

Eating disorders in the social web

an ego-network analysis approach

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Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Literature
- 3 Empirical approach
- 4 Conclusions

The “pro-ana” and “pro-mia” Internet movement

- A controversial subculture: advocacy for anorexia and bulimia nervosa on the web.
- Challenges medical and psychological wisdom: anorexia as a lifestyle.
- But also, mutual support and advice to fellow sufferers.



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Anorexia Goes High Tech

By JESSICA REAVES Tuesday, Jul. 31, 2001

anorexic nation

Welcome to ANOREXIC NATION a pro-ana Website.

If you are looking for a good trigger then you're onto the right place!
If your heart out of balance check out www.trigger.com
If your in recovery then go to www.recovery.org
If your just curious, GET AOP!

A pro-anorexia web site

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The “pro-ana” and “pro-mia” Internet movement

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The screenshot shows a news article from The Sun website. The article is titled "I set up a 'pro-ana' site and dropped to 6st. Now I know this destroys lives" and is written by Nikki Watkins. It was published on 23 Mar 2010. The article text reads: "EMACIATED, shaking and on the brink of collapse, 20-year-old Stephanie Moore struggled to her computer to email for help." To the right of the article is a photograph of a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a purple top and blue jeans, standing with her arms crossed. The website header includes "THE Sun" logo and navigation links for HOME, MY SUN, SITE MAP, and NEWS ALERTS. A sidebar on the left lists various categories like WOMAN, Mums & Dads, Beauty, Fashion, Sex and Love, Health, Real Life, Wellbeing, Superhunks, Betty Brisk, Bingo, VIDEO, NEWS, SunVote, Forces, Sun City, Captain Crunch, and SPORT. The article is edited by Sally Brook.

The “pro-ana” and “pro-mia” Internet movement

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The screenshot shows a BBC News article page. At the top, it says 'BBC NEWS' and 'LIVE BBC NEWS CHANNEL'. The article is dated 'Wednesday, 8 August 2007, 11:10 GMT 12:10 UK'. The headline is 'Seeking 'thinspiration''. The main image shows a woman looking at a laptop screen. The article text begins: 'Pro-anorexia websites offering tips on extreme dieting are nothing new, but their growth on social networking sites is a disturbing new twist and brings them within reach of a wider audience.'

A challenge for researchers

- How to study this social phenomenon?
- How to devise suitable public health tools and communication policies?

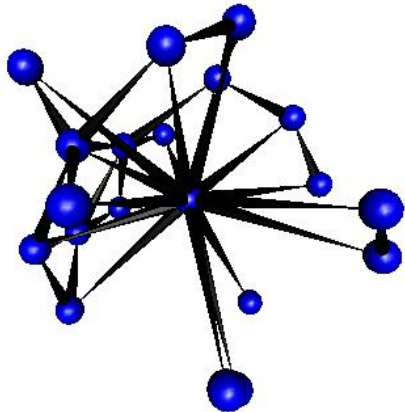


THIN AMOR UNIVERSITY
for the thin and the restless



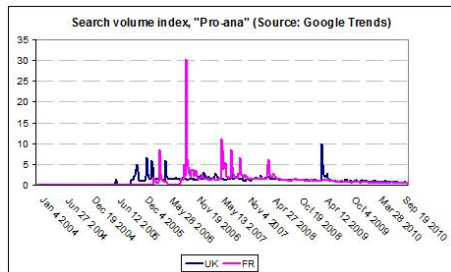
A social networks approach

- Ongoing project ANAMIA: a social networks approach to “ana-mia” sociability.
- Focus is on online vs. offline personal networks of “ana-mia” website users.
- Goal is to understand effects on health and eating behaviours.



The study

- Comparative study of anorexia subjects in UK and France;
- Mixed methods: quantitative, qualitative, simulation;
- Multi-disciplinary: social science, economics, philosophy, law, computer science.



ANAMIA in practice

Agence Nationale de la Recherche
ANR

L'ÉCOLE
DES HAUTES
ÉTUDES
DES SCIENCES

Centre
Maurice
Halbwachs

TELECOM
Sud Paris

GRQ AM

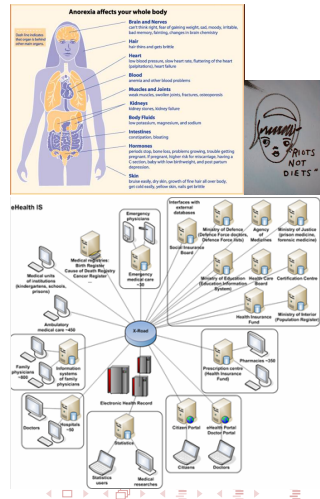
OWE^{lab}

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of
GREENWICH

- PI: C. Fishler, CNRS Paris;
- Funded by the French Agency of National Research (ANR).
- 5 teams.

A new role for the SSH in the study of eating behaviours

- Before Internet:
 - Clinical approaches dominant;
 - SSH counterpointed development of health sciences mainstream.
- Internet:
 - 60 articles on “ana-mia” phenomenon (2000-2010);
 - SSH play a major role in defining the field;
 - Health sciences follow suit;
 - Role of SSH in study of health with ubiquitous computer-mediated interactions.



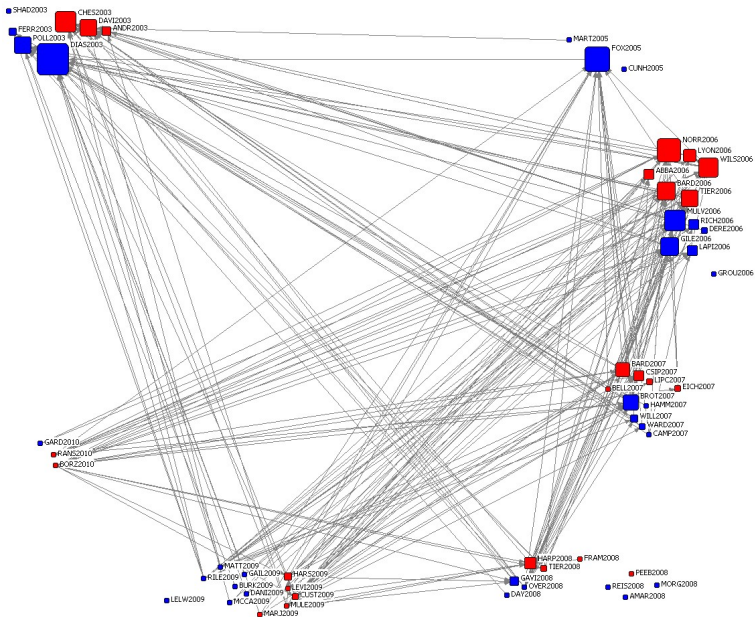


Figure: Network of citations highlighting the development of the body of literature over a decade. Red = clinical, blue = socio-cultural approaches. Node size is proportional to number of citations.

New challenges ahead

- So far, mostly content analyses; rare active data collections (surveys, experiments);
- No conclusive evidence on the health impact of pro ana/mia websites;
- Online social networking remains to be addressed.

Today's presentation

- Today, focus is on design of the empirical study;
- We aim to reach ana-mia website users and question them;
- Data collection just started (French part; English version will follow);
- Emphasis is on fieldwork methodology, dataset construction, test results.

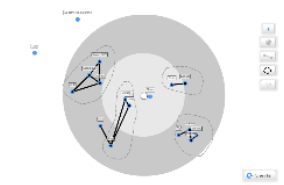


The challenge of interrogating ana-mia subjects

- Ana-mia population is difficult to reach:
 - Small size;
 - Vulnerabilities (health risk; underage);
 - Frequent migrations.
- Large quantitative surveys / webcrawling possible only to an extent;
- Need to rely on smaller-scale, purposive samples.

Our approach

- Web-based survey with participant-aided sociogram drawing tool;
- For current users of eating disorder-related websites, forums, blogs etc.;
- Questions on online and offline personal networks, and health-related advice network;
- Subsequent in-depth interview for a sub-sample of respondents.



Questionnaire structure

Four “classical” questionnaire sections with questions on:

- Basic indicators;
- Socio-economic indicators;
- IT usage;
- Health, weight, and body image.

Name generators.

[Insert Interface here]

[Insert first page of questionnaire here]

Name generators with participant-aided sociograms

- Two name generators for personal ties (very general):
 - **Offline** ties (family, friends, schoolmates, colleagues, etc.);
 - **Online** ties (connections through email, MSN, social networking sites, forums etc.);
 - The two may overlap, in part or in full.
- An extension of the name-generator method with real-time visualization, adapted for computer-based use.

[Insert example of an offline ego network as can be designed by a participant]

[Insert example of an online ego network as can be designed by a participant.]

Name generator for health advice ties I

Finally, we ask respondents whom they would like to speak to in case of:

- For one (randomly selected) group of respondents: serious health condition (go to hospital);
- For others: mundane issue (hair loss).
- They choose from among the list of contacts already mentioned, both offline and online, and may add new names;

Name generator for health advice ties II

- Goal is to understand *who* may affect their health and nutrition behaviours;
- Key issue is relative importance of online vs. offline ties.
- Effects of social web on health to be deduced on this basis.

Conclusions

- We hope to gain insight into motivations and behaviours of ana-mia subjects;
- To understand impact of online social interactions on health, and difference from non-web interactions;
- Possible extensions to social dimensions of other health issues;
- Aim to draw implications for health policy campaigns.

Thank you!

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