

The use and effect of persuasive rhetoric in pro-eating disorder websites

Research question: How do the persuasive techniques used in pro-eating disorder websites create appeal and attract their visitors?

English A Category 3

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Introduction

This essay explores the question “How do the persuasive techniques used in pro-eating disorder websites create appeal and attract their visitors?” by examining the pro-eating disorder websites, primarily “www.myproana.com”, which was chosen as it is one of the largest and most well-known pro-anorexia websites. Additionally, blog posts in this website frequently include references to other such websites and information posted there, therefore providing a comprehensive perspective of the pro-anorexia community as well as ample material for analysis. For additional support of the argument, some other pro-anorexia websites (a list of which can be found at the end of the essay) will also be looked at.

Since the purpose of the essay is to take a deeper look into the persuasive strategies - various types of imagery, anecdotal evidence, and propaganda devices - deployed on pro-eating disorder websites and investigate how they affect the intrinsic appeal of the sites, these persuasive strategies will be thoroughly analyzed and specific examples of them will be given in order of their prevalence on the websites.

In addition, John Leach’s research “The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on “pro-ana” websites” will serve as the primary tool providing a framework for critical analysis, as one of its’ main goals is to investigate the prevalence of various persuasive techniques deployed on 126 pro-eating disorder websites examined. As a result, it provides a holistic view of the most common methods of persuasion used in the websites and deepens the awareness of the topic's complexity, allowing for a focused in-depth analysis of the effect of persuasive rhetoric used in pro-anorexia websites.

Main body

Relevance of discussing eating disorders

Eating disorders are disorders characterized primarily by a pathological disturbance of attitudes and behaviors related to food. The most common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and bulimia nervosa¹. In recent decades, the debate over the emergence of unattainable beauty standards depicted in the media and their role in triggering eating disorders has grown increasingly prominent around the world. According to a 2017 UNICEF and Dove "Self-Esteem Project" study 8 out of 10 girls who have low self-esteem have placed their health at risk, for example by skipping meals². Seeing such facts, it is not surprising that eating disorders affect an estimate of 9% of the population of the US³, for example, and have the highest mortality rates among psychiatric disorders⁴.

Eating disorders, as well as other mental health issues, are still surrounded by various stereotypes and are stigmatized; people suffering from them often face societal judgement and discrimination, which can make the issue extremely difficult for one to admit. This leads to a never-ending cycle of denial of eating problems and eating disorders being seen as a taboo, which explains the treatment rate of only 20%. However, many with eating disorders choose a different way than seeking professional help to confront or affirm their illness, such as visiting internet websites and blogs where they are able to communicate and connect with others who are also suffering from eating disorders. Even though at first glance this might

¹ "American Psychological Association". *APA Dictionary of Psychology* <<https://dictionary.apa.org/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

² "Unicef" 2019. *New Dove and UNICEF partnership to reach 10 million young people with essential self-esteem and body confidence education* <<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/new-dove-and-unicef-partnership-reach-10-million-young-people-essential-self-esteem>> Accessed 28.08.2021

³ "The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders" 2021. *Eating Disorder Statistics* <<https://anad.org/get-informed/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁴ "Anorexia & Bulimia Care". *Statistics* <<https://www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk/about/statistics>> Accessed 28.08.2021

seem like a quite positive coping route, the majority of the individuals who are a part of such online communities see their eating disorder as primarily beneficial.

Pro-eating disorder websites

Since recently the internet has become an integral part of life for many people, the variety and accessibility of specialized websites and blogs that portray eating disorders as lifestyle choices rather than an illness has grown as well. According to John Leach's research on the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites, there were at least 300,000 websites promoting anorexic behaviors⁵. Even though a lot of such blogs have been recently banned from websites like "Tumblr", this is a significant growth from 2001, when TIME magazine reported on only 400 sites. Pro-anorexia ("pro-ana") and pro-bulimia ("pro-mia") websites are highly controversial examples of such internet subcultures/communities that promote harmful behaviors as a desirable lifestyle. It is important to acknowledge, though, that pro-anorexia members' conceptualizations of beauty are not an isolated system of beliefs; rather, they are extensions of Western societies' conceptualizations of beauty. On a broad scale, pro-anorexic attitudes that anorexia is desirable, advantageous for one's body and mind, and raises one's social value are not dissimilar to widely held Western notions that thinness is a desirable, beneficial, and value-enhancing characteristic, especially for women. There is a clear link between society's and the pro-eating disorder movement's conceptions of female worth⁶. As mentioned earlier, pro-ana and pro-mia content appeals to people who suffer from disordered eating because it serves as a coping mechanism and provides a safe space where they can feel understood. It relieves the feeling of loneliness, isolation, as these websites are communities based on

⁵ "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁶ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

shared beliefs and values, free of society's judgments on eating-disordered body and stigmatization of mental health problems⁷.

Complexity of eating disorders

There are some features that are common to most pro-eating disorder websites, such as content warnings, contact information for organizations that help individuals recover from eating disorders, as well as weight loss tips and images of extremely thin individuals.

Although such examples may appear to be a contradiction, eating disorders are extremely complicated mental illnesses. This shows the complexity and diversity of experiences of people who suffer from an eating disorder. Even though there is an assumption that people who publish pro-ana, pro-mia, or "thinspiration" content are intentionally malicious, fully aware that they are misrepresenting symptoms as lifestyle choices, and willfully intend to encourage people to develop or maintain eating disorders, that is not always the case, as many of the people who post this content suffer from eating disorder themselves. Often pro-ana and pro-mia social media profiles and sites contain content that acknowledges the destructive reality of eating disorders or even expresses a wish to recover at the same time. It is very common for people to experience mixed emotions about their illness and recovery.⁸

However, whether it is done intentionally or not, these websites attract visitors and keep their attention by placing the eating disorder at the very heart of self-worth and convincing that it is the most important part of one's identity⁹. This is done by deploying various persuasive techniques and propaganda tactics, which can be said to be the foundation of such websites.

⁷ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁸ "Beat Eating Disorders". *The Dangers of Pro-Ana and Pro-Mia* <<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/recovery-information/dangers-of-pro-ana-and-pro-mia>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁹ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

Use of visual imagery

The majority of pro-eating disorder websites analyzed use various types of visual imagery as a persuasive technique. As John Leach's research states, it was included on 84.9 percent of the 126 pro-anorexia websites studied, making it the most common persuasive technique¹⁰. To the reader, imagery can make something abstract, such as an emotion or a theory, seem more concrete and tangible¹¹. It elicits the emotion that the writer wants to convey in the readers, thereby engaging them and allowing them to connect with the message that the writer is aiming to deliver. It is no wonder that visual representations abound on pro-eating disorder websites, given how closely eating disorders are linked to the significance of physical appearance. Images of extremely thin body type, which is depicted as a slender frame that is clearly undersized and framed in stances that make a person look even thinner, such as top-down angles and poses imitative of mainstream modeling, images featuring visible bone protrusions and weight loss images, showing the "before and after" photos of individuals who have lost a significant amount of weight are one of the most prevalent types of imagery found on such sites^{12*}. It is often referred to as "thinspiration" - portmanteau word which consists of the words "thin" and "inspiration". It is not difficult to decipher this word and comprehend the aim of such images: they serve as an inspiration to strive for extreme thinness, as well as depict what should be the desired beauty standard of those who see the images.

Images of thin celebrities are another way of portraying the yearning for "perfection" and imitating the positivity that supposedly comes from being pro-anorexic. Therefore photos of

¹⁰ "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹¹ "PrepScholar" 2019. *What Is Imagery? A Complete Guide* <<https://blog.prepscholar.com/what-is-imagery-definition-examples>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹² "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

* Examples can be seen in the appendix.

celebrities, such as Nicole Ricci, Paris Hilton, Hilary Duff and Lindsay Lohan are often posted and thoroughly scrutinised with respect to their weight loss. The amount of weight lost by the celebrities is often praised in the comments underneath the photos, and the members of the pro-eating disorder community are encouraged to follow the same diet plans that the celebrities have followed in order to achieve the beauty standards that are defined by such photos¹³.

Use of verbal imagery (conceptual metaphors)

In addition to visual imagery, pro-eating disorder websites frequently employ conceptual metaphors, which are a form of verbal imagery, to persuade visitors and structure the movement's beliefs. Traditionally, metaphor is defined as an expression that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object¹⁴. CMT (conceptual metaphor theory), on the other hand, claims that metaphors organize the conceptual system in the human mind. To help comprehension, abstract domains are constructed in terms of more concrete domains, according to this approach. Unfamiliar topics are interpreted as something more familiar. "Love is a journey" is an example of such a metaphor. Mappings across domains occur in conceptual metaphors, where features of the concrete, source domain (e.g. a journey) are mapped onto features of the abstract, target domain (e.g. love)¹⁵. Conceptual metaphors often occur in pro-anorexia websites: "Ana is an art form, a revival of the ancient art of body modification only instead of just piercing, tattooing and adorning, we are changing the structure and shape of the body itself. Ana is a science, the science of balancing nutrition, survival, and metabolism ... Ana is

¹³ *Common Content found in Anorexic and Bulimic Websites*

<https://www.kean.edu/~schandle/Students/acastillo/new_page_10.htm> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹⁴ "Cambridge Dictionary". *Metaphor* <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/metaphor>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹⁵ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

a religion, a system of beliefs based in the awareness and experience that the power of the will, put together with the powers of the mind and imagination, can alter the state of the body and actually in many ways also that of the spirit. Ana is a form of magical craft, the modern form of the ancient spell of changing shape. Ana is a form of mysticism -- seeking a particular state of mind and body through deliberate, calculated efforts and repeated rituals to get us there¹⁶". However, the two main, most frequently found conceptual metaphors are "Anorexia is a religion" and "Anorexia is a skill". Members occasionally include the source domains of skill and religion explicitly in their language. The reason for the use of conceptual metaphors in this context could be seen primarily as a way of coping with the illness and making it more tangible, since the source domains often have a clearer structure and thereby are perceived as less complex than the target domain - eating disorder, this way helping to understand it and deal with it. While this suggests that these people are to some extent conscious of their conceptualizations, the widespread use of implicit verbal realizations of these metaphors indicates that these structures are inescapable and ingrained within members' conceptual systems, rather than being temporary creative devices¹⁷.

Religion, in the broadest sense, can be defined as a particular system of faith and worship¹⁸.

When eating disorders are equated with religion, they are no longer considered illnesses.

Rather, the eating disorder takes on a life of its own, complete with its own set of beliefs.

Starvation is alluded to as an act of strength and willpower on these websites. Some sites

even include an "Ana Psalm" or "commandments"¹⁹, for example, "Being thin is more

¹⁶ "plagueangel.net".

<<http://www16.plagueangel.net/grotto/analog/id3.html?sub1=20210826-0429-2209-8ddb-3b1860b06579>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹⁷ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts*

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹⁸ "Oxford English Dictionary" 2021. *Religion, n.*

<<https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/161944>> Accessed 28.08.2021

¹⁹ *Common Content found in Anorexic and Bulimic Websites*

<https://www.kean.edu/~schandle/Students/acastillo/new_page_10.htm> Accessed 28.08.2021

important than being healthy”, which are inspired by the biblical Ten Commandments²⁰. In addition, members of the community tend to personificate anorexia and bulimia and call them by human names - Ana and Mia: “I’ve known Ana and Mia for about five years now and we’ve become very close²¹”. Ana and Mia are often portrayed as goddess-like figures and are detached from the full form words - anorexia and bulimia, as these two terms are acknowledged as illnesses: “Ana is a choice and control. Anorexia is neither.”²²

As well as associating eating disorders with religion, members of the pro-anorexia community also see their eating disorder as a skill to be practiced. Thus, they perceive themselves as talented people who possess the anorexia skill set. Some of the websites even have "Ana Recipes," which explain the characteristics that a true anorexic and/or bulimic must own. Low self-esteem and a desire to maintain a lifestyle of starving are among these qualities²³. It might be tempting to think of an eating disorder as a skill as it is natural for a human being to want to feel strong, talented, and successful. Furthermore, persons who already have an eating disorder frequently have a greater need for external validation as well as self-validation, which can be achieved through such measures. The conceptualization of anorexia as a skill might also give one a sense of control, as the eating disorder is portrayed as something which can be learned, practiced, and improved on²⁴. That is also the reason why most of such websites contain “Tips and Tricks” sections, where various dietary tips are described.

²⁰ “Discourse & Society” 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

²¹ “LiveJournal”. *Speed Skinny* <<https://speedskinny.livejournal.com/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

²² “Forums and Community” 2017. *ProAna definition at Ana's Prophetess, Blue Dragonfly, Ana's Underground Grotto, Project Shapeshift*

<<https://www.myproana.com/index.php/topic/2425186-proana-definition-at-anas-prophetess-blue-dragonfly-anas-underground-grotto-project-shapeshift/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

²³ *Common Content found in Anorexic and Bulimic Websites*

<https://www.kean.edu/~schandle/Students/acastillo/new_page_10.htm> Accessed 28.08.2021

²⁴ “Discourse & Society” 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

Use of anecdotal evidence

Some sorts of anecdotal evidence may also provide a sense of control to persons who publish it. On pro-eating disorder websites that have been examined, remarks about personal gain from the eating disorder, such as improving self-confidence, as well as statements about new lifestyle choices (new hobbies, exercise habits, improved interpersonal relationships) linked to the pro-anorexia lifestyle are common, along with photos of thin individuals performing everyday activities in an effort to appear healthy²⁵. These techniques are employed as an attempt to normalize the pro-eating disorder lifestyle. Records of weight change are also very frequently found on such websites²⁶. The detailed information about an individual's "lowest weight", "current weight", and "goal weight"^{**} is often displayed at the top of their profiles on the websites, which once again confirms the fact that people engaging in the activity of such websites believe their physical appearance defines them and is the most important part of their identity. Quotes, such as "I'm dying to know how much I weigh"²⁷ prove this once again.

The persuasiveness of these examples of anecdotal evidence can be explained by the fact that anecdotal evidence has been proven to be more convincing than statistical evidence in a number of studies. It is not because anecdotal evidence is based on a single instance, but rather because it is more imaginable²⁸. Furthermore, statistics might be interpreted as static symbols on a website, whereas a human is a dynamic source of knowledge and hence more reliable. People have a natural tendency to trust people and can relate to a story about someone else's experience.

²⁵ "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

²⁶ Ibid.

^{**} Examples can be seen in the appendix.

²⁷ "LiveJournal". *Fasting Support* <<https://fastingsupport.livejournal.com/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

²⁸ "ResearchGate" 2001. *Anecdotal, Statistical, and Causal Evidence: Their Perceived and Actual Persuasiveness* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226764072_Anecdotal_Statistical_and_Causal_Evidence_Their_Perceived_and_Actual_Persuasiveness> Accessed 28.08.2021

Use of propaganda devices

Even though persuasion is generally defined as any communication meant to influence people to think or act in a specific way and is usually seen as neutral or positive²⁹, in pro-eating disorder websites it often relies mostly on pathos, which is a feature of propaganda. Although propaganda is considered a type of persuasion, it is usually associated with the negative connotation of manipulation. So, as well as employing previously discussed persuasion strategies, pro-eating disorder websites also employ all seven of the key propaganda devices: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card-stacking and bandwagoning. Despite the fact that pro-eating disorder websites contain all of them, three are the most prevalent. The first is glittering generality, which is the most extensively used and frequently occurring. It is an emotionally appealing term that is closely associated with highly valued community ideals and beliefs that convey or elicit conviction without providing supporting information or reason³⁰. Glittering generalities were found on 69.8% of the 126 websites examined in John Leach's research on the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites³¹. It is expressed on pro-eating disorder websites by attaching pro-anorexia context to emblems that are already prominent in mainstream media, particularly social media³². It is important to keep in mind that glittering generality, like most of the other persuasive strategies discussed in this essay, can sometimes overlap and intersect. In this case, glittering generalities frequently overlap with imagery, as pro-anorexic remarks appear on viral online memes^{***}, for example. These are obvious attempts to link

²⁹ "Difference Between Similar Terms and Objects" 2020. *Difference Between Propaganda and Persuasion*

<<http://www.differencebetween.net/language/difference-between-propaganda-and-persuasion/>>
Accessed 28.08.2021

³⁰ "Your Dictionary". *Glittering generality* <<https://www.yourdictionary.com/glittering-generalities>>
Accessed 28.08.2021

³¹ "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

³² Ibid.

^{***} Examples can be seen in the appendix.

well-known catchphrases and symbols to relatable features of the pro-eating disorder community.

Transfer is the second most common propaganda strategy observed on these websites. It's a technique of projecting a person's, entity's, object's, or value's positive or negative qualities onto another in order to make the latter more acceptable or discredit it. It was found on 67.5 percent of the sites studied by the same research³³. This is an attempt to transfer a person's respect for one thing to something that a propagandist would like to be admired, in this case, the pro-anorexia movement. To reach a desirable outcome, this kind of propaganda employs a variety of symbols³⁴. It evokes an emotional response in the target, prompting him or her to identify with recognized authorities. Symbols are often placed over other visual imagery in this approach, which is often highly vivid³⁵. Through this propaganda technique, images of healthy food and exercise routines are commonly associated with the pro-eating disorder movement. Use of dietary science, which strongly overlaps with imagery, is common as well, it occurred on 69.8% of the websites studied in John Leach's research. Examples of dietary science pertained to the calculation of caloric intake and methods for utilizing one's diet to produce a negative intake of calories³⁶, as well as listing "menus of the day"^{****} and low-calorie foods. All of these examples encourage weight loss and control by cherry-picking favorable elements of dietary science and using them as a strategy to promote unhealthy behaviors. It is often extremely easy to do so, especially since the internet and the media are full of misleading information regarding dietetics and nutrition, which then can be used for such purposes.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "Advergize" 2020. *7+ Different Types of Propaganda Techniques that Happen Everyday* <<https://www.advergize.com/advertising/examples-of-propaganda/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

³⁵ "Definitions". *Definitions for transfer (propaganda)* <<https://www.definitions.net/definition/transfer+%28propaganda%29>> Accessed 28.08.2021

³⁶ "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

**** Examples can be seen in the appendix.

Lastly, card stacking is the third most common propaganda technique seen on pro-eating disorder websites, appearing in nearly half of the sample analyzed by John Leach in their research on the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on “pro-ana” websites³⁷. Card stacking is a persuasive strategy that involves deliberate distortions, such as concealing information, overemphasizing certain facts, manipulating data, and quoting rigged or questionable studies³⁸. It also entails cherry-picking facts in order to fit a narrative. On pro-eating disorder websites, card stacking is frequently observed in the promotion of cigarette smoking as a weight-loss method. However, the potential harm that cigarettes may cause to one's health is not mentioned. This strategy is also used to mask the negative consequences of eating disorders in order to appease the internalization of the slender ideal³⁹. As a result, just one viewpoint is represented: the pro-eating disorder viewpoint.

Other propaganda strategies, while less prominent, are still worth mentioning and being aware of. Testimonial, for example, is a device that consists in having some respected or hated person say that a given idea is good or bad. In pro-eating disorder websites, they often represent the sugar-coating of distortion, a falsehood, a misunderstood notion, or an accidental suggestion⁴⁰. This technique may appear comparable to card stacking in that it employs questionable sources to establish its point or to the transfer technique, as it uses a respected person or another authoritative figure (instead of the use of a respected symbol in the technique of transfer) to make an idea seem more acceptable. The remaining three main propaganda techniques, when found in pro-anorexia websites, may also often seem similar to one another or overlapping in a way. Plain folks is a technique that convinces the audience

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “American Psychological Association”. *APA Dictionary of Psychology* <<https://dictionary.apa.org/card-stacking>> Accessed 28.08.2021

³⁹ “TTU DSpace Home” 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁴⁰ “Propaganda Critic” 2018. *Testimonial - Decoding Propaganda* <<https://propagandacritic.com/index.php/how-to-decode-propaganda/testimonial/>> Accessed 28.08.2021

that an idea is good because it is shared by the vast majority of people like oneself⁴¹. This is very similar to bandwagoning, which is a technique for persuading others to accept an idea or argument simply because others have. The goal of bandwagon propaganda is to persuade the target that one side is the winner or superior since more people are joining it. The person who is exposed to the propaganda is led to assume that because so many individuals have joined, everyone will eventually join⁴². However, it is not as frequently found on pro-eating disorder websites as most of the people visiting such websites already have pro-anorexic beliefs and do not need to be convinced to start seeing eating disorders as primarily beneficial. Moreover, as mentioned at the beginning of the work, lots of these sites contain content warnings, which supposedly do not encourage people who do not suffer from an eating disorder already to engage with the content posted there. Even though this depends on the context and might be very subjective, as some people might still find such warnings attractive and arousing curiosity instead of as a precautionary measure, it does not coincide with the principle of bandwagoning. That might be the reason why in pro-eating disorder websites analyzed, bandwagoning is used relatively rarely.

If bandwagoning plays on the fear of being left out if one does not accept or join the idea or argument, name-calling, when describing someone who is against the ideology of a propagandist, in this case, against pro-eating disorders, utilizes derogatory language or terms that carry a negative connotation. By labeling the target as an entity to despise, propaganda aims to engender prejudice⁴³. In pro-eating disorder websites, name-calling is usually used against parents or other family members, friends or doctors who notice the unhealthy

⁴¹ *Propaganda Techniques to Recognize* <<https://www.uvm.edu/~jleonard/AGRI183/propoaganda.html>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁴² "TTU DSpace Home" 2018. *The allure of thinness: An inquiry into the propaganda techniques and persuasive strategies used on "pro-ana" websites* <<https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/74448>> Accessed 28.08.2021

⁴³ Ibid.

behavior and start to suspect eating disorders, try to stop them from getting deep into it or help get rid of it.

Conclusion

To summarize, in this essay, a wide range of persuasive strategies employed on pro-eating disorder websites were discussed - all of which help in attracting their intended audience - people who already suffer from an eating disorder. These websites are appealing as they provide a secure environment, which is achieved via the use of persuasion strategies. Since persuasion in pro-eating disorder websites often relies on pathos, which is a feature of propaganda, it shows how negatively impactful pro-eating disorder websites are. People that publish this form of content persuade each other to believe what they want to believe or what they already believe. Furthermore, people generally reject objective facts and tend to consider the viewpoint that corresponds to what they already know. As a result, it is comfortable for individuals with eating disorders to visit such websites and engage with the persuasive/propaganda content, because their beliefs are not challenged, and their illness, as well as their willingness to keep it and not seek help, is affirmed. That is why such websites are exceedingly dangerous and harmful, as they push people with eating disorders even deeper into the condition. Furthermore, many people who claim to be new to blogs/websites and appear to be of a healthy weight are visiting such sites and engaging with the content in order to find quick weight loss solutions to make themselves fit the beauty standards depicted in the media better. As a result of engaging with the material on the websites, a number of people who may not yet have an eating disorder are pushed towards one.

The analysis of language which is used on various media platforms to encourage women to measure their self-worth and beauty through their physical attributes and to have pride in

attaining lower body weight⁴⁴, along with what effect that has on women's self-confidence and self-image could be an interesting area for further research.

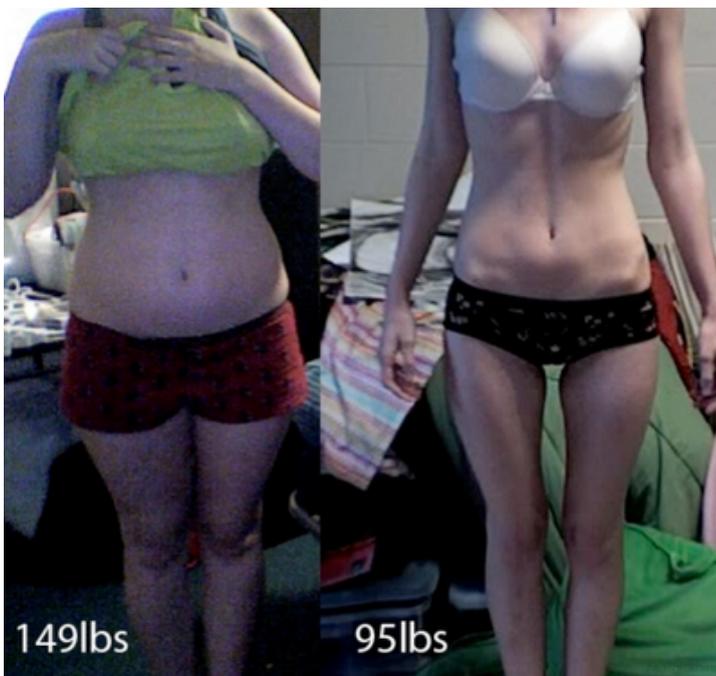
⁴⁴ "Discourse & Society" 2013. *Pro-anorexia: extensions of ingrained concepts* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24441481>> Accessed 28.08.2021

Appendix:



138 lbs 5' 8" 103 lbs

** Image 1: "Before and after" photo of an individual who has lost a significant amount of weight*



149lbs 95lbs

* **Image 2:** *“Before and after” photo of an individual who has lost a significant amount of weight*



* **Image 3:** *Example of “thinspiration”*



* **Image 4:** *Example of “thinspiration”*

Height: 5'3 (5'4 on a good day)

Current Weight: 145 (This Morning.)

Highest Weight: 205 (Sick.)

Lowest Weight: 115 (I must have been like, 13 though.)

Short Term Goal Weight: 135 (Before November)

Long Term Goal Weight: 100 (After November)

**** Image 5:** *Example of detailed information of an individual's weight/height*



***** Image 6:** *A pro-anorexic remark turned into/associated with a popular internet slogan*

~~~~~  
 Breakfast;  
 3/4 of a medium banana: 80 cal.  
 1 tiny bite of cheese: 5 cal.  
 ~~~~~  
 Lunch;
 1/2 of a porkchop: 114 cal.
 3 bites corn: 12 cal.
 1/8 of a yam: 20 cal.
 ~~~~~  
 1 can chicken noodle soup: 150 cal.  
 ~~~~~  
Total;
 381 cal.

******Image 7:** *An example of an individual's "menu of the day" and total calories consumed throughout the day*

- part, i did pretty horrible today;
- less than half of a fruit&yogurt parfait from mcdonalds
 - glass of orange juice
 - an apple (before my soccer game, i couldn't run on an empty stomach)
 - piece of pizza and water for dinner. (FMLLLLLL.)

****** Image 8:** *An example of an individual's "menu of the day" (including their emotional expressions caused by the amount of food they have consumed throughout the day)*

Resources:

Pro-anorexia websites:

<https://www.myproana.com/>
<https://anassupport.livejournal.com/>
<http://anaandren.blogspot.com/>
<https://thxn.weebly.com/blog/before-and-after-thinspo>
<https://thinsopmania.wordpress.com/category/tips/>
<https://community.livejournal.com/--thinspiration/>
<https://ana-hug.livejournal.com/>
<https://speedskinny.livejournal.com/>
<https://pro-ana-nation.livejournal.com/?skip=9>
<https://fastingsupport.livejournal.com/>
<https://ana-circle.livejournal.com/>

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