

# Defying the Feminized Scale: Women Weighing in on Eating Problems from Cyberspace

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## Purpose

To examine the diverse examples of women's public and active fight against eating "disorders" (EDs) through social media. These stories poignantly combat the biased assumptions, severe stigmatization, and marginalization—result of power-and-commercially laden overmedicalization of such ailments. Together with contemporary scholarship on *eating problems*, these voices challenge the systems and institutions that police, control, and affect women, their relationship to food and eating, and their bodies.

- *What does this virtual resistance tell us?*
- *Do these examples help us re-think EDs?*
- *How can we formulate a more broad understanding of eating problems?*

## Background

- *Eating "disorders" (EDs) presume narrow and homogenous groups of women<sup>3,5,7</sup>.*
- *"Disordered" differentiations lead to differential focus and methods of research and treatment<sup>1</sup>.*
- *EDs symbolism reinforces and perpetuates stereotyped assumptions.*
- *Professional discourse suggests psychological, personality, and psychiatric pathologies<sup>3</sup>.*
- *EDs neglect and dismiss Other women<sup>7</sup>.*
- *New challenges to these biased constructions, and disproportionate availability of treatment have begun to surface through online media.*

## Method

- Literature review
- Data collection: Case studies
- Virtual environments: Facebook, blogs, online communities, etc.
- Open coding: identifying recurring themes, experiences, etc.
- Critical feminist analysis of findings



## Themes

- Idealization/Objectification
- Identification
- Pathologization/Medicalization
- Stigmatization
- Marginalization

## CYBER-SPEAK

*"I felt 'entitled' to not being on a diet for the first time in 13 years." – Julie Sweeney (during pregnancy)*

*"I still have an internalized sense that it's a condition of straight white cis women, and there is no reason to bring this 'white girl disease' into conversation with my friends or queer of color communities."*

*"Growing up, I didn't have a gender, or sexuality; I had an eating disorder." – Janani Balasubramanian*

*"My story is one historically told by white, middle to upper-class women. Mental illnesses, like eating disorders and suicidal ideation, are generally not the province of young Latinas, or so 'they' say." – Raquel Reichard*

*"I had a neurotypical (my therapist) say that I didn't have a 'real eating disorder' because the (outdated and now invalid) DSM VI said so. Because they have total power to judge that I 'wasn't sick enough' because I didn't miss enough of my periods." – Anonymous*

*"For some victims, self-starvation, bingeing, and purging may begin as a way to cope with the trauma of the assault, to feel in control of a certain aspect of their lives."*

– RAINN.org

## Discussion Development

- Deconstructing eating "disorders."
- Examining implications.
- Women's voices of support
- Reconceptualizing eating "disorders" as *eating problems*.

*"[These problems] will continue until women's access to racial, social, sexual, and political justice is ensured."  
– Becky Thompson (1994)*



## References

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