

ARE WE ALL UGLY DUCKLINGS WHEN WE LOOK IN THE MIRROR?
MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND NEW INTERPRETATIONS: A DISCURSIVE
ANALYSIS OF THE IDEALIZED BODY WITHIN PRO-ANOREXIA WEBSITES

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By

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the controversial nature of the pro-anorexia (pro-ana) websites. While previous studies have been conducted on the nature of these websites, it is essential to uncover the motivating factors behind maintaining a pro-ana identity. The purpose of my research is two-fold; a) uncover the definition of the idealized female body within the pro-ana websites, drawing connections between the idealized female body as conceptualized within our current society, and within the pro-ana websites; b) to demonstrate the core values held by pro-ana users that enable them to pursue their goal of achieving the idealized female body.

The theoretical framework for this thesis is based upon the work of feminist scholar Susan Bordo. Specifically, her analysis of the idealized female body within Western culture acted as the lens through which pro-ana websites were examined. A five step critical discourse analysis approach put forth by Norman Fairclough was implemented to guide the research and data analysis. Textual data was collected from three different pro-ana websites over the period of one week. In addition to discourse analysis, a brief content analysis was used to distinguish the common themes of posting topics.

From the results of the content analysis, the definition of the idealized female body according to the pro-ana users was created. In addition, the three underlying values held by pro-ana users during their pursuit of the idealized body -- discipline, self-surveillance and drive – emerged from the data collection and analysis. It is important to distinguish that an underlying need to maintain constant control is present.

As the existing literature on this topic is still undergoing development, the results of this study offer key insights into the underlying motivations of those users found within pro-ana websites. It is clear that further research is needed in order to distinguish new and desperately needed approaches to treating eating disorders as they are only becoming more prevalent within society.

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As long as you do beautiful things, you will always be beautiful.

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PREFACE

Within this thesis I have incorporate the story of the Ugly Duckling, which was originally written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1842. Due to the fact that this story is referenced within the thesis within numerous different sections, I feel it is important to include a brief summary of the story. This will provide a frame of reference for the reader.

The tale begins with a mother duck sitting on her eggs waiting patiently for them to hatch. While most of her ducklings that hatch are “normal”, one egg takes longer to hatch, and when it does, a large, grey, clumsy duckling emerges. He does not fit in with the rest of the beautiful little yellow ducklings at all. Though the mother duck tries to accept him as her own, the entire barnyard points out that the duckling does not belong. The little duckling suffers much abuse from the other ducklings and barnyard animals. After much harassment, he leaves to fend for himself. He wanders through the rest of the summer and fall, for no one will take him in. At one point, the ugly duckling nearly freezes to death in an icy pond during the winter. By the end of winter, he is miraculously still alive. During the spring, the ugly duckling stumbles upon a beautiful pond where he sees two beautiful birds swimming in the water. He wishes with all of his heart that he could be as beautiful as those birds. However, he believes he is too ugly. He is drawn to the birds and thinks that even if they will not accept him, he must try to get to know them. To his surprise, when the ugly duckling approaches the water’s edge, he glances down and sees that he too looks like the beautiful birds. It turns out the little ugly duckling was a swan, and not an ugly duckling at all.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CREATION OF THE UGLY DUCKLING

“Then he felt quite ashamed, and hid his head under his wing; for he did not know what to do, he was so happy, and yet not at all proud. He had been persecuted and despised for his ugliness, and now he heard them say he was the most beautiful of all the birds. Even the elder-tree bent down its bows into the water before him, and the sun shone warm and bright. Then he rustled his feathers, curved his slender neck, and cried joyfully, from the depths of his heart, ‘I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling.’” Hans Christian Andersen (1844)

Many girls have heard the story of the ugly duckling, and believe that they too will turn into beautiful swans. I believed this to be true myself—I always thought one day some magical transformation would occur and I would see a beautiful girl staring back at me in the mirror. Honestly, to this day I am still waiting for this transformation to happen. I am comfortable with my body, but not in love with it. I am able to navigate daily life without letting the image in the mirror get to me; however, there are occasions when it does. I poke and prod at places that “need work.” I knew I wanted to address this issue. Why do young women¹ look at their own bodies through such a skewed lens? Do other people think this way, or am I the only one who critiques my body?

I found out that I am not alone when I picked a book called *Ophelia Speaks* (Shandler, 1999). It was compiled and written by 18-year old Sara Shandler, who was determined to affirm the voices of young girls in North America. She sent out 7,000 letters to American high and junior high schools urging teenage girls to contribute to her book. She included topics such as parental expectations, racial relations, friendships, and

¹ I would like to recognize that men/boys also suffer from eating disorders. However, due to the predominant focus on the female body within the pro-anorexia websites, and the high prevalence of eating disorders among women, I use ‘she’ to describe the website users throughout this thesis.

sexuality. Shandler found a majority of the letters she received dealt directly with eating disorders. Shandler provided a space for the voices of girls with eating disorders and as I turned page after page, I realized this was a population I wanted to study. Of her own experience, Shandler (1999) writes:

I was a media fed child... Adolescence is not what I thought it would be. Happy endings aren't inserted conveniently before the last commercial break... I was fed a cookie cutter standard of beauty and I do not invariably meet the media's image of perfect. As a media baby, I'm a disappointment.
(p. 31-32)

Many young individuals within current Western society feel this way. Somewhere along the bumpy road of adolescence, young women (and increasingly young men) pick up the belief that they must achieve the idealized female body to become successful within society. When the imagined transformation from ugly duckling to swan does not happen magically, some young individuals take matters into their own hands.

My research began with a review of the websites Google uncovered when I entered "pro-ana" (for pro-anorexia) in the search box. I was, at first, shocked at what I found. Website after website warned me not to enter, explained to me the experience of the pro-ana user, and showcased the extremely thin "ideals" members were striving to attain. The websites described the lives of individuals who have in the past or who are currently suffering from eating disorders. Emphasis was placed on the need to pursue the idealized female body. The individuals within the websites stated that although they were aware that eating disorders are harmful to their health, they do not wish to recover. The intent to live with an eating disorder, without wanting to recover, is why the users give themselves the title of pro-ana. In the end, I was left wondering why pro-ana users thought the way

they did. What made them believe that beauty was seeing bones through skin? Why did they so desperately post about their desire to be “lighter than air”?

After gathering an extensive list of pro-ana websites, I decided I would conduct a literature review and uncover what research had already been done on the topic. I found that most studies focused on three main topics of analysis: a) the anti-recovery perspective; b) the creation of a supportive environment; and c) the description of what it means to be pro-ana. Some studies mentioned the effects of the media on individuals; however, none of the studies focused on examining the links between the idealized female body and the pro-ana websites. At this point, I knew my research, through the use of discourse analysis, would focus on the idealized female body and the language used to create and maintain this ideal. An examination of the pro-ana websites shows what happens when young women become consumed with trying to achieve the current representation of the idealized female body.

Although the words written by young individuals within the pro-ana websites illustrate ways in which the media-created ideal affects people, the media is not the only reason individuals act the way they do. Many complex factors contribute to an individual’s struggle with eating disorders. However, within my thesis research, I began to examine one of the reasons people suffer from eating disorders. I chose to look at the ways in which society and pro-ana members constructed the ideal in my attempt to understand why society at large condemns those with eating disorders for literally embodying a message that everyone acknowledges exists: Thin is in!

At some point, young individuals realize that life is not a fairytale, the ugly duckling does not always turn into the swan, and happy endings do not come right before

the last commercial break. My analysis tells one of the stories left out of the fairytale: What happens if you never wake up a swan? What if you are a swan but cannot recognize it? The young individuals within the pro-ana websites do not recognize themselves as beautiful. They view their bodies as different from the current idealization, and thus, they are in the process of changing them. What pro-ana users fail to recognize is that the body they are so desperately trying to achieve will only be the so-called ideal for a short period of time. Historical records indicate that the idealized female body shifts over time. The common thread is the belief that the idealized female body of each era needed to be achieved by all. In this sense, the dominant forces within society act as the barnyard ducklings, poking and prodding at all those individuals who do not conform to the current idealized female body. A form of mob-think is found within popular society. None of the ducklings stands out within the fairytale; they are utterly consumed by the need to call attention to the fact that the little signet appears nothing like them. The current overly-determined and consumerist body serves to drive marketing projects. Everyone is ugly by the standards of cosmetic improvability. Personal emancipation from the bindings of the label 'ugly duckling' comes with the choice to withdraw participation from the fracas.

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the idealized female body and the way it is constructed by pro-ana users. Using discourse analysis as the methodology, I uncover the connections between the images of the idealized female body presented within society and the literal application of them within the pro-ana websites.

1.1 Purpose, Objectives and Thesis

The purpose of my research is to provide a better understanding of how presentations of the idealized female body within our current Western culture affect those

who suffer from eating disorders. My research is relevant to numerous domains within sociology, such as gender analysis, medical sociology, and sociology of the body. My work extends the current knowledge base by critically examining the idealized female body that pro-anorexia website users wish to achieve. My analysis pushes the current pro-ana research beyond the scope of the medical field and into the realm of sociology of the body. I show how the readings of the idealized female body within the pro-ana websites stem from the creation of an idealized female body by the dominant forces within society. Through discourse analysis, I provide a more comprehensive deconstruction of the pro-ana websites.

The major aim of this research is to explore the ways in which the idealized female body is conceived of and pursued by members of pro-ana websites. Current Western society has narrowly defined the “ideal” body of a young woman. Deconstructing the images seen within the media and advertising industry is important as these images are what the pro-ana users are pursuing. Thus, more specifically my aims are:

- To uncover the definition of the idealized female body within the pro-ana websites, in addition to drawing connections between the idealized female body as conceptualized within our current society and within the pro-ana websites.
- To demonstrate the core values held by pro-ana users that enable them to pursue their goal of achieving the idealized female body.

During the research process, I was able to draw connections between the idealized female body presented within advertisements that consumers see on a daily basis and the ideal images found within the pro-ana websites. The images that are desired by pro-ana users are clearly some of the same images that advertisers are using to promote their products.

Thus, critically examining the meaning women are to draw from the messages presented by the current idealized female body is important.

I begin my thesis by contextualizing my work. I review several domains of literature, beginning with the biomedical, and then moving through sociological theories of the body, including feminist approaches. I then focus on the work of Susan Bordo (1998, 1993), before turning to focus on the body and advertising, as well as a review of pro-ana studies.

My work has direct application to the study of the body within current Western society, which both furthers the understanding of the medical condition of eating disorders while drawing key connections between the images one sees within Western culture and how one may perceive their body. My work has implications for the ways in which one views the pro-ana websites and the images and meaning one draws from them. This thesis presents the knowledge uncovered through the examination of the pro-ana websites and content found within them.

1.2 Outlining the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter in which I establish my research interests and focus, the second and third chapters bridge theory and methodology. I examine and situate my topic within the context of sociology of the body. I review major current feminist theories regarding the operations of the female body within society. I then review the work of Susan Bordo, which acts as the theoretical lens of analysis for my thesis. I review a five stage analytical method that acts as the guide for conducting my discourse analysis. Chapter 2 is especially relevant to my examination of the pro-ana websites, as it addresses some key sub-stages of analysis: a) set the general context of the

social problem, b) connect the general context to the specific discourse that is deconstructed, and c) conduct an analysis of the discourse itself. I then move through a discussion of my methods, which involved gathering data from three websites: Ana-Bones, Pro-ana Nation, and World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting. Chapter 3 concludes with a process journal, which documents my thoughts and ideas during the research process.

In Chapter 4, I explore the construction of the idealized female body, as created by the pro-ana members. This sets the context for my discussion of the three key themes specific to the thin ideal: thinspiration, celebrity images, and written beliefs. The examination of these key themes provides the foundation for Chapter 5. In that chapter, I uncover the themes specific to pro-ana values—namely discipline, self-surveillance, and drive—and the ways that these themes are coupled with a need to have a sense of control, however limited.

My work concludes with a review of society's relationship to the current idealized young female body. I address the need to restructure the current ideal and suggest possibilities for the future. I also reflect on my experience of conducting research and the ways in which my thought processes have been influenced by the research found within this thesis. I conclude with possible directions for future research within the area of pro-ana websites and conceptualization of the body.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH: SCOPING OUT THE POND

I begin my second chapter with an overview of the clinical definitions of eating disorders. This establishes the medical context for diagnosing eating disorders, along with some of their physiological and psychological components. Next, I turn to sociological explorations of the body in order to establish the particular disciplinary space into which my research fits. From the broad exploration of sociology of the body, I narrow to a focus on feminist work on the presentation of the female body within society. This provides the theoretical background and situates the work of Susan Bordo within the feminist framework. Bordo is a professor of English and Women's and Gender studies at the University of Kentucky. She is known for her groundbreaking ideas on the media and has been widely credited with having established the field of "body studies." Her early work focused on the portrayal of the female body within popular media, however, her attention has now turned to the examination of the male body within popular media. She has been and continues to be a leading scholar within the field of body studies.

Thus, it is necessary to unpack the work of Bordo and highlight the ways in which her theories aid the examination of the pro-ana websites. I discuss the current construction of the idealized female body as well as the three key values possessed by individuals who are in the pursuit of the this body. I then turn to a review of the idealized female body as it is constructed and presented by the advertising industry. I touch upon the various ways the idealized female body is presented to consumers on a daily basis. Finally, I conclude this initial chapter with a review of the previous pro-ana literature. I

highlight the common themes of analysis and situate the relevance of my research within the field.

2.1 Clinical Definitions of Eating Disorders

Clinical definitions of the different types of eating disorders serve as a reference or guide for practitioners. They describe the clinical inclusion criteria for those evaluated with eating disorders. Importantly, not all of the individuals on the pro-ana websites have necessarily seen a psychologist or physician and received a proper diagnosis. In most cases, pro-ana users wish to avoid the doctor or psychologist entirely, which means most pro-ana users within the websites I examined are self-diagnosed with eating disorders. Some users clearly state they have been diagnosed and received treatment, whereas others skip discussion of the topic entirely.

The clinical recognition of eating disorders can be traced back to 1689, when an English physician reported on two separate cases of individuals who had a “wasting” disease of nervous origins (Gordon, 2000). However, mental health professionals did not formally recognize eating disorders until they appeared in the third edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980 (Gordon, 2000). The criteria used to diagnose anorexia, bulimia, and eating disorders not otherwise specified (EDNOS) are slightly different, although all are characterized by a psychopathological obsession with weight and shape (Herpertz-Dahlmann, 2009). However, some researchers argue that the definition put forth by the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which is cited by many clinicians as the ultimate guide to diagnosis, does not fully capture eating disorders.

Fairburn and Cooper (2007) argue that the classification for eating disorders within the DSM-IV has fundamental flaws. First, the EDNOS category is the most commonly

encountered, even though it is not as clearly defined as anorexia or bulimia. Second, the definitions of the disorders as currently expressed remain too arbitrary in conception. Fairburn and Cooper (2007) express the need for a complete redefinition of eating disorders and their categorizations to more fully account for a wide range in symptoms and characteristics. Clearly, there is some debate regarding the definitions and diagnostic criteria of eating disorders. Despite this debate, the DSM-IV still remains the ultimate source in practice for the diagnosis of eating disorders, according to Gordon (2000), a leading expert within the field. He is a professor of psychology, with a private practice, who has published and lectured extensively on the subject of eating disorders. He has also treated both anorexic and bulimic patients within his clinical practice for the past 20 years. Thus, with the support of his work, I rely on the DSM's entries to establish a clinical definition, however problematic, of eating disorders.

The clinical definition of anorexia nervosa taken directly from the most recent version of the DSM (DSM-IV) requires the following criteria for an individual to be diagnosed with anorexia nervosa:

1. Refusal to maintain body weight over minimum expected for age and height;
2. An intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat;
3. A disturbance in the experience of body weight and shape, undue influence of body weight or shape evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight; and
4. Amenorrhea (absence of menstrual cycle for at least three months in post-menarcheal women).

Types:

- Restricting type: During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has not regularly engaged in binge-eating or purging behavior (self-induced vomiting or misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).
- Binge-eating–purging type: During the current episode of anorexia nervosa, the person has regularly engaged in binge-eating or purging behavior (self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas).

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

Although individuals may show signs of a number of the above characteristics, all must be present to be officially recognized as anorexic.

The DSM-IV specifies the following criteria for the diagnosis of bulimia:

1. Recurrent episodes of binge eating characterized by both:
 - i. Eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g., within any 2-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances.
 - ii. A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode, defined by a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating
2. Recurrent inappropriate compensatory behavior to prevent weight gain
 - i. Self-induced vomiting
 - ii. Misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications
 - iii. Fasting
 - iv. Excessive exercise
3. The binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behavior both occur, on average, at least twice a week for 3 months.
4. Self-evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.
5. The disturbance does not occur exclusively during episodes of anorexia nervosa
(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

Similar to those diagnosed with anorexia, bulimics share the same negative self-evaluation of body shape and weight. The characteristics of bulimia are more inclusive of the binge-purging behaviors that those with bulimia tend to experience more frequently than those with anorexia.

Finally, an additional category, EDNOS, within the DSM-IV accounts for eating disorders that are difficult to classify or do not meet some of the stated requirements within the first two categories. The criteria that must be met to be classified as having this form of eating disorder are:

1. For female patients, all of the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met except that the patient has regular menses.
2. All of the criteria for anorexia nervosa are met except that, despite significant weight loss, the patient's current weight is in the normal range.
3. All of the criteria for bulimia nervosa are met except that the binge eating and inappropriate compensatory mechanisms occur less than twice a week or for less

than 3 months.

4. The patient has normal body weight and regularly uses inappropriate compensatory behavior after eating small amounts of food (e.g., self-induced vomiting after consuming two cookies).
5. Repeatedly chewing and spitting out, but not swallowing, large amounts of food.
(American Psychiatric Association, 2000)

The above definitions act as the criteria that health care professionals use to diagnose patients with eating disorders. Yet, as suggested by Gordon (2000), once the case progresses to a state in which it can be accurately clinically identified, the sufferer has “already become entrapped in a complex web of psychological attitudes and physiological sequelae associated with prolonged starvation” (p. 24). This partially explains why eating disorders are typically so difficult to treat; the individual has already changed the way in which they view and nutritionally treat their body. The patients typically go into extreme denial about their eating disorder: “probably no disorder other than alcoholism or drug addiction is so invariably accompanied by denial” (Gordon, 2000, p. 24). In this sense, denial acts as a mechanism to further cloud reality for the eating disordered.

Although the DSM-IV is widely accepted as the primary source in regards to the definitions of eating disorders, researchers and clinicians alike do not believe it is without faults (Fox, Ward, & O’Rourke, 2005; Herpertz-Dahlmann, 2009). The requirement for the presence of all four criteria in the diagnosis of anorexia has frustrated some academics and those working with the eating disordered, as they feel individuals should still be considered anorexic even if they lack one criteria (e.g., amenorrhea). Moreover, the fourth requirement is especially vulnerable to criticism, as some individuals may be suffering from anorexia but have not yet experienced amenorrhea, and thus are not

clinically diagnosed. Mitchell, Cook-Myers and Wonderlich (2005), express the need to remove the amenorrhea requirement, stating, “research suggests that the presence of amenorrhea does not increase the diagnostic specificity of the criterion, given that some patients will continue to menstruate at a very low weight” (p. S96). The DSM-IV has also been critiqued due to its inability to adequately address the sub-types of anorexia.

Officially, anorexia has two sub-types: restrictive eating and binge eating followed by restrictive eating. Those individuals who show both restrictive and binge eating qualities are called bulimic anorexics, according to Gordon (2000). Bulimic anorexics typically tend to be heavier at the onset of the disorder, which causes their bodies to react more violently to starvation (Gordon, 2000). Bulimic anorexics also tend to be less psychologically stable than restricting anorexics. In some cases, this is due to the strong association between bulimia and depression; noticeable changes in social adjustment and social interaction often occur (NEDA, 2010). Although both those individuals with bulimia and anorexia are pursuing the same goal—to be thin—each deals with unique issues arising out of specific disordered eating practices during the pursuit of thinness.

Another key distinction between the two types lies within the individual’s behavior pattern. Those individuals with anorexia who are extremely restrictive tend to be highly controlling and attempt to create the image of perfection. In contrast, those with bulimic anorexia show symptoms of borderline personality disorder and are typically unstable and conflict ridden. Those who suffer from bulimia may fall into the second type of anorexia; however, a separate definition of what it means to suffer from bulimia also exists. Due to the overlap in symptoms, classifying patients with eating disorders using

this rubric is often difficult.

Because defining and diagnosing eating disorders is difficult, their treatment is also quite challenging. Many factors affect treatment, such as refusal to accept a diagnosis, deception, and secrecy, among others. By the time clinicians and family members note physical and mental changes, the individual is most often fully consumed by the disorder. If drastic weight loss has occurred, patients are typically admitted to the hospital for treatment and put on a regimen that promotes healthy weight gain (Fox et al., 2005; Gordon, 2000). Once a healthy weight is restored, patients are released from the hospital and ongoing psychotherapy is prescribed (Gordon, 2000). According to Gordon, the current best treatment for those suffering from eating disorders involves admittance to specialized clinics, which offer a wider variety of treatment methods. Although Gordon suggests professional treatment is not the only solution, he does believe it is beneficial to those who suffer.

It is important to clarify that although professional treatment is recognized as the best course of action to address eating disorders, it remains out of reach for many who suffer due to the high costs associated with intensive treatment. The average length of in-patient stay for someone who suffers with anorexia nervosa in the United States is 26 days; the average length of stay for someone with bulimia is 14.7 days (Yu, 2009). In the United States, the current costs associated with the length of stay for both anorexia and bulimia are quite substantial; the average for anorexia is \$17,384, and for bulimia is \$9,088 (Yu, 2009). Thus, not all those who suffer can privately afford to fund in-patient rehabilitation treatments. For some, no treatment options are available due to a lack of health care coverage or insurance. In 2007, the US Census Bureau reported 253.4 million

people—approximately 85 percent of the population—had some form of health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Just recently, eating disordered individuals and their families in the United States have hope. On October 3, 2008, a U.S. federal mental health parity bill, introduced by Representative Patrick Kennedy, was passed and later put into effect in January of 2009. The mental health parity and addiction equity act addresses the need to include eating disorders within the coverage for the mental health and substance abuse disorders. Health plans must include the same coverage for eating disorders as they do for all other medical and surgical procedures (Yu, 2009). Although this act only aids those who already have health insurance, it is a step in the right direction towards the medical treatment of eating disorders.

The treatment of eating disorders within specialized clinics and facilities offers one method of recovery; however I wish to suggest the possibility of harm reduction theories as a potential way of dealing with eating disorders. “Advocates of harm reduction see it as a grassroots movement that has emerged as a middle path between the polarized opposites of the moral and medical models – a path that promises to provide humane and practical help for drug users, their families and our communities” (Marlatt, 1998, p. 3). Although Marlatt is discussing harm reduction in reference to those who abuse drugs, the application of harm reduction to eating disorders is not irrelevant. Similar to those who suffer from addictions, those with anorexia tend to become socially isolated. We also see the same hyper-focus on a potentially self-destructive activity. The following points are the basic principles central to harm reduction practice:

- Accepts, for better and for worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.
- Ensures that drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real

voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them, and both affirms and seeks to strengthen the capacity of people who use drugs to reduce the various harms associated with their drug use.

- Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others.
- Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being-not necessarily cessation of all drug use-as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.
- Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harms.
- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harms.
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the many real and tragic harms and dangers associated with licit and illicit drug use.

(HRC in Marlatt, 1998, p. 7)

In each case, the substitution of the words “licit and illicit drug use” for the words “eating disorders” would provide an approach to the treatment of eating disorders not yet documented within the academic arena. I have to date not found any published studies that examine or apply harm reduction as a possible treatment method for those who suffer from eating disorders. This opens a world of possibilities regarding the implementation of new theories and practice which are especially applicable to the pro-ana user. During my analysis, I will highlight the situations in which harm reduction is especially applicable to the pro-ana users who suffer from eating disorders.

To summarize, the clinical definitions and treatment of eating disorders provide a biomedical frame of reference for my work, but such definitions are not without controversy. Harm reduction puts forth another alternative treatment option for working with eating disorders and responds to the widespread occurrence of disordered eating. Unlike the clinical treatments, which focus on curing patients altogether, harm reduction focuses on providing practical help to aid those who suffer. Bordo (1993) clearly states

that although officially diagnosed eating disorders may currently affect 10 million girls and women, she believes a larger population of women is eating disordered. That is, although women may not be officially diagnosed with an eating disorder, their preoccupation with food is disordered. Registered psychologist Shelly Russell-Mayhew (2007) comments on the need to address this preoccupation with food: “Prevention and intervention efforts need to be connected to the systemic roots that determine people’s relationships with food and their bodies” (p. 10). Additionally, in support of her assertions, Bordo cites a study by Kevin Thompson (1986), which found over 95 percent of women over-estimated their body size, even though none of those surveyed were currently clinically diagnosed with an eating disorder. In addition, these women also perceived themselves to be, on average, one fourth larger than they actually were (Thompson in Bordo, 1993, p. 56). Thus, Bordo includes those women who may not be officially diagnosed within her analysis of the current cultural and societal beliefs regarding the idealized female body. Before focusing on Bordo’s work in more depth, I situate my work more broadly in relation to the sociology of the body.

2.2 The Theory of the Body

2.2.1 Sociology of the Body

The body is always socially formed and located.
(Turner, 2008, p. 56)

Although the body has been a central focus of many other disciplines, including anthropology and medicine, it has only recently received attention within the area of sociology. As Turner (2008) suggests, sociology of the body distinguishes the importance of examining the social formation of the body, and not only the ways in which the body is conceptualized within the discipline of healthcare medicine. In the following section of

Chapter 2, I briefly outline the position of my work in relation to other studies that arise out of the sociology of the body. I begin with a discussion of the conceptualization of the body within society and sociology. I then move into a discussion of Michel Foucault's theories regarding the medicalization and regulation of the body as a technology of self-construction and deconstruction. I conclude with a discussion of the perceived importance of being able to exert control over and self-regulate one's body. This discussion provides a clear transition into the examination of the regulated body as understood by feminist theorists and more specifically in the work of Susan Bordo.

Within Western society, the human body is most commonly constructed and defined by the medical community as a biological site. However, with the emergence of sociological articulation of the body in relation, academics have been able to redefine the body as a social or cultural construction. Although we all possess a biological body, individuals within different cultures conceive of and perceive their bodies differently than others. This allows for tremendous variability in the ways in which different cultures deal with physical conditions of the body, such as illness or pain, and mental conceptions of the body, such as health and beauty. Deborah Lupton (1999) articulates the centrality of the body within human life; "One's body, therefore, is central to one's self-identity; it is the thing or container in which we present ourselves to others, and through which we experience the world" (p. 122). Here lies the dualism of the medical and sociological bodies: we both have and are a body.

The medical field has constructed numerous scientific belief systems surrounding the body, which larger society perceives as scientific fact. This gives the medical field a form of privilege and power in relation to other disciplines. Experts in the medical field

examine the body and apply diagnoses based upon accumulated knowledge of medical conditions. This process is fundamental to the theories put forth by Michel Foucault regarding the power relations between the patient and the doctor. According to Foucault, a doctor receives a form of medical power; he refers to this as ‘disciplinary power’, through the examination and diagnosis of patients (Foucault, 1980). Doctors make assertions about how individuals should care for and treat their bodies through self-regulation. Lupton asserts that through the application of Foucault’s theory one can see how “Disciplinary power rarely involves direct punishment or coercive control of people; rather, it encourages people to behave in certain ways ‘for their own good’”(Lupton, 1999, p. 126). This creates a powerful coercive hold over individuals; they are taught to monitor and restrict their own bodies based upon a dominant perception of the idealized female body.

Individuals are not only subject to the dominant perspectives in relation to the medical field; they are also subject to Western culture’s beliefs regarding the idealized female body. Within Western culture, there is a clear connection between those who are perceived to be properly self-regulated and the healthy idealized female body. To exert control over the body’s needs and urges implies the highest level of competence. Those whose bodies are not ‘properly’ self-regulated, such as the ill or overweight, are too often seen as inferior and socially deviant. In contrast, those who are thin are perceived as able to maintain strict self-control and regulation. This ability is also intertwined with ideology regarding physical attractiveness and morality, yet two more means by which individuals are compelled to maintain strict self-regulation. This ability to strictly self-monitor is addressed within Foucault’s theory regarding the individual’s motivation

behind self-monitoring.

Foucault (1979) theorized the need to self-restrict emerged from the perceived scrutiny of others, which in turn produced the highest level of self-scrutiny. Foucault's theory developed from his observations regarding a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham called the Panopticon. The Panopticon was organized in such a manner that the prisoners could never tell whether or not they were being monitored due to a complex design. Based upon his study of the Panopticon, Foucault (1979) argued the prisoners became their own guards by constantly observing their own behavior, thus causing them to self-regulate. Foucault's theory of the panoptic gaze has been used by several feminist theorists who believe it is directly applicable to the regulation of woman's appearance within society (Bartkey, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Saul, 2003). Women feel the need to regulate their own appearance due to the belief that they are constantly being observed and judged by others within society. Foucault's work has influenced the way the body is conceived of and conceptualized within the area of both sociology and feminist studies. His work has discussed the importance of studying the body as it is perceived within Western society. It also offers the conceptual ground on which I will build my theory regarding pro-ana users' need to self-manage and self-regulate.

As Bryan Turner (2008) states, "The body is always socially formed and located" (p. 56). Within our current society, this statement is more relevant than ever. Society has seen an increase in the integration and sexualization of the body over the past three decades (Cortese, 2008). The advertising industry has desensitized the population with advertisements that incorporate the human body in every position. Cortese states, "Advertisers use size, attention, and positioning as methods to convey social superiority

or power”(Cortese, 2008, p. 55). The body becomes a tool through which power and superiority is modeled and marketed. Due to the use of the body in this manner, there is a great need to study sociology of the body.

Although an examination of the pro-ana websites could be conducted within the field of medical sociology, I felt it important to situate my work within the context of sociology of the body. Sociology of the body literature is a better fit for this topic, as I am fundamentally examining the way the idealized female body is conceived of and regulated by the pro-ana users. Although eating disorders are a medical condition, pro-ana users pursue the idealized female body constructed by the current culture. My thesis directly examines the socially formed idealized female body located in contemporary culture and the desire of the pro-ana user to achieve the thinnest possible version of this body. While a comprehensive review of the sociology of the body is beyond the scope of this thesis, I did wish to outline the place of my work within my home discipline. I turn now to a more specific examination of the body, in relation to feminist theory and the work of Susan Bordo.

2.2.2 Feminism: Does the Image Fit Reality?

According to feminist perspectives, most women in Western culture, then, are “disordered” when it comes to issues of self-worth, self-entitlement, self-nourishment, and comfort with their own bodies; eating disorders, far from being “bizarre” and anomalous, are utterly continuous with a dominant element of the experience of being female in this culture. (Bordo, 1993, p. 57)

Because eating disorders predominantly affect women, it is important to examine the domain that has contributed most significantly to the understanding of women’s

experiences—feminist theory. In this section, I review some of the major arguments generated by leading feminist scholars regarding the presentation of women’s bodies within Western culture.

Of the many valuable contributions from feminist scholars, one significant area of focus has been women’s bodies and appearance. In the 1980s, a surge of feminist work theorized on women’s bodies and society. Feminist writers sparked a great deal of publicity and discussion beyond the academic circle. Books such as *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978) by Susie Orbach, *Bodies that Matter* (1993) by Judith Butler, and *The Beauty Myth* (1990) by Naomi Wolf, brought examination of the female body to the forefront of discussion. Within these writings, beauty was discussed as something that was socially constructed within each cultural era and imposed upon women as an ideal.

Feminist scholars also analyzed the ways in which the popular media and culture influence women’s ideas in regards to their bodies (Bruch, 1978; Orbach, 1986; Wooley & Wooley, 1982). For the first time, language was analyzed and deconstructed as a means of creating cultural discourses about the thin female ideal. Some feminist scholars began making connections between the pressures placed on women to achieve the idealized female body and eating disorders. Hepworth (1999) asserts that the work of Susan Bordo is, “an important source of the reinterpretation of women, body image and eating disorders” (p. 103).

According to Hepworth, Bordo’s work marked a shift in the examination of the body and eating disorders by employing a Foucauldian perspective. Several other discussed feminist theorists, such as Sandra Bartkey (1990), then applied Bordo’s new method of examining issues of the body through the use of Foucauldian theories. Bartkey

applied Foucault's discussion of surveillance in the Panopticon to an explanation of the ways in which women act as self-surveillance agents who perpetuate the beauty ideal through their own self-monitoring. In addition to keeping women politically docile, both Bartkey and Bordo are quick to assert that the watchful gaze of women within society acts to further perpetuate the unachievable ideal of beauty. However, Bordo, with her emphasis on the reasons women feel compelled to achieve the idealized female body, offers the most promising foundation for my work.

2.2.3 Susan Bordo: The Body Constructed and Controlled

In the article "Reading the Slender Body," Bordo (1998) offers unique insight into how the current cultural norms act to create and define the idealized female body.

Images of the idealized female body is presented to women on a daily basis through the media and advertising industries. Women find themselves within a culture in which they can rarely ignore the message of the media: they are surrounded by it, bombarded by it. The message promises happiness, wealth, and love, but only to those who conform to the ideal. Thus, while some women may desperately try to achieve happiness, wealth, and love in keeping with this message, they

...are involved in an absolutely contradictory state of affairs, a totally no-win game: caring desperately, passionately, obsessively about attaining an ideal of coolness, effortless confidence, and casual freedom. (Bordo, 1993, p. 164)

She asserts the preoccupation with "fat, diet and slenderness" (Bordo, 1993, p. 85) is not actually abnormal within society. These practices have become mainstream and act as "one of the most normalizing mechanisms of our century" (Bordo, 1993, p. 85). In terms of the ugly duckling metaphor, these mechanisms fuel the ducklings in the social pond and provide standards by which they inaccurately judge others within the barnyard

setting. Because of Bordo's assertions, I argue her work is directly applicable to the pro-ana websites and helps provide insight into the pro-ana communities.

Bordo asserts the necessity of examining the contemporary slenderness ideal, which she believes will "reveal the psychic anxieties and moral valuations contained within it – valuations concerning correct and incorrect management of impulse and desire" (Bordo, 1993, p. 187). This is crucial to the examination of the pro-ana websites. By applying Bordo's analysis of the contemporary slenderness ideal as the lens for examining pro-ana websites, one can determine the ways in which distorted desires motivate individuals in their quest to achieve the idealized female body. Secondly, through the use of her analysis of the social body of consumer culture, one can see how those individuals who are part of the pro-ana websites are confined within a 'double-bind construction of personality'. That is, they are continually told how to manage their desires correctly in a culture driven by consumption and yet it is a culture where thin is also the ideal.

The present economy is based upon the consumption of products. Individuals are exposed regularly to advertising that promotes unhealthy food choices. Advertisements for McDonald's[®] and Wendy's[®] show individuals consuming massive amounts of unhealthy foods. These ads appear alongside advertisements that showcase the idealized thin female body. The consumption of fast food will clearly not result in the idealized female body. Another such example appears on the cover of the November 2009 issue of *Marie Claire*. On the left of the cover, the magazine promises to teach how to get supermodel hair and baby-doll skin; it also divulges Madonna's secret to keeping off the holiday pounds. However, on the right side of the magazine is the caption to the cover

story: “Courteney Cox on Jen, men and why she overdid the Botox”. At this point, it seems somewhat evident why she overdid the Botox: due to some of the same messages she was receiving to look beautiful from the left side of the magazine cover. Keeping this in mind during the analysis of the pro-ana websites, I focus on the ways in which individuals are seemingly caught within the contradictions put forth by society, revealed for example within discussions centered upon bingeing and purging. Bordo asserts that the double-bind virtually sets up individuals for failure before they begin. The contradictions of the social body make self-management an impossible task.

In the following sections, I examine the ways in which the body is constructed and controlled within Western society as discussed through the work of Bordo. I first review Bordo’s deconstruction of the presentation of the ideal woman’s body within society. This provides the background for analyzing Bordo’s theories regarding why some women feel the need to pursue and achieve the idealized female body as presented by the advertising industry. Next, I review the three values that influence women’s conceptions of their bodies: discipline, self-surveillance, and drive. These values, I argue, are directly applicable to the pro-ana users and their pursuit of the idealized female body.

“The body-what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body-is a medium of culture” (Bordo, 1993, p. 165). If this is assumed accurate, one need only look around to see the ways in which the idealized female body is presented to us on a daily basis to determine current cultural beliefs. Western cultural representations have shifted over time and, as mentioned in the previous section, and mediated culture suggests that the thinner the body, the better. However, the focus is not solely on being thin; individuals must also be toned and firm as well. The ideal of a toned

and firm body coincides directly with the beliefs of those with anorexia, as they focus on ridding their bodies of any soft or fleshy areas. According to Bordo, the desire to remove all fleshy and soft areas is key to understanding how the idealized female body is virtually impossible to achieve. Because women must apparently construct the idealized female body through strict management, to ensure a flesh free body: “one must trim very near the bone” (Bordo, 1993, p. 191).

Numerous other scholars agree with Bordo’s assertions. Within her analysis of feminine appearance, Saul (2003) asserts that although many women these days believe beauty and the pursuit of beauty is a free choice, a closer examination reveals that this is not necessarily true. She argues that there is homogeneity in the current choices that women make, and through the use of Bordo’s theory one can see how these choices, which are often encouraged as playful, actually coincide directly with the current cultural messages. Saul uses Bordo’s theory to argue that the look “desired” by women currently has more to do with coercion than simply individual preference. Women are given a narrow image from which they are to make their appearance-related decisions. The theory regarding uniformity of appearance introduced by Bordo, and adopted by Saul, is illuminating in the examination of the pro-ana websites. Uniformity is evident in the discourse of the posts, the look the members are in the process of pursuing, and the images and inspiration used within the websites.

Within Western culture, the uniformly idealized female body can only be achieved through the maintenance of control over the body. Bordo (1993) recognizes control as fundamental within her work and asserts it is closely related to other key values, such as morality, self-maintenance, and desire. These values are essential to the

pro-ana users, are instilled within the websites, and encourage participants to achieve the idealized female body. Within my own analysis, I have used these three values to help categorize the themes within the pro-ana websites. Having introduced Bordo's work and its relevance to my own, in the following section I discuss the three values she proposes as key: morality, self-management, and desire. Bordo believes these values are closely linked to control, which is fundamental to the pursuit of thinness—an ideal associated with Western society and the culture exploited by it.

As Bordo (1993) suggests, the way individuals conceive of body shape within Western society has shifted:

The moral-and, as we shall see, economic-coding of the fat/slender body in terms of its capacity for self-containment and the control of impulse and desire represents the culmination of a developing historical change in the social symbolism of body weight and size. (p. 191)

Those who have slender bodies are viewed as the perfect example of individuals who have complete control over their bodies. In Western culture, thinness and control over the body is equated to morality; as Bordo (1993) argues, “excess body weight came to be seen as reflecting moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will” (p. 192). Some individuals turn upon themselves as a means of monitoring their intake in order to feel adequate. This points to a larger social problem many women are facing: how to escape one's own internalized critic. Although we have seen a shift over the past 10 years and an increase in the campaign to love one's own body, the rate of plastic surgeries has also increased dramatically (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2008). When the critic becomes the voice in one's head, it is hard to ignore the impulse to self-monitor.

Various other scholars also provide examples of the equation of morality with adequacy that occurs within Western society. Fox, Ward, and O'Rourke (2005) argue that

a combination of Bordo (1993) and MacSween's (1995) arguments serve to document the existence of body fascism within society. Fox, Ward, and O'Rourke use these arguments within their analysis of pro-ana websites, which they assert may act to partially explain the pressures some of the pro-ana users may experience. They discovered that some pro-ana users actually did believe that anorexia was a "symptom of a more deeply seated malaise emerging from psychological, emotional and social problems faced by sufferers" (Fox et al., 2005, p. 963). This discovery suggests that the presence of anorexia within individuals is comprised of a combination of larger societal as well as personal issues.

Although Bordo's theories may not be directly referenced in all articles written about pro-ana websites, her morality equation can be identified within other articles. The moral connection between the physical body and personal adequacy is continually expressed within the discourse of the pro-ana members themselves. A study by Mulveen and Hepworth (2006) found that some individuals thought being pro-ana was a choice that was self-empowering and psychologically healthy. Pro-ana individuals view ana as a moral choice that implies strength and self-assurance. Study participant O expresses an example of this: "To me self-direction implies health...Self-direction and self-governance are markers of independence and psychological health" (Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006, p. 290). Note the use of politicized metaphors, such as self-governance, which are typically thought of as liberating discourses among minorities; however, self-governance within this example becomes quite restrictive and controlling.

Within Brotsky and Giles's (2007) covert study of pro-ana, individuals associated the ana identity as more positive than other available identities. Without ana users express feelings of worthlessness: "That's what I am now, fat and nasty, If I'm not ana, then IDK

(I don't know) what I am" (Brotsky & Giles, 2007, p. 105). These two typical examples show that, within the pro-ana community, most members associate losing weight and looking slim with personal success. In this sense, Bordo's theory of embodiment as a sign of morality, although established within the early 1990's, is still quite relevant and applicable to the pro-ana communities. But control is not only linked to morality; it is also linked to values surrounding self-management.

For those who are not naturally slim, daily self-management may be a constant struggle. Bordo (1993) asserts:

Constant watchfulness over appetite and strenuous work on the body itself are required to conform to this ideal, while the most popular means of "correction"- dieting- often insures its own failure. (p. 202)

Those who suffer from eating disorders are in constant pursuit of the so-called ideal, and excel at playing the self-deluding game. The anorexic attempts to excel at society's restrictive dieting game, while those who are bulimic manage their bodies through periods of restriction and overconsumption. In this sense, the anorexic "pays homage to dominant cultural values, outdoing them in their own terms" (Bordo, 1993, p. 203). The anorexic successfully restricts and self-manages their body (as suggested by society's method to achieve the idealized female body) to the point of starvation in order to achieve thinness.

Several studies have documented members of pro-ana websites discussing the exertion of their own self-control in the pursuit of the ideal. A participant in Rich's study (2006) asserts,

It [anorexia] shows that you have a strength that others don't, because, let's face it, not many people have the ability to starve themselves to death all the girls seemed to, I don't know, idolize it... (p. 298)

This same desire of control to the point of starvation is noted by Mulveen and Hepworth (2006): “I WANT CONTROL. I will LEARN to have control. I will BE in control” (p. 290). Similarly, the desperate lengths individuals go to in order to avoid losing control over their bodies are evident within a study by McCabe (2009): “My plan is to take a sleeping pill after school and hopefully sleep through dinner to the morning when I can workout...At least if I am asleep I can’t lose control” (p. 13). Thus, Bordo’s theory of self-management is highly relevant within the pro-ana websites and the arena of eating disorders in general. It clearly alludes to the intense need for self-management individuals with anorexia experience on a daily basis. Bordo’s theory is also useful in the examination of the pro-ana forums, as it helps to explain why pro-ana individuals feel the intense need to self-manage. Along with self-management, control is linked to desire.

Another key facet of Bordo’s theory of the slender body is her assertion that a body’s gender meaning is never neutral. Her theory hinges upon the concept of control being coded as male and lack of will-power coded as female. These concepts are foundational to understanding why, according to Bordo, women’s desires are considered to be irrational within society. Women are not expected to maintain control over their physical and emotional needs. In this sense, those who are eating disordered are actually exerting severe self-discipline and control over their bodies; these women are understood as the ones to be envied. This is crucial to understanding the reasons why Bordo believes women are conditioned to consider importance of appearance and achieving the idealized female body. This internalization of social control is actually a loss not only of strength, but of self-aware engagement with the full spectrum of possibilities and limitations one faces.

According to traditional gender schemas, women's bodies must be carefully controlled and managed to achieve the correct image within society; desire becomes the motivating factor. Women have the desire to achieve and maintain the ideal, as they have been told the current idealized female body is that for which they should strive. However, two contradictory points must be noted: a) some individuals are starving to achieve the ideal and thus become sexual attractive to the opposite sex, yet b) others are starving to achieve the ideal so as to avoid the desires of others. There is, of course, a deep paradox here. While some individuals are seeking attention from the opposite sex, others are seeking attention from each other. Typically, during the initial point of joining the pro-ana websites, users are focused on achieving the idealized female body in order to attract a partner. However, as time passes, there appears to be a shift in focus – users become obsessed with the constant need to lose weight and maintain control over the body. Thus, the target audience shifts away from those who may find the users attractive towards the attention of other users themselves. Thus, depending on the stage of their disorder, the pro-ana users address two different audiences through their pursuit of the ideal.

It is important to distinguish the predominantly heterosexist nature of the pro-ana websites, in addition to the deep paradox surrounding these images. At first glance, the images found within the pro-ana websites suggest the pursuit of the idealized female body in order to attract a male companion. Upon closer examination, one finds that these same images are not just used to inspire individuals to become attractive to the male population, but that the images are also used as the measures for those attempting to achieve the idealized female body as a goal in itself. Other users envy those who are seen as being the closest to achieving the idealized body within the pro-ana websites. This

actually positions female users within a different frame of reference. Although other users do not sexually desire these individuals, they do desire the ownership of bodies of similar to the ideal.

In order to achieve the idealized female body showcased within the pro-ana websites the users must possess a strong desire to self-manage. The expression of an extreme desire to self manage is evident within studies conducted on pro-ana websites. Within her study, McCabe notes that, “perfection is about having self-control and being thin” (McCabe, 2009, p. 8). The pro-ana users have an extreme desire to achieve ‘perfection’ and the website acts as a supportive environment for them to discuss these desires. McCabe concludes that one of the key reasons individuals maintain membership within the pro-ana websites is to read about others who successfully maintain their eating disorders.

A study conducted by Lock, Epston, Maisel, & Faria (2005) demonstrates the ways in which the desire to be thin consumes the individual, to the point where the disorder is actually thought of as a separate entity from the self. Such personification of the illness acts to motivate the individual and allow them to maintain ‘control’ over their bodies. A participant of their study describes their eating disordered identity:

I made a new friend this year. Confident, strong, in control, my friend understands me as no one else does. His black eyes watch over me as He breathes softly in my ear, whispering secrets about myself. He tells me who I am. He tells me who I should be. (Lock, Epston, Maisel, & Faria, 2005, p. 324)

Interestingly, this individual’s persona is male, which follows Bordo’s belief that the ability to exert self-control is understood to be primarily a male characteristic. This split of identity through the eating disorder is remarkable, as it shows the repressed desire

of the individual and the need to maintain control within the persona; it is a constant struggle between two sides of the individual.

Bordo's work clearly demonstrates the current cultural belief system has a profound effect upon females within society. Culture affects the ways in which individuals believe they should present themselves. Morality is equated with body control, and pressure is exerted upon those who feel they do not meet the ideal. Culture also affects the ways in which individuals believe they should control and regulate their bodies. It alters the ways in which young women self-manage and self-monitor, and these processes are also connected to desire. Thus, Bordo's work regarding the slender body is applicable to explorations of discourses found within the pro-ana websites. I now discuss the current cultural beliefs regarding the idealized female body as presented by the media and advertising industries.

2.3 Advertising & the Media

2.3.1 The Idealized Female Body Constructed

An analysis of our Western culture through the lens of the media suggests some female members of society are obsessed with becoming thin. For example, celebrity media, are very vocal about who is the correct weight, who is too fat and who is too thin. Individuals within the celebrity media act as misguided ducklings that regulate dominant beliefs regarding acceptable appearance within the barnyard. American celebrity television shows, such as *Entertainment Tonight* and *Extra*, monitor and are quick to judge those who deviate from the standard instead of recognizing them for their unique beauty. Take, for example, the entertainment media's reporting on the pop star Britney Spears in 2008. During the lead up to her mental breakdown, the media repeatedly commented on the weight she appeared to be gaining. However, once Britney declared

herself mentally better 9 months later, the entertainment media was quick to report on how Britney lost her extra weight and regained the idealized female body. Of no surprise then is ongoing criticism as to the effects of the media, as well as advertisers, on body image and eating disorders (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Saul, 2003; MacSween, 1995). The purpose of the subsequent section is to present both the findings of various research studies and the messages currently perpetuated by the media and advertising industry, within two broad themes: a) the construction of the idealized female body, and b) achieving, showcasing and promoting the idealized female body. These themes reinforce the ways in which the advertising industry acts to define and promote the idealized female body in money making enterprise.

The idealized female body is conceptualized within Western current culture through a wide variety of media sources, such as film, television programs, advertisements, billboards and magazine articles. If women choose to view these media regularly, they are repeatedly told that they must have the ideal body, get it, and/or keep it. This message is part of a large multi-million dollar industry focused on perpetuating the need to be the current definition of ‘beautiful’ within today’s society. Advertisements are constantly pushing the next big diet, while magazine articles promote ‘4 moves for a super hot bikini bod’ (Millar, 2009). Every day, girls grow up surrounded by popular media delivering messages that the perfect body will make them happy. In the past, these messages focused upon the upper middle classes, using young Caucasian women; however, current popular culture has begun to address racialized women and wider demographics in their campaign for beauty. In a 1995 nation-wide study conducted within the United States by Thomas Cash and Patricia Henry, it was found that, “Nearly

one-half of the women reported globally negative evaluations of their appearance and a preoccupation with being or becoming overweight” (p. 19). Also important to note is that the idealized standard by which one is measured applies to all females, regardless of race or ethnicity. A shift to market products for older women has also occurred, and they are encouraged to avoid the inevitable aging process. The popular media has branched out in its market base to include a large majority of women.

What is the idealized female body according to the media? Researchers have put forth several different definitions of what constitutes the current idealized female body. According to Saul’s analysis, “the prevailing ideal body in the US and UK includes large breasts and slim legs” (Saul, 2003, p. 145). An analysis conducted by Sypeck, Gray, and Ahrens (2004), examining fashion magazines’ depictions of idealized female beauty from 1959 to 1999, concluded that:

One strong message communicated by the print media over the last 40 years regarding female beauty seems to have changed from one espousing the importance of a pretty face to one that additionally emphasized an extremely thin figure, as women have been increasingly exposed to models’ bodies and as these bodies have become progressively thinner. (p. 346)

Sypeck, Gray, and Ahrens are not the only ones to find that the idealized female body is portrayed as being extremely thin; other researchers have also drawn this conclusion (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004; Park, 2005). When college students were asked to describe female images in the media, Watson and Vaughn (2006) found the feature most often included was thin. The authors continue, “This standard of thinness, seen in approximately 95% of images in the media, represents the sociocultural ideals of attractiveness” (Watson & Vaughn, 2006, p. 386).

However, a new type of beauty campaign has emerged to mixed reviews. The Dove® pursuit of ‘true’ beauty campaign focuses on using ‘real’ women to promote their

products (see www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/). Essentially, the ads present women who more accurately reflect the average woman. While the women within these ads are more representative, they are also flawless in other ways; for example, they all have beautiful skin. Although the messages do not always dictate that the women must be thin, they do focus on promoting beautiful skin and the idealized beautiful body. Although at first glance the Dove[®] campaign seemingly promotes a healthier body image, it is important to remain critical and ask what they stand to gain by this practice. In the end, the Dove[®] advertisers are able to easily distinguish the flawed campaigns of their competitors in an attempt to win over the cosmetic consumers. In this sense, Dove[®] appears virtuous while capitalizing in the process.

The media not only portray thin women as the ideal, they also dictate to women how to attain the slim body: “The media also explicitly instruct how to attain thin bodies by dieting, exercising, and body-contouring surgery, encouraging female consumers to believe that they *can* and *should* be thin” (Yamamiya, Y., Cash, T., Melnyk, S., Posavac, H., & Posavac, S., 2005, p. 74). The American television shows *Extreme Makeover* or *The Swan* (a television show that is a perfect play on the idea that if one is not born a swan, one must be made over into one) give step-by-step guidelines, with a real life example, of how to obtain the idealized female body albeit via means that few could afford to pay for, let alone incorporate into busy lives.

Dieting has become a multibillion dollar a year industry (Derenne & Beresin, 2006) and continues to grow in size. According to Gordon (2000), this reflects the importance of dieting as a ‘cultural institution’, and he cites “the economics of a highly variegated dieting industry” as proof (p. 152). Losing weight has thus not only become a

significant part of North Americans' daily lives, it has also become a significant part of the economy. Each new diet that hits bookstore shelves often promises to make their authors a great deal of money (Gordon, 2000). For example, *In Defence of Food* by Michel Pollan (2008) spent 21 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller List in 2008. Numerous other diet books also made Amazon's most popular list, such as the *South Beach Diet*, the *Sonoma Diet*, the *Abs Diet*, and the *Best Life Diet*, to name a few. Diet books have become a popular form of literature as diet-centred consumers are always keen on the next fastest way to lose weight.

In most cases, however, dieting is simply not enough to obtain the idealized female body. According to Bordo (1993), simply having a thin body is no longer enough; this body must be thin and toned:

The ideal here is of a body that is absolutely tight, contained, "bolted down" firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control. Areas that are soft, loose or "wiggly" are unacceptable, even on extremely thin bodies. (p. 190)

However, lost along the way is the actual fact that the human body does require some fat in order to be healthy.

Obtaining a gym membership acts as a method of achieving this toned body. However, assuming those who work out are doing so purely for health reasons is inaccurate. Sarah Grogan (2008) cites interviews conducted at Manchester Metropolitan University in the late 1990s that indicate women used the gym or various forms of exercise as a way to lose unwanted weight and tone their bodies: "the primary motivator to exercise for all the women interviewed was to improve muscle tone and lose weight, rather than for health reasons" (Grogan, 2008, p. 158). For some consumers, this form of dieting and exercise as presented by the media is not the preferred method of obtaining

the idealized female body. Some individuals resort to the less restrictive, more invasive route of plastic surgery.

For those looking for a ‘quicker’ route to achieving the idealized female body, both the media and the advertising industry present a solution to this problem—plastic surgery—which has become a booming industry in the past decade. It allows individuals to obtain the ‘results’ they desire without having to be on restrictive diets or intense physical regimes. Women’s magazines are filled with advertisements submitted by various clinics and doctors who are more than willing to perform surgery on anyone who desires to change their appearance. All one has to do is open the back of any current *Cosmopolitan* to discover numerous ads promoting clinics that have worked wonders on the bodies of others.

According to Saul (2003), liposuction and breast augmentation have become the most popular operations in the United States: “in 2001, over 300,000 women had liposuction and over 200,000 had breast augmentations” (p. 146). According to the Quick Facts by The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2007), these numbers grew by 2007 to 456,828 for liposuction and 399,440 for breast augmentation. This growth in numbers would suggest that the importance of achieving the idealized female body via invasive means is growing within Western culture, even if it involves having surgery to obtain it.

It has also become common practice for the media and advertisers to hire a graphic artist to airbrush their celebrity or female models to the desired proportions. On the basis of their research on mass media, self-esteem, and body image, Kim and Lennon (2007) assert:

Advertising presents pictures of unrealistically thin, idealized models. In addition, it is well known that technology and special effects such as airbrushing, cropping and lighting effects are used to make media images appear more perfect or ideal than they are otherwise. (p. 15)

When special techniques, such as these, are used to create images of an idealized female body that cannot even be achieved by anyone within society, perceptions of the idealized female body are further skewed. The use of these techniques to create ideal images affects not only women but men as well, as concluded by Leone, Sedory, and Gray (2005), who focused on the recognition and treatment of muscle dysmorphia and body image disorders: “Many of the supermodels (both females and males) we see in everyday life are products of airbrushing or body image drugs such as anabolic steroids” (p. 358). Thus, due to the use of airbrushing and pharmaceuticals, the idealized female body is not achievable through dieting, exercise, or even plastic surgery. This has destructive and even deadly consequences for those who are focused on achieving society’s idealized female body.

As shown, the idealized female body is created and defined with assistance from the current media and advertising industries. Specific images of women are used within advertisements to perpetually promote a uniform ideal of beauty and slenderness. Essentially, the message from the mob mentality duckling community (portions of the media) encourages ‘swans’ within society not to appreciate themselves correctly, as they do not seem to fit the perpetuated model of beauty. The idealized female body is defined, not by individual women, but rather by consumer culture and further, since women cannot obtain the idealized female body, this same consumer culture offers numerous and increasingly extreme ‘solutions’ on how to obtain it. In the next section, I argue that those who promote the idealized female body also stand to make a great deal of money through

its promotion, thereby linking the idealized female body more explicitly to capitalist enterprise.

2.3.2 Achieving, Showcasing and Promoting the Idealized female body

The thin ideal is used to the advantage of the advertising industry in several ways. Although numerous examples could be drawn from, I touch upon three different ways in which the idealized female body is used within the media and advertising industry: a) to promote products to achieve the idealized female body; b) to promote products to showcase the idealized female body; and c) to promote products that have nothing to do with the idealized female body.

One way in which the potential achievement of the idealized female body is accomplished is through beauty product advertisements (Cortese, 2008). Advertisements project the idealized image to convince people that they need to buy the beauty product of the moment in order to be seen as attractive. As noted by Saul (2003), a key method is the creation of insecurities within those who consume the advertisements. Numerous examples of these ads can be seen in American magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. Most ads show examples of stereotypical beautiful women and the products they used to become beautiful. However, what is not advertised is the amount of work that goes into creating this beautiful, flawless image, such as make-up artists, stylists, personal trainers, cooks, and computer alterations. Beyond the cosmetic industry, advertisements create insecurities related to other ‘products.’ One advertisement critiqued within the video *Killing Us Softly 3* by Jean Kilbourne (2001) shows a woman looking quite concerned in front of a man who is caressing her from behind. The caption reads, “Does your husband wish you had larger breasts?” This is positioned above the address for a plastic surgeons’ office that offers breast augmentation procedures. Kilbourne argues the implications put

forth by this ad are very clear: “If he does, you better change your body, not your husband” (Kilbourne, 2001).

Advertisement campaigns for gyms often not only promote an ideal physique, but an ideal lifestyle as well. One such ad examined by Bordo (1993) shows a young woman with a physically fit body next to the caption “you don’t just shape your body, you shape your life” (p. 196). This would lead readers to question if they are not concerned about the shape of their bodies, are they really concerned with their lives? Another advertisement for Bally Matrix Fitness Centre[®] quotes actress Heather Locklear: “You exercise, you diet and you can do anything you want” (Bordo, 1993, p. 195). Thus, this advertisement suggests that women must be in control of their bodies to be in control of their lives. These advertisements create a belief that one must do everything in one’s power to achieve and maintain an idealized female body in order to be successful in life.

Linked closely to the promotion of the thin ideal is advertising’s ability to showcase the ideal. Thin models are almost always the trademark image of the fashion industry. Some models appear to be clinically anorexic, although the actual number of anorexic models is not known (Gordon, 2000). Kilbourne directly connects the promotion of the thin ideal to an advertisement for a clothing line. Within *Killing Us Softly 3* (2001), she shows an advertisement of an already slender young girl sitting down with her legs bent out in front of her, which acts to obscure half of her body. The caption at the top of the advertisements reads, “The more you subtract the more you add” (Kilbourne, 2001). This advertisement acts to not only promote the clothing line but also the idealized female body, which it implies should be thinner than ever.

Likewise, the October 2009 issue of American women's magazine *Allure* (which calls itself the beauty expert) features a cover story on "the best of beauty". The article covers some of the commonly emphasized features of the female body (eyes, lips, face), giving tips on how to enhance these features while highlighting the body as an item to be focused upon and altered. The feature contains an image of a very thin woman who is dressed in only her underwear. She is shown lying on her back and suggestively pulling at her bottoms. This woman fits the description of the idealized female body: beautiful and thin. The caption for this article reads, "We're all for a beautiful mind – we'd also like our bodies to match" (Allure, 2009, p. 204). This caption accurately reflects the subtle ways in which the magazines that consumers read regularly act to promote the pursuit of the idealized female body. This statement encourages readers to use the products highlighted in the article in order to make their bodies match their beautiful minds. Interestingly, the magazine integrates the intelligence of the reader as a method to promote the idealized female body. Moreover, the consumer is evidently easily manipulated regularly by the advertising and magazine industries. The consumer is underhandedly presented the idealized female body through the promotion of products that are completely unrelated to the body, and are fooled into accepting the fallacy that it is smart obtain these products.

The idealized female body is also used to promote items that have nothing to do with the human body whatsoever. This might be thought a difficult task—to connect the thin body to items as distant as chocolate or sports cars— however, the advertising industry is able to make this connection flawlessly. As noted by Kilbourne (2001),

women are often also dismembered to promote products, with parts of their idealized bodies used to sell commodities:

Women's bodies continue to be dismembered in advertising. Over and over again just one part of the body is used to sell products, which is, of course, the most dehumanizing thing you can do to someone. Not only is she a thing, but just one part of that thing is focused on. (Kilbourne, 2001)

Similar to Kilbourne, Cortese (2008) describes numerous advertisements in which the female body is used to promote commodities that have nothing at all to do with the female body. One such ad pictures an ideal female body positioned lying on her back in a bed with a man positioned directly over top of her. The implication is that these two ideal figures are in the process of having intercourse; however, covering the woman's face is a picture of a BMW in a magazine spread. The caption reads "The ultimate attraction" (Cortese, 2008, p. 61). Obviously, the assumption the reader is to make is that not even the ideal woman is enough to keep the attention of the man. Thus, women are doomed to be second best to a BMW even if they reach the idealized female body type.

Some ads never actually include an image of the idealized female body but simply allude to the need to maintain one. An example of this technique is shown within the work of Gordon, as he deconstructs a Hershey advertisement for its new slender-milk chocolate bars. Gordon (2000) asserts, "The campaign used the Duchess of Windsor's famous dictum, "You can never be too rich or too thin"" (p. 133). Even without the image of the idealized female body to promote the disconnected object, the underlying ideal of thinness is used to sell this product, which consists of empty calories. It is double speak at its most insidious.

Through this brief analysis of the media and advertising industry, it is evident how the unattainable idealized female body is constructed and promoted within Western

culture. The media and the advertising industry expose us to over 3000 advertisements per day (Kilbourne, 2001). It is hard to imagine that exposure to these ads has no influence upon our own beliefs about our bodies. The media acts to create the ideal body image and the advertisements show the consumer ways in which they may be able to achieve this ideal. I argue that the idealized female body is used to promote not only an unattainable standard, but is also used to promote the fashion industry and completely unrelated products. This section thus provides some indication as to the ways in which people encounter the ideal. Through critique of these ads, I demonstrate how the seemingly passive daily exposure to images can, in fact, impact an individual's conception of the idealized female body.

Many of the pro-ana websites include images of the idealized female body drawn from the advertising industry. Previous studies have examined this occurrence as well as the prevalence of pro-ana websites on the Internet. I now review and discuss studies similar to my own. I also critically examine what they have to offer to the understanding of pro-ana websites.

2.4 Reviewing Pro-ana Studies: Perspectives on Anti-Recovery, Support, & Being *Pro-ana*

The Internet has become a key source of information within today's consumer society; it has also acted as a key source for those seeking information regarding health related issues. Many online discussion forums have emerged in order to facilitate conversation about wide ranging health topics. These forums have allowed researchers insight into the public discussion of many health issues. Although research studies examining the Internet have grown exponentially in the past 10 years, research focused on the Internet is still in its infancy (Tierney, 2006). Mulveen and Hepworth (2006)

conclude within their study that, “[p]ro-anorexia Internet sites...represent a potentially rich resource to understand further and strengthen both theory and practice in the field of eating disorders” (p. 294). My study expands upon this insight by providing a detailed examination of some of the main motivating forces within the pro-ana websites.

Approaches to the analysis of pro-ana websites range from narrative analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and discourse analysis to participant observation and covert participant observation. A majority of the literature is based in qualitative research approaches, as they suit both the subject matter and the analysis of online text. Within prior research, the approaches used may be wide-ranging; however, three predominant themes of analysis emerge: a) the anti-recovery perspective; b) the creation of a supportive environment; and c) what it means to be pro-ana.

The first researcher to critically discuss the anti-recovery stance was Karen Dias (2003) in her article “The Ana Sanctuary: Women’s Pro-Anorexia Narratives in Cyberspace”:

Most sites make it clear that their purpose is to support those who are struggling with an eating disorder, and to provide a space, free from judgment, where they can share ideas and offer encouragement to those who are not yet ready to recover. (p. 35)

Several research articles cite Dias’ work on pro-ana websites and illustrate the anti-recovery stance of the pro-ana sites, making Dias a leading authority on the issue (Fox et al., 2005; Martijn, Smeets, Jansen, Hoeymans, & Schoemaker, 2009; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006).

In these studies, anti-recovery means that members of these websites are adamant that they are not interested in recovering from their eating disorder. For instance, warning text boxes may pop up on the screen before anyone is allowed entry into the websites.

Faux (2006) gives an example of this warning found before entry into the pro-ana website *Fading Obsession*, which clearly states, “If you do not accept the condition of anorexia / bulimia / other eating disorders plus the pro-ana pro-mia movement then you must also leave this pro-ana website immediately” (Faux, 2006). Several studies document the occurrence of these warnings to discourage website entry of those who do not support anti-recovery beliefs (Fox et al., 2005; Lipczynska, 2007; Martijn et al., 2009). However, as noted in the literature, warning text boxes are not the only way in which pro-ana websites convey their anti-recovery position to outside users; the anti-recovery position can be found in the setup and content of the website as well (Brotzky & Giles, 2007; Dias, 2003; Ferreday, 2003; Fox et al., 2005; Lipczynska, 2007; Lock et al., 2005; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006; Tierney, 2006). Thus, it is important to critically examine the purpose of the content that appears within the websites.

Several researchers discuss the presence of ‘thinspiration’ as another indicator of an anti-recovery position. Thinspiration consists of images of both celebrities and non-celebrities who are extremely thin. These images act as a sort of inspiration for the members of the websites, and are the end goal of most users (Ferreday, 2003). Thinspiration images have become one of the most recognizable aspects of a pro-ana website; however, Dias (2003) critically asserts, “If the models and celebrities were not familiar to us, it would be very difficult to discern between the ‘deviant’ bodies of those with anorexia and the ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ bodies of the models” (p. 36). Unlike other research done on pro-ana sites, which simply condemns thinspiration, the analysis done by Dias highlights the similarities between print media advertising and thinspiration. Within her argument, one can clearly see that young women today

encounter an excess of consistent and inconsistent messages regarding appearance and their bodies. It is no wonder that young women use media advertising photos as inspiration in their quest to remain thin (Cortese, 2008 see also Andrist, 2003; Ferreday, 2003; Lipczynska, 2007).

The anti-recovery perspective is one of the largest issues of discussion within the literature focusing on the pro-ana groups; most likely because it is the defining feature of the pro-ana websites. Some of the research tends to focus on the general anti-recovery theme of most pro-ana sites, and consider this as the main attribute of the websites. However, this focus overlooks the complexity of issues encompassed within the pro-ana sites. These websites go far beyond simply advocating a resistance to recovery; they are also comprised of many different facets of life as well. Thus, another key issue under examination is that of the 'supportive' environment.

Several researchers discuss social/emotional support in relation to weight loss. The pro-ana members, through their participation in the websites, experience support for exercise and diet (Brotsky & Giles, 2007; Ferreday, 2003; Gavin, Rodham, & Poyer, 2008; Lipczynska, 2007; McCabe, 2009; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006; Norris, Boydell, Pinhas, & Katzman, 2006). The issue of creating a supportive environment is understood to be negative by most researchers; individuals are acting to support each other in maintaining a potentially fatal illness. However, the members themselves would experience this support as positive (Dias, 2003), perhaps suggesting how little support many feel in the culture.

The members' views of the idealized female body act to create a strong bond between individuals (Ferreday, 2003; Fox et al., 2005; Rich, 2006). Fox et al. (2005)

conclude, “It [pro-ana website] offered an alternative sense of ‘health’ in which a body size that the mainstream would consider unhealthy and morbid was to be managed pro-actively to sustain life” (p. 996). Life here is conflated with the extreme.

Ferreday’s work (2003) expands upon this idea of the websites and their members as supportive:

...the ideal community is not that in which the body is transcended, but one where ‘different’ ‘sick’ bodies are made visible and where it is possible to speak out about one’s experiences of embodiment and of encountering abuse and prejudice as a result of being positioned as other. (p. 287)

The creation of the online support groups removes the category of ‘other’ and allows its members to feel accepted. Within the virtual world, all members of the pro-ana websites are accepted as they are; however, the same users feel disconnected from the real world where due to their extreme preoccupation with their body as they are cast as the ‘other’. Thus, acceptance is a major theme within pro-ana websites and these websites allow their users to feel ‘normal’.

Many studies echo the finding that members of these websites view them as an exclusive hideaway where they are able to be their ‘normal’ selves (Brotsky & Giles, 2007; Gavin et al., 2008; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006). Through their examination of the presentation of pro-ana online groups, Gavin et al. (2008) argue:

In contrast to the users individually identifying themselves as different and abnormal compared to those outside the pro-ana community, the forum itself functions to reassure users that they are normal within the context of pro-anorexia. (p. 328)

To offer an alternative, yet insightful perspective, McCabe (2009) uses Bormann’s (1973) fantasy theme analysis to examine the social construction of the pro-ana communities. She found that the online communities offered a positive fantasy world for their users:

Individuals can be alone with the personifications and find safety, security, and an absence of guilt when immersed in their constructed world. Moreover, individuals are no longer *alone* and find themselves reinforced in a community of fellow believers.” (McCabe, 2009, p. 11)

Each of these studies mentioned above examine the ways in which users are supported in their endeavor to maintain their eating disorder; however, none of these sites examine how these support systems go beyond simply supporting the disordered aspects of members’ lives. Previous studies have failed to uncover how these support networks not only aid in supporting the individuals with their eating disorders, but how members also gain support for other aspects of their lives, such as boys, academia, and social networking.

Although support is freely given in some websites, Brotsky and Giles (2007) found that one website was heavily guarded against outsiders. The researchers made two different attempts to access the chat room, disguised with two different user names, only to find that they were identified by site users and asked to leave. This demonstrates not only the various levels of support given by different websites, but also the various levels of accessibility users may have. This is important, as it insinuates different levels of trust and access within the various websites. It also reflects the notion of becoming part of the group through gaining acceptance. Just as one would gain a friend over a period of time, users gain access to particular pro-ana forums over a period of time. Within the website Pro-ana-mia, those granted entry into the forums are placed on probation. The exclusivity discovered within the research of Brotsky and Giles (2007) suggests that users are suspicious of outsiders and attempt to keep only community members they deem legitimate, which suggests that the concept of support may be more complex and specific than previously recognized in the literature.

The final theme of analysis within the pro-ana websites is the differentiation between websites that are Pro-ana (they actively promote anorexia as a lifestyle and a choice) and those that are *Pro-ana* (those who support individuals who are already struggling with an eating disorder and do not believe in actively providing tips or tricks on how to become eating disordered). To avoid confusion between the two types of websites, from this point forward I refer to the first pro-ana group as *pro-ana-lifestyle* and the other simply as *pro-ana*. I also refer to anorexia as ana from this point forward, in order to reflect the personification of the illness evident on websites.

Returning to my review of the literature, the year of a particular study's publication plays a role in whether or not the distinction between pro-ana-lifestyle and pro-ana is made. Earlier articles—both academic and media-related—tend not to make the distinction and are more likely conducted upon the pro-ana-lifestyle websites. These websites provided a great deal of shock. However, this is not currently the case as these websites are becoming harder to find. Within my research, I was only able to find one website in which it was clearly stated that members supported a pro-ana-lifestyle position. It is also important to mention that this website had been inactive for approximately a year, and had not been updated since I originally discovered it. Thus, websites that endorse the pro-ana-lifestyle are clearly becoming scarcer. I am unable to conclude why this type of website is fading away; perhaps it is due to the negative backlash or the lapse in popularity.

Discussion about the pro-ana-lifestyle websites tends to refer to ana as a lifestyle choice and frames those involved in the websites as voluntary participants (Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006; Shade, 2003). Within this framework, these websites become quite a bit

more dangerous as they are actively recruiting and teaching users how to be anorexic. In her study, Shade (2003) found that pro-ana sites were claiming to be a place where ana is adopted as a lifestyle choice. Further, she discovered within her examination that pro-ana users adamantly denied being victims of any kind, and that true pro-ana's are 'survivors.' While much of the research on lifestyle choice was done in the area's early phases, a study presented by Hammersley and Treseder (2007) also frames these websites as sites:

... which actively promote and encourage anorexia and bulimia nervosa, provide detailed advice on accessing laxative and effective purging, and/or supply motivational pictures of emaciated models and anorexic young women. (p. 291)

They go on to state that, "these sites also take a strident, human rights stance, advocating anorexia as a lifestyle choice rather than a health problem" (Hammersley & Treseder, 2007, p. 291). Unfortunately, Hammersley and Treseder fail within their study to mention the existence of pro-ana websites that do not promote becoming anorexic. Some websites only focus on acting as a supportive network for those who already suffer, and these websites do not offer tips or tricks on how to become anorexic. Thus, their analysis, like earlier studies, acts to stereotype all pro-ana websites as pro-lifestyle, which is simply not accurate.

Other research done on the pro-ana websites was careful not to generalize all pro-ana websites. Dias (2003) suggests:

Most sites make it quite clear that their purpose is to support those who are struggling with an eating disorder, and to provide a space, free from judgment, where they can share ideas and offer encouragement to those who are not yet ready to recover. (p. 35)

This assertion conveys a different image than the research by Hammersley and Treseder (2007). The idea of joining a pro-ana website because one is "not yet ready to recover" is far different than joining a pro-ana website in hopes of seeking out how to become

anorexic. In this sense, the websites who support those not yet ready to recover may be closer to taking a harm reduction approach.

Other research also distinguishes between the types of pro-ana websites (Ferreday, 2003; Fox et al., 2005). In a review of pro-anorexia websites, Norris et al. (2006) found that only 1 of the 12 websites under review actually stated, “they view anorexia nervosa as a lifestyle choice.” Further, the researchers state “almost one half of the website creators viewed their website as a means of supporting individuals with eating disorders” (Norris et al., 2006, p.445). This would suggest generalizations could no longer be made about the purpose and beliefs of the pro-ana websites as previous research may have done. It also suggests that those websites whose goal it is to actively recruit and teach individuals how to be anorexic may in fact be on the decline. A more recent website review done by Lipczynska (2007) shows that:

...the prevailing mood of these sites seems to be “yes these are diseases which are dangerous to your physical and mental health, but bearing that in mind here is the inspiration to carry on if you want to, or feel you have to. (p. 546)

Although this message is not entirely positive, it does not leave the reader with the impression that eating disorders are glamorous or something to be sought after.

My review of the existing pro-ana literature shows that researchers are still quite divided as to what beliefs, ideas, goals, and even definitions apply with respect to what it means to be a pro-ana member. A clearer picture of the pro-ana user is needed. Nevertheless, research has discussed the three main themes that seem to proliferate on all pro-ana websites: a) the anti-recovery perspective; b) the creation of a supportive environment; and c) the distinctions among versions of what it means to be pro-ana. The discussion of these themes provides the research community with a place to start a deeper

analysis of the pro-ana websites and introduces the key issues users discuss on their websites.

2.5 Conclusions and Connections

I began this chapter with a discussion of the numerous pressures on females to attain the idealized female body, which reveals why the issue of eating disorders is an important topic to examine. I then provided a review of the many different ways in which eating disorders can be defined, because understanding the various definitions of eating disorders is important to comprehending how pro-ana members discuss and define themselves, both within the pro-ana websites, and in Western culture at large.

I also situated my work within the sociology of the body, focusing on feminist theory, and, more specifically, Bordo's (1993, 1998) work on the ideal body. Bordo's work is fundamental to my examination of the pro-ana websites as it reveals issues that may have been overlooked by previous studies, related specifically to gender identities.

Also within this chapter are reviews of the advertising industry as well as the current literature regarding the pro-ana websites. The review of advertising literature reveals the many ways in which consumers are inundated on a daily basis with the key components of the idealized female body.

Within my review of the current ana literature, I discussed the previous research and demonstrated the gaps in the literature via three key themes: a) the anti-recovery perspective; b) the creation of a supportive environment; and c) the distinction of what it means to be pro-ana. Although these themes are important to understanding why pro-ana users maintain membership within the various websites, they fail to account for the motivation behind the desire to achieve the thin ideal. This is why my topic of analysis

will contribute to the development of a more clear understanding of the pro-ana individuals.

In the next chapter, I describe the methodological approach that I use to examine the pro-ana websites. I reveal the reasons why discourse analysis is my chosen tool when examining the pro-ana websites. I provide a review of the definition of discourse analysis, as it is important to be clear in regards to what are deemed as data for analysis. I use several previous academic studies to highlight the different types of data that fall into the definition of discourse. This then leads to a discussion of the work of Norman Fairclough, one of the leading scholars in discourse analysis. I review his framework for the analysis of discourse, which consists of five stages.

I then move through a discussion of how I generated a list of pro-ana websites, from which I chose three for my analysis. I also review the classification of the various types of pro-ana websites I generated during my review. Inclusion of a section that discusses some of my ethical considerations was important, as disordered eating is a sensitive topic. Following this discussion I review the entire data collection process. This includes reviews of how I gathered my data and the vast number of data pages generated. I conclude the next section with my process journal, as I feel it shows my growth in perspective as a researcher.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY & METHODS: SORTING BIRDS OF A FEATHER

3.1 Why Discourse Analysis? The Rationale Behind the Methodology

Discourse analysis allows me to gain insight into the topic of pro-ana websites, because this methodology involves a critical examination of language and meaning. By deconstructing the discourse found on the pro-ana websites, I am establishing connections between the image projected as the ideal and the real life consequences of its unachievable nature. Discourse analysis enables me to critically examine the language used within the media and advertising industry and describe the ways in which this language is reflected on the pro-ana websites. The ability to draw these connections is essential to my analysis, as the message within pro-ana websites is the same as the advertising projected message: to be successful in life is to be thin. Through the use of critical discourse analysis I am able to apply theories of body, feminist theory, and, more specifically, Bordo's (1993,1998) theory to the content of the websites, which allows for a more in-depth understanding of their pursuit of the idealized female body. I am also able to weave in the metaphor of the ugly duckling story as this research unfolds. I explicitly show the ways in which portions of the media act as the ducklings attempting to regulate all those within the barnyard.

Chapter 3 consists of two major sections: methodology and methods. In this chapter, I begin by establishing a general conceptualization of discourse and then move to a discussion of critical discourse analysis, more specifically. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the various types of pro-ana websites as I chose to categorize them. I then turn to a discussion of some of the ethical issues regarding the pro-ana websites,

specifically looking at issues regarding research. From there, I describe the process by which I collected my data from the three pro-ana websites I chose to analyze. This chapter provides the ground work for my study and outlines the procedures I used to gather my data. It also provides a detailed outline of the methodology I chose for my analysis and why I thought it best suited for this study.

Discourse analysis stems from the work of many influential theorists of the past and has emerged as a strong method of analysis of present social trends and methods of communication. Discourse analysis allows researchers to investigate the use of both language and communication across histories, societies, and cultures (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). Although discourse analysis has been defined in many different ways, the definition offered by leading scholars Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates is: “Discourse analysis is the study of language in use”(p. 3) coupled with “the study of human meaning making” (p. 3). It is the coupling of these two aspects that provide an excellent tool for examining the underlying motivations for individual’s behaviors.

But what constitutes discourse? Discourse is any sort of textual, visual, or audio form of communication. From the above definition of discourse analysis, discourse encompasses any form of communication in which individuals derive meaning or carry out the act of meaning making. Discourse analysis thus becomes an in-depth methodology for analyzing the meaning created by individuals through the use of textual and other forms of communication. As such, this is the most appropriate method for my work on pro-ana websites. The pro-ana websites I examined contain textual data from which users draw meaning from on a daily basis. In this sense, every detail of the pro-ana websites was examined for meaning, including images, written work, and layout. I

include the main webpage and the images posted within the website as a portion of the discourse that carries meaning, as they act to influence the conceptualization of the idealized female body as defined by the pro-ana users.

The definition of discourse analysis is exemplified through examination of two studies, one specific to anorexia, the other to media advertising. A study by Pamela Hardin (2003) employs discourse analysis to examine the ways in which young women are institutionally positioned as anorexics and the effects that those positions have on their behaviors. Data were generated from online accounts and individual interviews. Hardin examined for the ways in which this group of young women creates meaning and navigates the position of the anorexic (Hardin, 2003). She states, “The deconstructive reading of the texts used in this study focused on the effects of constructive processes that centralize some beliefs and truths over others” (Hardin, 2003, p. 211). However, as mentioned above, discourse is not simply limited to the analysis of textual data; visual advertisements also act to create different meanings for the consumer of the advertisement.

A critical discourse analysis study by Small, Harris, and Wilson (2008) demonstrates the ways in which in-flight magazine advertising produces, mediates, and reproduces discourses surrounding air travel. Within this study, the researchers examined a selection of in-flight magazines and found that these magazines acted as a way to socially sort airline travelers. The advertisements promote an identity and lifestyle to which the average air traveler is expected to aspire. In this situation, the media advertisements create meaning around what it means to be an air traveler as well as imposing this meaning on all air travelers. The advertisements within the in-flight

magazines stressed exclusivity and privileging of wealth. Small et al. (2008) critically examine the language to uncover the following meanings within the advertisements:

Being selfish and indulgent is presented as 'okay' and pampering of the body is encouraged. For example, an advertisement for real estate in Fiji uses the tag words, 'Selfish, Sexy, Fun, Envied' (Air New Zealand, August) while a Porsche ad claims: 'Your inner child deserves to throw a tantrum if you don't at least take it for a test drive' (Quantus, April). (p. 25)

The analysis of the in-flight magazines exemplifies how the meaning created within the advertisements is intended to affect those who consume these magazines. By attending to specific words in the ads, the researchers reveal information about meanings and values, such as individualism, having fun, and being sexy. The study cited above also shows that discourse is not just limited to text or conversation, but that it encompasses images as well. Similarly, pro-ana websites convey meaning about what it means to be pro-ana. All of the components that make up the websites, such as text and photos, work together to create meaning for those who view these sites. Within my analysis of the pro-ana websites, I examine not only the textual data for meaning but rather the entire composition of the website.

While many different types of discourse analysis and methods for conducting discourse analysis are available, the present study employs the use of critical discourse analysis. According to Norman Fairclough (2001), a leading expert in this area, critical discourse analysis (CDA) varies from other forms of discourse analysis in that it does not begin with the analysis of texts or interactions; rather, it begins with the analysis of key issues within society, an approach which resonates with sociological research. But CDA is an interdisciplinary methodology: "it opens a dialogue between disciplines concerned with linguistic and semiotic analysis, and disciplines concerned with theorizing and

researching social processes and social change” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 230). Due to its interdisciplinary nature, CDA partners well with the feminist framework put forth by Bordo, who draws upon feminist cultural analysis, sociological data, and materials selected to be representative of mixed coercive social messages. CDA enables me to examine the pro-ana posts not only from a sociological lens, but a feminist lens as well. According to Potter (1998), CDA “provides a rigorous way of directly studying human practices” (p. 139), such as those evident on the pro-ana websites.

The critical aspect of CDA is described as follows:

It is critical, first, in the sense that it seeks to discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque...second it is critical in the sense that it is committed to progressive social change; it has an emancipatory ‘knowledge interest’. (Fairclough, 2001, p. 230)

The coupling of CDA with Bordo’s work enabled me to critically examine the relationship between culture and pro-ana beliefs. According to Bordo, Western culture, through the medium of advertising, creates specific beliefs regarding the idealized female body. CDA enabled me to deconstruct and analyze not only the posts within the websites, but also the structure of the websites, for the ways in which our cultural ideal impacts these sites. In addition, I examined the connections between language and meaning, what young women contribute to the websites, and what they encounter when visiting them. Deconstructing images and texts reveals some meanings that may be “opaque” or taken for granted. To fully understand the implications of a CDA approach, it is important to briefly reflect upon its origins.

3.2 Five Stages of Critical Discourse Analysis

Although CDA has been implemented as a method of analysis with increasing popularity in the past couple of decades, consensus as to how precisely it is conducted is

lacking. There are no step-by-step instructions. Due to this lack of information, I combine the works of a few different theorists in developing my own methodological design.

My analytical framework is based on a modified approach of Fairclough (2001), based on the work of Roy Bhaskar (1986). The analytical framework consists of five stages of analysis:

1. Focus upon a social problem that has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to the social problem being tackled.
3. Consider whether the social order (network of practices) 'needs' the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis (Stages 1-4).

These five stages act as guideposts for my analysis. I also integrate the feminist perspectives of Bordo within my analysis. Combined, this created an integrated approach to my topic, which consisted of five stages, outlined below.

Stage one involved beginning the research process with a social problem having a semiotic component rather than a research question. In my research, this meant examining the websites with an open mind, rather than coming into the analysis with a pre-determined question. I was interested in the semiotic or representational claims asserted by the websites and their effects on website use.

Within the second stage of CDA are three sub-stages of analysis: a) set the general context of the social problem, b) connect the general context to the specific discourse that is deconstructed, and c) conduct an analysis of the discourse itself. First, I conducted a brief analysis of the network of practices in which the social problem is located. Within my analysis, this consisted of identifying the overall cultural perception

of the idealized female body. This provided the context that enabled me to position the websites within a wider societal framework. Second, I connected the general context to the specific discourses, which showed the ways in which the images and statements on the pro-ana websites were connected to the idealized female body represented elsewhere in the social order. Third, I analyzed the data gathered from the pro-ana websites and conducted an analysis of the discourse itself. According to Fairclough (2001),

The objective here is to understand how the problem arises and how it is rooted in the way the social life is organized, by focusing on the obstacles to its resolution – on what makes it more or less intractable. (p. 236)

Following the analysis step of Stage 2, I considered whether the social order needs the problem to exist in order to fulfill its own agendas. Fairclough stresses this process involves consideration of who benefits the most from the way in which social life is currently organized, and who has direct interest in the problem not being rectified. In other words, do the media and advertisers need the idealized female body and is this implicated in pro-ana websites to create consumers for products that would otherwise have no market? I address this issue in Chapter 6, Section 6.1.

Having established who benefits from social relations and discourse, the next stage involves social change. This stage, Fairclough argues, acts to complement the second stage, as the researcher is not simply stating the existence of a social problem—they are taking the analysis one step further to hypothesize solutions. Fairclough (2001) believes addressing the following questions within this portion of analysis is essential:

On the one hand how does a text hold together to produce its own local network?
On the other hand, what are the incompletions, gaps, paradoxes and contradictions in the text? (p. 239)

He believes it is within these texts that unrealized potential for dealing with the problem is situated. I address some of these paradoxes and contradictions, as well as possible opportunities for social change, in Chapter 6.

The final and fifth CDA stage requires critical reflection on the analysis itself. Within this stage, researchers reflect upon their positions and beliefs. This stage provided me with a space to critically reflect upon my analysis, biases, and judgments. Researchers must reflect upon their own work to maintain a standard of excellence for themselves. In Chapter 6, I outline my reflections on my work.

The five-stage method of CDA guided my analysis. The principles and guidelines fit well with Bordo's work, as the stages are both critical and reflective, allowing for analysis of the pro-ana websites as well as a contextualization of the issue within broader societal trends, which is lacking within the current research. Having provided an orientation to my methodology, I turn now to a discussion of the methods I employed.

3.3 Methods: Preliminary Scan, Website Selection, Data Collection, & Process Journal

During the initial phases of research, I did a preliminary scan of the Internet to determine the common terms used to search for the pro-ana websites. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, many of these sites are well hidden behind various search terms—some of which are not typically associated with eating disorders (e.g., Lighter than Air, Invisible, Go Pro). This is partially because of the negative comments and harassment many websites receive in regards to their depiction of eating practices. Therefore, the initial review of the pro-ana websites allowed me to gain insight into what terms are used to conceal these websites from the general public, which enabled me to identify potential sites to study.

Conducting this preliminary scan was also important as pro-ana websites often close and re-open. Some websites cite harassment as the reason they change names, while others do not provide an explanation and simply re-open under a new name. Thus, the scan helped me to determine which websites have long standing records of being open, and from which websites I would successfully be able to collect data.

I began my research with a general search for the term 'pro-ana' within the Google database, which produced 9,230,000 hits. Two websites I used within my analysis were ranked 1 and 2 on this list; however, this is not the reason I chose them, which I will discuss shortly. I began with these top ranked websites, but found many more hidden on the Internet. These hidden websites were accessed through a variety of search terms, such as thinnest of them all, anorexic queen, pro ana mia, thinspiration, ana bones, anas angel, and UEN (University of Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified), which were all linked to various other websites. Travelling between websites using the suggested links allowed greater access into the online world of pro-ana.

So many of these websites experience shut downs or negative backlash, the methods they have come up with to be accessible to their users are themselves interesting. Through these linking networks of support and encouragement, users learn which websites are actively running, which are highly informative but inactive, and which are abandoned or shut down. Due to the links, pro-ana users are able to find the website that fits most closely with their beliefs.

3.3.1 Defining Pro-ana

The Internet hosts a wide variety of different pro-ana websites, each with slightly varied beliefs in regards to what it means to be 'pro-ana'. Several existing categories of pro-ana websites include distinctions between lifestyle and pro-ana approaches. After

viewing these websites, I defined the pro-ana websites in four ways: Triggering, Maintenance, Dissuading, and Forum. These categories have been developed to further refine the existing analysis of the different types of pro-ana websites currently on the Internet. This classification allows readers to have a better grasp of the variations among pro-ana websites. Below is a review of each of the categorizations I created.

(1) Triggering

The first type of website rejects the idea that anorexia and/or bulimia are pre-existing eating disorders, or illnesses. Instead, the users believe eating disorders are desirable and can be acquired through learning how to be anorexic or bulimic. Users focus on posting content that could be called ‘triggering’. This content ranges from images of thin models or celebrities, and ‘inspirational’ quotations, to thin commandments, ana’s creed (a poem which describes the rules of being anorexic in terms that could be read as spiritual or political), and tips to lose weight quickly. This type of website is especially coercive as it attempts to influence its viewers’ beliefs regarding how they should look. It uses images and writings that are especially explicit regarding how the idealized female body ‘should’ appear. An example of the first type of website would be the Proactive Anorexia site ‘Hunger Hurts But Starving Works.’ Within this website are sections such as thinspiration, thin commandments, ana’s creed, and weight loss tips. Most importantly, however, the website states that it will show individuals how to become eating disordered, which is why it fits the criteria of this category. (Note: a year after I began my research, the link to this website now reads that this site has been shut down and another has been developed in its place. However, when I followed this link I found the replacement website strongly discourages the belief that you can teach

individuals to become eating disordered. This change in opinion of the webmaster, which occurred over the past year of operation of the website, is interesting to note. Perhaps this change has also emerged as a method of survival for pro-ana individuals; those who wish to remain open claim to present their materials only for those who already suffer.)

(2) Maintenance

The second type of website conveys the message that eating disorders cannot be acquired; rather, they are a psychiatric illness. This category of website does not support the ideology that individuals can learn to acquire an eating disorder but instead focuses on supporting members who already suffer from one. The content found on the supportive websites varies from site to site; some contain the controversial ‘thinspiration’ whereas others do not. The commonality between all of the supportive websites is that they actively engage users who maintain an eating disorder. A large majority of the supportive websites do not reject the idea of recovery; however, most users admit up front that they are not ready to recover. These websites are somewhat coercive, as they promote the maintenance of eating disorders and use some explicitly coercive texts to this effect, such as the Thin Commandments. Examples of this type of website include ‘House of Thin’ and ‘Ana-Bones’; each website promotes the maintenance of an eating disorder and contains sections that encourage those who suffer to maintain their illness through the use of diets, thinspiration, or maintenance messages, among other means.

(3) Dissuading

The third type of website conveys the message that eating disorders are illnesses that should not be encouraged. This is similar to the second type; however, the dissuading sites post no content that could assist their users in maintaining their disorders. Often, the

content shows the stark reality of what it means to suffer from an eating disorder and focuses on educating the users. The dissuading websites at no time encourage any harmful behavior. These websites are the least coercive I encountered within my review. They are rarely coercive, if at all, as they attempt to persuade others away from becoming eating disordered. An example of this type of website would be ‘Pro-ana Nation’ or ‘Cerulean Butterfly’. Both websites stress that eating disorders are not something desirable, but rather are very serious disorders. These websites encourage individuals to seek treatment if they are suffering from eating disorders and attempt to discourage those who would like to become eating disordered.

(4) Forum

The fourth type of website is freely accessible to the public and does not require memberships to post. Forum websites can be set up through the website LiveJournal.com and are regulated only by their users. Each forum website has a topic heading, although users are able to post freely about any topic they wish. Typically, users posting on forum sites are supporters of individuals seeking recovery and discourage those who post asking how to ‘become’ anorexic. An example of a forum website would be ‘World’s Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting’. Users on this website post freely about a wide range of topics, some relating directly to eating disorders, others pertaining more to home or social lives.

3.3.2 Collecting from the Websites: Selection and Ethics

As previously mentioned, due to the controversial nature of pro-ana websites, they are often forced to shut down and re-open under different names and with different web servers. I spent a period of 6 months tracking different websites, noting those that shut down and those that remained open. After this period, I carefully chose three

websites from which to collect my data: Pro-ana Nation, Ana-Bones, and World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting. These websites each represent a different category of the pro-ana websites, thus providing a sample of three of the groups I describe above. The only group not represented was the first category (Triggering, which rejects the idea that eating disorders are an illness), as web servers continually shut down these websites, which would make it difficult, if not impossible, to gather data over time.

Of the chosen websites, each provided rich data for analysis. The number of pages gathered per site varied from 47 (Pro-ana Nation, dissuading website) to 104 (Ana-Bones, supportive website). The 24 Hour Forum site (World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting) produced over 90 pages of postings per day.

I chose the website Pro-ana Nation (PaN) based on several factors. It was an accurate representation of the third type of website (a supportive website that encourages users to become knowledgeable on the issue), it contained a wide range of information on eating disorders, it was current and up to date, it documented the web mistress' struggle with eating disorders, and information was clearly presented. This website represents a group of people who, although they suffer from eating disorders, are well aware of the dangers and consequences of maintaining their disorder.

The website Ana-Bones (AB) was chosen because it was an accurate representation of the second type of website (they support their users and provide tips on how to maintain their illness). This is the most popular type of pro-ana website currently in existence. I specifically chose this website because of several factors: it was clear and user friendly; it was current and up to date; and it provided users with all the key elements, such as thinspiration pages, dieting pages, ways to conceal their illness, and

ana's creed, which I identified as part of the supportive websites. In addition, AB had a section that allowed its users to publicly post their thoughts on each subject. This is especially valuable as I could use these data to contrast with the posts on the pro-ana forum.

The forum website World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting (WLPAS) was chosen based on its popularity among users as well as its accessibility to the public. Accessibility to the public was especially key, as it allowed me to observe and gather data without requiring the creation of a user name, which may act as a form of deception and would be unethical. The popularity of this website was important as it allowed for a thorough representation of the common issues the users of these forums discuss. These can range from the laxatives they have ingested, to trips to the gym, to simple complaints about their personal lives. All of these posts provide insight into the struggles of the online pro-ana poster.

A brief discussion of ethical issues surrounding pro-ana websites will preface my methods of data collection. Due to the nature of these websites, several researchers have struggled with the issue of ethics and what is ethical in regards to gathering data (Brotsky & Giles, 2007; Fox et al., 2005). For example, Fox et al. (2005) created an identity, to gain access to a single message board and stated their position as a researcher. The participants within their study were fully aware that they were acting as participants in a research study. The method of research involved no deception of the participants and served to gain insight into the pro-ana community.

Other researchers have chosen to keep their identity hidden within the process of gathering data. Brotsky and Giles (2007) used a covert approach to collect their data; they

created the identity of SB, an eating disordered individual. Through the use of the SB persona, the researchers gained access to 23 different pro-ana websites and participated in 38 instant messenger dialogues to collect their data. The pro-ana users within Brotsky and Giles' (2007) study were not aware that they were answering the questions of a researcher or that they were taking part in a web-based research study. The above-mentioned studies offer two distinct methods of gathering data from the pro-ana websites. Neither method is better than the other, as they both offer insight into the pro-ana websites, however they offer very different ethical understandings.

Within my own research, it was important to remain an outsider when gathering data from the websites, as if I were clipping articles from a newspaper. My application of CDA was based upon the analysis of textual and visual data. It was not based upon my interactions with pro-ana members. It was important to my analysis that I only used data that were already extant for analysis, as I aimed to uncover the ways in which specific discourse was used within these websites.

The data I collected for my study were from written online entries in the publicly accessible pro-ana websites. At no time were any attempts made to contact/interact with the website users; all data were collected in a passive observational manner. Thus, data were not gathered from any websites that required a password or user login. I approached the collection of my data as if my study had no participants, as I was only looking at textual online entries. This method of data collection allowed me to gather data in an ethical manner, as all entries were posted to a publicly accessible arena that anyone with an Internet connection could potentially access. In this way, I avoided the issue of deception and potentially the betrayal of a confidence.

Moreover, as opposed to the Fox et al. (2005) study, I felt it important that the data not be affected by the knowledge of a researcher's presence within the websites. My study also contrasts the method used by Brotsky and Giles (2007), as I am not comfortable with deception. The data I collected were drawn from the original messages posted by the pro-ana users' and always consisted of postings or messages meant to be read within the public arena. This sets my approach apart from previously conducted studies, as I examined posts unobstructed by knowledge or diplomacy of a researcher and consistent with the posting methods of each particular website.

3.3.3 Data Collection Process

As mentioned, all textual data were only collected from open access areas on the pro-ana sites. These data include any posted images and written information on the website, as well as all publicly accessible comments made by other viewers. Since I only accessed publicly available information; this *excluded* any forums or chat rooms that required a password or pseudonym. I did not directly question members of the pro-ana groups nor did I directly interact with the members. The data for this research were from the three different online pro-ana websites identified previously. The data were gathered from these sites over the span of a week, in order to gather enough information for analysis without being overwhelmed.

The computer software programs 'Capture Me' and 'Snap Web' enabled me to acquire time sensitive screen shots of the pro-ana sites. Shots of entire web pages were taken daily as changes to the pages were made on a daily basis. These web shots act as the data for this study; however, data from any website displaying the copyright symbol or using the phrase "all rights reserved" or "copyrights/ property of" were used only for analysis and do not appear in this thesis. All quotations taken from the websites are

written exactly as they appeared within the websites, to preserve the original emphasis, context, and voice of each user. By preserving the original typos and written text, I also maintained some of the original emotion conveyed within the quotation.

Informed by my six-month monitoring of the pro-ana websites, I approached the one week collection of my data in two ways. First, the data from Pro-ana Nation and Ana-Bones were collected over a period of one week. This was done both to ensure a wide variety of posts would be included in the data and to account for changes to the websites that may occur over the period of a week. Second, the data from the World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting were collected over a period of two days. This was based on the number of posts made by individuals on a daily basis; during each of the two days, I collected over 90 pages of postings. Each format of data collection allows for a comprehensive review of the pro-ana websites.

My data were filed in electronic folders on a usb data stick, titled with the date, then divided into folders with their website names. Over the course of the data collection, I began to note some very interesting trends. Content on the website Pro-ana Nation never altered during the entire data collection process. As the forum on this particular website is restricted by a password, the pages containing content in regards to various topics were never commented upon. The website acted as an information database, and therefore I stopped collecting screen images of the pages on this particular website after day 2. The pages on Pro-ana Nation did not change throughout the entire data collection period.

Another interesting trend occurred during data collection. Within the website Ana-Bones, there were not only comments on the particular page topics, but also

comments on the comments. Users were creating mini-forums on individual page topics. Moreover, some topics were commented upon daily while other pages were not commented upon at all. Thus, similar to data collection on Pro-ana Nation, I only collected screen images from this site when the webpage changed from the previous day. In addition to the collection of the altered web pages, I also collected all of the comments left by other users in regards to the original posters' comment, which provided data on the interactions between pro-ana members.

During data collection on World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting, I also encountered the trend of posting comments in relation to other users' comments. The 24 Hour Forum is organized so that when a user comments on a post by another user, a mini forum is created with a new link. Thus, the main initial post shows up in the large forum, in addition to a link with the connection to the other users' comments. Therefore, although the 24 Hour Forum may appear to only generate 8 or 10 pages of new posts per day, each post could in itself produce an additional 1-5 pages of comments. Capturing all of these sub-posts was extremely important as they show the various ways individual users interact with one another.

In total, 378 pages of data were collected from Ana-Bones, Pro-ana Nation, and the World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting websites. Data collection from these three websites involved an estimated number of over 200 individuals. I include quotations from various pro-ana users within my analysis. To protect the anonymity of the users, I refer to them by a single letter. This letter has no connection to the online names or pseudonyms of the pro-ana members. Thus, the code name participant A, which is abbreviated as PA, will represent a quoted user. I chose to assign participant code

names in this manner, as it was impossible to speculate on the gender of the posting user, and this method allowed me to provide an indication of which site the participants posted their comments.

3.3.4 My Process Journal

I also used a journal to capture my experiences and reflections during the research period of my thesis. I typed out my reflections upon the research process on days when I felt important stages were reached, or when I felt the need to document my feelings and thoughts. I have included this in my thesis to demonstrate the ways in which I changed my views and perspectives over the course of the thesis. Because these are journal excerpts, I have not edited them in great detail (e.g., for punctuation, sentence structure), but I have selected information that is most relevant to my work herein. I have included my overall reflections between entries in italics to create a more cohesive and reflective journal.

May 3rd, 2008

Today I am reviewing the pro ana websites and checking to see how long each website has been up and running. I am looking for the length of time of existence, when it was posted on, when it was last updated and whether or not the site owner is still actively running the website. I have created a list of websites that I will monitor over time. What I have noticed is that some of the websites have been up for a long time but are not updated anymore, it is almost like they are sunken ships that are part of the pro-ana past, unused and abandoned. As well, some other sites are posted upon by the members, but not updated by the site owner. This seems odd to me. Other websites seem to be the main projects of some website owners as they are updated regularly and maintained well. One website I have run across is set-up in university format, it is called the university of EDNOS and those who wish to become members must actually submit an application, similar to that of a real university. It would be interesting to do a study on this website alone and the ways it is marketed and set-up like a real university. This individual has obviously poured a lot of energy into creating this website. Tracking these websites will allow me to become familiar with what is currently out there and the ways in which pro-ana sites change over time. These websites need to be critically examined for their content as I feel they are only making an already difficult to manage disorder worse. As well those who visit the websites because of the ongoing media scrutiny may be vulnerable to practicing the diets and tips posted on the websites. I am beginning the process of writing my proposal; it is difficult to decide what I should include and how I

should narrow my topic. I feel like there are so many directions I can take this project and I have a hard time deciding exactly what it is I want to look at. It seems as though there could be numerous different angles I can approach my topic from and I'm not sure what it is exactly I want to examine.

The above entry documents how complex this issue is...there are many strong arguments for why these websites should be shut down entirely, however it is my job as a researcher to remain as objective as possible... 3 months later I make an interesting discovery...

August 26th, 2008

I am surprised to find that during my random checking over the summer, some sites have been closed, frozen or abandoned. It is interesting to see this occur. It makes me wonder if the individuals who ran these websites were forced out, by either the domain or something similar, or whether they chose to stop posting and stop running their websites. It would be interesting to find out what the reasons behind quitting were however due to the set-up of the Internet this would be nearly impossible to find out. What I have come to notice is that some sites are quite strong in their membership and are permanent fixtures on the internet. Some website owners are quite dedicated to their websites, and post on their websites regularly. I have decided that I would like to track 3 websites within my own thesis work. I feel it is important to include a forum within these three website but have not found one that grants open access to individuals (most forums require members to set up accounts and user names to access them). I have decided I would like to include the website Pro-Ana-Nation. The reason I want to include this website is because its owner has some interesting ideas about what it means to be pro-ana and how their views differ from the other websites out there. I have put this website on my list of monitored websites. I am working on submitting my second draft of my proposal. It seems that as the summer has progressed I have changed my views and even the angle from which I would like to examine my topic from. What do these websites consist of and how do the long running websites stay open?

I have found there to be a disappearing act occurring, those radical websites have been shut down or abandoned, those long standing websites showcase an alternative perspective. They attempt to only support those who are already suffering...what a sensitive group of individuals to examine...

October 28th, 2008

I am getting my application ready to be submitted to ethics. It requires quite an attention to detail. Due to the nature of my thesis topic, I have decided to frame the data that I collect under the same lens as that of a newspaper analysis. I will describe the entries as textual data that is posted to a public space. In this sense I am not really dealing with participants at all, I am dealing with textual data posted publicly. This will help us deal with the issue of the sensitive nature of the posts. I have also found a website that is encouraging of pro-ana individuals, I am currently tracking it to see if it stays open for a period of time and is a website that users post on within the forum sections. The forum of this website is open which will come in handy as I will be able to compare it to the 24 hour forum.

One thing that strikes me about the ethics application process is the respect and dignity afforded to the participants, regardless of their live or virtual presence. I will strive hard to respect their ideas and thoughts, in addition to accurately representing them within my work... I wish to capture their true need to connect...

December 17th, 2008

I have rewritten my proposal again for the third time. I feel like every time I read the silly thing my thoughts from before sound childish and outdated. Not to mention the fact that my opinions about the pro-ana sites have changed quite dramatically over time. I started this whole process believing these are websites that should be shut down as they are only causing harm to their users. I now believe they are actually supporting their users and creating a method of practicing eating disorders that are less dangerous than experimenting on your own. This line of thought falls into the stream of harm reduction and thus that will be integrated into my analysis of the pro-ana websites.

Looking back over this process I have realized that all young individuals feel alone in regards to their own personal struggles with the image in the mirror. Perhaps these individuals are attempting to break out of the isolation they feel and connect with others with similar beliefs...that made me think of the connections created within harm reduction approaches...

January 19th, 2009

I have started the data collection process. I am collecting screen shots from three different websites; Pro-ana Nation, World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site 24 Hour Posting, and Ana-Bones. I am taking screen shots of the websites and this is proving to be more difficult than I originally thought. I have to piece together the images and correctly line them up. I am currently looking into a different program which will allow me to take pictures of the entire website at the same time.

An Hour Later... I have found a program called SnapWeb, which I am going to use instead of Capture Me. It delivers a picture of the entire webpage and gives you the ability to zoom in without a large amount of distortion occurring. I have gone back and re-done the images from the websites that I gathered this morning. This new program works much better than the previous one and will enable me to collect a shot of the entire webpage as it sits in that moment in time.

I am gathering pictures of the websites the pro-ana individuals frequent. Similar to them grabbing pictures of the idealized female body for inspiration, I too gather images in hopes of academic inspiration...The difference is that I am turning images into data whereas they are turning images into iconic representations...

January 23rd, 2009

I have completed the data collection process. What I have noticed is that other than the 24 Hour Forum website the other two websites did not change as much as I had originally thought they would. The 24 Hour Forum changed on an hourly basis, and sometimes several new posts were made in an hour. However the websites Pro-ana Nation did not change at all the entire week even though the website is updated on a regular basis. Due to this I only ended up taking shots of the websites on the first couple days, as it did not change during the rest of the week. The 24 Hour Forum was the only website that ended up changing on a daily basis, which was interesting to note.

Similarly to some of the websites, my opinion on this topic changes, evolves and re-emerges. In order to grow and move forward these changes need to occur, however for the Pro-ana Nation website this did not occur. The lack of evolution makes me question the popularity if there is no weekly evolution which takes place...evolution of these websites is crucial to gaining insights into their thought processes...

January 27th, 2009

I have organized the posts into categories or themes of discussion. I feel this will make them easier to analyze at a later date. I have noticed that within the post the individuals are either quite talkative about the issue that is posted or they only have words of encouragement for the other members. It is also interesting to note that on the Ana-Bones website, users continually post about the images posted on the website even though some of the images have been on the website for quite some time. This shows images of thin girls are always relevant no matter how dated the pictures may be at the time of comment.

During this current time period, the idealized female body is showcased to be very thin and has been that way for a while. There is a lot to be learned from those who turn to the pro-ana websites for inspiration and connections... I am certain from this point forward that I will be able to uncover some of the motivating factors for joining and maintaining membership within these websites...on some level I believe individuals do not want to confront the image in the mirror alone...

Advice for Future Students Working with Sensitive Topics

I felt it important to include a short write-up on the advice I would give any students who will be examining and researching sensitive topics. Whether we believe it or not the things we research on a daily basis profoundly affect us. The acquisition of new information allows us as human beings to be continuously evolving. That being said, the first bit of advice I would offer is to keep an emotional journal in which you reflect upon the emotions you experience due to the subject you are researching. It would have been very informative to be able to review the ways in which my opinion has changed about my own body over time due to this research. The second bit of advice I would offer is for the student to meet with their committee more often than may be usual or the institutional norm. As students, sometimes we don't realize the ways in which sensitive topics affect us as individuals. It would be great to come together with a committee and discuss the potential emotional effects of research. I believe this would offer the student a greater ability to reflect critically on their topic in addition to being able to discuss insights with accomplished academics. It is only through deep reflection that we can truly understand our inner selves.

3.4 Conclusions and Connections

Within this chapter, I have presented the methodology that is most effective for my analysis of the pro-ana websites. Critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to approach the topic with an open mind and uncover meaning within the text. It also allows me to make connections between the discourse and greater social issues. This is essential, as I wish to draw connections between the theoretical work done by Bordo, my analysis of the media, and the discourse found within the pro-ana websites.

I also provided a review of critical discourse analysis and a five-stage approach. I outlined the major steps for analysis as put forth by Fairclough. These will act as the guideposts for my analysis. Within this chapter, I also discussed the methods of my data collection, beginning with the ways in which I searched for relevant websites for analysis. This led to a description of the many definitions of pro-ana used within websites. Finally, I discussed the three websites I chose to examine: Ana-Bones, World's Largest Pro Anorexia Site-24hr Posting, and Pro-Ana-Nation. I have provided a justification for each website and the importance of including each within my analysis.

Due to the sensitive nature of my topic, it was also important to discuss ethical considerations. This involved discussing the specific way in which I collected my data for analysis. I wanted to capture the pro-ana websites as they were within their current space; thus, it was important to me not to reveal my presence or question the individuals within the websites. I concluded this chapter with my process journal, which I kept to reflect my thought process during the important stages of my research. It illustrates the ways in which thoughts and beliefs can change over the course of research. The next two chapters build upon the first three, by presenting the data that I analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL: DUCKLINGS ARE BEAUTIFUL

In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of using critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the website postings made by pro-ana users. I also explain the process by which I use CDA, in combination with Bordo's theories, to achieve a well-rounded analysis of my topic. Within Chapter 4, I first explicitly examine how the idealized female body is constructed, the evolution of the thin ideal, and the presentation of the thin ideal within the pro-ana websites. Second, I showcase two sections within the websites that act to dynamically promote and maintain the idea that being thin is the ultimate goal. Finally, I present the concept of control, which is foundational to the entire pursuit of the idealized female body. Pro-ana members assert that through consistently maintaining 'control', they will ultimately achieve their idealized female body. Thus, it is fundamental that I discuss how this thought process is expressed and reinforced within the websites. I also discuss, through the use of actual pro-ana quotations, what happens when 'control' is lost and the efforts members go through to regain 'control'.

A total of 378 pages of data were collected from the websites. Once the data collection process was finished, I created general categories based on the posting topics. The 24 Hour Forum, where users can consistently post new comments or respond to the posting of others, generated 17 different categories. Ana-Bones, the website already divided into specialized sections on which users can comment freely, generated 15 different categories. Some overlap in these categories across the two websites was inevitable, as both have segments on dieting, purging, and thinspiration. However, other categories were specific to each website, such as television topics (the 24 Hour Forum) or the MK challenge (Ana-Bones). Due to the variation in topics, I collapsed the themes into

categories based upon the content of the post. For example, one post discussed the desire to watch America's Next Top Model, which is a television show; however, I labeled the post under thinspiration because the user discusses the 'need' to watch the show to be inspired. This allowed for the analysis of posting themes that may not have been similar across the websites.

I completed a brief content analysis of the websites to show the number of posts considered within my analysis. It also served to show some of the general themes I found within the websites. Within the table below, the top row represents my categorization of the postings I found within the websites. The cells below these offer some of the posting categories found within the websites. This table shows how I categorized some of the topics I found within the websites into themes and values. The three main values I examined within my analysis were discipline, self-surveillance, and drive. I categorized some of the other posts that I found into the themes of support and thinspiration. I briefly touch upon the effects of thinspiration within the next section of this chapter. I decided not to examine the theme of support, as previous research studies have examined this theme in depth. This table indicates which were 'hot topics' and received the most posts. It also offers an example of the typical type of posting found within each theme of discussion. I also found a range of topics, such as the weather, boys, ballet, and boredom, which I chose not to examine within my analysis. An example of the type of discussion reads, "I hope it snows more so i can get out of school early :) where are you? I'm in ny" (WLPAS). I chose not to analyze these posts; although they provided me with insight into the daily lives of pro-ana users, they did not provide relevant support to my analysis.

Seemingly unrelated topics, such as the weather, may offer a fruitful site of analysis for another research project in the future.

From the general themes in Table 1, I placed the posts into three major themes, which coincide with Bordo's theories: 1) discipline; 2) self-surveillance; and 3) drive. These themes tend to overlap due to the self re-enforcing nature of the subject; however, each theme adds crucial insight into unpacking the discourse of pro-ana users. I discuss these themes further within Chapter 5; however, each of the major themes I discuss share one central and fundamental focus—the idealized female body. I now turn to an examination of how this body is created, what the key features of the idealized female body are presently, and how the pro-ana websites present and enforce this body.

Table 1: General Themes of Postings within the Examined Websites

My Categorization of Postings →	Discipline	Drive	Support	Self-Surveillance	<u>Thinspiration</u>
Subcategories → of Postings – Number of Posts and Example	Love/Hate of Disorder – 4 “i dont understand.. for like the first three months of recovery i stayed at a constant 100 lbs, and in the past like 2 months ive skyrocketed up to 120 without changing my diet really. and it keeps going up the less i eat =(i dont know how to make it stop, much less REVERSE it.” (WLPAS)	Losing Weight - 14 “I’m 150 and 5’5 I really need a way to lose at least twenty lbs fast. Any suggestions?” (AB)	Pen Friends – 4 “ anyone outside UK want a pen friend?! X” (WLPAS)	Fasting – 14 “6 hours into my fast... so hungry. haha hope i can get through the next 7 days =)” (WLPAS)	Pictures – 16 “I have never wanted ...needed craved something as badly as I want this” (AB-Comment on picture)
	Discussing Others’ Appearance – 4 “OMFG, that is absolutely disgusting! Totally Sick! I don’t ever want to look like them!” (AB)	Envy – 7 “ballerinas are the perfect inspiration!!” (AB)	Ana Buddy – 30 “Hi, I am 23, live in Canada and really need an ana buddy. I have no one around me to help or offer support.”(AB)	The Gym – 7 “that I’ve gotten dizzy (but satisfied) after a workout. I wanna feel like this all the time.” (WLPAS)	Written Beliefs – 13 “Ana is the beautiful, bone thin model everyone sees and is so jealous of...”(AB)
	Failing – 12 “I actually have to Restart as I kept so well yesterday then binged last night urrrrrgh.” (AB)	Diets – 20 “You can lose 15lbs in 8 days!!!...drink skim milk or reduced cal milk” (AB)	Supportive Comments – 40 “ Awww baby. You should try to relax. Make a hot drink and... take a bubble bath! Clear your mind and try and get some rest. :) I hope you are okay,≤3” (WLPAS)	Self- Harm – 7 “laxative intake today = 50 =[shit!” (WLPAS)	
	Self-Worth – 15 “ I MISS HAVING A BOYFRIEND. but now that i’m not thin anymore i feel like no guy will ever like me = (“ (WLPAS)			Control – 12 “A wonderful sense of control is washing back over me. a few lbs closer :)” (WLPAS)	

4.1 Evolution of Thin and Trim as Ideal

MacSween (1995) argues that the construction of the idealized female body in different cultures has become a major topic of analysis in anthropological work. The idealized female body has been studied in various disciplines for its effect on society. MacSween (1995) also points to several different theorists who actively discuss the ways in which the human body is culturally constructed. Polhemus (as cited in MacSween, 1995) argues:

The human body does not exist and is not understandable apart from ‘the social construction of reality. Our bodies and our perception of them constitute an important part of our socio-cultural heritage. (p. 115)

It can be concluded from this perspective that without direction from Western culture, the mythical idealized female body would not exist. In this sense, Western culture needs to actively construct the definition of this type of body . Polhemus is not the only theorist to discuss this idea; Turner (as cited in MacSween, 1995) also argues a similar point:

Human biological presence is socially constructed and constituted by communal practices...biology and physiology are themselves classificatory systems which organize and systematize human experience, and they are, therefore, features of culture not nature. (p. 116)

For Turner, the body is actively defined and created through the use of culture. This argument further confirms the belief that the idealized female body is constructed based upon the cultural beliefs of the current society. The thin body has been created as desirable within the North American culture by society itself. It is then actively reinforced as the current ideal to be pursued within this same culture. It is key to my thesis to briefly review how the thin body became the current ideal.

Within Western culture, a culturally constructed ideal of beauty exists that hinges upon being thin. Bordo (2003) argues that the construction of the thin idealized female

body is a very recent occurrence that can be traced back to the 1920s. The evolution of this ideal occurred during the shift from the promotion of fashion through the use of hand-drawn illustrations to promotion through the use of photographs of real female models wearing the fashion (Nielsen, 2008). In the 1930's and 1940's, Western culture saw a shift toward the more shapely figures with the emergence of the wartime pinup models Betty Grable and Jane Russell. However, in the 1960's the thin body came into fashion when the model Twiggy became the new "it" girl. She was extremely tiny, flat chested, with a boyish figure, and became the ideal for all white women (Grogan, 2008). Since then, studies suggest fashion models have become thinner and thinner each decade. In the 1990's, Bordo argues society saw the emergence of the 'heroin chic' model Kate Moss, who bears a similar body to that of Twiggy from the 1960's. In the 2000's, fashion models remained extremely thin and upheld the thin ideal. This brief review of the history of the body provides the necessary background to showcase how the extremely thin body has come to be idolized by our culture and presented as the desired body for women to achieve.

4.2 Pro-ana Websites Create Their Definition of Ideal

Pro-ana users are taking ideas found within contemporary culture and literally shaping their bodies so that they themselves match the thin ideal promoted by the fashion industry. Bordo (1993) argues that the anorexic successfully imitates the contemporary ideal:

The emaciated body of the anorectic, of course, immediately presents itself as a caricature of the contemporary ideal of hyper-slenderness for women, an ideal that, despite the game resistance of racial and ethnic difference, has become the norm for women today. (p. 170)

Pro-ana websites take this “contemporary ideal” seriously. Pro-ana website users frequently discuss their desires to attain the perfect body. Although the definition of the perfect body may vary from user to user, the underlying commonality between each description is the focus on slimness. A critical analysis done by Levine and Murnen (2009) confirms that although definitions of the idealized female body vary, the common thread within the mass media messages remains the emphasis upon thinness. They state:

Weight and shape concerns, along with a ‘dieting mentality’, tend to emerge in childhood for girls of varying sizes and backgrounds- and children are heavy consumers of mass media (e.g., TV, children’s books, and videos; Comstock & Sharrer, 2007) that are replete with clear messages about the positive features of thinness and the many negative aspects of being fat. (p. 11)

All three websites under analysis are constructed of images that clearly convey the message that thin is the ideal. Upon close examination of the posted images showcasing the idealized bodies, the relative uniformity is clear: they all contain extremely thin women. These images of thin women are held as the ideal within our current culture according to Bordo, and thus it is not surprising to find that pro-ana members use them as an essential part of their daily struggle. The use of written pro-ana beliefs also aids users to remain focused during their pursuit of the ideal. Most pro-ana websites contain a section of quotations and mantras regarding what it means to be pro-ana. These texts encourage users to maintain their strength and control. In the following three sections, I present examples of the different ways through which pro-ana users discuss and present the idealized female body within the categories of thinspiration and written beliefs. These two categories were created based upon the textual and visual aspects of the websites. Each discussion highlights how the idealized female body is pursued within the realm of the pro-ana websites.

4.2.1 Thinspiration

4.2.1.1 Regular Thinspiration

Pro-ana members use images of other women whose bodies they desire to increase their ability to control their own bodies. Commonly referred to as thinspiration (pictures of extremely thin or emaciated individuals), these images act as a means of inspiration and motivation for individuals to maintain their goals. The images showcased within the websites often depict young women in various states of undress. Typically, the bodies of the featured young women are extremely thin, sometimes to the point of protruding bones. Due to the fact that pro-ana members believe that bones are attractive, photos in some cases are edited with Photoshop to create the impression that the individuals are extremely thin. An example of this editing is provided in photos 1 & 2, where I contrast the real images on the left with the Photoshopped image on the right.



Image 1: Original photograph on the left; Photoshopped image on the right.



Image 2: Original photograph on the left; Photoshopped image on the right.

The pro-ana members believe that if they continually refer to these images, it will increase their ability to maintain control over their bodies. This belief is held even if the images they refer to do not reflect reality.

Thinspiration is commonly posted within the pro-ana websites, and users comment on the need to view thinspiration to keep motivated. For example, PA posted on the 24 Hour Forum website: “I fail. Why must I do this the hard way? If I had my way I’d sit here and look at thinspo all night” (PA, WLPAS, 2009). This posting is expressive of the struggle individuals face to maintain control in order to achieve their stated goals. In the above post, thinspiration becomes the preventative measure used to avoid failure. I argue that pro-ana users define failure as the inability to effectively control their bodily needs. Thus, PA views thinspiration as a supportive tool that makes maintaining their eating disorder easier.

This post is followed by a comment made by PB validating the need for thinspiration: “at the moment I watch thinspo every morning before work and usually fall asleep with it on as well. Hopefully some of it will seep into my dreams and increase my willpower” (PB, WLPAS, 2009). PB is validating PA’s post, as well as reinforcing the use of thinspiration as a controlling mechanism. However, PB’s post makes the need to view thinspiration a daily task in order to maintain control of their eating disorder. PB even goes as far as to say that they wish it would enable them to become stronger during their sleep. This is illustrative of the intense need to regulate the living body in order to achieve an idealized female body.

Thinspiration becomes an essential tool for individuals to navigate through the day with their eating disorder. Many websites provide an album of thinspiration that the

website operator has gathered from other websites or from pictures of themselves.

Websites often distinguish between celebrity thinspiration and real-girl thinspiration, and set up two different albums. Thinspiration has also emerged on the video website *YouTube*. Some individuals have created short thinspirational movies with music and all of their favorite pictures. These videos can also be found linked to the pro-ana websites, offering an even greater database of thinspiration than just the pro-ana website itself. The immense availability of and effort put into developing and monitoring thinspiration by some individuals clearly shows the importance of thinspiration to the pro-ana members. Thinspiration acts as a tool for reinforcement of the goal they wish ultimately to achieve.

4.2.1.2 Celebrity Thinspiration

Another way in which the important role of thinspiration can be seen is in the analysis of postings regarding celebrity photos as thinspiration. Pictures of thin celebrities are featured on the websites to act as thinspiration. Pro-ana members openly comment on the desire to obtain a body similar to that of a celebrity. One pro-ana member on the website *Ana-Bones* illustrates this desire in her post regarding an image of Nicole Richie: “She’s SO pretty! I want to look like her. And she gets all the good jobs, and all the handsome guys ;)!” (PZ, AB, 2009). PZ begins by expressing their opinion on the outward appearance of Nicole. The use of capital letters in the word ‘so’ places emphasis on their assessment of Nicole’s degree of beauty. PZ goes on to state their desire to appear like Nicole. Nicole thus possesses a standard of beauty that the user feels a strong desire to emulate. Not only is Nicole Richie’s body held in high esteem, she is also equated with being successful at obtaining ‘good jobs’ and ‘handsome guys’. In this posting, Nicole clearly encompasses all of the traits the user strives for: beauty, success, desirability, and social acceptance. The belief that slenderness equals success is exactly

what Bordo (1998) is referring to in her argument regarding contemporary representations of women:

A range of contemporary images and representations have coded the transcendence of female appetite and its public display in the slenderness ideal in terms of power, will, mastery, the possibilities of success in the professional arena. (p. 182)

In both of the above examples, thinspiration acts to enable users to maintain their eating disorders in their goal of thinness. The images used for thinspiration contain an overall uniform ideal, which is closely related to images of women the advertising industry uses to convey success and desirability. Thinspiration thus can be seen as mirroring the advertisements one can currently see within Western culture. Similar to the ways in which advertising encourages consumers to buy particular products or consume particular products to look beautiful, thinspiration is used by pro-ana members to encourage each other to maintain control over their bodies in pursuit of the proposed ideal.

4.2.2 Written Beliefs

Another mechanism that aids pro-ana users in their pursuit of thinness is written beliefs. In this portion of the websites, coercive language is used to enforce the message. Within the Ana-Bones website is a category devoted to Ana Beliefs. This category consists of written thin commandments, inspirational quotations, and reasons to be thin. The Thin Commandments is a play on the Ten Commandments from the Bible. Ten ‘commandments’ are listed that all pro-ana users are encouraged to follow. These written commandments are coercive in nature and for the pro-ana users are held in the same esteem as the biblical commandments are by religious believers. The inclusion of written beliefs, such as the commandments, demonstrates the intensity of the belief systems

created by the pro-ana users. Each entry acts to persuade the individual to maintain the pro-ana quest. These commandments include “If you aren’t thin you aren’t attractive”; “Being thin is more important than being healthy”; “You shall not eat without feeling guilty”; “You can never be too thin”; and “Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success” (AB, 2009). I am unsure of the author, but these commandments appear in various forms on many of the different pro-ana websites.

The thinspirational quotations found on the websites are extensive and seem to mimic each other from site to site. Several strong quotations are associated with the pro-ana beliefs, such as “nothing tastes as good as thin feels,” which has also been the slogan for the weight loss giant, Weight Watchers®, and their Winning Points diet (Weight Watchers International, 2003). Other examples of commonly found quotations include “Every time you say ‘No Thank you’, You say ‘Yes Please’ to Thin”; “Sacrifice is giving up something good for something better”; and “The only thing that matters is being thin” (AB, 2009). Users are encouraged to read over quotations such as these to remind them why their struggle is worth continuing.

From an analytical point of view, the quotations act to enforce the belief that power and control can be achieved through restriction and discipline. They are coercive and persuasive in nature; they attempt to transform the beliefs of the readers. The original context of the quotations may not have been in relation to achieving the perfect body; however, set within the framework of the pro-ana websites they may become highly motivational to individuals who are pursuing the proposed ideal.

A section on the Ana-Bones website also provides 57 reasons to be thin. These reasons are slightly different from the Thin Commandments and the inspirational

quotations; however, they follow the same general theme. All of the quotations attempt to persuade pro-ana members that they do not need to eat and that they do need to achieve the ideal. Not all pro-ana websites have this section; however, I thought it useful to include this within my description of “motivational” writing. I feel the reasons listed reveal the extreme beliefs of some pro-ana users. The list shows a serious attempt to persuade individuals into believing that they absolutely need to be thin. The first five reasons are:

1. You will be FAT if you eat today, just put it off one more day.
2. You don't NEED that much food.
3. Fat people can't fit everywhere.
4. Guys will be able to pick you up without struggling.
5. You'll be able to run faster without all that extra weight holding you back. (AB, 2009)

These are all statements that individuals who may be looking for a reason to lose weight might believe and repeat to themselves.

Bordo (1993) argues that women within our culture are conditioned to believe that by achieving physical beauty, individuals also achieve power and control within society.

She asserts:

...my understanding of eating disorders as rising out of and reproducing normative feminine practices of our culture, practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being *experienced* in terms of power and control. (p. 27)

According to Bordo's argument, the 57 reasons section acts to normalize the pursuit of the thin ideal, while at the same time enforcing control and restriction over one's own

body. She also suggests that conformity and happily delimited aspirations are re-visioned as elite activism. She reveals the mirage at the heart of the delusion.

This becomes clear through the examination of an example of an inspirational quotation. The first quotation reads, “if you want to be thin...you have to have control. You can control your life...from the inside out. So do it...you can...you can do it...you will do it...ana is a way of life embrace it” (AB, 2009). This quotation directly discusses eating disorders as the way to achieve control in life. The language is set up to reinforce the ana belief—through the regulation of the body individuals can achieve control within their lives. Through the application of Bordo’s theory, pro-ana users appear to become docile and obedient to the Western cultural norm of thinness and as a result experience the model of power and control they desire.

The above example demonstrates the persuasiveness of a pro-ana quotation within the 57 reasons section. However, examining how the users themselves feel about the posted quotations is also important. The following example is a quotation discussed by a pro-ana member as influential. A pro-ana user posts:

I printed these off...I love them :D. One of my favorites was: ‘Always set your goals and expectations high. There will come times when you think that you can’t push any harder. You can. There will come times when you want to walk away. DON’T. Never lose sight of what you really want to accomplish.’ (PY, AB, 2009)

This posting reflects the importance of the quotation section to the users themselves. Not only are these quotations important to the website creator, the quotations are also important to the members.

The above is essential to my analysis—these quotations are not only used by the website creator, they are also used and discussed by the visitors to the websites. Thus, the quotations act as a supportive tool to encourage the pursuit of the goals of those with

anorexia. Importantly, however, sometimes the quotations are taken out of context. The above quotation, for example, has been removed from its original context. Dawn Staley wrote the above quotation about always setting your goals and expectations high. Staley is a three time Olympian and a professional basketball coach and empathetically not eating disordered. Indeed, she could not perform at this level of athletic achievement if she was. The original context of this quotation was centered on achieving a goal in the area of sports. The original context is not mentioned within the Ana-Bones website and now the quotation is framed in relation to achieving the thin body. This suggests that any influential quotation regarding the pursuit of a goal can be reframed within the pro-ana context. This is a notable example of the interesting ways in which discourse can be altered to serve the purpose of the reader/poster.

To further pursue the comment left by PY, it is important to note that first she states she has printed off these quotations. Thus, one can assume PY means the entire list of quotations. Printing off the quotations allows PY to read over them whenever they are in need of inspiration and away from their computer. PY goes on to state that the quotation by Dawn Staley was their favorite. This quotation within the pro-ana context acts to enforce the idea that being pro-ana is about achieving that which at times seems unachievable. The language of Staley's quotation conveys a strong message of power and control when framed in the pro-ana context. The ideology expressed within the Staley quotation coincides perfectly with the pro-ana mentality; ultimately, being pro-ana centers on the ability to achieve perfect control over one's body resulting in the achievement of what pro-ana members believe to be the perfect body.

4.3 Controlling and Pruning the Body

Within previously discussed construction of the idealized female body, I express the importance control plays in the lives of those who are part of the pro-ana websites. Regardless of the topic of the posting, and/or the website on which it was posted, an underlying theme of control emerges from the data. It is important to set the context in which the idealized female body is constructed to clearly show the role control plays within the lives of pro-ana individuals. Control, as defined by Random House Dictionary Online (2009), is *–verb (used with object)*

- a. to exercise restraint or direction over; dominate; command.
- b. to hold in check; curb: *to control a horse; to control one's emotions.*

(Control)

Within the context of the pro-ana websites, both of the above definitions describe the way in which the members use control. The words used to compose the above definitions are important; these words are directly applicable to the pro-ana members. The pro-ana users exercise restraint and direction over their bodies in the form of dieting. The users actively dominate their own bodily needs to achieve their imagined idealized female body. They command their bodies to ignore their need of food in order to lose more weight.

The second definition also actively describes the use of control by pro-ana members. Pro-ana users consistently attempt to hold their bodies in check, sometimes blogging about their ability to remain in check. They also try to curb their appetite as much as physically possible; they curb their need to consume food as much as possible. In this sense, the above definitions of control act to set the context in which the word

control is used. As well, these definitions reconfirm that the data I am analyzing actively contribute to the theme of a very limited model of control.

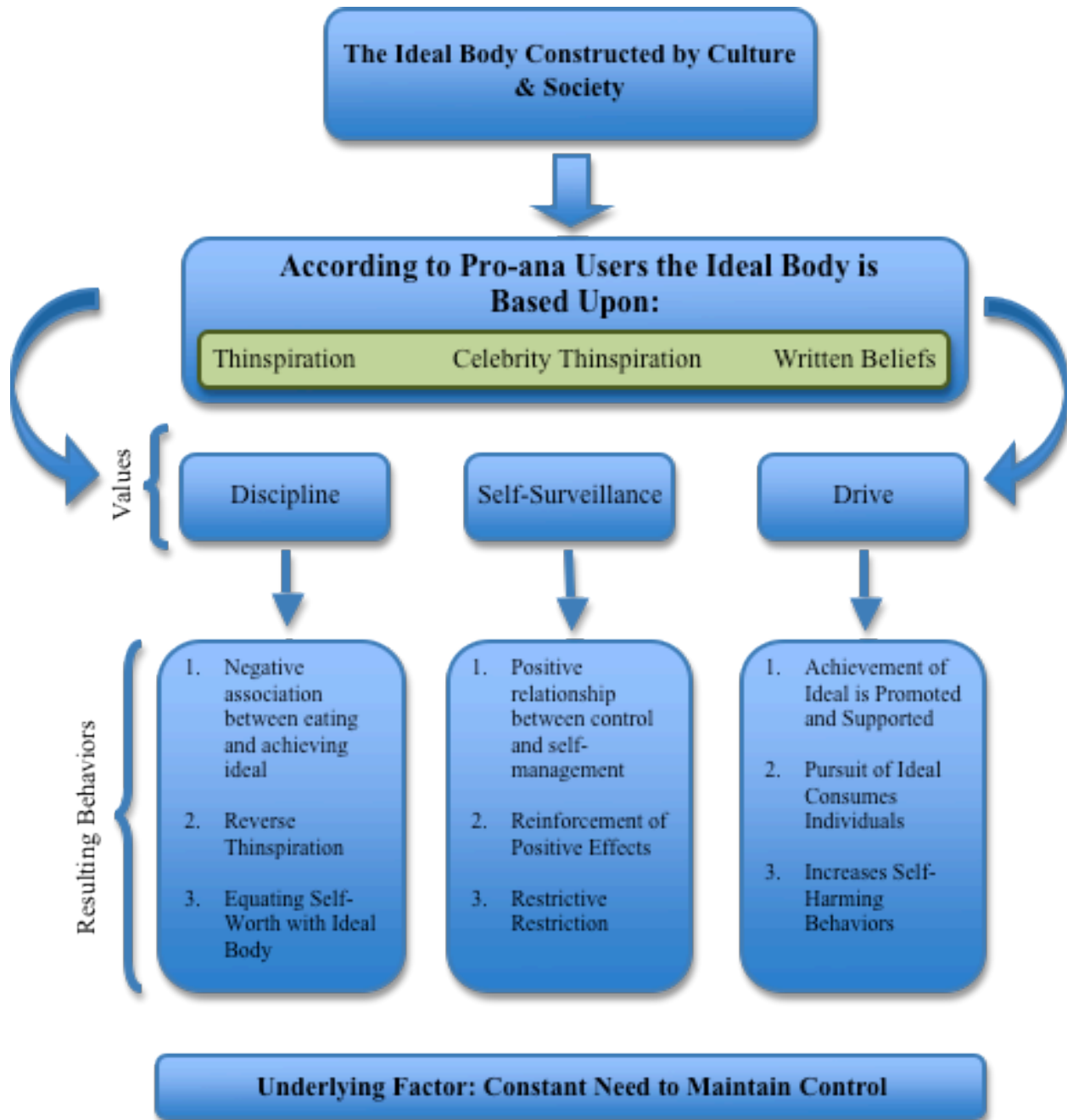
In the pro-ana websites, as shown in the previous examples, each post is centered on achieving control in some aspect of life. Within the thinspiration pictures, the pursuit of control is less explicit although still present. I argue pro-ana users are in continuous pursuit of the idealized female body and use the above-mentioned methods in an attempt to encourage themselves in their pursuit. I ultimately believe these images are used to promote control over the body in order to achieve the ideal. Bordo has argued young women are conditioned to believe that they are in control of their own bodies, and with the correct will power they can achieve the idealized female body. This has become extremely evident within the context of the pro-ana websites. Pro-ana individuals believe that if they can remain in control of their bodies at all times, they will be able to achieve the idealized female body and all that is associated with it.

Ultimately, pro-ana users share a similar belief and ultimate goal that hinges upon achieving their idea of perfection. Similarly, Mulveen and Hepworth (2006) found within their study that members of the online community had shared aims regarding a weight goal, achieving the idealized female body, and body appearance. This finding reflects the shared belief system of the pro-ana individuals as well as the use of restriction and extreme control to attempt to achieve the “ideal”. I have created the following diagram (Figure 1) to express the relationships I found within my analysis of the pro-ana websites.

The idealized female body has been constructed by Western culture and society; this consists of the images seen in the media and advertising industry of thin, young, beautiful women. The pro-ana users view the ideal image and embed three values in the

discourse around achieving the ideal body: 1) discipline; 2) self-surveillance; and 3) drive. Many resulting behaviors occur during the pursuit of the ideal. The figure below illustrates the values held by the pro-ana users and their resulting behaviors during the pursuit of the idealized female body.

Figure 1: The Basis For The Idealized Female Body



In Figure 1, I list the behaviors that I argue exist due to the users' attempts to uphold their values. At the top of the diagram is the idealized female body as constructed and presented within Western culture. Then, as shown in the second level of the diagram, the pro-ana users take this conceptualization of the idealized female body and impose values upon themselves to achieve it: discipline, self-surveillance, and drive. The third level of the diagram shows the particular behaviors associated with the values held by the pro-ana users. The values cause the pro-ana users to carry out particular behaviors to achieve the idealized female body, such as maintaining a negative association between eating and achieving the ideal. The fourth layer of the diagram shows that during the entire process, an underlying need to maintain control is always present. Users feel the need to maintain control in two possible circumstances: 1) when they conduct their resulting behaviors and 2) over their values, which will ultimately help them to achieve the idealized female body. Regardless of circumstance, pro-ana users feel control must be maintained at all costs in order to achieve the idealized female body.

4.4 Conclusions and Connections

Within this chapter, I outlined the construction of the idealized female body and set the context for the next chapter, which examines the pro-ana websites at a deeper level. A review of how this body is constructed by Western culture and altered throughout history was important, as this provided a foundation for understanding why the pro-ana users desire the extremely thin body. Next, I examined the pro-ana construction of the idealized female body to provide an understanding of how the pro-ana users define ideal and the images they believe to represent the ideal. This understanding acts as the basis for interpreting why certain elements are found within the pro-ana websites. I also set the context for the quotations that are thoroughly examined within the next chapter.

Through the examination of the thinspiration images, I constructed a picture of the key images used by the pro-ana members within their pursuit of the ideal. A discussion of the defining characteristics of the thinspiration pictures is important to provide understanding of the goal the members are striving to achieve. Pro-ana users value the sight of bones above all else; to them this reflects the achievement of thinness and beauty. The images they use as thinspiration, in some cases, do not even accurately reflect real life bodies, as they have been Photoshopped to look thinner than they actually are. This reflects the altered state in which the idealized female body is defined for pro-ana users.

The discussion of the written beliefs also acts as a foundation to set the context for the following chapter. The beliefs that many of the members follow are provided in the “thin commandments” or “57 reasons to be thin.” Similar to the analysis of thinspiration, the analysis of the written beliefs shows the extreme thought processes of pro-ana members. It demonstrates the extent to which pro-ana users go to in order to achieve the definition of the idealized female body. In some ways, it also helps to highlight how the idealized female body is put before everything else including the health of the individual: “Being thin is more important than being healthy” (AB, 2009). The written beliefs give perspective to the current belief system of the pro-ana users.

In my next chapter, I build upon the foundation laid in this chapter as I examine the quotations written by the pro-ana users on the 24 Hour Forum and Ana-Bones websites. It is important to keep in mind the constant underlying need to maintain control, and understand this need as I present the ways in which it is woven into every aspect of the pro-ana user’s lifestyle. I highlight how maintaining a very circumscribed form of control becomes an underlying force when coupled with the three themes of discipline, self-

surveillance, and drive. These themes become central to understanding the ways in which the pro-ana websites function, as well as how the construction of the idealized female body is maintained and perpetuated within the websites.

CHAPTER 5

PRO-ANA VALUES: CONNECTIONS TO CONTROL - “IF ONLY I COULD BE AS LOVELY AS THE OTHER DUCKLINGS”

5.1 Core Values

My discussion of the construction of the idealized female body by pro-ana groups, and how the idealized female body is portrayed and reinforced as the goal of the pro-ana users within the websites, shows the important role control plays within the lives of the pro-ana users. Maintaining ‘control’ is foundational to their pursuit of the idealized female body.

In this chapter, I further present how control is central to the achievement of the idealized female body through the use of discourse analysis. Within the pro-ana websites, I discussed three values that are intertwined with maintaining control: 1) discipline, 2) self-surveillance, and 3) drive. These values encompass Bordo’s theories regarding morality, self-management, and desire; however, I have used the terms discipline, self-surveillance, and drive as they better fit what I have found within the pro-ana websites. Through the consistent need to maintain control and the acceptance of these three values, pro-ana users pursue the idealized female body. I have kept in mind two key principles of conducting discourse analysis put forth by Harper (2006) during my analysis: 1) look for patterns within the data and 2) actively consider the functions, effects, and consequences of the present accounts. Conducting discourse analysis is “a process of reading from a position of curiosity, formulating questions about what one is reading and then crafting a coherent written analysis” (Harper, 2006, p. 49). I kept an open and curious viewpoint during the analysis of my data.

Within my analysis discussed in this chapter, I first define each of the core values. I then incorporate Bordo's theories to better showcase how these values are reflected in cultural construction of the ideal. I use examples of the particular behaviors tied to each value used to pursue the idealized female body from the pro-ana websites, directly tying together Bordo's theory and the examples from the pro-ana websites whenever possible.

5.2 Control and Discipline

Discipline (def): a. activity, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill; training
b. behavior in accord with rules of conduct; behavior and order maintained by training and control
(Random House Dictionary Online, 2010)

At first glance, how discipline may be an overarching topic when the postings are categorized within the themes of support, re-invention, and users' love/hate of their disorder, among others, may be hard to see. However, upon reading and re-reading these posts, I found that discipline is closely tied to all of these categories. The pro-ana users discuss weight and achieving the ideal in a way that conveys that maintaining control over the body reflects personal adequacy. Bordo argues that women within our society have been taught to associate beauty with morality. The condition of the body, according to Bordo (1998), is a direct reflection of the condition of the individual: "the size and shape of the body have come to operate as a mark of personal, internal order (or disorder) – as a symbol for the emotional, moral, or spiritual state of the individual" (p. 193). In this sense, individuals are taught to monitor their bodies not only in order to achieve the ideal, but also to project the socially desirable image of themselves.

Within both AnaBones and 24 Hour Forum, I argue there is a relationship between weight and discipline. Users often post about their struggle with eating and how, after they have eaten, they feel like they have failed. The users within these websites have a

very narrow sense of self-esteem, one which is entirely dependent upon their ability to avoid the consumption of calories. This is illustrated by a posting from a user on the 24 Hour Forum website. She states, “I just ate...I feel like shit! It is the first thing I’ve eaten today and it was only some peaches but I still feel like a fat pig! Ugh...I want to be skinny and beautiful so so so bad!!”(PC, WLPAS, 2009). In this post, I assert that PC equates eating, even the smallest amount, with failure. This becomes quite evident in the very first sentence; “I just ate” is directly followed with “I feel like shit”. The sentence is simple and the message is a clear declaration of PC’s feelings at that moment in time. The second sentence acts to provide the other users with both a qualifying statement, “it is the first thing I have eaten today...”, and the offence itself, “it was only some peaches.” This directly demonstrates that these posts are written with the intended audience being other pro-ana users, as they are the only ones who would find the consumption of the peaches offensive. However, she interestingly uses the qualifying word ‘only’ when describing peaches; although they see it as offensive, it is recognized as a lesser offense.

PC goes on to post that they “still feel like a fat pig!” and “I want to be skinny and beautiful so so so bad.” Thus, from these statements I conclude that although her intake was very little, PC sees this failure as keeping her from her goal of achieving an idealized female body. If upon examination of this post it is unclear how the offence of eating a few peaches could be received with such severity, a review of the posted reply to this user provides understanding. The commenting user PD states, “tomorrow is a new day. Don’t worry about it, beating oneself up only gets you weak” (PD, WLPAS, 2009). Within the context of this discussion, PD’s post acts to acknowledge the failure and

offers consolation in the expression “tomorrow is a new day.” This clearly indicates that the consumption of peaches was a serious offence; however, PC must focus on maintaining control for the following day. PC must stay focused and avoid falling to temptation in the future. PD’s post acts to reinforce the idea that eating is to be avoided at all costs and success is dependent upon strength and denial.

Consider another particularly clear example in which morality and discipline are equated with the idealized female body. A section on the Ana-Bones website contains images of extremely obese individuals posted as a means of deterrence. PX posts:

I’ve tried sooo much to figure out how someone can grow and grow and grow...how do their family or themselves have any quality of life? Youd be an embarrassment to your children and every step would terrify California. Its not even human... (PX, AB, 2009)

PX begins her critique of the images with a sense of wonderment, suggesting that it seems virtually impossible to become obese from this point of view. She implies she does not understand how anyone could lose his or her discipline and become that obese. She then goes on to equate obesity with low quality of life and then humiliation. The statement “youd be an embarrassment...” weaves morality and self as well as mutual respect into the critique, suggesting no individual would willingly want to be seen with anyone as obese as those depicted. Finally, she weaves in the notion of morality into being self-disciplined by suggesting that a lack of discipline makes a person inhuman: “its not even human.” PX directly suggests that when an individual lacks discipline and is extremely overweight, they are no longer human. The dehumanization of individuals is unacceptable regardless of weight or size, and that such a view could be perceived, as a moral stance is, in and of itself, immoral. One can see how for pro-ana users, their thoughts and beliefs regarding morality is differs from other members of society. This

issue of what is defined as moral or immoral is based entirely on an individual's ability to properly self-discipline.

Statements such as these exemplify how, within our Western culture and certainly on pro-ana websites, individuals have been conditioned to believe that those who are overweight lack discipline, and thus are lesser beings simply due to their weight. This directly coincides with Bordo's (1998) critique, "if the rest of us are struggling to be acceptable and 'normal' we cannot allow them [obese individuals] to get away with it; they must be put in their place, be humiliated and defeated" (p. 203). One user (PW) posting on the Ana-Bones website exemplifies this drive to critique and humiliate. In a post regarding the website manager's current body weight, PW states:

ew...OH GOSH...ugh...190?!?!!!Ik [I know] I'm being mean, sry [sorry]. But 190?! seriously? omg! [oh my god] u DO need to loose weight! If I saw u I guarantee u that I'd b making fat jokes about u... (PW, AB, 2009)

This post demonstrates that the intense drive to criticize and make fun of someone due to their weight is prevalent within the pro-ana websites. Individuals within pro-ana environments take it upon themselves to reinforce the belief that it is incorrect to voluntarily become obese.

Pro-ana users strongly express their beliefs that deviating from the idealized female body image shows a loss of discipline. Coupled with this belief is the concept of self-worth. According to Bordo (1993), women within our culture are encouraged to derive self-worth from their bodies.

Culture has not only taught women to be insecure bodies, constantly monitoring themselves for signs of imperfection, constantly engaged in physical "improvement"; it also is constantly teaching women how to *see* bodies. (p. 57)

Women are taught to see thin bodies as ideal and to strive to improve and change their bodies to meet the ideal. They are taught to monitor their bodies to the extreme and find

fault in every wrinkle and roll, no matter the size. Women are encouraged to eliminate their ‘flaws’, and are praised and encouraged if they do. Thus, according to Bordo (1993) because of the teachings of our culture, “the anorectic does not ‘misperceive’ her body; rather, she has learned all too well the dominant cultural standards of *how* to perceive” (p. 57).

Pro-ana users see their bodies as riddled with ‘faults’, which they attempt to eliminate to the fullest extent. They derive self worth from their ability to mimic the idealized female body. As they lose weight and come closer to achieving the idealized female body, their concept of self-worth rises. The posts by pro-ana users who have lost weight are positive and encouraging of others. However, the posts of those who feel they are not accomplishing their goals quick enough have a negative tone and tend to be self-deprecating. The sense of self-worth is very low in the following post written by a pro-ana user on the 24 Hour Forum website. PE writes:

I feel like a ‘wanna’ because I’m so fat now, and I can’t lose like I used to. I restrict, and then I binge, but I won’t purge. Though I tried the other day, in a movie theater bathroom. I just feel like if I’m not even good at this, I can’t be good at anything. Like, if you’re not even good at being fucked up...you’re just useless. Ugh, sorry. (PE,WLPAS, 2009)

The language and tone of this post indicates that PE currently has a very low sense of self worth. PE picks apart her body to the fullest extent, even resorting to the reductive assumption that her is useless due to the fact she cannot lose weight. This quotation clearly demonstrates that when pro-ana users are not in the process of losing weight, their already vulnerable self-esteem plummets.

PE describes feeling like a ‘wanna.’ This is in reference to the idea that there are individuals on the Internet who ‘wanna’ be anorexic, as in they do not actually have an eating disorder. She is addressing a particular population with her statement, as most pro-

ana websites strongly disagree with individuals who want to try and become anorexic or bulimic. In fact, some websites will go as far as to remove access to users they believe do not actually suffer from an eating disorder but rather are learning how to become eating disordered. Users who try and ‘learn’ how to become eating disordered typically receive no respect from the pro-ana users themselves. PE’s statement that she feels like a ‘wanna’ implies that she believes she is worthless and has little respect for herself.

PE also implies something is wrong with her ability to maintain control over her body, as she feels she “can’t lose like I used to” and “I restrict, and then I binge, but I won’t purge.” In other words, the body becomes a rebellious entity to be controlled and managed. PE describes attempting to purge to no avail, thus contributing even more to the negative sense of self-worth. Up to this point in the post, the negative sense of self-worth is implied but not explicit; however, within the last two sentences is the direct belief of their worthlessness. PE states; “... I just feel like if I’m not even good at this, I can’t be good at anything” (PE, WLPAS, 2009). Interestingly, the idea of not being good at restricting one’s body to the point of starvation is the ultimate denial of self-worth.

PE goes on to state, “Like, if you’re not even good at being fucked up...you’re just useless” (PE, WLPAS, 2009). For PE, not only is her self-worth tied to the ability to control and restrict in order to achieve the perfect body, she also believes she cannot be worth anything as an individual if she is not good at being imperfect—a circular and self-defeating argument. Interestingly, Brotsky and Giles (2007) also note a connection between the positive view of the disorder and self esteem. They state, “absorbing the disorder into their personal sense of self perhaps means that they need to take a positive view of it in order to maintain self-esteem” (p. 102). The intensity of the post is clearly

presented through the use of the words ‘fucked up’, as it acts to convey the strength of the negativity in this statement; PE does not believe she has any self-worth at this point. The users recognize that eating disorders are dangerous and berate themselves for their inability to achieve unrealistic and unhealthy goals. This closely ties into the analysis done by Brotsky and Giles; PE ties their self-worth to being successful at having an eating disorder. Thus, being ‘successfully’ disordered becomes part of their overall identity.

By ending with an apology, PE feels that she is not even worth the posting space within the 24 Hour Forum nor does she want to annoy others with her rant about her uselessness. By apologizing, PE invalidates her need to take up space within the 24 Hour Forum, in turn implying an even lower sense of self-worth. However, a wish for an audience is present, wherein this user almost begs for someone else to post that their feelings are valid. This example is key to showcasing the interconnections of self-worth, morality, discipline, and control. I have demonstrated that, for pro-ana users, maintaining their discipline to achieve the idealized female body is tied to being understood as a good person. However, without a sense of control and the ability to restrict their bodies, their sense of self-worth plummets and they question their self-worth entirely as a result of such a limited indication of success.

Within the above examples, I have shown the close connections between control, discipline, and perceived morality. These connections are evident in many different forms within the pro-ana websites. The following short examples further distinguish the connections between feeling adequate and obtaining the imagined perfect body. One user writes; “I live to be perfect enough for him...which will NEVER happen” (PF, WLAPS,

2009). Another user comments, “now that I am not thin anymore I feel like no guy will ever like me =(” (PG, WLPAS, 2009). These examples clearly express that the self-worth of pro-ana users is tied to achieving the idealized female body as evaluated by others. Within the context of the above two examples, the pro-ana users believe they will not attract males without being ‘perfect’.

Pro-ana users clearly feel that their inability to control their eating habits directly reflects their adequacy: “I just ate ...I feel like shit” (PH, WLPAS, 2009). Pro-ana users believe even the smallest consumption of food to be a sign of weakness and a reflection of inadequacy. Pro-ana users also express the belief that anyone who carries excess weight, whether or not the person is obese, shows an inability to self-discipline and is morally inadequate. They are extremely judgmental of others and cannot comprehend why anyone would want to deviate from their chosen ideal. The previously mentioned pro-ana user PX states, “its not even human,” implying anyone who is obese does not deserve to be called a human being anymore. This exemplifies the belief that, within the realm of the pro-ana world, it is immoral to lack self-discipline to the point of obesity. This preformed lack of interest in others and assertion of censure demonstrates the extent of bias encouraged by isolation.

The pro-ana users express their sense of worthlessness and inability to be good at being disordered: “Like, if you’re not even good at being fucked up...you’re just useless” (PE, WLPAS, 2009). My analysis of the pro-ana websites within this section demonstrates two things. First, there is a clear divide between success and failure, which reflects the ability to control the body according to the pro-ana members’ disciplinary standards. Second, self-worth becomes intricately tied to the ability to be eating

disordered; those who cannot adhere to the rigid restriction it takes to continuously be losing weight claim a great sense of worthlessness. Within the next section, I show how the pro-ana users attempt to avoid this feeling of worthlessness through the exertion of extreme self-surveillance and control over the body.

5.3 Control and Self-Surveillance

Surveillance (def): a. a watch kept over a person, group, etc., esp. over a suspect, prisoner, or the like.
b. supervision or superintendence.
(Random House Dictionary Online, 2010)

Young women are taught within Western culture that appearance is fundamentally important; because of this, some individuals act as the moderators of society. Some women harshly judge others and critique their own appearances in fear of what other members within society may think of them, whether or not anyone else really cares. By doing so, affected members of society self-impose a restrictive lifestyle, one in which they are constantly monitoring their own appearances. Through this struggle to maintain absolute control over the body, some members of society turn to dieting. Within the pro-ana sites, the concepts of self-surveillance and control are extremely evident; they emerge with a wide range of posting topics, such as workouts, fasting, diets, thinspiration, and self-harm. The goal of self-surveillance, I argue, can be found within all of the posting topics, which points to the centrality of this issue. According to Bordo (1993), the anorexic successfully restricts and self-manages their bodies to the point of starvation in pursuit of the ideal. Within the following examples, I show how Bordo's theory holds true within the pro-ana websites. In the following examples, the emphasis on control changes depending upon the current mood of the user and their feeling of control at any given time.

The first example discusses the central role played by control in properly conducting self-surveillance. The ability to self-manage and the sense of control go hand-in-hand because as the individual successfully restricts their body, they gain more perceived control. Given this positive relationship, a loss of control would result in a loss of the ability to correctly self-monitor, according to the pro-ana commandments and rules. Within the first example, PI's need to possess control over her body at all times is evident. PI posts; "I need my control back. Tomorrow is a new day right? It can't come soon enough" (PI, WLPAS, 2009). This post is short and to the point; PI is clearly expressing her loss of control and looking for reassurance from other members that control will return tomorrow. At the beginning of the post PI states that she "need their control back," implying she is unable to function without control. Also interesting is the implication that control can be lost, but upon the dawn of a new day can be regained.

There is an association with a new day bringing more control; PI does not feel that control can be regained within the next hour or minute but rather with the dawn of a new day. PI expresses her impatience for the new day to come and implies that the present day is lost. The combination of these three sentences showcases the central role dietary control plays in PI's life. There is almost desperation to have and maintain control of food intake at all costs. Mulveen and Hepworth (2006) found similar results within their examination of a pro-ana website. One of their users posts, "I WANT CONTROL. I will LEARN to have control. I will BE in control. I will never feel lost or in a frenzy again" (p. 290). Through the examination of these posts, the concept of having control is evidently fundamental to pro-ana users and their daily life. The ability to control is a fundamental requirement within the pro-ana websites. The underlying message of the

“thin commandments” is to maintain restrictive control over the body. In this sense, the websites function similarly to advertisements. The pro-ana websites teach the desirable qualities pro-ana users are expected to possess.

According to Kellner (1988), “Advertising itself is a pedagogy which teaches individuals what they need and what they should desire, think, and do to be happy, successful, and genuinely American” (p. 36). Our media-dominated Western culture constantly inundates individuals with messages regarding what is currently culturally correct. Bordo (1993) cites many ads which act to encourage the public to control, shape, and contain their bodies. One advertisement suggests that:

The ideal here is of a body that is absolutely tight, contained, ‘bolted down’, firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control. (p. 190)

Bordo asserts that such ads demonstrate how the public is to be self-conscious and to maintain absolute control over the body. Another advertisement also discusses the need to control and shape the body. It states, “The body you have is the body you inherited, but you must decide what to do with it” (Saul, 2003, p. 143). Again, individuals are urged to gain control over the body in order to sculpt it into the idealized female body. An equation of power is conveyed within advertisements: the more you restrict and control the body, the more you will be able to do in the world. Even though this belief is not accurate, these above examples directly distinguish how the current culture stresses the directive to correctly conduct self-surveillance while forever maintaining control.

When users are able to maintain control, their outlook on life drastically changes. Pro-ana users are positive and supportive of one another, even though they are cruel to others. According to Bordo (1993), anorexics are the only group of people who truly excel at society’s game of restriction. The anorexic takes literally the cultural teachings of

restriction and self-surveillance and applies them directly to themselves. Some pro-ana individuals believe that they can actually achieve the idealized female body if only they maintain their control and restriction.

Due to the belief that the ideal is within their reach as long as they properly conduct self-surveillance, the pro-ana websites are set-up with numerous sections providing diets, tips, and tricks. Through the use of these tricks and tips, pro-ana users attempt to regulate their nutrient intake and shape their bodies. When the pro-ana users feel they are successfully maintaining control, their attitude is very positive and supportive. I argue there is positivity in some of the pro-ana posts on the 24 Hour Forum. PJ states:

10 hours yay.! So I had to go to this meeting for a group I'm in...and someone brought popcorn and CHOCOLATE and I'd been craving that...but I didn't have any... muahaha...I'm so proud of myself...when I get to my 1st gw [goal weight] I'm going to go shopping because I deserve it!!!! I feel invincible =) (PJ, WLPAS, 2009)

This post conveys the excitement that PJ feels when actively maintaining her control and restriction. This post also shows the connection between happiness and the ability to control and conduct self-surveillance, for if PJ had not refused the popcorn and chocolate, the tone of the post would have been entirely different.

Within the following pro-ana example, it is evident how when another user feels that they are in control, the feelings of hopelessness and need for a new day are replaced with a need to embrace the present day. On the 24 Hour Forum website, the pro-ana user PK posts:

Today is going to be a good day. A wonderful sense of control is washing back over me. A few lbs closer ☺. This feeling doesn't happen very often. But I love it! I'm off to the gym! Hope you're all well xoxoxo. (PK, WLPAS, 2009)

PK's outlook on the day is a very positive one. Interestingly, this statement is directly followed by one in which she expresses a return of her control. This shows that the sense

of happiness is directly tied to the sense of control. Even the use of the word 'wonderful' is interesting. Normally 'control' is a very powerful and restrictive word, typically not one I would think to associate with the word 'wonderful'. PK also expresses that due to this control, she feels a few pounds closer.

It is also important to discuss the fact that PK is off to the gym. If she is successful in restricting so far today, it would be interesting to find out if this restriction lasts, as the body will need to burn up calories at the gym. PK also provides encouragement to others by posting this post. She suggests that for those who have lost control, it is simply around the corner of a new day. As well, PK offers best wishes to the other users within their statement "Hope you're all well." This is a positive message to others, which is followed by encouraging comments posted by other users. Through the positive posts, the pro-ana users reinforce the idea that control can be maintained and correct restriction over the body can occur. They also perpetuate the self-surveillance / maintenance of control lifestyle of the pro-ana users.

Finally, I would like to touch on an examination of what happens when things are not going well for the pro-ana users. When they have lost all of the weight they can lose through regular restriction, they are forced to either eat and take in calories, or resort to some extreme means of restriction. When the pro-ana users begin their restriction, they may use one of the diets posted on the website to lose weight. When the diet works in the beginning, they get a positive high from the quick loss of weight. However, when they are done losing the weight quickly, they turn to methods such as purging or laxatives to help them continue to lose weight.

Within my initial organization of posts into themes, I found several themes in which more extreme measures of dieting were discussed such as fasting, losing weight, purging, refusal to eat, and overuse of the gym. The postings within each of these categories lie on a continuum of restriction and severity. As the pro-ana user comes closer to their ‘ideal’ body weight, the act of restriction becomes harder. Users post comments such as, “I keep telling myself I just have to get through one day of not eating till at least dinner. But I cant do it!”(PL, WLPAS, 2009) or “6 hours into my fast...so hungry” (PM, WLPAS, 2009). Some pro-ana users also turn to mind games to aid their weight-loss. PN writes, “Bah! I’ve convinced myself again that I don’t need food. Major restricting ahead” (PN, WLPAS, 2009). The above examples demonstrate that when pro-ana users find it harder to control and conduct self-surveillance, the tone of the posts become more desperate.

The following example demonstrates the sense of hopelessness and the need to do something more drastic in order to lose weight:

ugh well I am not eating anything for the rest of the week I am just drinking water and occasionally some juice! That’s it! And I am going to exercise a ton and go get some stupid weight loss pills or patches or something, because right now I feel like a fat pig! (PO, WLPAS, 2009)

This quotation is explicit in conveying the restrictive behavior PO exerts over her body. The first sentence shows how PO will avoid any intake of food or nutrients that could cause her body to gain weight. PO states that they will go to the gym ‘a ton,’ as this will help her to lose the weight quicker. Finally, PO states that she will use weight loss pills. The hope to lose weight quickly becomes more intense as PO writes this post, even more desperate and obsessed with weight loss as the post goes on.

Similarly, McCabe (2009) found the occurrence of extreme desperation and in turn need to conduct extreme self-surveillance to lose weight within his study. One user

posted: “I’m a fucking failure. I have 20 days until my goal weight and I’m like 15 pounds over...I just lost all control...If I am not 99 pounds like I made my goal I will die” (p. 12). The language here is desperate and self-deprecating. The user is attempting to reach a goal that is unachievable, and believes not achieving this goal is equal to death; however, achieving it may also cause death. This is telling of the nature of the pro-ana lifestyle. As the weight comes off more slowly, the users get more and more obsessed with losing weight and achieving their goals. The pro-ana users find ways to restrict their bodies and lose the weight they desire.

Pro-ana users are intensely focused on their ability to conduct self-surveillance and maintain control over their bodies. They take society’s message of restriction and discipline literally and apply it to their bodies in order to achieve the idealized female body. I have shown within the previous examples that the attitude of the pro-ana user is closely tied to their ability to restrict and control their bodies. On the days that restriction is active, the users provide thinspirational posts to encourage others to maintain their pursuit of their goals. However, on the days when it is an effort to restrict or they feel they have lost control, an underlying current of hopelessness and desperation is found within the posts.

It also became clear that when the users are unable to lose weight, they turn to drastic measures to restrict their intake of food and calories in order to keep from gaining weight. In some cases, this involves not eating at all, coupled with the use of diet pills just to lose a few pounds. Within this section, I have shown how the act of self-surveillance and control is a daily effort for the pro-ana users. In the next section, I

discuss the role played by drive within the pursuit of the idealized female body and how this ultimately fuels the pro-ana user to take drastic measures.

5.4 Control and Drive

Drive: (def) a. to strive vigorously toward a goal or objective; to work, play, or try wholeheartedly and with determination.
b. an inner urge that stimulates activity or inhibition; a basic or instinctive need
(Random House Dictionary Online, 2010)

I have left this section of analysis for last as drive is one of the most essential values to deconstruct. The idealized female body has been created based upon the messages sent by the advertising industry. Hepworth (1999) argues, “increasing consumerism used women to advertise commodities by positioning them alongside desirable objects, and in doing so, women also became advertised as objects of desire” (p. 61). The women positioned next to these objects are almost always young, beautiful, and most importantly, thin. The creation of certain types of women as desirable also creates a drive within those wanting to achieve this image. This is confirmed by Reichert and Lambaise (2006) in their book *Sex in Consumer Culture*. They state that the current advertising culture always uses the same sexual content within their ads, which consist of, “heterosexist images of women fitting the Western beauty ideal: slender, tall curvaceous and young” (p. 4). Individuals within society make the connections between the desirable objects and the body image being presented within these ads. Thus, not only is the object desired, the body next to it is objectified and desired as well. A research study conducted by Brit Harper and Marika Tiggemann (2007) confirmed objectification of the female body on two levels. The women within their study noted the female portrayed within the advertisement as being objectified in addition to their own self-objectification. The drive to achieve the desirable look is simultaneously created by the wish to be desired.

Drive plays the most important role in motivating individuals to achieve the idealized female body. Pro-ana users have an intense drive to achieve the idealized female body and will risk anything, including their health, to achieve the ideal. Every aspect of the pro-ana websites, Ana-Bones and the 24 Hour Forum, showcase this intense drive. The websites are constructed in a way that promotes the proposed ideal, while simultaneously encouraging users to maintain their pursuit of the model of 'perfection'.

The 24 Hour Forum website homepage consistently changes on an hourly basis, if not more frequently. However, it too conveys the same beliefs surrounding the ideal and drive to be thin. Some posts written by users explicitly state their drive to be thin and the methods they are currently using to achieve their goals. Consider the following post by PP: "Fuck me I'm a cow. ☹ - So, in officially 5 minutes I start my 14 day fast..."(PP, WLPAS, 2009). PP goes on to talk about how she will fast and why she is fasting (wanting to be thin by the senior prom). Other posts are less explicit and may discuss the weather or television. However, they are still able to convey their drive to be thin; as PQ posts, "I'm watching America's Next Top Model because I'm bored and I don't know what other shows to watch..."(PQ, WLPAS, 2009). Pro-ana users also convey their want to be thin through the small icon image associated with each user. These small images are posed next to the user's pseudonym and continuously post whenever the user posts. A large majority of these images consist of either parts of emaciated bodies or pictures of celebrities/individuals with extremely thin bodies. It is clear within my examination of these images that the users who choose them hold these mini-images in high esteem. Thus, even though the 24 Hour Forum website homepage shifts and changes as new posts

are written, one can still see the message of thin as being idolized, although not always explicitly stated.

The opening page of Ana-Bones welcomes individuals to the website with an image of the Olson twins (who both look quite close to the ana ideal thin). Just above this, a sign says: "Please do not bring food or beverages into the website" (AB, 2009). This homepage effectively promotes the ideal by showcasing the Olson twins, both of whom are often used as thinspiration for pro-ana individuals. As well, the pursuit of this ideal is obviously important to the webpage owner, given the command that food not be brought into the website. This declaration is somewhat tongue and cheek, as one cannot actually bring food into cyberspace at all. I think this statement acts to convey the intensity of the user's drive to pursue the thin ideal. If this message was taken as literally as possible, users would refrain from the discussion of food with other users (unless it is in the form of restricting from food), as well as refraining from consuming food while navigating the website. Thus, in the example of the Ana-Bones homepage, there is a clear expression of the ideal and the drive pro-ana users have to achieve it, as well as conveying the message of restriction and pursuit of the ideal.

The above two examples of the website homepages demonstrate the ways in which drive to be thin is explicitly showcased within the pro-ana web pages. In addition, each example within the two previously mentioned themes of discipline and self-surveillance also can be framed within the context of drive. A quotation I examined within the discipline section also acts to convey a deep sense of drive. At the end of the post, PC states, "I want to be skinny and beautiful so so so bad" (PC, WLPAS, 2009). The intense drive by PC to be thin is clearly evident through the use of the word 'so' three times.

Although I have originally framed this quotation within the theme of discipline, the possession of drive is also present in the text. A post from PK originally framed within the theme of self-surveillance also expresses the intense drive to be thin. PK posted about having a good day and the feeling of control returning, followed by, “A few pounds closer” (PK, WLPAS, 2009). This short sentence is key in demonstrating that PK is very much in the pursuit of a goal. Although not directly stated, I can determine through the expression of the statement ‘a few pounds closer’ that PK is motivated by an underlying drive to be thin. Thus, although I have framed some posts within the context of discipline or self-surveillance, these quotations all express a drive on the part of the user to be thin.

Drive to be thin is essential to the pursuit of the currently constructed ideal. The pro-ana users must believe that this body shape is the most idealized within Western society in order to justify the means of pursuit. At the beginning of their pursuit, the users have a drive to be thin; however, as they become more involved in this quest their drive becomes stronger and stronger, ultimately motivating them to risk their lives in order to achieve the ideal. The drive to be thin consumes the pro-ana users and becomes a central focus within their lives.

Posts on the Ana-Bones website, within the various celebrity photograph sections, reflect the pro-ana users’ drive to be thin and beautiful. PV posts a comment in regards to the page dedicated to showcasing current models, and she states, “Those models are all so pretty and thin...love the pics” (PV, AB, 2009). The models showcased within this section have bodies which are considered to be idealized by the pro-ana members. PV clearly conveys her belief that these models are the ideal. Not as explicit is the tone of the post, which conveys a drive to be like these models.

Another post by a different user (written in regards to a picture of the Olson twins) expresses their drive to look like one of the Olson twins, as she states, “The one where shes hugging her twin in the purple dress you can see her spine u want that back!!”(PU, AB, 2009). PU clearly conveys her drive to look like that Olson twin, as well as conveying the message that it is desirable to all to have their backs show their spines. Repeatedly within this website are statements regarding celebrity bodies and how they are idealized. PT simply posts, “I wish I was as thin as Nicole Richie...” (PT, AB, 2009). Celebrities are flagged by the media as beautiful and pro-ana users strive to achieve these bodies in accordance. The difficulty lies in the dangers associated with the intense drive to be thin; for some users, self-harm is rendered justifiable.

As time goes on, the drive to become thin intensifies. Users become desperate to lose weight and this desperation points to the intensity of their drive to become thin. A post on the 24 Hour Forum website conveys PR’s desperate feelings to regain the ground they lost due to bingeing on some food: “SOMEHOW...SOMEHOW!!! I BINGED! FUCK IT. Im purging then im exercising till...I collapse then and only then will I allow myself to sleep” (PR, WLPAS, 2009). This post is telling of the intense drive to remain on track during the pursuit of the goal. PR seems somewhat stunned that she was capable of bingeing and intensely angry with herself for doing so. One can visually see the intensity associated with this post due to the use of capital letters within the first two sentences. Then PR goes on to tell others how she will make up for the binge by stating that she will purge. It seems that the action of purging is not quite enough for PR; she feels she needs to exercise until she passes out in order to make up for consuming the food. This demonstrates the extreme actions users will take to punish themselves for

consuming food. It also can be interpreted as a performance for a particular audience—those who share the same thoughts and beliefs will support and commiserate in PR's frustrations over her lack of control.

5.5 Conclusions and Connections

Maintaining control is an underlying factor in the daily lives of the pro-ana users. It is intricately connected to the values they hold regarding achieving the idealized female body. As my analysis shows, control is associated with the three values of discipline, self-surveillance, and drive. Pro-ana users seek to maintain control while they struggle with the behaviors that result from holding their bodies accountable to their strict values. Within this chapter, I have interwoven Bordo's theories to highlight the ways in which individuals are affected by the current cultural perception of the idealized female body. The pro-ana users are very critical of their bodies and the image they project with their bodies. They exert extreme control and restriction over their bodies in order to adhere to their own standards of beauty. They conduct rigid self-surveillance in attempts to reach their goal of achieving the idealized female body. However, as the examples show, often they feel hopeless and desperate when they are unable to continue the severe restriction needed to achieve their goals. Finally, I argue that drive plays a major role as a motivating factor within the pro-ana members' struggle. Pro-ana individuals value the idealized female body. The pro-ana users attempt to do whatever it takes to achieve the ideal body, even if this means risking their own health. This analysis reveals much about pro-ana users' ultimate values. It also reveals the ways in which pro-ana users do their utmost to maintain control over their bodies.

Within the next and final chapter of my thesis, I critically discuss my views on whether the current social order needs pro-ana websites and people who struggle with

eating disorders to exist successfully. Is it important to the success of society and the advertising industry to have individuals who believe they must be extremely thin to be successful in life? Does the advertising industry have an interest in keeping the definition of the idealized female body at a level nearly no one in society can achieve? Also within the next chapter, I discuss some of the possible unrealized solutions to issues regarding the idealized female body and the pro-ana struggle. I address the ways in which my research contributes to the current literature written on the pro-ana websites as well as discuss some of the gaps it fills in the knowledge base. Finally, I offer a critical reflection on the analysis itself and discuss the areas in which further research should be conducted.

CHAPTER 6

I MISTAKENLY PERCEIVED MYSELF AS AN UGLY DUCKLING

Someone making millions of dollars has decided to play on every adolescent girl's feeling of inadequacy. Insecurity is 'in', confidence is 'out'. In American culture, there's always room for improvement. The blond-haired, blue-eyed size four, as-close-to-Heather-Locklear-as-possible look is the social norm, and the people who fail to qualify don't even get a consolation prize in the game of adolescence.
(Elizabeth Fales as quoted in Shandler, 1999, p. 33)

Within the previous chapter I distinguished the core values held by pro-ana users - discipline, self-surveillance and drive. I demonstrated that these values are intricately connected to the pro-ana users' pursuit of the idealized female body. During my analysis of their pursuit of the idealized female body, the theme of control also emerged as fundamental. For the pro-ana users, a constant sense of control must be maintained during the pursuit of the idealized female body. The pro-ana users will go to great lengths to maintain their sense of control, even if this means risking their own health.

This chapter will critically reflect upon the current social order and possible unrealized solutions to the problems associated with pro-ana websites and eating disorders more generally. It is important to push the analysis of a topic beyond simply the topic itself, one must also critically reflect on the context within which this social problem is situated. I will also touch upon the ways in which this research contributes to the current literature written on pro-ana websites. Finally, I will critically reflect on the research I conducted and the ways in which it has affected me as a researcher.

6.1 The Reflection of the Current Social Order in the Barnyard

Current Western culture does not need individuals to be suffering from eating disorders to exist successfully; however, the current advertising media capitalizes upon those who believe in the idealized female body. For advertising campaigns to work

successfully, they need to be taken seriously. Those individuals who suffer from eating disorders place extreme emphasis on being thin, which functions to the advantage of advertising industries. For an idea to become a standard belief within any society, a sufficiently large group of individuals must believe in the idea. Advertising campaigns do not overtly intend for individuals to risk their health to achieve the idealized female body; however, the current drive to achieve the idealized female body does work to their advantage. Bordo (1993) describes this relationship when she states:

...watching the commercials is the anorectic, who associates her relentless pursuit of thinness with power and control, but who in fact destroys her health and imprisons her imagination. She is surely the most startling and stark illustration of how cavalier power relations are with respect to the motivations and goals of individuals, yet how deeply they are etched on our bodies, and how well our bodies serve them. (p. 164)

The thin ideal has gained popularity over time; it began back in the 1960s and the ideal body has progressively become thinner each decade. This reflects the significant role the elitist thin ideal holds within society. By marketing a shrinking female ideal, the consumer base expands each year. Individuals are striving to obtain a body that only a small percentage of the population can actually attain. For the advertising and marketing industry, this creates a large demand for any and all products that will enable individuals to achieve the idealized female body. Although I do not believe Western culture intends to produce eating disordered individuals, they do promote the illness amongst those who become eating disordered through the multibillion dollar a year diet industry. Weight loss has become a significant component of the gross national product (Gordon, 2000, p. 152). Thus, the advertising industries stand to benefit enormously from the perpetuation of the extremely thin ideal. Gordon (2000) comments:

Undoubtedly, a century from now, eating disorders and our current preoccupation with them will appear as quaint as nineteenth-century hysteria appears to us now. But who know what other vocabulary of discomfort will take their place? (p. 214)

As Gordon suggests, at some point in the distant future our preoccupation with eating disorders will be gone; however, far too much profit to presently still stands to be gained by perpetuating the current idealized female body.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter is quite telling. As an adolescent growing up within current society, Elizabeth Fales is extremely observant of the current state of affairs. Insecurity is 'in'. She is correct in her assertion that 'someone' is playing on the insecurities of individuals within society. However, I think the net of insecurity is far wider reaching than simply adolescents. Many adults are targeted within advertising campaigns that promise to restore the youthfulness of their adolescence. At some point in the future, the focus on the extremely thin ideal will fade. However, currently no other human insecurity offers the opportunity to gross as much money as a focus on the human body.

6.2 The Beauty Found Under the Make-Up

According to Fairclough (2001), the discussion section of a research project is where the researcher can hypothesize about the unrealized possibilities regarding the social problem under examination. There is a positive direction to move towards in order to begin to eliminate the extremely thin ideal. However, the movement towards a healthy ideal will take a fundamental shift in the conception of the idealized female body as presented within Western culture. Women will need to decide to own their own bodies and move away from the popular standard dictated by the current cultural beliefs. In some cases, this is happening. A current advertisement campaign run by Dove® beauty

products encourages individuals to embrace their own bodies no matter the size. Dove[®] has received some criticism due to their use of plus sized models and “real women” within their advertisements, even though those women are also reflective of certain ideals related to beauty. Moreover, some see this campaign as a bid for the middle-aged market of women who do not always conform to the ideas of the popular media.

In another powerful campaign during the Madrid fashion week in September of 2006, the world saw the first ban on overly thin models. Organizers actively turned away underweight models citing protests that young women are trying to copy the extremely thin appearance, which leads to the development of eating disorders (CNN, Sept 13, 2006). However, this positive initiative resulted in a great backlash from the fashion community. Designers cited discrimination of creativity and modeling agencies cited discrimination against the naturally rail-thin model. Thus, although some areas of the world are attempting to change the current ideal, this change will not be met without some backlash from the general community.

In another more recent event, a Canadian designer used larger models to showcase his fashion line on September 22, 2009, during London fashion week. The stylist for the designer stormed out of the show because the designer requested models that were larger than the models typically used. This particular designer made a decision to use curvier models to exhibit his collection as he explained he wanted to show the knit wear on a curvier body. The dispute became a highly publicized news topic and for several days following the occurrence was posted on the home page of Yahoo.ca[®]. In contrast to the previous fashion ban in Spain, this story did not receive harsh feedback or criticism

within the press. Perhaps society is finally moving into a place where it is able to support these small protests in the struggle for healthier ideals.

The other area in which change needs occur is in regards to the stigmatization applied to those who frequent pro-ana websites. Although pro-ana individuals collectively idealize the extremely thin body, they also access these websites as a means of breaking isolation. Previous studies have focused on the need for support within the pro-ana websites. Thus, perhaps pro-ana individuals would benefit from a website constructed to support them in many healthier choices, rather than forcing recovery. Harm reduction is based upon the belief that “it is possible to modify the behaviors of drug users, and the conditions in which they use, in order to reduce the most serious risks” (MacCoun, 2009, p. 137). If a website based on this same belief system was built, perhaps a reduction in the harm pro-ana users inflict upon themselves could be achieved. In addition, perhaps it would act to discourage those who were surfing the Internet seeking out eating disordered websites, through education and an increase in accurate information. Pro-ana users could access a website that would be supportive of their situations, provide key information regarding the healthiest way to deal with an eating disorder, and provide links to programs if they decide they would like to recover.

The unrealized possibilities are endless. Several key components must be in place for some of these above mentioned strategies to work effectively. Popular media must be willing to change the current cultural beliefs regarding the idealized female body. Women must be willing to redefine beauty within their own terms, regardless of what the popular media states. If women continue to opt out of the game of perpetuating the ideal, the current standards around the idealized female body will eventually shift as well. This

shift in thought will take time; it won't happen overnight. However, with persistence and perseverance I am positive it could occur.

6.3 Critically Reflecting on the Image in the Mirror

At the beginning of my research, I was taken aback by the images I saw within the websites. I did not understand why young individuals desired to see their bones through their skin. However, the more critically I thought about the topic, the more I was able to equate their unhappiness with their bodies with my own unhappiness. Eating disorders are clinically classified as a disorder of the mind. Although the individuals I encountered were not of healthy minds, they were extremely focused and in constant need to be in control. These individuals are quite sharp, and I would argue quite perceptive in very limited parameters of the pressures of the outside world.

Pro-ana users have taken matters into their own hands; they have taken on the task of remolding their bodies to fit the current cultural ideal. Pro-ana users are pursuing the ideal that popular Western culture inundates them with daily. These are some of the individuals who are taking seriously the popular media campaigns and the beauty advertisements. Thus, I think the time has come for popular media to stop condemning pro-ana users for what they are doing wrong, and instead critically reflect upon the wrong messages put forth on a daily basis.

Perhaps my research is biased because I too have grown up a media-fed child, always accepting the currently idealized image as the only ideal body. Perhaps I am biased because I too understand what it feels like to dislike my body and wish I looked different. I can state with certainty that my position within this research has allowed me to empathize with the pro-ana users. It has also caused me to think critically about the images I see within popular media and choose to opt out of the game. I will not buy into

what I see because popular media is telling me to; rather, I will create my own definition of beauty. This definition will not need to be attached to the static body, but will be attached to the ever-beautiful and ever-changing body.

Regardless of what is actually meant to be conveyed within every fairytale, media advertisement, and image of the ideal beauty, the fact remains that adolescents are extremely impressionable. The current cultural ideal is setting up young people for failure before they even reach adolescence. The standards are too high and the goal almost unattainable. We must teach young individuals to critically deconstruct the images they see within Western culture before they feel the need to buy into the currently defined idealized female body.

6.4 Contribution to the Barnyard

My thesis research contributes to the current literature in two distinct ways. First, it aims at discussing the current definition of the idealized female body is within society and the pro-ana websites. Second, I discuss the value placed upon the idealized female body by the pro-ana members. In these two ways, my thesis is different from previous research done on the pro-ana websites.

Previous research aimed to uncover key themes present within the websites (Brotsky & Giles, 2007; Mulveen & Hepworth, 2006). It also critically examined why individuals would gain and maintain memberships within these groups (Gavin et al., 2008; Rich, 2006; Tierney, 2006). Some studies examined the concept of identity within the pro-ana groups and the ways in which anonymity is maintained through the Internet (Ferreday, 2003; Hammersley & Treseder, 2007).

My research is different from these studies as I did not aim to examine why the users maintained membership or issues regarding maintaining an obscured identity. My

main focus centered upon how the idealized female body was presented within the pro-ana websites and the value placed upon the pursuit of this idealized female body. It was thus key within my research to examine the ways in which society and culture currently define the idealized female body. This led to a critical examination of the pro-ana users' definition of the idealized female body. From this, I was able to distinguish the key values the individuals hold in order to pursue their definition of the ideal. In this aspect, I have expanded the knowledge base. I have provided researchers with insight as to the thought process of the current pro-ana users, as well as the lengths to which they go in attempts to achieve their goal body.

My findings aid future research in understanding why pro-ana users think and function the way they do. In addition, it informs researchers as to why the pro-ana websites currently exist. Continual addition of fresh knowledge to a societal problem is important with respect to uncovering possible solutions. My thesis has laid the foundation for future research regarding the pro-ana websites. It also supports the idea of using harm reduction as a method of potential treatment for those who suffer from eating disorders. The creation of a harm reductionist pro-ana website could offer pro-ana users a place to interact that would be substantively supportive and offer methods to reduce the harm inflicted upon their bodies.

More broadly, my research adds to the literature on sociology of the body and feminist theory. It uncovers, through the use of critical discourse analysis, the important role the body has within the current culture. CDA allowed for a deconstruction of the current idealized female body and the idealized female body held by the pro-ana users. It has enabled me to draw connections between values and pro-ana discourse. CDA also

allowed me to discuss the meanings conveyed through the presentation of the idealized female body. In the past, the sociology of the body was not studied seriously within the discipline. The physical body itself is now recognized to be embedded with meaning. As mentioned by Turner (2008), “The body is always socially formed and located” (p. 56). Society is preoccupied with appearance now more than ever. Thus, critical examination of the current socially-formed body and the meanings it carries is essential.

6.5 If One is Not Born a Beautiful Duckling...

When I began working on this thesis almost two years ago, I never expected it to affect me the way it did. I expected to write a scientific paper on the current scandal of pro-ana websites. I never expected it to become a profound experience in which I learned as much about myself as I did about the young individuals on the websites. I have learned that what I think has a profound effect on how I research my topic.

My research has provided some insight into what it means to negotiate with the individual in the mirror on a daily basis. I also believe it has demonstrated some of the ways in which the popular media impacts our thoughts and beliefs through the use of marketing. I have been able to sympathize with those who become alienated through their pursuit of the idealized female body, as I have often felt disconnected from the image in the mirror. I have drawn upon many examples, from both the past and present, that indicate the idealized female body is clearly defined as thin. Critical reflection upon the messages and meanings created within the world around us is crucial. Members of society must also fundamentally examine the ways in which the messages put forth by the advertising industry affect individuals and the entire society.

I have integrated this analysis into my research on the pro-ana websites. I aimed to look at how the pro-ana members defined the idealized female body and the extent to

which they would pursue this ideal. I have shown the key values held by pro-ana users and the methods they use to maintain these values. I have drawn upon the unedited words of pro-ana members to highlight the intensity and focus the individuals possess. Their words have offered a glimpse into the world of the eating disordered.

In the end, the research that has gone into this thesis has made me more hopeful about the world than when I originally started. Although I have examined the words of many individuals who are/have struggled with eating disorders, it is key to highlight that I have been able to study their words. Each of the participants within the websites I examined has a voice; each has used this voice to reach out and connect with other individuals, and share their stories and experiences with the world. Their ability to share their daily struggles with the world has allowed me to conduct my research, research that I argue may aid others in understanding life in the pursuit of the currently idealized female body.

Only by more fully understanding a social problem can solutions be developed. Further research should be done to uncover and understanding the promotion of the idealized female body and the effects this promotion has on adolescents today. Researchers need to focus on the messages of the pro-ana users, as it is here that possibilities for the future will be uncovered.

I will never open a magazine, watch a commercial, or gaze at an advertisement with the same attitude as before. I will consciously act to create my own definition of beauty. I will be unable to look at an image without critically examining how it impacts my beliefs and values. I wrote this thesis because I wanted to know what happens if you never wake

up a swan. My answer lies within the many quotations within this thesis. Sara Shandler also perfectly sums up the answer:

I owe my confidence in my physical appearance to what the media-inspired world offers me to achieve the “look” I desire. I owe that “look” – long-legged, clear-skinned, bright-eyed- to the same media that inspired my self-destructive desire to achieve it. (Shandler, 1999, p. 34)

If you aren't born a swan, perhaps you are something equally as beautiful in your own right.

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