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“Thinspirations”: A Content Analysis of Pro- and Anti-Eating Disorder Social Networking Websites

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Title: "Thinspirations": A Content Analysis of Pro- and Anti-Eating Disorder Social Networking Websites

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Introduction: Social networking sites permit the exchange of information among individuals sharing ideas, interests, and problems and have the potential to alter human behaviors. According to Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project 80 percent of internet users have looked online for information about any of 15 health topics such as a specific disease or treatment. Of those internet users, 34 percent have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues on an online news group, website, or blog. Individuals suffering from anorexia and/or bulimia can use social networking to address the disorder; however, little is known about the availability of these sites, how they target their audiences, or the content and quality of information shared on them (Ringwald, 2008). The purpose of this research is to (1) map the landscape of these eating disorder social networking sites; (2) identify and classify the content on these sites; and (3) discuss how social media can be used to aid the recovery process for women with eating disorders.

Method: This study will use content analysis to evaluate twenty-four social networking sites. Sites selected for the analysis include ten-seven pro-eating disorder sites and ten-seven anti-eating disorder sites distributed among the following types: two "Facebook" networking pages used by more than 100 people, two "Twitter" sites used by more than 100 people, one personal blog (author to remain anonymous), one "Tumblr" site, and one "Pinterest" site. Content on the sites will be evaluated using a rubric that tracks the presence of ten-certain themes or characteristics that are indicative of two major dimensions of eating disorders: social support/interaction and eating disorder specific information. The anti-eating disorder sites will be evaluated using the same rubric as the pro-eating disorder sites. The purpose of this comparison is to bring awareness to themes specific to the audience using the presented on pro-eating disorder sites and how they could be used via the anti-eating disorder sites to target women suffering from eating disorders and the dimension of harmfulness and support for combatting anorexia and bulimia.

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Results:

The entire content analysis has not been conducted at this point.

Type	# of Members/Followers	"Like and Retweet" (shown by user and weight (top 10 habits)	Thinspiration's (presence/absence of very thin) (weight loss or "trigger" behavior)	Support of Support and Friendship	Intimacy (no internet only comments and questions)	Information (a discussion of eating disorder or a chosen study)	Resources and Links to other Websites	Statement of Purpose of site	Statement of Support and Friendship	Form of support (comments and questions)	Form of support (comments and questions)	Form of support (comments and questions)	Form of support (comments and questions)	Form of support (comments and questions)	Form of support (comments and questions)
Twitter	579							X							X
Twitter	197							X		X	X	X	X	X	
Facebook	11.3							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Facebook	1247							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blog	N/A							X		X	X	X	X	X	
Tumblr	N/A							X		X	X	X	X	X	
Pinterest	N/A		X					X		X					
Twitter	190	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Twitter	8822	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Facebook	163	X		X	X			X							
Facebook	42	X	X	X	X	X		X							
Blog	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Tumblr	N/A		X	X	X	X	X	X							
Pinterest	N/A		X							X	X				X

Conclusions: This study provides Findings will provide descriptive data about the occurrence and content of pro- and anti-eating disorder social networking sites. Due to the rise of social networking websites, the lack of regulations about the types of groups created on these sites, as well as the populations served, it was hypothesized that pro- and anti-eating disorder sites would be common on the internet. Another reason for this could be that many sites have the ability to make the group private or closed. Due to ethical restrictions I did not analyze any private sites, only sites that were open to the public were used in this study. Previous studies have revealed that that visiting pro-eating disorder websites might be harmful to viewers; and that they provide a much-needed avenue for to young women suffering from an eating disorder with a discussion of their potential to harm or help women suffering from the anorexia and/or bulimia who feel isolated from their family and friends (Csipke & Horne, 2007). The emotional content on the sites was often focused on family trouble, issues of self-esteem, and problems relating to self-control and self-mutilation. In general, the results of this study imply that pro- and anti-eating disorder social networking websites are primarily used as a means of obtaining social support. It can be concluded from the results of this study that users of these sites whether for or against eating disorders desperately need social interaction and encouragement. Although this research did shed some light onto the content of some of these networking websites, there is still substantially more research that can be done on the implications of being involved with pro-eating disorder sites and suffering from an eating disorder.

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References:

Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. (Feb. 2013). *The Demographics of Social Media Users — 2012*. Retrieved from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-media-users.aspx>.

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Csipke, E. & Horne, O. (2007) Pro-eating disorder websites: User's opinions. *European Eating Disorders Review*, 15, 196-206.

Ringwald, S. (2008). Pro-anorexia and social networking sites. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 13, 97.

Appendix:

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WEEK	3000	2500	2000	1500	1000	500	0
Week 1	3000	2500	2000	1500	1000	500	300
Week 2	400	500	East	150	200	400	350
Week 3	350	300	East	200	100	East	300
Week 4	350	300	150	100	50	100	300
Week 5	300	300	800	East	250	350	450
Week 6	East	500	150	100	300	300	350
Week 7	300	300	550	300	300	300	450

