, organic animal proteins and healthy fats to help heal the gastrointestinal tract, the story of the stomach as a doughy muffin top standing between the owner of said stomach and being blissful on the beach gradually is replaced with the stomach offering internal body wisdom. I help clients connect the seemingly failings of their body with what is actually, cries for help from the imbalances. By defining the problem correctly, they can befriend their bodies and heal.

For the accommodators, those learning from concrete experience and to provide this Experiential Learning stage, I then discuss ways to determine the progress of their digestive health by having them consider an overall snapshot of their digestive system based on what they are experiencing in their bodies. They are to evaluate if they have: at least one bowel movement a day, food in their stools, are frequently sick, have auto-immune symptoms like acne, allergies or migraines or on the extreme end of the diseased gastrointestinal spectrum, have murky diagnoses like Irritable Bowel Syndrome, depression or full-blown autoimmune conditions like asthma, arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis or Lupus. It’s the most calculated way to determine gut health at this stage. As stated in Chapter 3, there are more questions than answers, and medical tests for gut health are still in their infancy. After more whole foods are added into their diets in the subsequent
weeks, I do spiral back for them to try an elimination diet in Session 6 so they can more concretely determine if they suffer from some of the common food allergens.

Each week I outline homework experiments for the accommodators who especially learn through active experimentation and questions based on the experiments for the divergers or reflective observationists and to complete the Experiential Learning cycle for each food. For example, many of the symptoms and diagnoses mentioned above take awhile to heal. So after that discussion, I relate it to their immediate lives so the activators, in particular, understand what to measure aside from calories. They are given the experiment to try a probiotic or foods with probiotics like miso soup and a new leafy green, which will quickly hose off the inflammation in the gut as it begins to cool off many of these conditions. They are to look for the more immediate benefit of probiotics and leafy greens which include: ease of bowel movements, a flatter stomach that corresponds to less anxiety as nerve endings are calm, the bitter flavor of leafy greens reducing their sweet cravings, the high nutrition and oxygen quotient to observe feeling fuller and more energized, and the color adding an aesthetic element that makes them enjoy eating more. I then have journal questions for them such as, “How do I know what I know about nutrition?” This begins their questioning of their previous stories and helps them to recognize that they have never once consulted the ultimate expert, their bodies, in this way. One client came back from a family picnic to which she brought a kale dish and was shocked that for the first time she noticed how brown all the other food was. She had never before noticed the lack of color. I may also recommend they all try the green smoothie I eat every morning. Each person who tries it is floored at the amount of energy
and “indescribable” calm they feel after drinking it. As the group shares, I relate it to the theory of reinforcing the experience and a new way of understanding their bodies.

I repeat this cycle for blood sugar during session two; the learning involves proteins and experiments designed to monitor appetite and cravings. While often my clients assume they understand blood sugar, this is by far one of their most awe-inspiring discoveries. One client, by having egg yolks versus just the whites with breakfast, was shocked that the blueberry scones lying in her work’s kitchen were suddenly “uninteresting.” One of the most dramatic decreases in overeating and changes to one’s food story comes from working with, not against blood sugar. It changes the story of their hunger and cravings.

Just as each person’s gastrointestinal tract is in a different condition, so is the health of everyone’s blood sugar. On one end is someone with elite blood sugar control, usually above average blood work, with fasting glucose under 80. On the other end is full-blown type II diabetes or more systemic conditions tied into insulin resistance like heart disease or certain types of dementia and Alzheimer’s. However, most people are eating far too little fat and protein for their placement on the blood sugar continuum. The closer one is on the type-2 diabetes end of the spectrum, the more likely protein and fat are needed to replace carbohydrates in order for the body to heal. But fearing fat and usually animal protein goes with the battle territory. This then makes it also believable that appetites are something to fight. I start by explaining the biological theory of blood sugar, insulin and inflammation. I talk about the theoretical numbers, like A1C, fasting glucose, and fasting insulin to understand the health of their insulin response. I then move into the practical,
day-to-day experiences to know where one is on the blood sugar continuum. I ask clients to consider their answers to the following questions:

- Am I genuinely hungry every couple of hours?
- Do I have crazy mood swings that go from “I can take on the world” to overwhelming negative thoughts?
- Do I arrive at meals shaky, without “willpower”?
- Do I crave sweets in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon?
- Do I feel drained, in a bad way, at the end of the day?
- Am I exhausted after an intense cardio workout?
- Is most of my weight in my stomach?

After combining this new understanding, they are tasked with a lunch experiment, one with three quarters of their plate carbohydrates at noon, one with three quarters protein and fats at noon and then that same meal of protein and fats, at 2 p.m. They then are able to personally experience how these different nutrient combinations and eating rhythms influence their blood sugar and cravings. I tell them to notice in this experiment, how what one eats immediately sets them up for what they crave at their next meal. They also have another set of questions: “Do I trust my appetite? If so, why? If not, why not?”

When they come back the next week to discuss as a group, it is wonderful for everyone to see how varied the bodies’ responses are illustrating again, how unique everyone’s body responds to virtually the same nutritional profile. For example, one client recognized she
got heavy eyelids as a sign her blood sugar was beginning to crash. Another client felt almost manic not just with her appetite but also with her thoughts.

The change outlined above is designed to be gradual yet still very noticeable to allow for a more nuanced interpretation of events. This is important because the body’s language is often much more subtle than the shouting done in dieting marketing. Deeply internalizing their bodies’ digestive and blood sugar systems cues clients into the body’s language. They start to see many of what they perceived as body failures more as clues, and how powerful food can be to help them feel internally better. Also, it primes them for the importance of nuance in the Immunity to Change focus in the final two stages of Truce with Food.

As noted in Chapter 3 and above, this changing of the guard stage requires space to experiment. With clients gifting themselves that space to experiment and having a group to support them, they are accepting their bodies more than they were before. They are bringing curiosity and empathy to themselves and a higher degree of unconditional positive regard that Carl Rogers noted helped people change. Using Experiential Learning shortens their learning curve mainly because they are learning why their body does what it does versus non-learning when they are just remembering if food is “good” or “bad” but not understanding the flaws in that evaluation design.

The focus shifts from a label of “good” or “bad” food to experiencing what a food actually does. For example, their energy, calm and focus increase while also decreasing cravings, irritability and anxiety. Murdock (1990) notes that women find their way out of the initiation and descent to the Goddess “not by moving up and into the light
like men, but by moving down into the depths of their being” (p. 89). The wisdom of digestive health and blood sugar needs to be rediscovered after decades of trusting external authorities, many which have been funded by the food industry or doctors who have been trained in acute care and disease management, which only addresses these situations when they are in dire straits. Being able to detect how one’s body reacts provides the tools to continue to learn as they heal or have other health challenges arise. For example, once one’s gut heals, many times previous food allergies clear up. It also helps to start to question this “expert” and layperson model that currently dominates medicine.

After this phase, I often hear, “nothing has changed but everything has changed”, which lets me know stories are changing. As they witness their body’s resilience with such simple changes, a newfound respect often develops. They start to pay deeper attention as they gain a significant benefit from collaboration, not tyranny, with their bodies.

Clients generally come out of these first three sessions (two of structured teaching, one of coaching) feeling significantly different from some simple changes and more empowered in this ease. As the program continues in the same format, this collaborative structure replaces the external food police who are so black and white with an internal authority. While these three sessions help with the day-to-day nutritional decisions, the time arises to approach evening and weekend cravings. Murdock (1990) discusses after a woman comes out of this phase, she can’t go back to the way she was before. This phase “invariably strengthens a woman and clarifies her sense of self” (p. 91). I find my clients Vallée a calm and energy that most of society doesn’t possess. To maintain their physical
improvements, tactical lifestyle changes must be made to provide the body what it needs, such as proper sleep and preparation time for grocery shopping and cooking. What previously felt normal or assumed in their lives, like being busy and drained all the time, now feels toxic and out of sync with their new vibrancy - and who they want to be. This transition embarks the client on the next stage of Truce with Food, Discovering Your Fountain of Motivation.

**Stage 2: Finding Your Fountain of Willpower**

After a client realizes how paying attention to the body improves how much better they feel, they are now further open to editing a food story that is not just about food and the way a hero’s journey defines effort. They also are trying to understand nighttime or weekend cravings or being consistent with their efforts that are more emotional in nature. If they are not craving these foods, why do they eat them? If they know they feel better when cooking, why are they not cooking more? In this “Finding Your Fountain of Willpower” phase of Truce with Food, consistency, including the evening and weekends, is the focus. With the battle metaphor around food changing, clients start getting curious, trusting empathy and unconditional positive regard as a means to question not judge about the cause of overeating.

As mentioned in the literature review, for women, their *being* is nurtured with more yin than a man’s. Without more yin in their lives, which means nurturing who they are, the desire and energy to consistently make the right food choices will be a constant challenge; willpower sprouts from how strong your being is, not more doing. As the Yin Yang explains, the yin, the person making the choice, not the choice itself, is “destroyed
and disturbed by an imbalanced yang” (De La Vallée, Yin Yang in Classical Texts, pg. 129). Food feels like the enemy but in reality, it is the solution to a depleted being in an overly-yang world. Murdock (1990) describes this next phase of the heroine’s journey as an urgent yearning to connect with the feminine, or yin. Women, she explains, come back from their descent in the previous phase carrying “a bag of bones.”

The bag of bones represents exhaustion and a mix of emotions from the descent. She explains women want to be comforted, held and nurtured from the weight of the carry. Being nurtured by food from the earth, which in Chinese medicine includes the five flavors of sweet, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent, gives rise to more yin or nurturing, joyful, restorative energy (De La Vallée, 2006). In the food adaptation of the heroine’s journey, this energy gives way to feeling by the client for a need for change in other lifestyle areas. Now that their bodies feel more nurtured, it is easier to see what else is not nurturing. They are able to see more of their story versus seeing through it. One example I often see with clients is how they start to notice certain friendships feeling toxic and draining whereas before, misery was enjoying company, or they lose the need to feel needed now that they feel stronger.

Thus the problem with consistency and emotional eating is being more, not “gearing up” for more. It is integrating the yin energy of comfort and nurturance to be who she is and in turn, what she chooses to do. Murdock (1990) describes this phase after returning from the descent almost as a recovery phase of her being, which she does through “conscious nutrition and exercise, rest-taking, healing, lovemaking, birthing, and dying” (p.117). These metaphors paint a picture of how a woman can define conscious
restoration and rejuvenation. In other words, if something feels healing or rejuvenating, it will help her in this phase.

This brings to light another flaw of the battle metaphor. Traditional dieting tips that troubleshoot around consistency involve the exact opposite of restoration. They encourage one to heat up the battle like monitoring your calories closer or doing double workouts during the holidays. Many clients have told me tracking their food is exhausting in and of itself. It often wears away confidence in themselves the way a micro-manager wears on an employee. For example, a client came to me and said food was all she thought about: “It is always there on my shoulder. What I am going to eat, what I am going to miss eating and how no matter what, I will end up doing it wrong.” Her mind and actions were hyper-yang around food. She felt like she had resisted five servings of dessert with all the books, blogs and health infomercial emails she read. By the time it came to actually make a decision to eat, she was worn out from being overwhelmed. She then felt five times as guilty eating dessert because she was reminded five times that sugar sabotages weight loss. But so does shame and too much yang. We had her donate all her diet books to the library and unsubscribe from all the health infomercial emails she was receiving. She needed a break, so that space for her own wisdom and personal compass, which is crucial in this stage, could arise. At first, it required effort not to peak online or join in on the weight-loss dramas her coworkers were always discussing. As she realized the paradox that less information, not more, enabled her to make better food choices, she felt freer.

Willpower and motivation are generally used interchangeably when talking about food choices. And when the collective eating public talks about motivation, it usually
involves stressful pulsing with anxious energy and fruitless striving of monitoring their food or exercise. This also takes the form of white knuckling water glasses while eyeing dessert trays. Or spending 30 minutes after the work day reconfiguring points like a deranged accountant trying to justify sitting on the couch with a pint of ice cream. It is why people who hate running sign up for a half-marathon or there are gym-goers who work-out at a threshold low enough to read US Weekly on the Elliptical machine. From what I have seen, this determination closes in on people very quickly making them feel claustrophobic and suffocated by battling food. It wears away at their inner knowing. One of the qualities of the yang energy is to defend. And that is exactly what all these actions are doing: trying to defend from eating choices. In reality, it weakens the will and the body where the yin is stored.

So contrary to the battle story, the fountain of willpower is found in inspiration, not motivation. It is found in the inputs that replenish someone so they feel inspired to take action, not running away from fear. It’s a subtle difference but transformational. For the Truce with Food journey, it is not about tracking your food with three different phone apps but giving yourself a rest from all the external evaluation and judgment by turning inward. It is about enjoying the process of whatever changes one chooses versus focusing on the outcome. For example, what way does a client enjoy moving versus focusing on the calorie expenditure? It is not weighing yourself everyday but choosing to evaluate your days in other ways.

Incorporating yin into one’s life begins to dramatically decrease nighttime and weekend cravings. It helps to nourish not only willpower, but also a renewed sense of self. I make my case by drawing upon the field of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology
asks, what enables people to optimally live and provide a compass for facilitating this prosperity. It focuses on the conditions, the yin, and what is necessary for flourishing. It is wondering what gets someone from +2 to +8 instead of a more traditional view of therapy, which asks how do we go from a −8 to a −2 (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

One sub-field that has come out of Positive Psychology is Appreciative Inquiry. The foundation in Appreciative Inquiry is in framing a question to determine what gives life to an organization or person (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). One Appreciative Inquiry exercise I use is the peak experience exercise to identify what values must be infused into someone’s lifestyle so they continually feel renewed and alive with who they are.

During this phase, I ask clients to pick a time they felt the healthiest and their relationship to food was solid, or when food was something to which they gave little thought. This draws upon Positive Psychology’s concept of focusing on what works versus what is wrong. Rather than thinking, “Why can I not lose weight?”, the question becomes, “When did I feel the healthiest?” This memory draws out their true core and true feelings, the ones that made them feel most vital, not the ones they are striving for in a lopsided world. This also helps the convergers start to internalize this yin concept. They see that willpower was not an issue because what they put out into life came back to them in a healthy bounty, to keep with the soil metaphor. They were in a glorious creation cycle, with restorative feelings being continuously birthed. And the ultimate kicker: they are able to see they were not happy because they were losing weight rather they were losing weight because they were fulfilled beyond the tasks and doing of daily life. This
further helps shift the story of weight loss being about calories in, calories out. Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) identifies six main virtues or what I call values. Interestingly enough, Webster’s online dictionary offers vice as an antonym of virtue. The Positive Psychology virtues include: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence.

When taking clients through this exercise, I draw out their personal language for these virtues and the strengths that fall under those virtues. For example, many will say a beautiful environment is a value, not transcendence. It is important that it is in their language. I have learned from coaching that it is obvious everyone has her own definitions and feelings for the same word.

Once their strengths and values are identified, I ask the miracle question: Imagine your awakening tomorrow, and those values are active in your life. What does that day, that life look like? Really feeling the difference of how their lives would feel and be, helps to continue with the food story revision (Doan and Parry, 1994). Many realize that their lives do not require radical changes. And even if they do, there are shifts that are immediately accessible to them.

For example, many of my clients value beauty. One of these clients in particular hated her job because it wasn’t challenging or paying her enough. Because changing jobs takes time, she was tasked with making her work space beautiful. She had so much fun designing and creating a space that inspired her she found her work productivity increased, which then made her feel more confident in her skills. She eventually found a new job, about six months later and was hired for a job that matched her skill-set. In an
email, she updated me on the job change. She said because she realized that she could contribute her values in various configurations at her current job, and that her performance was influenced by whether or not her strengths of relationship development, creativity and novelty were active, she felt confident to negotiate and asked for a higher salary. She eventually got the job and the requested salary.

This exercise is also a great reminder that this previous time in life was not perfect. Even the “real them” will have problems and doubts about how to proceed in life. It is easy to forget that the fantasy of the real me in the weight-loss journey is a fantasy. The difference in that previous time was they were acting from their unique core, which gave them more power for how they handled those stressors.

I reinforce this point for the assimilators in the group with positive psychologist researcher Barbara Frederickson. She completed a study (Fredrickson, 2001) where she discovered the difference in ratio of positive experiences to people who felt like they were flourishing compared to floundering. It was only 0.9! People who felt like they were flourishing had 3.1:1 positive to negatives experience a day where the floundering group had 2.3:1 positive to negative. The key here is experiences. Not achievements but processes.

Frederickson’s research also reveals what happens when these positive emotions like restoration and relaxation are active in someone’s life. She proved positive emotions:

- Increase immune function
- Improve resilience to adversity
- Reduce inflammatory responses to stress
• Increase resistance to rhinoviruses
• Empower individuals to broaden focus & attention
• Increase intuition and creativity.

Regenerating the yin deficiency helps with the defending yang nature of the body as proven in positive psychology theory. Now that they’ve identified their strengths and values, it’s time to experience this in their homework. For session 4, I focus on Flow.

Flow

Another component of Positive Psychology, lead by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), is the idea of an immersive, creative experience called Flow. What makes this idea appropriate for this stage is the emphasis on the experience just for experience sake. It is not about the outcome but the process. Because it involves a high challenge involved with the strengths or skill set discovered in the peak experience exercise as outlined below in Figure 5, it becomes the type of immersive experience women crave in this stage.
Because many people assume creativity is just about writing or painting, I ask my clients to think back to the time around second through fourth grade and see what their interests were. Dr. Christiane Northrup, a leader in women’s health, discusses in her book *Mother-Daughter Wisdom* (2005) that this is a time when girls are most themselves before the onset of puberty and the cultural conditioning that arises to fit in, be liked, and above all, be good. I use my example of playing store and starting a third grade newspaper as I value being entrepreneurial, not just in a job but in solving problems, and is a strength I have that I can bring to various areas of my life. I am not going to start a newspaper or a general store, but I can bring those same themes of entrepreneur ship to my life like
planning a fun weekend with my husband or friends. One of my client’s strengths was humor and while it frightened her to death at first, she enrolled in an improv class. She of course, loved it and it gave her something to look forward to during her week and unsurprisingly, having an identity outside of “being heavy” made her eating better. Just having that “flow” experience once a week for a couple of hours radically changed her life.

So the assignment during Session 4 of the program becomes for them to create at least one flow experience before our next session and reflect on how it felt and if they felt more centered, grounded and rejuvenated after it was completed. Because this heroine’s journey is so food focused, if they cannot think of something (although they usually do), I recommend starting with turning their exercise into creative movement. Many of my clients’ strengths tend to be into the love of learning and courage buckets. I encourage them to try something that sounds fun but feels like a risk, like a dance or yin yoga class that will require them to be in their bodies (you can’t analyze yourself and learn new movements at the same time) to be successful.

This exercise provides a better understanding of the importance of focusing on their bodies as vessels or the soil. For example, those who try a yin yoga class cannot believe how much better they feel doing so “little.” They begin to experience the paradox of life and become even more curious and open to considering revising their story further.

In session 5, we dwell on the yin further by addressing their values. One way I like to make this more concrete for clients, especially divergers who like the multiple perspectives, is drawing upon Macrobiotic food theory and explaining the yin and yang
archetypes so they have a way to organize this concept in their minds. Macrobiotics is a Japanese dietary theory rooted in yin-yang philosophy. It views food energetically with the yin and yang archetypes. In Figure 7 the energy qualities are illustrated, with each food becoming more yin or yang the further away from the center.

Figure 7. Macrobiotic Food Energetics (from Institute for Integrative Nutrition curriculum hand-outs)

To help bring the yin and yang archetypes to life, I show this chart and that the yin season starts with fall and increases until winter when it begins to wane towards the yang of spring and summer. During the colder months, yang foods, both grounding and warm, help to balance the yin weather. And yin or cooler foods help balance us in the spring and summer. Or when someone drinks heavily one night, the next morning salty eggs and potatoes are usually the craving to balance out the extremes. Or you go to a bar and they put out salty nuts, not because they want to feed you but they want you to drink more.
then also discuss the other elements of the yin and yang archetypes so they understand this energy concept extends beyond food and the seasons.

I then focus on sugar being yin. It’s expansive. Additionally, most qualities of “off-track” foods, which usually include wine, dessert, pizza or fries are dense tasting foods, and density also indicates yin (De La Vallée, 2006). Just what a client wants after a tightly wound or extremely thought driven yang day or week. Western science has proven that adrenaline and cortisol, reactions to stress or hyper-yang, produce intense cravings as a means to refuel and restore the body to balance. In regards to one’s relationship to food, I find sugar, with its accessibility and hijacking of the brain, is the path of least resistance to feeling comforted, protected and joyful.

Sugar to an adult is like a blanket for a child. Notice milk and sugar, the taste profile of cheese, ice cream and frozen yogurt, again, often “off-track” foods are a replicate taste profile to mother’s milk and the first emotional food memories of safety, nurturance and joy as outlined in the literature review. An archetype for these feelings is being mothered, the original yin. These feelings are what one often craves after feeling more and more fragile around food, their bodies and other inevitable stresses of life. I think the dearth of certainty facing many Americans is one unspoken reason of why obesity continues to increase.

Aside from comfort and protection, I discuss how food provides easily accessible joy, something emotionally inaccessible these days. With the art of leisure being lost, eating has become sport. For example, when people eat out, the underlying motivation is to feel carefree, and connect with others. Trying to portion control while eating out is
pointless because underlying at least one motivation for going out is to feel the opposite of “on”. The qualities of yin are demanded to balance the build up of yang.

Macrobiotics has its strengths and limitations, as well as nuances. Everything in the yin yang is relative too. Sugar can also be yang when using it to keep driving and doing, beyond our body’s natural energy capabilities. But in the yin yang, something extreme eventually becomes its opposite. Because the yin focuses on process, it isn’t about extremely eliminating sugar. Rather, this food portion is focused on upgrading to whole grains and natural sweeteners as a way to step down gently from so much sugar or yin deficiency. Just like soil takes awhile to restore, cravings for those dense foods will take time to decrease.

With yin deficiency being the problem, the solution is to restore it deep within. While it can include bubble baths and massages, cultivating a nourishing way of being is not necessarily easy. My clients having such a detachment from the feminine in their relationship with food and in life, cultivating themselves is a discipline amongst so many competing commitments. I go through the explanation above so that clients can externalize what they see as having a weak or undisciplined character. In order for someone to create space between the narrative structures that create an emotional gridlock, the author must feel separate from, in this case, the weakness or lack of discipline. This then enables new rules to be created for a new story to take place (Doan and Parry, 1994). In this case, that food isn’t just about food, is the truth.

**Discovering Who You Are, Not What You Do**

Murdock (1990) describes a hallmark of this stage is, “peeling off the nice,
agreeable mask of the collective fathers” (p.120). It’s opting out of the badge of honor to be “so busy” in life. It’s not bonding with friends or Mom over weight woes. This stage includes making choices about the non-food choices that now feel stale or deadening, like eating lunch in front of their office computer. Murdock uses the analogy of a vessel, restoring it from the inside so it can birth a new beginning. It’s like the quality of wine being dependent on the quality of the barrel’s wood and length of time it is fostered.

I describe it in the program as the soil of who we are and all action and life springs from that. Murdock (1990) elaborates when she says, “Finding out about being instead of doing is the sacred task of the feminine” (p. 28). Harmonious food choices require cultivating the soil input so willpower can prosper.

From the peak experience exercise of Session 4, clients are tasked with making a nourishment menu in Session 5, when we discuss sugar as a substitute for yin. I ask them to list the categories of food, exercise, career, spirituality, relationships and free time. Then I have them brainstorm as to how they can bring their values to those categories of emotional nourishment. Take the feeling of justice, for example. If someone is currently shopping at the grocery store, can they make it a point to purchase some items from the farmer’s market or from those foods with a fair-trade label so they feel aligned with their food choices. Or if someone values courage, can they take time for lunch even though the company culture doesn’t actively support this? Or can they try a new food? They are then to try at least three things from their menu to which they are drawn. It’s important they continue to trust that internal compass and tune into the subtlety of intuition. This becomes their homework as the yin is about embodiment, not thinking about doing something.
Being or taking in the essence of these processes are their own rewards. Especially for the accommodators, this experiment is to have clients tune into the more subtle ways they are nourished. One client of mine traded in the stress of running religiously six days a week for three nights of hot yoga. She described, “It felt so restorative. I came home energized and excited to cook. And I didn’t eat chocolate because there was no need to eat it for accomplishing my run. Yoga was its own reward.”

Lifestyle influences food choices. The yin yang doesn’t silo energy. De La Vallée points out, “the intercourse of yin yang greet all the details of daily life, following the great rules of the order of the universe” (De La Vallée, 2005, p.106-7). Food choices become a muse to know if more restoration is in order.

As the body is deeply nurtured, like tufts of grass coming up at springtime, a desire for a rebirth often arises. Murdock (1990) describes that once a woman realizes she’s been cut off from her feminine nature, she “may slowly begin to reclaim who she is as she feels creativity start flowing” (p. 126) and that she is refreshed by “color, smell, taste, touch, and sound” (p. 126) or an embodied creativity versus only the development of the mind and intellect side of creativity.

Bigger questions of life decisions start to arise, which brings us to the next two phases of the Truce with Food journey.
CHAPTER 5

NEXT STEPS

Murdock’s final two stages of the heroine’s journey are the “Healing the Mother/Daughter Split” and “Healing the Wounded Masculine”. While these are two different stages, I believe the Immunity to Change theory, X-ray process and big assumption tests helps to address both of these phases. This is a piece of the process that I need to spend more time understanding, especially as to how it relates to the “Healing the Wounded Masculine.”

In Healing the Mother/Daughter split, the goal is to heal the split from one’s feminine nature or, in a sense, the internalized way we understand being mothered. Murdock (1990) describes this as reconciling and correcting how one has

Overridden my body, ignored its needs, and pushed it beyond exhaustion to illness. I have taken for granted the skills that come easily; I have ignored my intuition. I have felt guilty about taking time to relax and incubate. I have expected struggle instead of ease and have not Vallée enjoyed this precious gift of life. (p. 133)

Having done the Immunity to Change X-ray process with clients who want to continue beyond the first two stages of the Truce with Food journey, I find that the core big assumptions creating the shadow of emotional eating, anxiety or sheer exhaustion are some variation of “If I’m myself, I’ll be alone” or “If things aren’t perfect, I won’t get recognition” and/or “If I’m not exhausted, I’m not working hard enough.” These are all statements that indicate a separation from the feminine qualities of nurturance and restoration. However, they also involve a wounded masculine, which Murdock describes as, “combative, critical, and destructive” (p. 156) when unbalanced. A wounded masculine also demands “perfection, control, and domination; nothing is ever enough” (p.
156). Underneath a lot of those statements my clients give is a feeling of not being enough, which stems from not integrating their feminine nature, which has enabled the masculine to become unbalanced.

Given I have found clients to have the most mind shifts and improvements at this stage, mainly because the Immunity to Change facilitation helps move them along the continuum of adult development, I want to study this further. I really need to reflect a little longer on this, so that I can make sure I am able to help facilitate the process well enough to have an impact, mainly around helping design strong big assumption tests. I know ITC works well here. It is just now understanding how to present and facilitate it with a deeper understanding and including writing exercises that help my clients start to question their assumptions and decide which ones are calling to be revised now.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Starting this Capstone, I had no idea that what I was really walking my clients through was one spiral or trip around the heroine’s journey. I certainly recognized a pattern. But like my own story, I didn’t have the overall narrative to describe what was happening. Especially because I consider myself what Murdock (1990) calls father’s daughters, or women who have over identified with the masculine. I certainly have in my life and in many ways, still am far away from embodying the feminine qualities equally as much as the masculine qualities of life.

But in deeply researching archetypes, masculine ideology, how our stories form and adult learning theories, I’ve started to circle back. For starters, I’m more confident and comfortable bringing what is often referred to as “woo woo” tools (another way to degrade the feminine), like stories and archetypes more deeply into my work and my voice. I’m in awe at the power of story telling and its validity is now on par with my more analytical nature. Dr. Jean Houston, an expert on myth, in her new book, *Wizard of Us* (2012) discusses myth as a powerful tool for change. She says, “That is the power of myth. It is deep. It allows us to be more” (Location 294 Kindle edition). I think part of the benefit of learning the heroine’s myth archetype is that it isn’t a well-worn path or narrative. Unless one really seeks it out, it can be hard to know the clear steps. And clarity is a key facilitator of change in coaching. Additionally, I realize my Truce with Food program needs more space and room for reflection. It needs to provide women time to acclimate to trusting their voices which will surface with enough space. I’m currently considering making the fall version at least double the time. It will be the same amount of
content but provide more space in between sessions for more reflection and ease. This also includes doing in-class writing exercises to emphasize the importance of their own reflections.

This Capstone has also helped me understand that coaching, which I think of as a healing modality like acupuncture in that the client is using her own powers to shift patterns, has strong feminine qualities, especially when approached from a Client Centered Approach. Having grown up playing sports, I always think of coaching as more masculine by its nature. But in reality, it’s a collaboration of equals who are trying to come together for the greater good. I cannot think of anything as equally feminine and masculine than that.

Most importantly, I realize the stories that are not told are usually the ones that influence us the most in terms of “getting in our way”. For in this space, are the parts of our institutions and ourselves that need to be found. Knowing this, I am more able to discover how to learn for myself. I am looking for what is not being said as much as what is being said. It has given me a new definition not just of the feminine and stories, but of education. This is a guide, especially for adults and hopefully for myself one day in raising my child.

As for next steps, aside from pursuing a deeper understanding of facilitating Immunity to Change, I will adapt these teachings into a consumer book to help spread these ideas and to continue to bring it to my real life-coaching clients. While I understand my process is not for everyone, it is certainly for many. One of my favorite Rumi quotes is, “What you seek is seeking you.” I always ask my clients what their
health goals want from them. It encourages them to think about the process of becoming and what characteristics one must develop to arrive at the goal. As I now deeply understand, that spade is where the learning leaps happen. I have taken the heroine’s journey a couple of times in my life. But like Murdock (1990) notes, it’s circular and never finished. I believe this Capstone and book is now asking me to embody what I have just discovered, especially trusting the natural cycle of the feminine and the importance of leisure for leisure’s sake. Having been in school now for seven years, I’m not quite sure what I find restorative. As always, the learning begins.
REFERENCES


