

# Sacredness and Anorexia Nervosa: An Analysis of Moral Language in Pro-ana Blogs and Poetry

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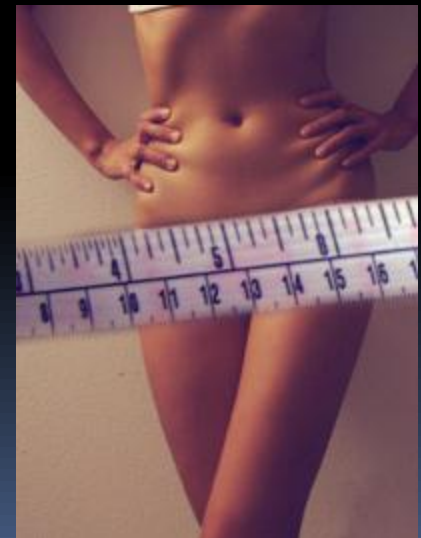


# Introduction

Anorexia Nervosa=

“individual refuses to maintain a minimally normal body weight, is intensely afraid of gaining weight, and exhibits a significant disturbance in the perception of the shape or size of his or her body.” (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2000, p.583)

- 20% mortality rate, recidivism rate over 50% (Brynolf, 2009)
- 2-5% of adolescents in West estimated to have it, 90% of them are women (Griffin & Berry, 2003)



# Pro-Ana (Anorexia Websites)

- emphasize and advertise grotesquely thin appearances
- advocate intense practices to achieve loss of weight
  - starvation, vomiting, laxatives, excessive exercise, but usually focuses on fasting techniques in contrast to pro-Mia websites (Giles, 2006)
- Viewership of sites correlates with higher body dissatisfaction, eating disturbances (Harper, Sperry & Thompson, 2008), increased perfectionism (Custers & Bulck, 2009), lower self-esteem (Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2006)

# Welcome to Ana Friends



3-5



... might be strong enough to bring order in the chaos that is

... worthless an useless person ever have to existed on  
... worthy of anyone's time and attention.

... holds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily

... THINGS  
... at Sod  
... A SERV

... some  
... an w  
... dy ar



ns

# Our Research



- Examines if certain patterns of moral word usage exist on pro-Ana/anorexia blogs and poetry by using Graham and Haidt's (2009) 5 moral dimensions and LIWC dictionary
- Specifically, we are interested if more words pertaining to sacredness (*disgust, purity*) and authority (*control, disobey, defy*) will be present in these sites
- Also, we're examining if more words pertain to ingroup loyalty (*loyal, together*) with ana-blogs



# AN and Moral Foundations

- Sacredness and AN
  - Ideational disgust– disgust of material which protects “the soul from harmful influences” (Rozin et al, 1999, p. 431)
  - “individuals with an eating disorder focus on the link between the body being disgusting and, by implication, that the self is therefore disgusting: disgust of the physical transfers to the spiritual.” (Troop & Baker, 2009, p. 234)

# Evidence for Ideational Disgust and AN

- AN and BN victims associate self-worth and self-esteem with weight and shape (Fairburn, Shafran & Cooper, 1999)
  - Ex: The Thin Commandments –10. Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success
- Pattern of pro-Ana users viewing Ana as superior identity due to greater self-discipline, strength of will, lack of gluttonous behavior in contrast to pro-Mia behavior (Giles, 2006)
  - Ex: “When I was mia I intentionally switched to Ana because mia is so disgusting...”
  - “....I’d always just have been pure ana, and can’t won’t throw up for the life of me. It’s just so dirty and gross” (p.468)

# Ideational Disgust and AN cont.



Evidence that people apply socio-moral values to eating behaviors

- Themes pertaining to purity and temptation in food advertising (Griffin & Berry, 2003)
- Magical thinking pertaining to eating food—aka “You are what you eat” (Nemeroff & Rozin, 1989)

# Sampling Methods

- Research=unobtrusive, naturalistic observation in public spaces

4 groups of samples:

- Pro-Ana blogs
- medical blog entries pertaining to eating disorders
- online pro-Ana poetry
- online mental illness poetry



# Sampling Procedure: Pro-Ana Blogs



- Search “pro-ana blog” under Google, Yahoo, Bing
- Look at first 10 pages of results (1<sup>st</sup> generation)
- Copy entries and obtain 500 words of text
- Take linked pro-ana blogs for sample (2<sup>nd</sup> generation)
- Exclude blogs that do not fit under our definition of pro-Ana, have a theme outside of AN, entries do not add up to 500 words or more
- Record date, time of search, search results, whether it’s first or second generation, author/user

# Eating Disorder Medical Blogs



- Search “eating disorder medical blog” on the 3 search engines
- Take entries pertaining to EDs in general— not entries specifically pertaining to bulimia nervosa, compulsive overeating, binge disorder, rare EDs (e.g. Pica disorder)
- Entries combined must be at least 500 words
- Must be from medical experts, authors of published ED books, journalists from well-known newspapers, universities, clinics
- Medical personnel= MD, RD, Ph.D, RD, MS, MA, LMSW, DMSW, MD, LP, LMFT, PsyD.
- Take first 10 pages with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation sites

# Pro-Ana Poetry

- Search “pro-Ana poetry”
- Take first 300 words of poetry from pro-Ana sites
- Whatever the author deems as poetry is poetry
- Exclude poem if it comes up again under different website
- Take first 10 pages with 1<sup>st</sup> and then 2<sup>nd</sup> generation sites
- Had to become a member on some sites to see poetry (checked with IRB)

Not so fast, pilgrim  
My scale says 98lbs.  
And I even tweaked it  
to show more weight  
then it should. Most  
people would be  
satisfied at that. But I  
don't LOOK like I  
weigh 98lbs. Wtf?!  
When I look in the  
mirror I see my old  
flabby (still) 115lbs  
self. I hate it. If the  
scales say I weigh 98  
why the f\* do I not  
see it?

# Mental Health Poetry

- Search “mental health poetry”
- Poems that fall under poetry labeled “mental health poetry” or author labels as mental health poetry goes in sample
- Exclude same poem from same author on different sites, but different poems on different sites can be included
- Exclude rated poetry
- Take first 300 words from poems, take first 10 pages 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation

# Research Questions



- Will pro-Ana blogs and poetry have more language referring to sacredness, than their controls?
- Will pro-Ana blogs and pro-Ana poetry differ in content regarding in-group loyalty, sacredness, or authority?



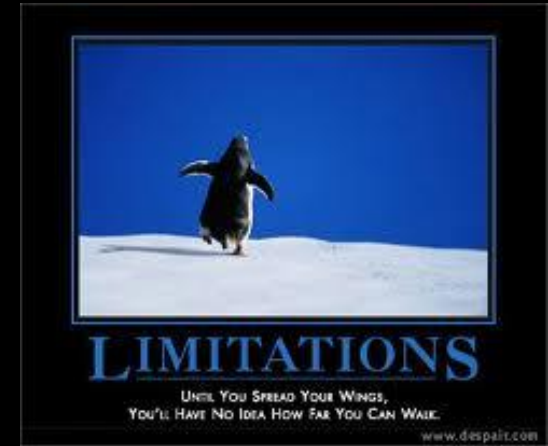


# Tests

- Run text samples under LIWC program
- Run independent sample t-tests of pro-Ana blog and poetry vs. its control in sacredness, authority, in-group loyalty
- Independent sample t-tests on pro-Ana poetry vs. pro-Ana blogs in sacredness, authority, in-group loyal



# Limitations



- Question of same authors for many of the pro-Ana poetry and blog samples
- Is 500 words a representative sample of say, a 15,000 word pro-Ana blog?
- Future Research: take whole sample of pro-Ana blog content and run under LIWC program

# Comments, Suggestions, Questions?

With all the time and energy we have spent on dieting, we could have by now built a small, fat-loving civilization.  
-Hallmark magnet



**I've been on a diet for two weeks and all I've lost is two weeks**  
-Totie Fields

I used to look at all my friends who were happy with their imperfect bodies and feel repulsion. How could they be okay with their fatty curves? Now I realize, I wasn't disgusted; I was jealous.  
--Anonymous

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