Self-Reported Orthorexic Behavior
In the Healthy Living Blog Community
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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 believe 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 = 0.767).
- 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 on food choices (p = 0.009); there were no significant differences among writers, readers, or commenters for orthorexic behavior.
- Time spent traveling, 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 (R² = 0.125, p < 0.001).
- Time involved in the HLB and social media community (R² = 0.065, p = 0.008) and the perceived influence of the HLB community on eating behaviors (R² = 0.063, p < 0.001) were significant predictors of self-reported orthorexic behavior in both univariate and multiple linear regressions (R² = 0.097; p = 0.005).

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 blogs and bloggers influenced food purchases and consumption, recipe preparation, and restaurant choices.

Discussion and Implications
- 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 disordered eating attitudes or actually promote positive eating behaviors.
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References


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