

Self-Reported Orthorexic Behavior in the Healthy Living Blog Community

Sarah E. Pember, BA, MT

The University of Alabama



Self-Reported Orthorexic Behavior In the Healthy Living Blog Community

Sarah E. Pember, BA, MT
The University of Alabama Department of Health Science

Background

- Even with the new DSM-V criteria, Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) are likely to remain the most commonly diagnosed eating disorder.
 - *Orthorexia nervosa*, a proposed EDNOS, is an extreme obsession with healthy food that may lead to dietary restriction and nutritional deprivation.
 - Populations knowledgeable about nutrition and health are more likely to fixate on related behaviors, making them at a greater risk for *orthorexia*.
 - The Healthy Living Blog (HLB) community is an extensive, self-defined network of bloggers who post about healthy lifestyle choices, predominantly related to food and fitness.
 - Previous quantitative analysis of coded HLB content has shown elevated disordered eating patterns, behaviors, and thoughts.
 - Social media's strong peer influence and continual exchange of visual information has the potential to negatively influence body image and social norms for behavior.

Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of orthorexic behaviors within the Healthy Living Blog online community and provide insight into both the manifestation of orthorexic pathology and the ways in which social media may inadvertently normalize disordered eating.

Methods

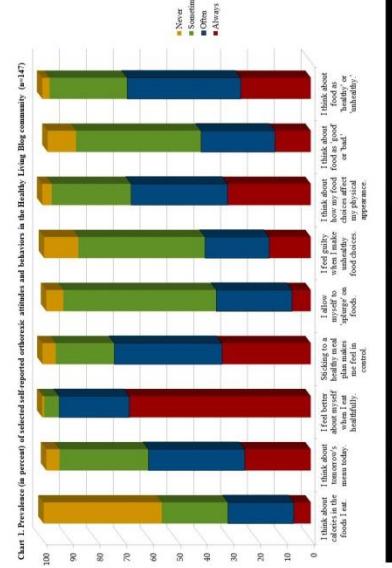
 - University IRB approval was obtained for this research
 - An online survey was adapted from the previously validated ORTO-15 questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = .767).
 - The adapted survey correlated strongly with the original ORTO-15 questions ($r = 0.928$; $p < 0.01$).
 - Respondents ($n=147$) were recruited through social media platforms: personal blogs, Facebook group pages, and Twitter accounts.
 - Anonymous data collection occurred in October 2013.
 - Statistical analyses were completed using SPSS version 21.0.

Results

- The HLB sample was predominantly white (93.0%), female (95.1%), aged 19-35 (79.4%).
 - Writing one's own blog predicted significantly greater perceived influence of the HLB community over food choices ($p = 0.008$); there were no significant differences among writers, readers, or commenters for orthorexic behavior.
 - Time spent writing, reading or commenting on blogs and using social media was a significant predictor of perceived influence of the HLB and social media community on eating behaviors ($R^2 = 0.125$; $p = 0.001$).

Methods

- community on eating behaviors ($R^2 = 0.125$; $p < 0.001$). Time involved in the HLB and social media community ($R^2 = 0.062$; $p = 0.008$) and the perceived influence of the HLB community on eating behaviors ($R^2 = 0.063$; $p = 0.008$) were significant predictors of self-reported orthorexic behavior



Analysis

- Orthorexic behaviors were calculated, with lower scores indicating greater sub-threshold disordered eating.
 - Participants were excluded from analysis if they did not report writing, reading, or commenting on blog posts.
 - HLB time investment was calculated based on time spent blogging, blog reading, or using social media.
 - HLB influence scores were calculated based on how often



Discussion and Implications

- An overall social media influence score included social media's influence on food choice and recipe selection.
 - Linear regressions were conducted for all sub-scores as predictors of orthorexic behavior.
 - One-way ANOVAs were conducted for grouped variable comparisons.
 - Health-focused social media and blogs may encourage and normalize a disordered approach to healthy eating among young, White women.
 - However, many of the behaviors associated with *orthorexia* are adaptive eating behaviors, known to mitigate overweight and chronic disease in the population.
 - Future research is needed to compare self-reported behaviors and actual behaviors portrayed through personal blogs and determine if these health-focused blogs encourage obsession and disordered eating attitudes, or actually promote positive eating behaviors.

Self-Reported Orthorexic Behavior in the Healthy Living Blog Community

Sarah E. Pember, BA, MT

The University of Alabama

References

- Bağcı Bosi, A. T., Çamur, D., & Güler, Ç. (2007). Prevalence of orthorexia nervosa in resident medical doctors in the faculty of medicine (Ankara, Turkey). *Appetite*, 49(3), 661-666.
- Boepple, L., & Thompson, J. K. (2014). A content analysis of healthy living blogs: Evidence of content thematically consistent with dysfunctional eating attitudes and behaviors. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 47(4), 362-367.
- Bratman, S., & Knight, D. (2001). Health food junkies: Orthorexia nervosa: Overcoming the obsession with healthful eating. *New York: Broadway*.
- Brytek-Matera, A. (2012). Orthorexia nervosa—an eating disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder or disturbed eating habit?. *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 1, 55-60.
- Donini, L. M., Marsili, D., Graziani, M. P., Imbriale, M., & Cannella, C. (2005). Orthorexia nervosa: validation of a diagnosis questionnaire. *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 10(2), e28-e32.
- Eriksson, L., Baigi, A., Marklund, B., & Lindgren, E. C. (2008). Social physique anxiety and sociocultural attitudes toward appearance impact on orthorexia test in fitness participants. *Scandinavian journal of medicine & science in sports*, 18(3), 389-394.
- Fidan, T., Ertekin, V., Işıkay, S., & Kırkınar, I. (2010). Prevalence of orthorexia among medical students in Erzurum, Turkey. *Comprehensive psychiatry*, 51(1), 49-54.
- Kinzl, J. F., Hauer, K., Traweger, C., & Kiefer, I. (2006). Orthorexia nervosa in dieticians. *Psychotherapy and psychosomatics*, 75(6), 395-396.
- Marsili, D., Graziani, M. P., Imbriale, M., & Cannella, C. (2004). Orthorexia nervosa: a preliminary study with a proposal for diagnosis and an attempt to measure the dimension of the phenomenon. *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 9(2), 151-157.
- Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research. *Sex Roles*, 1-15.
- Ramacciotti, C. E., Perrone, P., Coli, E., Burgalassi, A., Conversano, C., Massimetti, G., & Dell'Osso, L. (2011). Orthorexia nervosa in the general population: a preliminary screening using a self-administered questionnaire (ORTO-15). *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 16(2), 127-130.
- Robinson, K. M. (2011). *Is the Fixation on "healthy" Unhealthy?: A Study on Orthorexia Nervosa* (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University).

*For more information or to contact the presenter, please e-mail Sarah E. Pember at
sepember@crimson.ua.edu.*