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Final Revision

[Engl 3130 Advanced Composition](#)

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## Social Media and the Pro-Anorexia Movement

*How the Internet and Social Media are the only things feeding Pro-Ana believers*

### **Anorexia: A Definition**

Anorexia nervosa — often simply called anorexia — is defined by the Mayo Clinic as an eating disorder characterized by an abnormally low body weight, an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of weight. Mainly attributed to young girls, anorexia is as much a mental health issue as a physical one. The experts at the Mayo Clinic further state that, “Anorexia isn't really about food. It's an extremely unhealthy and sometimes life-threatening way to try to cope with emotional problems. When you have anorexia, you often equate thinness with self-worth.” Self-worth is often in short supply when you are a teenager when hormones and insecurities abound, but support systems can always be found whether it's your friends, family, or an online friend or group. But what happens when those influences start feeding and normalizing your fears and harmful behavior instead of helping you to overcome them?

## **What Is Pro-Ana?**

Pro-Ana stands for pro-anorexia. The pro-ana community is a subculture of individuals who have turned deviant, abnormal behavior into a secret community of people who support, encourage, and empower each other to starve themselves. In 2004, Bryanna Clark, a student at the esteemed Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa wrote about the sub-culture surrounding the pro-ana movement. Clark states that, “The pro-ana movement promotes behaviors associated with anorexia nervosa and challenges the established biomedical and psychological labeling of anorexia as a health disorder by advocating for anorexia as a sustainable lifestyle preference.” With the rise in internet accessibility, it’s easier than ever to promote and absorb a myriad of pro-ana images on a daily basis.

### **Contributors**

Online websites, blogs, and chat rooms are breeding grounds for people who have chosen this “lifestyle”. Contributors post pictures of women so skinny you can count their ribs and chat rooms are places where fellow pro-ana believers can finally talk about what’s going on in their lives. In this sort of environment there is no shame in eating nothing but an apple a day, whereas off line these people are more likely to face push back, anger, and confusion from people who “don’t understand”. Clark gives further examples in her article in “Subcultures and Sociology: Pro-Ana Background and History” that like any sub-culture these people have developed “a common language and specialized vocabulary” to set them even further apart from others.

*“The blogger tells what she eats a day and encourages her followers to be healthy and happy. It’s only when you find a post that says her current weight is one fifteen and her ultimate goal weight is ninety five pounds that you feel a bit sick.”*

In 2017, the researchers at The Social Issues Research Center further detail the pro-ana subculture in their article “Totally in Control”, “The emphasis is moved from self-destruction to self-control; in the words of one “rexie”, ‘A good ana doesn’t die’. If you are using anorexia as a means of self-destruction then, according to these girls, you simply aren’t doing it right. Key ideas are strength, will, achievement, fulfilment; eating disorders are portrayed as a means of achieving perfection and of forming an elite, a group of humans who will have successfully “mastered” or “governed” their bodies.” To the people who are committed to the pro-ana lifestyle your body is something that needs to be beaten.

Your hunger can be trounced by your will power, the tremors in your hands can be stilled if you just focus enough or meditate, and all the strength you need can be harnessed by your mind instead of your stomach. But if you start to stray from the lifestyle, end up in a health clinic, or make any attempts whatsoever to try and get better than you are instantly shunned because Goddess Ana doesn’t like quitters.

### **Advice From Goddess Ana**

Tips and tricks to avoid eating are listed and reposted on countless sites such as Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, and nearly every other social media platform that you can name. Typing the

words pro-ana into Google will bring up some pro-ana sites like, myproana.com and anorexiddiettips.com, but a whole slew of pro-ana sites and chatrooms are being taken down all the time. Unfortunately monitoring blogs is more difficult.

Tips such as wear short shorts or tights tops to motivate yourself to lose that extra flab to using smaller plates are common place on many Tumblr blogs. A list of excuses for not eating can often be found such as “I don’t feel well” or “I’m going to work out and don’t want the food to weigh me down”. Even downright denying food seems acceptable on these sites. Specialized food lists can be found, ones that only include coffee or green tea, while the Ana Boot Camp diet is especially toxic. The users here are willing to give up anything and everything to be worthy enough to kneel before the rail thin body of “Goddess Ana”.

### **The ABC Diet**

Coming from an unknown origin on the internet, The ABC, Ana Boot Camp, diet is a one month diet plan that details each day how many calories you are allowed to have, ranging from a high of 500 calories to several days a month where you are to fast, eat nothing at all. Though no one is sure who came up with the ABC diet, it is now a prominent feature on pro-ana sites and blogs. It has been rewritten onto poster boards and colored pieces of paper with markers, sharpies, and stickers all to make a very ugly message look prettier.

A handwritten chart on a spiral notebook showing calorie intake for a 5-day fast. The days are labeled Wed, Th, Fr, Sat, Sun, Mon. The rows are numbered 1 to 5. The calorie values are as follows:

	Wed	Th	Fr	Sat	Sun	Mon
1	400	300	400	500	450	650
2	400	300	400	500	450	650
3	400	300	400	450	500	650
4	400	300	450	500	450	650
5	400	FAST!				

Handwritten notes on lined paper:

**TODAYS CONSUMPTION** ♥

- three cups of coffee, one bottle of fiber water (extra extra fiber), one oatmeal raisin cookie. ♥

**TODAYS WORKOUT** ♥

- ♥ 200 sit ups (roughly... Maudros) :c ♥

## Water Fasting

Fasting is the process of abstaining from all or some food or drinks for an extended period of time. Fasting, for some, is exacted as a religious observance, but for pro-ana believers fasting has taken a new direction. Intermittent fasting is where observers eat for certain hours during the day and abstain from food and drinks other than water for the rest of the time. You can commit to a 16:8 fast, where you fast for sixteen hours out of the day then eat normally for the other eight hours. Or you can try something more extreme, like The Warrior Diet, where fasters abstain from food all day, eating only one huge meal at night.

In some instances, intermittent fasting as explained in an article by Marygrace Taylor for Prevention Magazine in October 2017 has many benefits, like ramping up your body's ability to

lose fat and increasing cognitive function, but water fasting is another thing entirely. Water fasting is a process in which users commit to eating and drinking nothing but water for an extended period of time. Water fasts, of this kind, can last anywhere between 24 hours to three weeks. During this time you are meant to do absolutely nothing but rest, and allow your body to “cleanse” itself.

For pro-ana believers fasting is nothing more than another way to try and get science to back up their deviant behavior and sociology. Terminology is a huge part of pro-ana. It is easier for believers to tell themselves that they are fasting instead of starving and to say that they are cleansing their bodies instead of depriving themselves of the nutrition that they so richly need. The terminology used in this sub-culture is used for the same reason that workouts are written in different colored sharpies and the ABC diet is rewritten on glitter covered poster boards because these horrific details are easier to swallow if they have a pretty shell.

### **Terminology**

Tag lines and phrases like Kate Moss’ now infamous quote, “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels” can be found as many pro-ana believers’ mottos. The people here communicate in code, referring to starting a diet or avoiding eating as spending time with their good friend Ana or Goddess Ana. Common acronyms are also used among pro-ana believers, G.W for goal weight, U.G.W for ultimate goal weight, L.W stands for lowest weight, and the most deceiving term of all, thinspiration, literally meaning the inspiration to get and stay thin.

**ABC Diet**[www.proanatictipsandtricks.com](http://www.proanatictipsandtricks.com)**Ana Boot Camp**

day1: 500 calories(or less)	18: 200 calories	35: 450 calories
day2: 500 calories(or less)	19: 100 calories	36: fast
day3:300 calories	20: fast	37: 500 calories
4:400 calories	21: 300 calories	38: 450 calories
5: 100 calories	22: 250 calories	39: 400 calories
6: 200 calories	23: 200 calories	40: 350 calories
7: 300 calories	24: 150 calories	41: 300 calories
8: 400 calories	25: 100 calories	42: 250 calories
9: 500 calories	26: 50 calories	43: 200 calories
10: fast	27: 100 calories	44: 200 calories
11: 150 calories	28: 200 calories	45: 250 calories
12: 200 calories	29: 200 calories	46: 200 calories
13: 400 calories	30: 300 calories	47: 300 calories
14: 350 calories	31: 800	48: 200 calories
15: 250 calories	32: fast	49: 150 calories
16: 200 calories	33: 250 calories	50: fast
17: fast	34: 350 calories	

**Excuses For Not Eating**

I don't like that kind of food.

I'm allergic.

I ate earlier.

I have a sore throat.

I'm a vegetarian.

I'll eat when I get home.

I forgot my lunch.

I don't have time.

Nothing looks good to me.

I need to finish my homework.

I'm still full from earlier.

My doctor put me on a special diet.

**Thinspiration**

Tumblr, a social media platform, popular among young people, have taken a stand against so called thinspiration, images of people or other media that motivates or inspires others to achieve very low body weight. The social media giant issued a new policy in two thousand and twelve against blogs that promoted self-harm. The policy prohibits content that promotes or glorifies self-injury or self-harm, content that would include anything that could be considered as encouraging readers to cut or mutilate themselves; embrace anorexia, bulimia, or other E.D's; or commit suicide rather than, e.g., seek counseling or treatment for depression or other disorders. But monitoring online content is difficult no matter the degree of censorship.

The Tumblr thinspiration/pro-ana community is varied. Some bloggers run along the extreme side of the spectrum, with photos of women so emaciated you can encircle their thigh with your hands and still have space. These images are paired with shots of flowers, beautiful

landscapes, and status symbols like the newest Mac computer or Louis Vuitton heels. The connection between wealth, travel, and all thing beautiful are directly linked to the idea that to have these things, to be able to travel the world, to have money, or attain beautiful things that you have to be as thin as you possibly can.

The beauty mixed with the message of pro-anorexia takes away from the truth of the matter which is that these people have a disease, and that along with a new body there is also alienation from their friends and family, tears of exhaustion, and bodies so weak from starvation that they can barely lift a bottle of water to their mouths.



Other blogs aren't as extreme, but they still push accepted social norms. The girls are slightly bigger on these sites, nowhere near as emaciated, but still on the very low end of what is

considered healthy. The blogger tells what she eats a day and encourages her followers to be healthy and happy. It's only when you find a post that says her current weight is one fifteen and her ultimate goal weight is ninety five pounds that you feel a bit sick. And while a simple Google search may not be enough anymore to get you to your favorite pro-ana site, there is always a workaround. Users will add an extra or change letters in their tags, Tumblr's search system that identifies prohibited content.

A small change means that most of the time the posts can fly under the radar even if they are deemed illegal by Tumblr's new policy. Even adding a disclaimer in a post can make it appear as if any pro-ana beliefs that you have are just your personal opinions. Users add lines to their posts such as "I have a problem. Please don't do what I'm doing" or urging their followers to seek help can throw off the attention of any sites moderators who are looking for prohibited material about this disease. Then, there's fitspiration.

## **Fitspiration**

Thus, the birth of fitspiration. Commonly shortened as fitspo, fitspiration is thinspiration's super active cousin. Blogs that claim they are fitspiration feature the same mix of beauty, wealth, and perfect bodies that thinspo blogs do, but all the images are of really active people. Women running in perfectly coordinated outfits and cute gym selfies abound on fitspo blogs. Photos of healthy food, colorful fruit, and green smoothies replace the images urging people not to eat and how to images for a month on the ABC diet, but are they really that different? Instead of a fragile, pale faced girl standing in a mirror you get images of a finely toned model lounging on a beach in Greece, her bikini showing off her impossible figure.

Fitspo was born as a work around for thinspiration and the pro-ana contributors who felt jilted by sites like Tumblr's policy or by their family's valid concerns. Still among so much raw honesty about what these people ate, what they didn't, what they hate about their bodies, and their dreams for the future there is no real information. How much do these idols weight exactly? How tall are they? What do they eat? What are their lifestyles, their jobs? Are they healthy? Medically? Psychologically? Or are they the exact same as you? Are they searching the internet for someone, anyone to tell them that what they are doing to themselves is okay?



### **Recovery and Recognition**

Treatment for eating disorders are as varied as the myriad of eating disorders themselves. Drugs like phentermine or even over-the-counter Hydroxycut are often used to suppress appetite and while there are drugs that encourage appetite, only some intense psychological intervention can truly affect this mental illness.

The Social Issues Research Centers article, "Totally in Control" goes on to ask if any sites are trying to block pro-ana material. "Some servers, e.g. Yahoo, have simply stopped

allowing certain sites to function in response to complaints and extensive media coverage on the issue of pro-ana. While this has prevented further complaints about the servers, it has proved ineffective in its primary goal of getting rid of pro-ana material on the web. Some sites now claim to be “diet sites” rather than pro-ana, yet contain the same material, tips and so on.” The fight against the pro-ana/ pro-eating disorders community is ongoing. But against a largely invisible enemy with a horde of perfection driven allies at its back it is imperative that the weapon we first use is recognition.

And that falls into all of society’s hands. We may not be able to redefine the definition of beauty or monitor every evil thing our kids hear or say, but we can monitor what we do, see, hear. We can chose to see beauty in others and ourselves. We can act with kindness and we can watch for those people who may be drifting to the fringe and say something, anything to bring them back before it’s too late.

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Tumblr is the home for many pro-ana sites and contributors. Thinspiration was largely popularized using Tumblr's platform. Both Thinspiration and Fitspiration blogs are still prevalent on the site despite the company's 2012 policy statement.