

Kelly White

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### Dying to be Thin through the Internet

Pro-Ana and Pro-Mia refers to anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa not as a mental or eating disorder but as a “life style choice”, where nothing is wrong with them for omitting food from their diet. The ED’s (eating disorders) are commonly referred to as "Ana" and is sometimes even affectionately referred to a girl named Ana or Mia by anorexics and bulimics. Pro-Ana organizations and websites state different reasons for their running. Most Pro-Ana Mia websites, chat rooms and forums claim that they exist as a non-judgmental environment for anorexics so that those suffering from anorexia and/or bulimia can have a place to turn to and discuss their illness and support those who choose to seek help. While others deny anorexia nervosa is a mental illness and claim instead that it is a "lifestyle choice" that should be respected by society.

Many websites are promoting anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa instead of being a safe haven for people with EDs to turn to. As encouragement to lose weight, members often exchange and post thinspiration (or thinspo) on these websites. Thinspo can be images, videos and slide shows of slim women who may be suffering from an ED or are just naturally very slim. Celebrities such as Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, Courtney Cox, and super Models like Kate Moss are commonly used in Thinspo. Thinspo can also be selected quotes or song lyrics. Jill Sobule is a well known singer whose songs are very common with the Pro-Ana and Pro-Mia

websites with songs entitled *Lucy at the Gym*, *Mary Kay*, *Resistance Song*, *Supermodel* and *Underachiever*. On these websites special diets and recipes are also posted to give a person advice as to what they can eat in order to lose weight. Jewelry is also worn as a sign of anorexia and bulimia as a lifestyle choice instead of a medical condition: Anorexia- you would wear red bracelets, Bulimia- you would wear purple or blue bracelets. It is a way to let other Ana Mia girls identify one another in public and Pro-Ana Mia is expanding rapidly since it has been so easily accessible on the Internet, especially since the 1990s.

Online blogs for Pro Ana Mia websites, members are able to tell one another what they did that day to go without eating, purging methods they use, and the diet they are currently putting themselves through. One popular diet among anorexics is the 0-2-4-6-8 diet. On this diet you fast the first day, eat 200 calories the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, 400 calories the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, 600 calories the 4<sup>th</sup> day and 800 calories on the 5<sup>th</sup> day, and then repeat. Keeping food charts, weight charts, and diaries on the blogs are also very common. With this information so easily accessible on the internet a growing number of pre-teens and even children are being diagnosed with ED's.

One thing we could do to stop Pro Ana Mia websites is to monitor them and filter who is able to access the websites. Monitoring the people who post blogs, and the frequent users so that the federal or state governments are able to offer help to them and filter minors from being able to post to the websites. In other countries, such as the United Kingdom, there is already public demand for government action against Pro-Ana Mia websites. The 2nd thing we could do is have it mandatory for the editors of the websites to post the effects of ED's directly on the website. Posting notices saying what the disorders are doing to their bodies and let the people know that there is help out there and that they do not need to be living with an ED. The 3rd

thing I think we as a society could do is bring it out to the open. Let parents and school officials know that these websites are out there and encourage them to keep tabs of what their child or student is eating and what websites they search on their free time.

The only reason why I did not suggest that Pro-Ana Mia websites should be banned is because of the first amendment. In America we have the freedom of speech and because of that the editors running these Pro-Ana Mia websites have every right to do what they are doing. I am in no way asking to impose on their rights but to regulate and monitor what they are posting and doing because the internet virtually allows everyone the ability to communicate their ideas and beliefs.