

Analysis of Moral Language in Pro-Ana Blogs and Poetry

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From ruthgill.com

Diagram of Typical Pro-Ana Content on Blogs and Sites



"Thinspiration" photos to inspire losing of weight

Often includes ethereal images of butterflies and angels (Arresting Ana, 2009)



http://www.d.umn.edu/~jvaleri/dissatisfaction%20in%20bodies.htm



From anabody.blogspot.com

*spin around and around in circles, it will make you too dizzy and nauseous to eat
 *drink water, water, water, before meals, after meals, during meals, when meals won't be happening, all the TIME
 *go to a movie with a friend, will keep your mind off of it, keep you away from food, and you can order a diet soda
 *Chew sugar-free gum

From http://www.angelfire.com/crazy/5janeandana.tricks.html

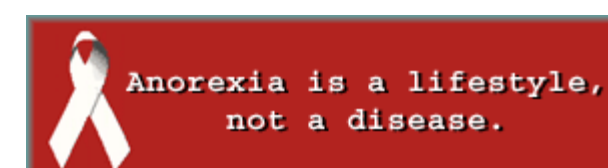
Creeds and commandments are common—generally there can be a religious theme among sites (Borzekowski et al, 2010)

Ana Creed
 I believe in control,
 the only force mighty
 enough to bring order
 in the chaos that is my
 world...

Sites and blogs will often include poetry lamenting certain weights and praising perfection

Twisted Minds
 some look at us and call us crazy
 how little they really know
 they pass us by and stare
 like we're in some sickly show
 don't they see?
 it is not us who is at fault
 they kill their bodies with fats and grease
 but we give our bodies nothing at all
 so, you see,
 we really are the purest of the pure
 nothing but skin and bones,
 plus a scale to reassure
 so think about which one of us is on top
 next time you stop and stare
 for we float in the realm of nonexistence
 where all we need is air . . .
 —Melissa Cox, with permission
 (Borzekowski, Schenk, Wilson & Peebles, 2010)

Tips and Tricks section
 Includes weight loss tips ranging from common sense to obscure and strange



http://proanastyle.blogspot.com/2007/07/anacreed.html

Introduction

Anorexia nervosa is one of the most difficult mental illnesses for therapists treat with its high recidivism rate over 50% and its high mortality rate of 20 percent (Brynolf, 2009, p.101). It is estimated that around 2-5% of adolescents in the western world have anorexia nervosa, and that 90% of them are young women (Griffin & Berry, 2003, p.43). Unfortunately, technology of the twenty-first century has brought new challenges for therapists in counseling anorexic individuals. One problem is the emergence of pro-Ana or pro-Anorexia nervosa web communities. These communities can be found on blogs or websites which entail poetry, pictures of thin individuals (thinspiration), and a tips and tricks section on how to lose weight.

These sites emphasize and advertise grotesquely thin appearances. They advocate for intense practices to lose weight and often include methods of starvation, vomiting, laxatives, excessive exercise. Unlike pro-Mia (or pro-Bulimia nervosa websites), pro-Ana sites usually focus on fasting techniques (Giles, 2006). Although there have not been many studies on pro-Ana sites or blogs, the few studies have suggested that viewership of sites correlates with higher body dissatisfaction, eating disturbances (Harper, Sperry & Thompson, 2008), increased perfectionism (Custers & Bulck, 2009), and lower self-esteem (Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2006).

Goals and Expectations

The goal of our research was to see if authors of pro-Ana blogs and poetry used more language referencing sacredness (disgust), authority, or in-group loyalty. We wondered if persons with anorexia nervosa may value some of Graham, Haidt & Nosek's (2009) moral categories over others. For instance, we are curious if persons on pro-Ana websites used more words referring to sacredness (e.g. *cleanliness, purity, disgust*) than medical professionals when discussing anorexia nervosa. There has been recent literature which suggests that eating disorders correlate with feelings of disgust (Troop & Baker, 2009). We have taken text from blogs and poetry associated with the movement and are in the process analyzing the samples by employing Graham, Haidt, and Nosek's (2009) moral foundations dictionary and word count.

Procedure

Sampling Procedure

Our research is an unobtrusive, naturalistic observation in public spaces.

There are four sample groups:

- pro-Ana blog entries
- medical blog entries pertaining to eating disorders
- pro-Ana poetry
- mental health poetry

Pro-Ana Blog Entry Sampling

Search "pro-ana blog" under Google, Yahoo, Bing

Look at first 10 pages of results (1st generation)

Copy entries and obtain 500 words of text

Take linked pro-ana blogs for sample (2nd 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

This study does a multi-stage selection of pro-Ana individual blog entries, pro-Ana poetry, medical blog entries pertaining to eating disorders, and poetry with subject matter pertaining to mental illness. It incorporates the three most popular search engines: Google, Yahoo, and Bing (GlobalStats, 2011). Before coding any of the website groups, we have cut out all pictures, link lists, website menus, and website disclaimers and changed the text into a plain text document. We also have recorded the date, search engine used, site generation, web address, author of each blog and poem, the credentials of that author (if necessary) and the linked sites that came with each sample. We also looked for duplicates among each searches and discarded the extra content. Moreover, if we have noticed an author's same passage or poem in multiple blogs or pro-Ana sites, we have thrown out the duplicate passage.

Pro-Ana Blog Samples

To sample for the pro-Ana individual blog entries, the researchers have searched the term "pro-ana blog" under the three search engines (terms from Borzekowski et al 2010; Harshbarger at 2009). According to Borzekowski and colleagues (2010), a pro-Ana website is part of a group of pro-eating disorder websites. These pro-eating disorder websites "encourage knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to achieve low body weights" and emphasize "achieving extremely thin or skeletal appearances" (Borzekowski et al, 2010, p. 1526). Therefore, for this study, we only took sites which referred to themselves as "pro-Ana" and emphasized restrictive dieting behaviors. Similar to Borzekowski and colleagues' (2010) content analysis of pro-eating disorder websites, this experiment sampled from sites found on the first 10 pages for each term search, under each search engine. We have taken the first 500 words from each blog and started with the most recent entries. The researchers have then obtained links to other similar sites ("second generation" sites) through the first blogs found. Sites that included additional topics outside of pro-ana content or did not have 500 or more words have been excluded. In addition, the researchers have omitted professional medical organizational websites, journals, or forums on pro-Anorexia from the pro-Ana individual blog sample.



From http://imgfave.com/search/thinspiration



From spildays.blogspot.com

Procedure

Medical Blog Samples

The researchers then searched medical blog entries sample by using the term "anorexia nervosa medical blog." Unfortunately, there were not enough medical blog samples simply pertaining to anorexia nervosa. Therefore, the researchers have expanded the search to "eating disorders medical blog." For the purpose of having similar content to control for the pro-Ana websites, we have excluded medical blogs whose subject matter specifically pertained to eating disorders outside of anorexia nervosa such as bulimia nervosa, binge disorder, eating disorders not otherwise specified (EDNOS), and other rare eating disorders (e.g. Pica disorder). We have primarily based our decisions on whether the blog pertained to one disorder through the descriptors in its title. For each sample, we have taken the first 500 words, going systematically for the latest entry to the next latest. We then have taken the first ten pages of results from each search engine and then found second generation blogs through the first ten pages of results. Medical blogs that were not written or endorsed by professional medical personnel (RD, MS, MA, LMSW, DMSW, MD, LP, LMFT, PsyD, and Ph.D), experts in eating disorders (e.g. published authors who wrote on eating disorders), accredited medical organizations (eating disorder clinics, hospitals, small mental health private practices), medical research facilities (e.g. universities) or well known newspapers (e.g. The New York Times) have been excluded. We also have excluded any medical blogs which discussed eating disorders and another illness or issue (e.g. eating disorders and medical marijuana).

Pro-Ana and Medical Blog Poetry Samples

For the pro-Ana poetry samples, the researchers have searched "pro-Ana," along with the term "poetry" on the search engines of Google, Bing, and Yahoo. This study has considered that works which were listed by their authors as "poetry" or a "poem" under a website which fits under our definition of a pro-Ana site constituted as "pro-Ana poetry." Similar to the blog sampling, the researchers took samples from the first ten pages from each search engine, and if any site led to other pro-ana poetry, the researchers will include such second generation sites. We then have taken the first 300 words of poetry listed on the site. The researchers have then obtained the control poetry samples by searching the term "mental illness poetry" or "mental health poetry" under the same three search engines and taking the first 300 words. The poems' authors had to either state explicitly that the poem pertained to a mental illness and/or health—or be categorized by the website's author/s as pertaining to mental illness and/ or health. We have excluded poetry that had been selectively posted (e.g. poems shown due to high approval ratings) from the sample in order to make the sample as similar to the freely written pro-Ana poetry. Likewise, we have looked at the first ten pages of results from the search engines, and also looked for second generation results from those first ten pages.

Procedure and Limitations

After taking the samples, we will run the four samples groups through the LIWC program. We will then run independent t-tests and first pair each group against its control for percentage of words pertaining to sacredness, authority, and in-group loyalty. We will also run the pro-Ana poetry group against the pro-Ana blog group for those three dimensions of morality, for we are interested if pro-Ana poetry writers will refer to more language of disgust and authority rather than write about tips to lose weight like pro-Ana bloggers.

There are several limitations with this study, the main one being that the pro-Ana blog and poetry samples could be from the same user and or users with a different alias. It is possible we are not getting an accurate representative sampling of the pro-Ana community. Moreover, the 500 or 300 words with which we have taken from each blog and poetry page may not be an accurate representation of blogs have thousands of words and the most recent entries or poems may simply be anomalies from the rest of the text. In the future, we hope we can take pro-Ana poetry and blog entries in their entirety and use them as samples which would be more likely to be representative of the pro-Ana population.

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