

CHAPTER III

3.1 Body, Buddhism and Socialization

Body, Buddhism and the process of socialization of Thai women are the key themes of this chapter. Theories of the body are highly relevant to Thai society, which is so noticeably concerned with the physical bodies of its citizens. Body theorems are currently en vogue among the sociological and anthropological set of scholars, which has created a plethora of theories that one may apply to any and all cultures. In this chapter I will give a brief summary of key theories of the body that help to illustrate the Thai construct of the social body.

Popular Thai Buddhism in general, maps the body and the Thai worldview. I use this term 'popular' to indicate that the Thai practice of Buddhism is intertwined with other spiritual traditions linked to Brahmanism and animism. Buddhism is a religious tradition that is greatly influenced by thoughts on and about the body. This chapter will examine the Buddhist worldview of the body and the view of the female body in particular.

The aim of this survey of body theorems and popular Thai Buddhism is twofold: to apply the fundamental elements of the bodily pollution theory promulgated by anthropologist Mary Douglas and to assess the implications the consequent worldview has on women in the sport of Muay Thai, otherwise known as Thai boxing. It is my contention that the Buddhist preoccupation with the body and its fear of bodily contamination relates directly to the restrictions placed on female Muay Thai competitors.

The issue of gender and Thai women has become of particular interest in the area of Thai studies in recent years. Books, seminars and numerous papers have been written on the position and role of Thai women in the areas of economy, politics and the family but what has come to light is that the issue of gender is the overriding factor that determines women's access and treatment in these various spheres. In the latter half of this chapter I discuss the agents of socialization for Thai women and furthermore to postulate that in the move towards modernization the focus of socialization has shifted from the family onto the peer group.

It is here that I wish to define the key terms in the above paragraph: Socialization and Gender. Socialization is the learning process that transmits cultural content to the individual, which facilitates their successful interaction within the society. It is a process that starts at birth and continues until death. However, the most important years within the process occur during childhood and early adolescence. The agents of socialization include parents, peers, teachers, institutions such as organized religion, media and popular culture including games, folktales and literature. Gender is more ambiguously defined as many people do not make the distinction between it and biological sex. In the past, phenomenon that are now ascribed to gender were called sex-roles. At present there is a consensus among scholars on gender that it connotes the psychological aspects of behavior exhibited by the sexes. For the purpose of this thesis I define gender as a cultural construct related to biological sex representing a dichotomy of social and psychological behaviors.

3.2 Body and Buddhism

Thai society has high levels of awareness about the body and its relation to other bodies within the society. Embodied displays of submission support societal norms of hierarchy and patriarchy. Social restraints on the body apply to men and women but there are many more restrictions placed on females. The over regulation of female bodies, the space they occupy, and the actions they perform contribute to sustaining the status quo of male dominance.

The *wai* is the standard greeting of the Thais. It should not be equated to the western custom of the handshake as there are rules governing the initiation, position, and return of this gesture. These rules relate to the social status of the actors. Following the rules of the *wai* reinforces the social structure by means of a purely physical act, which ritualizes submission to the hierarchy.

The Thais emphasize the significance of the head and feet as polar opposites of the body. The head is the top of the body and the residence of the *khwan* or spiritual essence. It is taboo among the Thais to touch the head of another. The *khwan* concept is superimposed upon other entities such as houses and villages. I believe it is also linked to the Muay Thai ring, which leads to the restriction placed

on women by which they must enter the ring under the ropes rather than over them as men do (to be discussed more fully in the section dealing directly with Muay Thai).

The feet, as opposed to the head, are the least sacred part of the body. Use of the feet for a purpose other than walking is frowned upon. Feet should not be used to point at an object or person. They should not be used to push or hold objects such as doors. People must be conscious of the position of their feet while sitting so as not to unintentionally point them towards another person or sacred image such as the Buddha image or King. This brief litany on the feet exposes the body awareness necessary to all Thais in order to conform to societal precepts.

In addition to the previously mentioned bodily sanctions, women must conform to other proscriptions governing their bodies. There are restrictions on the physical space that women may occupy. Women must avoid contact with monks. While both monks and women act to uphold this precept the system of hierarchy places the burden more fully on women, as they should make way for the monks. This has implications for women whenever they leave their own homes, as they must be conscious of a monk's presence and proximity.

The study of proxemics suggests that power, status and physical space are entwined. The amount of space allocated to individuals designates who is important and who has privilege. In the Thai social context it is clear that women have less power as it is mens' territory not womens' territory that is respected. In addition to the proximity of monks, women are also restricted from some areas within the temple grounds due to the presence of Buddhist relics. This restriction is based on the argument that women may pollute and detract from the mystical power of the artifacts. The concept of body pollution will be further discussed below; at this point it is noted as the underlying cause restricting the space that a womens' body may occupy.

3.2.1 Theories of the Body

"I think therefore I am" is the quintessential phrase that expressed early theories about the body. Rene Descartes, to whom these words are attributed, believed that his mind and not his body defined him. Cartesian thought separated

the mind and body implying that the body was just the house of the mind. The body, according to this idea did not influence the development of the mind. In the following centuries since Descartes espoused this idea there has been such a paradigm shift that some suggest that the body constitutes the self. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. New analysis of the body has shown that the physical self affects the mental self as well as vice versa. In the following paragraphs, I will detail some theories of the body which relate to Thai society in general and the situation of women in Muay Thai in particular.

The naturalistic concept purports that the body is the biological base on which the superstructure of society is organized. The capabilities and constraints of the body define the individual and generate the social, political, and economic relations between members of society. This view justifies the inequalities that are found within societies, which are often based on biological sex, race, and class. Such conceptions of the body are often used to justify the exclusion of women from various realms of activity including education, politics and sports. Gender inequality is cited as a direct result of females' weak and unstable bodies.

The implied weakness of the female body relates to early models of the human body, which were based on the male form. When bodies were first studied female anatomy corresponded with male anatomy and was described as a gradient of the male form. An example of this was the likening of the female clitoris to an underdeveloped penis. By the 19th century the female body became a polar opposite to the male body. Differences were emphasized and similarities not discussed. The female body was open to penetration and great expulsions either during childbirth or monthly menstruation. The weakness of such an open system with unprotected borders seemed self-evident to many scholars of the time (Shilling, 1993). Menstruation was dubbed the eternal wound, which corresponded well with the weak women discourse.

The physical inferiority of the female body constructed by the naturalistic conception of the body was strengthened by the actions of women themselves. Many women who limited their actions according to what society deemed appropriate internalized the message of the weak woman discourse. This reaction was generally confined to the upper levels of society where women were at their leisure. The "physically inferior woman" in lower levels of society was too busy performing

manual labor in industry and agriculture to be concerned with such social constructs.

Women may have helped promulgate this idea of the weaker sex in order to escape certain duties and obligations. Cases of the weaker sex argument are used to this day as any physical education teacher can attest; female students often use their menstruation as a ticket out of class. With this in mind, one must begin to question if it is the biology that creates this so-called weakness or is it actually the societies' compliance to the idea of weakness that shapes the physical body of the sex. Such questioning is answered by the social construction theory of the body.

Social constructionists conceptualize the body as the outcome of social forces, which act on and form the incomplete body. From the first breathe of life, and now with pre-natal sex determination even before, the body is culturally mapped according to gender, race, and class. Bodies are developed in ways that are seen to have value in social fields (Shilling, 1993). In Thailand this is clearly defined in terms of the male/female polarity cultivating boxers and beauty queens respectively.

The body is at the center of the nature/culture, biology/society debate. The two previous body theories are representative of these opposing views. A middle path between these two concepts is more comprehensive. The body is formed both by it's natural biological state and transformed and molded as it grows by the social forces exerted on it.

The gendered body concept promulgated by R. Connell, is useful in understanding the development of current male and female body forms and actions. He emphasizes that societies exaggerate the differences between male and female bodies. Furthermore, men and women are scripted by socialization to fulfill these bodily expectations. The idea of gender difference is embodied and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gender training creates women who are weaker and less capable in the sporting arena.

The concept of the commoditized body in the age of capitalism and modernization explain the overwhelming concern of modern people with body image. In Thailand the shift from an agrarian based economy to that of a market-based economy has led to a shift in ideal body image. The influence of the capitalist economy has created new bodily norms often shaped by marketing. The ideal shape for the male body has become increasingly muscular and that of the female body has

become increasingly thin. The new economy and the progression of women into important roles within the public sphere has led men to redefine themselves in terms of their physical appearance. The hyper-musculature that can be achieved by men is rarely physically attainable by women (due to lack of time for physical development caused by the double burden of women in regards to work inside and outside of the home). Furthermore, muscle in women is socially undesirable and few women challenge the social norm.

The body has become a source of physical capital. The body can be used to transform physical shape, size and ability into economic gain. For men there are more opportunities to translate physical capital into other forms. Men may participate in many forms of manual labour and a wide range of sporting activities for which they receive direct payment or generate social networks, which can later be translated into economic gains. Women's physical capital is less likely to be transformed into other sources of capital and is often controlled by their male relatives.

In Thailand male physical capital can be translated into great economic gain in the area of sports in particular Muay Thai. Thai women frequently translate their physical capital into economic gain through beauty contest and prostitution. The difference being that men actively work to develop their bodies and women passively keep their bodies and add to their marketability by applying work to the body's surface rather than transforming it internally.

Thai society is highly conscious of the body and how it interacts and interprets social values, hence these theories of the body have great relevance to the discourse on Thai culture. All of these ideas go some way towards deconstructing the superstitions and traditions, which limit women's participation in competitive Muay Thai. I will discuss these points further after a brief discussion of the popular religion in Thailand, which also factors into the limitations equation.

3.2.2 Popular Religion in Thailand

According to government statistics, over 95% of Thai citizens are Buddhist. However, Buddhism is supplemented by elements of Hinduism and animism, which constitute the popular religion of the country. These three religious traditions fill

different roles in the spiritual lives of Thai people. Buddhism serves the social formation through the Sangha and the mutual dependence of the monks and the laity. Animism has a therapeutic function for the people's day to day lives rooted in this earthly realm. Brahminism is used in court rituals creating a supernatural aura around the King. Many Thai Buddhist incorporate these religious traditions into their spiritual lives as Buddhist temples themselves often do. Some temples contain urns of holy water, fortune telling, and monks who perform tattooing in the Brahmanistic tradition none of which are part of canonical Buddhism.

Buddhism is a philosophy that was promulgated as a reaction to Hinduism in ancient India. It has since been adopted as a religion in many regions of Asia although its' popularity in the area of its' inception is notably the lowest in the area. The Thai people adopted the Theravada tradition of Buddhism, which is also known as the way of the elders. It is distinguished from the Mahayana tradition or that of "the great vehicle" by its' use of Pali rather than Sanskrit language and its focus on the original teachings of the Buddha as handed down from the first elders. It is also more focused on the individuals responsibility towards the ascertainment of spiritual enlightenment rather than the more altruistic goals of Mahayana Buddhism. Both traditions are based on the doctrine of the four noble truths:

All life is suffering (Dukkha)

Suffering is caused by desire (Tanha)

The cessation of dukkha

The way leading to cessation of dukkha is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consist of:

Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration (Titmuss, 1999).

3.2.3 Buddhism and the Body

The Buddhist tradition is strongly focused on the body. Theravada Buddhism, which is the form practiced in Thailand, focuses on individual detachment from worldly concerns. The physical body is often the focus of this detachment and a common source of revulsion in the Buddhist world view as

evidenced by this quote from the Therigatha, a text that is part of the Pali canonical scriptures attributed to female followers of the Dhamma, verses 466-471:

Why should I cling to this foul body, impure, smelling of urine, a frightful water bag of corpses, always flowing, full of impure substances? The body is soon carried out to the cemetery, devoid of consciousness: it is thrown away like a log by disgusted relatives. If anyone were dissecting it, were to make the inside outside, even one's own mother would be disgusted, being unable to bear the smell (Hanegraaff & Kloppenborg, 1995, 168).

One must learn that the body is impermanent and that desire is linked to the body of oneself and others. According to a translation from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu of the Kayagata-sati Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya subsection of the Tipitaka (Pali language text that forms the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism) a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body in the following manner:

"...if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, picked at by crows, vultures, & hawks, by dogs, hyenas, & various other creatures... a skeleton smeared with flesh & blood, connected with tendons... a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons... a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons... bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions -- here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull... the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells... piled up, more than a year old... decomposed into a powder: He applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.' (Tipitaka text available from www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/majjhima/mn119.html).

Desire is the cause of all suffering and it is the goal of Buddhism to eliminate this suffering. One of the greatest bodily desires is sexual and hence the physical bodies of women are considered dangerous to men and vice versa. Both of the following verses are attributed to the Buddha in the Pariyadana Sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya subsection of the Tipitaka regarding this problem:

"Monks, I do not see any other single form that invades the mind of a man and remains like the form of a woman. Monks, the form of a woman invades the mind of a man and remains.

Monks, I do not see any other single form that invades the mind of a woman and remains like the form of a man. Monks, the form of a man invades the mind of a woman and remains" (Tipitaka text available from www.quangduc.net/English/canon/sutta/angutarra/an01.html).

However, the negative influence of mens' bodies over women has long been overshadowed by the concern about the influence of womens' bodies on men in popular Buddhism.

3.2.4 Buddhism and Women

Buddhism is often charged with being gender biased and a force contributing to continued gender inequality in the countries where it is practiced. Eminent Thai Buddhist scholar Chatsumarn Kabilsingh argues that Buddhism dealing directly with the spiritual path is free from gender bias but other teachings have been affected by the social context of both the Buddhas' time and the current period (Chatsumarn, 1991, p.24). In addition, their male interpreters may further bias the Buddhist text.

The debate over gender equality and/or discrimination has roots in the earliest period of Buddhism, during the lifetime of the Buddha himself. When the Buddha first organized the society of monks, or Sangha, no female followers of the Buddha were admitted into the monastic order. After three attempts Ananda, the Buddha's preeminent adherent, convinced the Buddha to allow females entrance into the Sangha. The female monks, or Bhikkhunis, were treated differently from their male counterparts, or Bhikkhu, from the outset of the order. The Bhikkhunis had more precepts to follow, were restricted from activities such as climbing mountains and reclusive forest meditative retreats, and were subject to the male hierarchy in which they were lower in rank than the newest ordained Bhikkhu despite their own seniority within the Sangha. In fact, the admittance of women into the Sangha was said to shorten the longevity of the tradition by five hundred years. Despite these instances of discriminatory practices in early Buddhism it was,

at the time, the most liberal and equal relationship in existence between men and women. It was even admitted at this time that men and women were equally capable of achieving enlightenment, a spiritual equality not present in other religious traditions of the day.

Many restrictions placed on the Bhikkhunis served to protect the women from harm or the Bhikkhu from desire. Oft cited as an example of gender bias in Buddhism is the following discussion between Ananda and the Buddha with regards to how one should behave towards women:

The Buddha: 'Do not see them, Ananda'.

'But if we have to see them, what are we to do?'

'Do not talk to them, Ananda'.

'But if we are spoken to, Lord, what are we to do?'

'Remain established in mindfulness' (Hanegraaff & Kloppenborg, 1995, p.152).

Some scholars interpret this passage as a general belief in Buddhism that all women are seductresses who would revel in the destruction of a monk's piety. Alternately, the passage may be interpreted as concern for the monk's vow of celibacy and how he may maintain it in the face of his own unbidden desire for women. Whichever interpretation, women are construed as dangerous to monks by their bodily presence alone. The danger of the female body is further extrapolated to pertain to all things and places deemed sacred. In the following paragraphs, I shall delineate some instances of the body-based restrictions and taboos placed on Thai Buddhist men and women as well as illustrate the negative image of women in popular Thai Buddhism, which reinforces the perception of female bodily pollution.

3.2.5 Thai Buddhist Tradition and Women

Women in Thailand are restricted from entry into the Sangha. As aforementioned, a female order was established during the time of the Buddha but Thai Theravada Buddhist did not adopt the Bhikkhuni tradition. The main roll of female Buddhist is to provide sons for the monkhood and alms for monks. These duties are rooted in worldly attachments based on bodily and material functions

such as motherhood and economic activities, which serve to further alienate female Buddhist from the goal of spiritual enlightenment achieved by cessation of desire.

3.2.6 Popular Thai Buddhist Worldview of Women

The *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, written approximately in the year 1345 AD by Phya Lithai an heir to the Sukhothai-Srisachanalai throne and later to become King, is a sermon based on the Theravada Tradition with sources from various holy texts. It was composed with the intention of making the Dhamma more accessible to the laity. The text was composed in the Thai language rather than the canonical language of Pali. Furthermore, the text was frequently used as a source of monk's sermons to the people and often the inspiration for mural paintings in Thai temples. To this day the text is studied as a pillar of classical Thai literature and is well known by the general population.

The *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, which translates to *Three Worlds According to King Ruang* is based on the cosmological order of Buddhism. The three worlds can be loosely equated with the western conception of heaven, earth and hell or the underworld. In one section of the text entitled Female spirits a woman's punishment for various evil deeds during earthly life are detailed.

'One kind of female spirit is always naked and their bodies smell from every pore....These female spirits eat the flesh of their own children because they cannot stand the gnawing hunger. As human beings, they gave medicine to pregnant women to abort their babies....The next of the female spirits are ugly and naked. They are always hungry. When they see food and water before them and they pick out what they want to eat, the food and water turns into feces, blood clots, and pus. When they see a piece of cloth, they wish to wear it; but the cloth turns into burning-hot iron sheets when they try to cover their bodies. These departed spirits, when being human, were angry with their husbands when their husbands gave food, water and cloth to the monks and they cursed them...' (National Identity Board, 1992, p. 23-25).

The *Thrai Phum* is a central text in popular Buddhism in Thailand in which the major theme is the hierarchical structure of the cosmos and the position of women below men within that system. The above quotation elucidates the negative attitude toward women that is inherent in the Thai Buddhist worldview. The popular teaching of this text leads to the acceptance of this negative stereotype by both men and women. It illustrates women's evil in their propensity to kill the unborn, begrudge charity towards monks and, finally, to curse the embodiment of Buddhism, the monks themselves.

The Jataka tales are pre-Buddhist Indian folktales that were adapted to illustrate the doctrine of karma in the years following the Buddha's death. By the fifth century AD most of the Jataka stories dealt with the previous lives of the Buddha. The most famous Jataka tale is the Vessantara Jataka, which is the story of the last incarnation of the Buddha before his rebirth into the life in which he became the Buddha. In this tale, Vessantara gained great merit by giving away all his possessions including his children and wife. It demonstrates his commitment to detachment from this world by his willingness to give up his most beloved family. While however noble this action may be on the part of Vessantara it also illustrates the position of women and children as possessions of men who can not act with freewill. It is an example of the submissive image of the female, which is conceived as the ideal female in the Buddhist worldview. Vessantara's wife Maddi is quoted as saying: "From maidenhood I was his wife, he is my master still. Let him to whom so he desire or give, or sell, or kill.." (Kornvipa, 1989, p.37).

The Jatakas often operate to reinforce gender stereotypes and support the hierarchical structure of Thai society. The Gahapati Jataka portrays women as spiritually weak and intentionally seeking to disrupt a man on his path to spiritual enlightenment. This is also the theme in the Takka Jataka. The stories are depicted in popular drama, mural paintings and Buddhist sermons. The negative portrayals of women in the Jataka Tales helps to justify the restrictions placed on women by the society which are supported by both male and female Buddhist. The popularity of these stories effects the consciousness of Thai women and their self-image. They are socialized to accept subordination and oppression in return their moral goodness is visibly rewarded by outer beauty.

Apart from the popular Buddhist text that form the Buddhist worldview of women, general wisdom proclaims that birth as a female is the result of bad karma. This is never specifically written in the Buddhist canonical texts but it is assumed due to the inability of Thai women to gain merit through entrance into the Sangha and the belief that one of the highest spiritual attainments, that of a Bodhisatva, is only possible for males.

3.2.7 Women's Bodies and Popular Thai Buddhism

According to the evidence provided above, women in the Thai Buddhist worldview are often portrayed as weak, subservient, worldly and dangerous if not outright evil. The dangerous aspect of women is often manifest in their bodies either by the female forms' ability to seduce men or the polluting quality of female bodily fluids. The fear of menstruating women is not derived from canonical Buddhist text but may be related to animistic and Brahmanistic traditions incorporated into Thai Buddhism. Moreover the fear of pollution by menstrual blood is by no means restricted to Thai culture but is frequently observed in tribal cultures throughout the world (Douglas, 1966). Strictly speaking, it is the fear that menstrual blood will pollute and negate the magical powers of charms and sacred people, places and/or things that facilitates societies need to place restrictions on women. As it is impossible to know when a woman may be in this dangerous situation the result is a permanent ban on all women at all times from areas where they might cause pollution. It is through this reasoning that women are forbidden to enter some temple compounds for fear of defiling sacred relics kept within.

The order of pollution attributed to females extends to their entire bodies in the case of female interactions with members of the Sangha. Women are forbidden from touching a monk for to do so would contaminate the monk. According to John Van Esterik in his article, *Women Meditation Teachers In Thailand*, "Women are doctrinally polluting in their effect on monks, since any slight, even accidental physical contact between a monk and a woman must be ritually expiated" (Van Esterik, John, 1996, p.36).

Monks are restricted in their behavior towards women mainly due to fear of pollution from bodily contact with females. A monk must not sit next to or sleep under the same roof as a woman. He may not give a robe to a woman or communicate with a woman after sundown without the permission of other members of the Sangha. They must not go on a journey with women or teach more than five or six lines of the Dhamma to a woman at one time due to the supposed lack of female intellect. Many of these restrictions function to limit the power of women and sustain the patriarchal hierarchy in which men are the vessels of knowledge and spirituality and women are the material base for this worldly existence.

In the previous pages I have summarized the relationship between Buddhism, popular Buddhism and women as it pertains to the worldview of the Thais and their perception of women. I have endeavored to provide this overview to set the stage for the psychological background that frames the restrictions and limitations placed on women in the Muay Thai arena. First, I shall more thoroughly explain the overriding theory of bodily pollution that pertains to this subject matter by way of eminent anthropologist Mary Douglas's thesis on purity and danger.

3.3 Mary Douglas: Purity and Danger

According to the anthropologist Mary Douglas it is in human nature to classify people, places and things. Typically these classifications are often expressed in opposing categories such as right/left, male/female, and sacred/profane. There is a perceived danger when these categories overlap or the lines between the discrete categories become blurred. It is most often the function of ritual to maintain the separation and demarcation between these polarities.

The dichotomy of the sacred and the profane pertains to the bodily pollution fears expressed by Buddhism regarding women. Many societies have ritual behaviour concerning menstruation. Often this entails physical and or social isolation of the female during this time. The danger may be explained by the uncertain state of the female during this process. Women during menstruation may not be categorized in either of the typical female bodily states; pregnant or capable of conception. It is this blurring of the boundaries of womanhood, the danger of the transitional state, as well as the fear of bodily discharges in general that creates the

perception of pollution. Pollution, or more simply put dirt, is an object out of place be it toilet paper in the kitchen, shoes on the table, or blood out of the body.

At a more basic level, all bodily discharges both of women and men are considered polluting, potentially dangerous, and dangerous to both the polluter and others that may come in contact with the offending item(s). The body should be a perfect container with no physical emissions that may weaken it. The protective power of the tattoo used throughout Thailand to ward off bad spirits is vulnerable during urination and ejaculation, both are times when a man is unleashing part of his inner strength into the world outside his body. Bodily discharges or pairings hold strong magic that can be used in black magic such as Thai love potions that may contain menstrual fluid, corpse oil, and feces. The more polluted, dirty or disgusting the substances used in black magic the stronger the spell.

Ritual is a symbolic action that relates to the sacred and sustains societal relationships and roles. Focusing on a ritual creates a framework for experience and provides a means of focus as well as an expectation of the ensuing events. An individual is construed as polluting by disregarding ritual actions and etiquette. Such anomalous behaviour threatens to collapse the structure of the society.

A parallel danger can be drawn between female members of the Sangha and women in Muay Thai. Women in these positions cause bodily pollution as a result of menstruation and threaten the patriarchal hierarchy of Thai society by crossing the ritualistic lines that divide the sexes. It is in part the spiritual basis of the Muay Thai tradition that embeds the modern sport with a worldview that restricts women's actions due to both the perception of female physical weakness and their psychological power over men. In the following pages, I will explore the implications of the Thai Buddhist worldview towards women on the sport while seeking to explain the restrictions placed on women in Muay Thai using the above pollution theory.

3.3.1 Pollution Theory and Muay Thai

Over the years superstition has developed around Muay Thai and the presence of women in or near the ring. Women are forbidden to enter the Muay Thai ring or function as coaches on the outer ring during a male fight. Nor are they

allowed to touch the sacred item, the mongkon or headband, used by the fighter during a contest. The reason for such restrictions appears to be fear of contaminating the magic in the ring as well as stories of bad luck linked to a female presence in the ring prior to fight time. Similarly, women are not allowed to train in the same ring as male fighters, again due to the perception of women's strong magic endangering the magic of the male fighter. Informants have directly stated that female menstruation was the source of the perception of pollution linked to these restrictions.

Women are also required to enter the ring between rather than over the top of the ropes as their male counterparts do. This is linked to the *khwan* concept of spiritual essence, which is located at the top of the body, or in this case, structure. The *khwan* is the magic of the ring and may be defiled by females placing themselves above it. This is a metaphorical allusion to the hierarchy, which is part of the Thai social structure. Generally speaking, the Thai hierarchical structure places women below men and sacred objects such as Buddhist relics and in this case the Muay Thai ring.

Female Muay Thai practitioners are an anomaly in Thailand. This creates the state of pollution caused by marginal people who do not subscribe to societal norms. The power of their pollution, which is defined as matter out of place, has the ability to challenge the existing social structure. It creates danger in Thai society where the lines of structure in ritual are clearly defined as explained previously in the description Thai Buddhism. Women in a position of power threaten the patriarchal basis of Thai society.

3.4 Socialization

3.4.1 Group Socialization Theory

General theories on the process of socialization contend that it is facilitated by the primary social institutions of family, school and religion with parents cited as the prime socializing agents. Recently, the work of Judith Rich Harris and other psychologist has called this perspective into question. Harris, in her article entitled, " *Where is the child's environment? A group socialization theory of*

development”, posits that peer groups are more influential in the socialization process of children and adolescents (1995). The group socialization theory, henceforth referred to as GS, asserts that peer groups filter the input of all other socializing agents such as parents, teachers, and the mass media and then transmit what is deemed typical or approved behavior to their members. GS further details the process by describing the parent not as an individual agent but also as a peer group member of that age cohort.

GS theory is particularly applicable to the new social realities of Thailand in this age of modernization. The process of modernization in Thailand has entailed mass migrations from rural to urban areas facilitating the break up of the traditional family unit. Many rural migrants leave home in their early adolescence to work in urban areas often surrounded by hundreds of people in the same situation. The source of social support and approval is transposed from the family to the peer group.

3.4.2 Gender Socialization

The process of socialization begins at birth and now, with technologies such as ultra sound and genetic testing, during fetal development in the womb. The first question about any baby usually is: boy or girl? In the West this biological fact is symbolically infused with gender stereotypes that initially include the colour dichotomy of pink/blue respectively for girls and boys. The situation in Thailand is different not in the presence of this gendered dichotomy but in its material manifestation which is a notebook in the cradle for boys and a sewing kit in the cradle for girls representing societies expectations for the sexes regarding family and education.

Children recognize gender constancy; the fact that ones own gender and the gender of others will not change, at three years of age. From this time onwards they may socialize their peers in gender roles. Children learn gender roles mainly by imitation and internalization through identification with role models of the same sex. The role models may be parents, siblings and/or peers. Children generally are not directly instructed in how to conform to gender expectations but they are

frequently discouraged from displaying behaviours that are culturally considered inappropriate.

3.4.3 Women in Thailand

Thai women have become one of the main commodities of Thai cultural capital. But what is it that they are selling? Picture books marketed to foreign tourist include such titles as the "*Women of Thailand*" along side other depictions of Thai cultural treasures such as Buddhism, architecture, and world heritage sites. In this context, Thai women are depicted as the epitome of beauty and grace, two key components of the traditionally "good" Thai woman.

The stereotypical "good" women is easily recognized in Thai culture whether presented in drama, literature, art, the media, Buddhism, government social policy, or school texts. A list of "good" attributes for Thai women includes beauty, grace, neat, sweet smelling, polite, virginal, pure, ornamental, nurturing, dutiful, sexually faithful, self-controlled, self-sacrificing, subservient, obedient, respectful of authority, physically weak, and motherhood. Such is the standard that Thai women are expected to uphold in order to be respected members of society. Often these expectations are at odds with the social reality of ordinary woman who often have to forego the surface manifestations of this stereotype due to economic necessities. Nevertheless, Thai women are regarded as both ...*flowers for the bees to suck honey from* and ...*flowers of the nation* indicative of the high value placed on feminine beauty.

3.4.4 Culturally Ascribed Gender Roles

In *The making of a Thai Woman*, Panit Boonyavatana suggest that most Thai women would agree that the typical characteristics of a Thai woman were sweet, motherly, well-mannered, pleasing, loving (1999, p.1). This description may well encompass the characteristics of women the world over but in Thailand the role and station of mother is of utmost importance. The life of women as mothers has confined them to the private sphere of the home until recently when the industrialization process of Thailand created the need for labourers and Thai women

answered the call. Still it may be seen that many of the preferred attributes of women are linked to this domestic past. The transition of Thailand into a highly materialistic culture has left a void between traditional attitudes and lifestyles and the new, often urban, reality. The new gender roles and reported equality between the sexes are much like the westernized appearance of many Thais, only an application of surface display with a traditional Thai worldview underneath.

Sila Khomchai depicts an example of this duality, between traditional and modern women, in the short story *Choice of Life*. The main character chooses between a woman who represented the ideal characteristics of a lady in traditional society and a modern professional woman in the capital city of Bangkok. The country girl, Wipha, is thus described, "...sweet and well-mannered...she was good at house work and administering to others' needs. She was cool and calm..." (Suvanna 1992, p.146). The qualities of a good wife in Thai society were also discussed, "A lady-like manner, proper behaviour, and obedience were still qualities men were searching for" (Suvanna, 1992, p.146). In the end, the main character chooses the city girl due to her ability to help him in the increasingly difficult modern world that is Bangkok.

3.5 Female Gender Socialization in Thailand

3.5.1 Family

Family is the initial and traditional location for socialization in Thailand, but as discussed previously this is changing although it's still an important agent of the process in the preschool years. Children are clearly gendered within the Thai family institution. Gender roles and associated behaviours are drastically different for boys and girls. Family work is segregated with girls expected to stay at home acting as mothers' helper while boys work in the fields, care for buffaloes and play. The girls are kept close to home and are not allowed the freedom of movement that boys possess. Due to girls' proximity to, or within, the house they are under constant observation and scrutiny reducing their proclivity for independence and increasing the burden of responsibility. Boys' activities, which take them far afield, allow for

independence and fewer interactions with authority figures, which reduces their accountability.

3.5.2 Peer Group

Peer group interactions occur at school age or prior to that depending on the size of the village or social network of any given family. Children's play is a key tool and reflection of the peer group socialization process. In a study of children's games in a village community in Thailand, Anderson noted the boy/girl split in activities especially after the children were of school age (1980). Girls played games such as house, dolls, and store whereas boys played games that were more physically active and competitive as well as a game role playing ordination into the monkhood, a male only activity. She also noted that there were no games that pitted the boys against the girls although they often played similar, or the same games, side by side in the playground. Finally, in a mixed group game similar to leapfrog, the boys of school age insisted that when the girls jumped over them they mustn't leap over their heads but across their backs. This stipulation is a reflection of the cultural constructions of taboos against females due to fears of menstrual pollution, hierarchy of males, and the sacredness of the head.

3.5.3 School

In the school environment, children and teachers actively inculcate gender roles. The children typically divide the class seating arrangement boys vs. girls. Many teachers encourage them to do so and according to GS theory the peer group assess this sanction, based on gender, finds it acceptable and therefore adopts it as their own. Consequently, teachers who counter this trend face strong opposition from the students.

Teachers frequently choose activities for students based on their gender and the expectations Thai society places on children according to their gender. They typically assign tasks requiring responsibility to girls and those requiring strength to boys. They also reinforce the "good" woman stereotypes common in Thailand emphasizing the domesticity, obedience and beauty aspects of the myth.

Thai schools indoctrinate children in gender roles by the very clothes they wear to class. All students from pre-school up to university level are required to wear uniforms to school. Girls wear skirts and boys wear shorts or pants. Girls are taught how to move properly in this attire in order to conform to social standards of proper conduct. This often limits the activities that girls can participate in without risking the revelation of their underpants and incurring social censure.

A survey of Thai school textbooks found them to uphold and perpetuate prevalent gender stereotypes. The study, published in 1983, found that more male characters than female characters were portrayed. Male characters occupied more professional fields, 72 compared with females in 23, and with greater frequency, 813 characters compared with 242 female characters (Thanitthar, 1983, p.44-43). The school text portrayed females most frequently as mothers, this being the main social function of women in Thai society. The occupational category of "father" is not even present in the list of male occupations but the category "monk", a position unavailable to women, is cited as the most frequently held occupation for men. This is a clear demonstration of gender role stereotyping that is taught within schools that socializes women to limit their occupational aspirations and accept their role within the family as mothers.

Finally, extracurricular activities are often divided along the lines of gender. Girls are encouraged to learn various handicrafts that accentuate her feminine gentility such as fruit carving, paper folding, and needlepoint. All of these activities are related to the future domesticity of women and have no practical application. Furthermore, these activities are done without reference to others as a solitary activity. Boys activities usually involve sports such as football and takraw which facilitates group interaction, leadership, team work, competition and development of physical strength.

In sum, the Thai school system is a toxic environment for Thai women as it perpetuates gender role stereotypes that are used to reduce the opportunities available to them in life. The insidiousness of the socialization process is such that inequalities are proliferated to the detriment of the very people promoting them albeit often unconsciously.

3.5.4 Religion

According to popular Buddhist thought, beauty is a physical sign of merit. This is true for both men and women but whereas men are considered to have greater merit based on the fact of their sex alone a woman's beauty can never be equivocated with the merit presumed inherent in the male sex. The prevalent belief of Thai women is that to be born a woman is a sign of bad karma, which requires them to make merit sufficient for three lives if they wish to be born as a man in the future.

As mentioned previously, women can not gain entrance in to the monkhood, the formal power structure of Buddhism. Although they are excluded from power, women are generally the most active in religious activities such as the giving of alms. They are expected to support the religion materially by providing food, money and their sons to perpetuate the Sangha. This exclusion of women is qualified by negative stereotypes of women in Buddhism. According to Kloppenborg in the article "Female Stereotypes in Early Buddhism" these stereotypes include:

A woman is stupid; a beautiful woman has no brains.

A girl should be a devoted daughter, and agree to the arrangements made for her by her parents and in-laws.

A woman is only concerned with her body, her clothes and her jewelry.

A woman is sensual and seductive, and should therefore be under male control.

Children and relatives are a central concern in a woman's life. Female reproduction is painful and having children binds women to the world of matter.

Women who are old are ugly and useless. A women's body as an example of impermanence and decay (Hanegraaff and Kloppenborg, 1995, p.153-154).

The character Maddi, in the popular Jataka tale Vessantara, portrays woman as property. This Jataka is the story of the last incarnation of the Buddha before his birth as Prince Sidhartha. It is touted as the Thai national Jataka and as such is key to the Thai understanding of what it is to be Buddhist (Suwanna, 1997, p.244). Vessantara practices detachment from worldly concerns by giving freely of all he has

including his wife and two children. The wife, Maddi, dutifully obeys as first her children and then herself is given away like so much chattel. The tale clearly shows the authority of man over woman, the position of woman as property and the duty of women to obey their lord and master, the husband or father.

3.5.5 Popular Culture

Popular culture influences the socialization process of Thai women as it reflects both old and new gender roles on a daily basis. In this category of popular culture I include proverbs, media, fine arts, and literature. The popular culture of today's Thailand is a pastiche of ancient legends and folklore, sexist ad campaigns, stereotypical villains, and a trivialization of women in most arenas of public display.

The most frequently quoted Thai proverb stating the relationship between the sexes is that *women are the hind legs of the elephant and men are the front*. This is popularly believed to indicate both the fundamental supporting role of women and their place in the social hierarchy as well as their subservience to men. Several other proverbs illustrate gender stereotypes including women's inferiority, lack of intelligence, dependency on men for security and their duplicity. *Women are buffalo and men are their masters* has a clear enough meaning except perhaps to elaborate that buffalo are considered very stupid and it is a great insult to be called one. At beauty's finish a woman must turn to the *charm at the tip of the ladle* to maintain his interest. The fickleness and duplicity of women is depicted in the proverb *three days absence and your wife is another's*.

Television is a pervasive socialization agent throughout Thailand. Even the poorest villages have access to television and the gendered lives and lifestyles they display. One key component of the Thai television experience is the consumption of locally produced soap operas. Men and women alike are addicted to watching their soaps and follow the lives of the characters religiously. The soaps depict stereotypical, one-dimensional characters with female characters falling into two main roles either the "good girl" or "the bitch".

A Bangkok Post article entitled, "The Bitch is Back" highlights the stereotypical behaviour of the 'bad' and "good" girl role models for Thai women in

television soap operas (Bangkok Post, 11/07/99). The bitch is characterized as self-centered, short tempered, and sexy. She shamelessly pursues the male hero while tormenting the “good” girl. She wears low-cut, revealing clothes and dental-floss bikinis. According to actresses, the bitch is a much more rewarding character to play due to the fact that the “good” girl is only characterized by her grace and beauty leaving little scope for the actress. This duality of women is not a recent construct. In *The Defense of Polygamy* written in 1867 by Chaophraya Thiphakorawong, two contrasting yet stereotypical images of women are described. “Women are passive and submissive; the woman yields to the mans’ sexual relations...women are jealously possessive, ambitious, and ruthless, capable of murdering their own husbands in pursuit of ambition” (Reynolds, 1977, p. 25). It dovetails well with the good woman/ bad (bitch) woman dichotomy currently represented in the Thai media.

Commercials, both on television and in print, often perpetuate gender stereotypes. Due to their highly condensed format and frequent repetition, commercials penetrate the belief system of the viewer more directly than numerous different episode containing similar but not the exact same message. Adds in the Thai media often portray women as sexual objects such as the instance where a telephone company advertised it’s sales pitch on the almost naked butt cheek of a desirable woman. Other adds depict cultural norms that demoralize women an example being a commercial where a man is beset by his wife and his mistress insisting that he choose between them.

Newspapers have gender biased reporting and frequently depict women as victims. In the case of sports reporting gender bias is prevalent the world over. In Thailand, sports in general and in particular the sport of Muay Thai, which is a rite of passage for many Thai men, is reported with a strong gender bias against women. A male reporter writing on the first Asian Women’s Amateur Boxing Championship described the Thai women in negative terms and said little regarding the actual action of the fights. A female reporter for the same paper writing about the 5th Amateur Muay Thai World Championship described the fights in terms of the action indicating the boxers tactics and punches as well as describing the female competitor as lion-hearted. The style of reporting is notably different according to the gender of the reporter with a heavy bias shown by the male writer and obviously not objectionable to the editorial staff.

Newspapers in Thailand are well known for their sensationalization of violent crime and the excessive reporting thereof. Newspapers constantly have pictures of the most recent rape or murder victim plastered over the front page with a black rectangle over the eyes of the victim intended to hide her identity. I use the pronoun her in the previous sentence as almost all of these front-page spectacles are women. This type of reporting constantly bombards the public with the message that women are victims, weak and unable to defend themselves. The message oft repeated becomes self-fulfilling and a culture of learned helplessness and violence against women is perpetuated.

In the fine arts, paintings depict women as sexual objects subject to the force of men. This is a theme in ancient paintings as well as modern works of art. The mural painting at Wat KhongKharam has scenes of the following events: women taken prisoner by men, rape of said prisoners and finally punishment of the female prisoners for their sexual indiscretion by the very men who raped them. Another scene from Wat KhonKharam in Ratchaburi province represents men giving attentions to near naked women with extraordinarily large and stylized breast while the male characters remain fully clothed. Thus the paintings in this Wat illustrates that the inequality of Thai women is a continuation of social norms from a bygone era. Furthermore, this display of gender inequality is shown in a sacred place and imbedded with the authority of that place.

Thai literature is a rich hunting ground for examples of gender role constructs. Literary portrayals of women are limited to several stylized versions, which are as follows with corresponding text as illustrative examples:

The good woman- Si Phaendin, Trai Phum Phra Ruang, A Maxim for Ladies

The helpless woman- Ramakien

The duplicitous woman- Khun Chang Khun Phaen, Phra Law, Kae-The Horse Face Girl

Literature from all eras incorporates these idealized visions of women. Female characters who were, " passive and subservient were considered the ideal types in Ayutthaya periods' literature" (National Identity Board, 1992, p.53). They were considered the property of men and expected to be obedient, loyal, and dutiful to their husbands. The story of Chanthakhorop written in the early Rattanakosin Period is a didactic text, which cautions men against the stereotypical bad or fickle

woman. The tale begins, “ Here goes the tale of a wicked, treacherous woman that all noble young men should be advised against” (National Identity Board, 1992, p.81). In literature of the early 1900’s a perfect woman was described as having, “...all the good qualities of a mother in looking after her husband in times of sickness; a younger sister in time of play and joy; a wife for sexual pleasure and reproduction; a servant for her service” (Panit, 1999, p.3).

Thai literature also provides many examples of the sexual double standard regarding selection of mates and promiscuity. The following list of stories gives examples:

Si Phaendin, Khun Chang Khun Phaen, Sangtong, Kae-The Horse Face Girl, and the Ramakien.

The poet Sunthorn Phu best describes ideal female behavior. His advice for women, written in 1844, continues to be part of the school curriculum and is as follows:

Walk slowly. While walking, do not swing your arms too much...do not sway your breasts, do not run your fingers through your hair, and don’t talk...

Do not stare at anything, particularly a man, to the point where he can tell what’s going on in your mind...Do not run after men.

...Love and be faithful to your husband

...Be humble in front of your husband

...When your husband goes to bed, wai him at his feet every night without fail. When he has aches and pains, massage him, then you may go to sleep

...Get up before your husband and prepare water for him to wash...

While your husband is eating, sit and watch him nearby so that when he needs something he does not have to raise his voice. Wait until he finishes before you eat (Cooper, 1982, p.30).

Although many of these stories were written before the turn of the 20th century, with the exception of Si Phaendin, they have a current place as socialization agents of modern Thai women due to their ongoing popularity. These Thai literary classics are taught at all levels of education from primary to post-secondary and are often parlayed into films, television series and dramas.

3.6 Implications for Thai Women

The body is a very important sociological construct in the Thai worldview. It both forms and is formed by the culture. It is used to physically display the important concept of hierarchy and is restricted by the rule of patriarchy in Thai society. Of Thai bodies, the female body is the most restricted especially in the areas traditionally dominated by men: the Sangha and Muay Thai. Restrictions on the female body are justified by the popular Thai Buddhist worldview, which depicts women as lesser spiritual entities than men and also a danger to them.

The danger of womankind lies in the possibility of bodily pollution via menstruation and the anomalous behaviour that threatens the distinct constructions of dichotomies that support the social structure. The Buddhist canonical text as well as folk beliefs based in older religious traditions clearly display a fear of pollution by women. It is this well documented phenomenon of the embodied female menace to Buddhism that is applicable to the practice of Muay Thai and the restrictions placed on women in and out of the ring.

The process of gender socialization in Thai culture appears to be facilitated by all aspects of the females' life. At every turn a young girl is faced with societal expectations that force her to reduce and restrict her activities, as well as her chances in life for education, career opportunities and religious fulfillment. From earliest childhood, when a cradle is adorned with a sewing kit to the viewing in adulthood of sexually exploitive television commercials and serialization of Thai literary classics like Si Phaedin epitomizing the ideal Thai woman, the gender socialization process is occurring. The world is a gendered minefield through which Thai women must gracefully navigate.

In this new era of modernity, gender stereotypes prevail but are frequently in conflict with new ideas and social situations. In the thesis entitled, "We are not our Mothers", Mills described the conflict between tradition and modernity for female migrant workers in the Bangkok area (Mills, 1993). The disintegration of the traditional family and the substitution of peer group support systems has changed the dynamics of the socialization process among Thai youth and young adults

particularly women who in the past were kept close to home under parental supervision.

Group Socialization theory is applicable to the new social realities in Thailand especially the new Thai woman who confronts modernity and its conflict with traditional Thai values and norms. Many material expressions of modernity directly contrast with the stereotypical “good” girl image and may be directly associated with the “bad” girl or bitch role model portrayed in Thai soap operas. Peer group socialization can filter and transcend these discrepancies in ways that the institutions of family, school and religion can not. Acceptance among peers is more important than within families that are geographically distant.