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"Dwelling in fear of the scales forever": Religious diction in Pro-Anorectic websites from a discourse-analytic perspective

A B S T R A C T   Anorexia Internet sites (also known as "Pro-Ana" sites) employ various linguistic devices in the propagation of their message. This article sets out to investigate such devices as they are used in or by these sites. The sites themselves are regarded as texts, and are explored within the ambit of Discourse Analysis. The research looks at discourse strategies employed by Pro-Ana participants by which they share their experiences as a type of virtual support group. To decode the concealed language of these sites, Discourse Analysis is used. Central to this language are coinage, code words, and metaphors. One of the problems inherent in such language strategies are that they continually reshape themselves either to escape being shut down by search engines or to keep the sites from being read by anti-Ana individuals or groups. This constant changing was in itself a type of language evolving faster than everyday language outside these sites. Because the articulation of the Pro-Ana dogma manifests strongly religious overtones and demands absolute adherence to its liturgy, portions of the websites sampled revealed religious or quasi-spiritual diction. The aim and scope of this article is to focus particularly on specific religious diction by making use of the semantic and syntactic levels of Kitis and Milapides-model (1997) to amplify the religious aspect of anorectic websites. Because of the limited scope of the article format, Kitis and Milapides' (1997) pragmatic and intertextual/textual rhetorical levels have been excluded. The article has a three-fold relevance for language teaching. First, it demonstrates the manner in which language is being manipulated on the internet to propagate the insidious "worship" of anorexia, and so brings awareness of such strategies to language facilitators and, through them, to learners. Secondly, in discussing specific examples of religious diction from these websites, the article shows how these language strategies are used (and misused), no matter how ineptly, for the advocacy of Anorexia Nervosa as a desirable way of life which may lead to tragic and unnecessary deaths. Finally, through worked examples, the article demonstrates ways in which Discourse Analysis may be usefully used to decode internet websites devoted to Anorexia.

Keywords: Anorexia Nervosa, Pro-Ana sites, Discourse Analysis, Thinspiration quotations, religious metaphors, Semantic and Syntactic Levels

1. Background

The purpose of the research was to investigate the various linguistic tools used in/by Anorexia Internet sites (also known as "Pro-Ana" sites). The research looked at these sites as texts within the ambit of Discourse Analysis.

The research hypothesis of the study centred on discourse strategies that Pro-Ana participants employ to share similar experiences as a type of virtual support group. At the same time, discourse analysis was used as a parameter to decode the concealed language of these sites. Coinage and code words as well as metaphors were central to this language. The problems with such a language were emphasised as it continually reshaped itself either to escape being shut down by search engines or to keep the sites from being read by anti-Ana individuals or groups. This constant changing was in itself a type of language that evolved faster than everyday language outside these sites.

The bipartite research design included (1) data collection, and (2) the analytical frame-works. Data collection entailed identifying and downloading postings to Pro-Ana websites on the Internet. Other materials included Pro-Ana journals, so-called "Thinspiration" images of iconic figures, such as film stars embodying quasi-anorexic ideals as well as various forms of practical advice on how to achieve anorexic aims (the "Ten Commandments of Anorexia", for example). Chat rooms were not accessed, however, as the accessing process raised ethical questions of anonymity and confidentiality.

The main analytical framework that was used, and which will be defined and explained briefly, is Discourse Analysis in which the levels of analysis identified by Kitis and Milapides (1997) were employed: (a) the semantic; (b) the syntactic; (c) the pragmatic, (d) the intertextual/ textual rhetorical. The discourse model proposed by Kitis and Milapides (1997) falls under Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA. Van Dijk (1998:1) brings critical discourse analysis (CDA) and socio-cultural dimensions together by arguing that CDA "primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". Therefore, CDA can be regarded as a type of discourse analytical research that takes explicit positions and "thus wants to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality" (Van Dijk, 1998:1).

To these were added discussion of the metaphors and coined words used specifically by anorectics.

One of the final assumptions of the research was because the Pro-Ana dogma has strong religious overtones and demands absolute adherence to its liturgy, some portion of the websites sampled manifested religious or quasi-spiritual diction. The aim and scope of this article is to focus more particularly on specific religious diction by making use of the semantic and syntactic levels of Kitis and Milapides-model (1997) to amplify the religious aspect of anorectic websites. Because of the limited scope of the article, the pragmatic and intertextual/textual rhetorical levels of Kitis and Milapides (1997) are omitted.

A brief background of Anorexia Nervosa is given in order to establish the specific context for the reader who is less familiar with this eating disorder. In order to signpost the research, a brief discussion of Pro-anorectic websites follows to familiarise the reader with this specific New Millennium Internet device.

2. Anorexia Nervosa Online

In the psychiatric and psychological domains, Anorexia Nervosa is regarded as a psychopathology that is mapped out in terms of its characteristics in the *DSM–IV–TR*. It is viewed as an eating disorder that predominates in Westernised societies, having its origins in the self-mortifying starvation of medieval saints (Hesse-Biber, 1996:45). One of the defining characteristics of Anorexia Nervosa is having "an intense fear of obesity and relentlessly pursuing thinness" (Barlow & Durand, 2000:241).

The most useful New Millennium devices for pursuing thinness are found on the Internet. In recent years, there has been a proliferation in the number of Pro-Anorectic Internet sites – most of which have been created by anorectics themselves – which are aimed at promoting and supporting anorectics (cf. Mulveen & Hepworth, 2002:283), approximately 90% of whom are female (cf. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR*, published by *American Psychiatric Association* in 2000). Thus, a new genre of websites was being established in the form of Pro-Anorectic (Pro-Ana) sites, chat rooms, web rings, and blogs. This meant that new virtual communities were multiplying on the Internet without too many parents or health professionals noticing this phenomenon. Only after television programmes, such as the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, broadcast exposés of these websites did thousands of parents become aware, for the first time, what their daughters might be involved in. Servers like Yahoo were pressured to shut down these sites, which they ultimately did in 2001 (Holahan, 2001).

However, Pro-Ana websites survived this onslaught simply by shifting to other servers, especially free ones. Despite vicious attacks on their anorectic agenda, countless websites have continued to share the Thinspiration's three Ts – Tips, Tricks, and Techniques – with fellow anorectics. The Pro-Ana community also makes extensive use of death and dying metaphors that are to be found mainly in song lyrics (Fiona Apple's lyrics recur frequently); and Thinspiration is drawn from religious texts, such as the Bible, and exemplified by the "Ana Psalm", and "The Thin Commandments". Because the Pro-Ana dogma has strong religious overtones and demands absolute adherence to its liturgy, it is reasonable to hypothesise that some of the websites sampled would manifest religious or quasi-spiritual diction in the presentation of their doctrine.

3. Religious metaphors in Pro-Ana sites

Pro-Ana sites tend to use religious metaphors/language/a(na!)phorisms which mirror society's obsession with dieting as a pseudo-religion: "What diets have in common with religion are sets of rules and prohibitions that distribute foods and eating into lists of 'good' and 'bad' practices" (Tebbel, 2000:84). These lists

> resemble the section in the Bible in which God hands over a set of dietary rules to Moses. Known as the Abominations of Leviticus, the list goes into immense detail about which foods are taboo and which permitted. What's striking about the list is its arbitrariness, a characteristic that suggests it is the existence of rules, rather than what they say, that matters (Tebbel, 2000:84).

4. Discourse analysis and Anorexia

In this research, Discourse Analysis (DA) is the main paradigm used to decode the anorectic's religious language into a more comprehensible narrative.

Here, the specific discourse analytical framework of Kitis and Milapides (1997) is used. This discourse model falls under Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA. An asset of CDA is that it enables analysts to "foreground language use as social action, language use as situated performance, language use as tied to social relations and identities […] language use as essentially a matter of 'practices' rather than just 'structures'" (Slembrouk, 2005:1).

In their introduction to "Read it and believe it: How the metaphor constructs ideology in news discourse. A case study", which constitutes one of the frameworks of the Pro-Ana research, Kitis and Milapides (1997:558) discuss language as discourse. The authors' model follows a CDA perspective for the following reasons: First, they maintain that language is embedded in socio-political and ideological structures. Secondly, the close reading of a specific text could "contribute significantly towards the realization of the social conditions governing the acts of the production as well as the interpretation and consumption of texts" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:558). Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of a text should be based on the analysis of discourse, rather than the text in isolation, giving it a denotative function. Thirdly, a text is analysed as a communication act. The text is thus read as a message and characterised by "directionality" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:559). This means that the text has a producer and a recipient and its purpose is to communicate.

Furthermore, these argumentative stances are organised in specific ways: "the main organizing feature of the structure of the text at a global level is the construction of a dominant metaphor calling forth the 'script' (or myth)" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:562). The authors believe that there is no text representing a neutral reality, therefore distinguishing between neutral and emotionally charged language.

4.1 Semantic level

The first level of critical analysis of a text is embodied by the semantic level. An important aspect of this level is the title: "Because of its grammatical form (a declarative sentence), the title is taken to be an assertion" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:564).

In addition, in a "comprehensive, multi-level critical analysis of a text, close attention should be paid to the status of the propositional content of the text" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:564). A proposition expressing a value judgement "usually registers the speaker's or writer's attitude towards his/her topic and as such it is not amenable to truth-valuation" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:565). However, if it is not "lacking in assertive force and, as it is not expressed in question form, but is formulated in the declarative mode, it may delude readers and pass as an assertion" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:565). This is called "factivity guise".

Concluding this section, Kitis and Milapides (1997:570) assert that the choice of

> emotionally charged lexes and figures of speech serves to heighten the semantic and pragmatic intensity and expressiveness, as well as the connotational, evaluative, and affective content of what is said. Consequently, the referential-denotational aspect of

meaning is considerably de-emphasized, not to say suppressed and distorted. This way of using language might be called persuasive manipulation by means of seduction.

4.2 Syntactic level

Syntactic aspects include the transactive model, i.e., their semantic structure shows "an actor, an action, and an affected participant" (Kitis & Milapides, 1997:570). A necessary condition for transitivity is that the agent should be active, rather than passive. *Passivisation* looks at the passive constructions within a text, whereas the *relational model* includes relations between nouns or nouns and attributes.

Van Dijk (2003:39[6]) asserts that some sentence structures allow for variation, such as word order, active and passive sentences, and nominalisations. Therefore, words may be "put up front" by topicalisation or be downgraded by putting them in a clause or sentence later, or by deleting them completely. The canonical order in the English language is to "match the semantic agents with syntactic subjects, which are typically in first position, for instance: 'the police arrested the demonstrators'" (Van Dijk, 2003:39).

This sentence can change in terms of the relational model Kitis and Milapides (1997:570) propose: "the demonstrators were arrested" (passive voice), here the agent is left implicit by leaving out "the police". Nominalisation can also be used: "the arrest of the demonstrators". A "cleft" sentence can topicalise the sentence: "it was the demonstrators that the police arrested". Therefore, by using different sentence forms, the specific order of the words may "signal whether the meaning expressed by some words is more or less emphasized" (Van Dijk, 2003:39).

Dellinger (1995:2) says the following about the transactive model:

> The mode in which an action is presented, either as transactive or nontransactive, is not a matter of truth or reality but rather a matter of the way in which that particular action is integrated into the ideological system of the speaker, and the manner in which such an action is therefore articulated in a specific discourse.

Consequently, Dellinger argues, the actual decision to use either a transactive or nontransactive clause is not coincidence but choice.

According to Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:5), the analysis of a clause as a selection of one process type is transitive analysis. In a clause, an entity is not only ascribed an identity through the choice of a category but now it performs a role. Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:5) distinguish between two roles. In the first, a participant is an agent if he/she controls the process. The example the authors use is "the police charged young demonstrators yesterday". The agent in the sentence is "police".

In the role of such an agent, Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:5) further distinguish between an agent and a force. A force is defined as a physical entity which performs the role of an agent. As an exemplar, the authors used "a stone breaks a window" in which "stone" denotes the force. In the sentence, "the police charged young demonstrators yesterday", the young demonstrators are cast into the role of the patient. Wisler & Tackenberg (1998:6) define "patient" as being in the role of the affected participant. Furthermore, the authors distinguish between persons – a patient – and goals – a physical entity. In "a stone breaks a window", the "window" is the goal.

Affected participants can perform many different roles. Wisler and Tackenberg distinguish between the roles of (1) a beneficiary (Stones flew over the *police*); (2) an experiencer (A *demonstrator* suffered a heavy injury); (3) a result (Miners produce more *coal*), and an instrument (I picked the lock with a *hairpin*).

Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:6) define transitivity as a process that is "affected, extended or directed at a patient (or a goal). However, the patient may not always be named. If the process cannot be extended to another participant, it becomes intransitive: "Demonstrators run away". According to Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:6), there are three types of processes: (a) an *action*, which is deliberate and controlled, (b) a *process*, which is not deliberate, and (c), a *state*. Each type in itself can be *physical*, *mental* or *verbal*. For example, an action could be *physical* (the police hit, arrived, charged); *mental* (the police speculated, estimated), or *verbal* (the police issued warnings).

Furthermore, in a transitive clause, the patient can be "deleted". Wisler and Tackenberg (1998:6) distinguish between a "directed action" (the police charge the demonstrators) and a "non-directed action" (the police charge). When the text favours the non-directed action, it "characteristically limits the responsibility of the agent" (Wisler & Tackenberg, 1998:7). Thus, the action does not explicitly reach the "patient" and appears relatively benign.

However, passivisation is the reverse syntactical process. By stating "the demonstrators are charged by the police" instead of "the police charge the demonstrators", the demonstrators, rather than the police, are emphasised. After such a sentence executed in the passive voice, the reader's expectation will be more on the demonstrators than the police. Thus, through passivisation, agency fades into the background.

The discussion now moves to a detailed application of discourse analysis to examples drawn from three Internet websites.

WEBSITE 1: *Ana Psalm*: Page 2.

http://www.freewebs.com/pain_is_beauty/quotes.htm.

Date of access: 3/19/2006.)

3.1 Semantic level of analysis – Website 1

For the purpose of the article, both the semantic and syntactic levels of Website 1 are discussed in detail. The remaining websites are presented in tabular form. It should also be noted that Websites 1 and 2 contain one Pro-Ana quotation each while Website 3 contains two.

Psalm 23 below is quoted from the King James Version of the Holy Bible and does not appear on the Pro-Ana website. A short comparative survey between the King James Version and the Pro-Ana variant is conducted for the purpose of understanding just how far the Pro-Ana variant has deviated from the original.

(1a) **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil;

my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(1b) *Ana Psalm*

1 **Strict is my diet. I must not want.**

2 **It maketh me lie down at night hungry.**

3 **It leadeth me past confectioners.**

4 **It trieth my willpower.**

5 **It leadeth me in the paths of alteration for my figure's sake.**

6 **Yea, though I walk through the aisles of the pastry department,**

I will buy no sweet rolls for they are fattening.

7 **The cakes and the pies, they tempt me.**

8 **Before me is a table set with green beans and lettuce.**

9 **I filleth my stomach with liquids.**

10 **My day's quota runneth over.**

11 **Surely calorie and weight charts will follow me all the days of my life.**

12 **And I will dwell in the fear of the scales forever** (Website 1:2).

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1982:830), a psalm is defined as a sacred song or a hymn. A hymn, in turn, is defined as a song of praise to God; or a song of praise in honour of a god or other exalted being or thing (1982:490). While these implied functions are self-evidently fulfilled in Psalm 23 of the Holy Bible, their sacredness is subverted to honour the goddess, Ana, or to exalt the "thing" that is Anorexia. Just as there are emotional, psychological, and spiritual benefits to be gained from adhering to the Way of the Lord, so there are emotional, psychological, and spiritual "benefits" from adhering to the Way of Ana. In both instances, the crucial aspect depends on commitment to the demands of belief in their respective dogmas.

Such is the "religious" fervour of the Way of Ana's adherents that they have found it necessary to mimic religious texts by creating their own quasi-psalms. These texts are anonymous in origin, the authors frequently unacknowledged or unidentified in much the same way that several of the Biblical authors remain unknown. However, the creators of the Way of Ana psalms reveal considerably less literary talent and command of rhetorical skills than their Biblical predecessors. The Pro-Ana "psalmists" pay little attention to the elevated style and

appropriate diction associated with religious texts. Nor do they imitate the rhythmical patterns of the Biblical phrases.

It should be noted that Psalm 23 focuses attention on the power of the Lord's benign presence while the Pro-Ana psalm is a litany of threat and absence of redemption. The first two words of Psalm 23 are "The Lord…" while the Pro-Ana version opens with "Strict", thus initiating the vocabulary and tone of stringent discipline and absence of love.

The Pro-Ana psalm makes deliberate but ineffectual use of seventeenth century forms of verbs, such as "maketh", "leadeth", "trieth" and "filleth". Such forms may have been used to suggest that the Ana dogma is a centuries-old phenomenon. At the same time, these forms seem anomalous in the context of the remaining diction. This diction is focused predominantly, if not obsessively, on words naming specific foods, such as "sweet rolls", "cakes and pies", "green beans and lettuce" or identifying dietary processes or the personal issues associated with drastic weight loss including "my figure", "willpower", "calorie and weight charts" and "scales". These themes are initiated in the last two words of the opening sentence, "my diet". In passing, one notes the irony inherent in the word, "diet", in whose first three letters make up the word, "die". Excessive dieting embodies the distinct possibility of death.

The second sentence reads, "I must not want", which, at one level, suggests the correct attitude of not desiring or coveting things. But this charitable attitude is undercut by the reader's knowing that the words are restricted wholly to matters of food and body image. In line 6 of the Ana psalm, the Biblical idea of walking through the valley of the shadow of death is diminished to walking through the supermarket aisles and the pastry department. Although this smacks of rather tasteless parody, anorectics pursue their avoidance of the pastry departments with an obsessive fervour. It is no coincidence that avoiding the pastry department and the shadow of death are brought together. Pastries constitute the epitome of sin for the anorectic and lead inevitably to the "hell" of fatness. For this reason, "is a table set with green beans and lettuce". This diet reveals a monastic austerity, one that is entirely appropriate within the closed community of the anorectic sect with its secret language and strange rituals.

The Biblical psalmist's cup that "runneth over" with the Lord's blessings is replaced at the anorectic's table by a quota of food that, no matter how small or, in extreme circumstances, non-existent, is perceived as running over or excessive in all negative senses. Consequently, while the true believer will "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" and so relish all its joys, the anorectic is doomed to "dwell in the fear of the scales forever". It is ironic that the Pro-Ana psalm concludes with the word, "forever", because anorectics may not survive the rigours of their way of life (cf. Birmingham, Su, Hlynsky, Goldner & Gao, 2005:143-146).

From the discussion, it should be clear that the Pro-Ana psalm is to be seen as a devout message of encouragement to fellow believers in the Way of Ana. It is designed to encourage them and seduce them into a mode of persistence. For the non-anorectic reader, however, this text may be regarded as little more than a clumsy parody, despite its covert seductiveness.

3.2 Syntactic level of analysis – Website 1

In the Biblical Psalm 23, the opening sentence is in the active voice – "The Lord is my shepherd" – and the present tense is emphasised particularly through the typographical use of italics. It is clearly an affirmative statement.

In contrast to Psalm 23, the Ana version is in the passive voice – "Strict is my diet" – and does not contain any typographical emphasis. To some extent, such emphasis is unnecessary because of the placing of the word "strict" at the very beginning. Bringing the two versions together implies that the Biblical Lord is substituted by the anorectic's strictness.

In the second half of verse 1 in the Bible – "I shall not want" – the Lord is seen as carer and provider, the guardian of the flock's wellbeing. By contrast, the second half of the Pro-Ana verse – "I must not want" – suggests that the responsibility for "caring for oneself" does not lie in the hands of a benign deity, but rather in the individual anorectic's own. In this second half of the Biblical verse, the emphasis falls on the word "want" since it is positioned at the end of both the sentence and the verse, hence assuring it of a double stress. The same is true of the Ana equivalent. Given this parallel structure, the verbs in each instance assume even greater significance, with the Biblical "shall not" being transformed into the Ana "must not".

In the Biblical verses 2 and 3, the Lord is referred to by the pronoun "He", while the speaker refers to himself as "me". This suggests a personal relationship of care between the deity and the individual. By contrast, the repeated use of the pronoun "it", referring to "my diet", de-humanises the relationship between the anorectic and food. This de-humanisation of the relationship between the actor and affected participant implies a conflictual relationship which is embodied in the following words and phrases: "to lie down at night hungry", "past the confectioners", "trieth my willpower", "paths of alteration", "no sweet rolls" and "the cakes and the pies, they tempt me".

In verse 5 of the Biblical psalm, "He" has become "Thou", suggesting an even more intimate relationship. In this verse, the Lord prepares a table for David, the affected participant in this example. There is no suggestion as to what was placed on that table whereas in the Ana variant, the table is set specifically "with green beans and lettuce". From Wisler and Tackenberg's perspective (1998:6), David would assume the role of a "beneficiary" while the anorectic's role would be that of an "experiencer". The table that the Lord prepares for David is "in the presence of [his] enemies" whereas the food on the anorectic's table constitutes that very enemy.

In the final verse of the Biblical psalm, David asserts that "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life", while the anorectic proclaims "Surely calorie and weight charts will follow me all the days of my life". The Biblical verse concludes with David dwelling "in the house of the Lord forever", a phrase replete with nuances of security and spiritual nourishment. The anorectic, on the other hand, has no such comforts. The final sentence of the Ana psalm does not even contain the word "house". Instead, the anorectic will "dwell in the fear of the scales forever".

In terms of the syntactic structure, Psalm 23 consists of six verses, each containing at least two sentences. With the exception of verse 1, where a semi-colon is used, the second or further sentences are separated from the first by a colon in the King James' version. However, in the revised standard version of the Catholic Edition, all the colons have been replaced by semi-colons. The distinction between the use of a semi-colon and a colon is significant. A semi-colon does not necessarily require the sentence following it to be linked logically to the sentence preceding it. In the case of the colon, the converse is true. The sentence following it must be related logically to the one preceding it.

With regard to punctuation strategies in the Pro-Ana psalm, there are neither semi-colons nor colons. Instead, each sentence concludes simply with a full stop and where a sentence runs on to a second line, either a comma or no punctuation mark is used. Where the comma is used in a run-on line, it occurs after the opening clause of line 6.

It is worth noting that, while the Biblical psalm's verses are numbered (from 1–6), the Ana psalm has no such numbering. The numbering present in the text given above has been inserted by the researcher for the reader's convenience and for ease of referencing.

Most spiritual texts can be identified not only by the ideology of their content but also by the stylistic elegance and gracefulness of the diction. It has been frequently observed that much of the Bible's style can be characterised as "poetic". Such elements are singularly absent from the Pro-Ana variant, to the extent that line 10 is not a run-on line, yet lacks any end-stopping punctuation mark. This would lead to the conclusion that, within the ideology of Anorexia, only the message counts; style and diction are secondary and liable to neglect. It would also seem from this lack of attention to detail that writers of such texts are less concerned with the literary merits of their work. Ultimately, for them, *what* has to be said is infinitely more important than how it is said. Anorexia websites do not constitute a mine of stylistic sophistication.

The transitive and transactive structures in the Ana psalm are illustrated in the table below.

Transitive Structures	Transactive Structures
[My diet] maketh me to lie down at night hungry. Subject: *My diet [It]* Object: *Me*	*[My diet] maketh me to lie down at night hungry.* Agent: *My diet [It]* Affected participant: *Me* Type of act: Inducing hunger-pangs
[My diet] leadeth me past confectioners. Subject: *My diet [It]* Object: *Me*	*[My diet] leadeth me past confectioners.* Agent: *My diet [It]* Affected participant: *Me* Type of act: Forcing one to ignore food
[My diet] trieth my willpower. Subject: *My diet [It]* Object: *my willpower*	*[My diet] trieth my willpower.* Agent: *My diet [It]* Affected participant: *Me* Type of act: Trying one's willpower
[My diet] leadeth me in the paths of alteration for my figure's sake. Subject: *My diet [It]* Object: *Me*	*[My diet] leadeth me in the paths of alteration for my figure's sake.* Agent: *My diet [It]* Affected participant: *Me* Type of act: Forcing one to remain thin

	[Sweet rolls] are fattening. Agent: *Sweet rolls [They]* Affected participant: *Me (implied]* Type of act: Threatening
[Cakes and pies] tempt me. Subject: *Cakes and pies [They]* Object: *Me*	*[Cakes and pies] tempt me.* Agent: *Cakes and pies [They]* Affected participant: *Me* Type of act: One of temptation
I filleth my stomach with liquids. Subject: *I* Object: *My stomach*	*I filleth my stomach with liquids.* Agent: *I* Affected participant: *My stomach* Type of act: Filling one's stomach with liquid (instead of food)

WEBSITE 2: *THIN COMMANDMENTS*: (Pages 1-2)

http://analifetsyle.com/28.html.

Date of access: 3/18/2006.

(1) If you are not thin you are not attractive (1).
(2) Being thin is more important than being healthy (2).
(3) You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner (2).
(4) Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty (2).
(5) Thou shall not eat fattening foods without punishing oneself afterwards (2).
(6) Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly (2).
(7) What the scale says is the most important thing (2).
(8) Losing weight is good/Gaining weight is bad (2).
(9) You can never be too thin (2).
(10) Being thin and not eating are true signs of will power (sic) and success (2).

SEMANTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 2

CRITERIA	
Propositions	The Thin Commandments (1) – (10): (1) *If you are not thin you are not attractive;* (2) *Being thin is more important than being healthy;* (3) *You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner;* (4) *Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty;* (5) *Thou shall not eat fattening foods without punishing oneself afterwards;* (6) *Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly;* (7) *What the scale says is the most important thing;* (8) *Losing weight is good/Gaining weight is bad;* (9)*You can never be too thin;* (10) *Being thin and not eating are true signs of will power [sic] and success*

Lexes	(1) …*thin…not attractive;* (2) …*thin…more important…being healthy;* (3) …*buy clothes… cut your hair…take laxatives…starve…thinner;* (4) *eat…feeling guilty;* (5) …*eat fattening foods…punishing oneself…;* (6) …*count calories…restrict intake..;* (7) …*scale…most important;* (8) *Losing weight…good…gaining weight… bad;* (9) …*too thin;* (10) …*thin…not eating…true signs…will power [sic]…success*
Metaphors	Not applicable.

SYNTACTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 2

CRITERIA

Transitive Structures	(3) *You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives…;* (5) *Thou shall not eat fattening foods without punishing oneself afterwards;* (6) *Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly*
Transactive Structures	(3) *You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner;* (4) *Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty;* (7) *What the scale says is the most important thing;* (9) *You can never be too thin*
Passivisation	(2) *Being thin is more important than being healthy;* (8) *Losing weight is good/ Gaining weight is bad;* (10) *Being thin and not eating are true signs of will power (sic) and success*
Relational Structures	(1) …*not thin…not attractive;* (2) *Being thin…more important than being healthy;* (4) …*eat…guilty;* (5) …*eat fattening foods…punishing oneself;* (7) *What the scale says is the most important thing;* (8) *Losing weight is good/Gaining weight is bad;* (9) *You can never be too thin;* (10) *Being thin and not eating are true signs of will power [sic] and success*
Imperatives	(3) *You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner;* (4) *Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty;* (5) *Thou shall not eat fattening foods without punishing oneself afterwards;* (6) *Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly*
(Implied) Conditionals	(1) *If you are not thin you are not attractive;* (3) *You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner*

WEBSITE 3(a): – *ANA BELIEFS* (Pages 5-6)

http://thinspo.conforums.com/index.cgi?board=rel&action=display&`num = 1145771956.
Date of access: 5/7/2006.

(1) I believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to chaos that is my world (5).
(2) I believe that I am the most vile, worthless, and useless person ever to have existed on this planet, and that I am totally unworthy of anyone's time and attention (5).
(3) I believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots. If they could see how I really am, then they would hate me almost as much as I do (5).
(4) I believe in oughts, musts, and shoulds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behaviour (5).
(5) I believe in perfection and strive to attain it (5).
(6) I believe in salvation through trying a bit harder than I did yesterday (5).

(7) I believe in calorie counters as the inspired word of God, and memorise them accordingly (5).

(8) I believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures (6).

(9) I believe in hell, because I sometimes think that I am living in it (6).

(10) I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting (6).

SEMANTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 3

CRITERIA

Propositions	Ana Beliefs (1) – (10): (1) I *believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to chaos that is my world*; (2) I *believe that I am the most vile, worthless, and useless person ever to have existed on this planet*; (3) I *believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots*; (4) I *believe in oughts, musts and shoulds as unbreakable laws*; (5) I *believe in perfection*; (6) I *believe in salvation*; (7) I *believe in calorie counters as the inspired word of God*; (8) I *believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures*; (9) I *believe in hell*; (10) I *believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting*
Lexes	(1) *…believe…Control…force…mighty…order…chaos…world*; (2) *…vile… worthless…useless person…to have existed…planet…unworthy…time…attention*; (3) *…people…tell…differently…idiots…hate*; (4) *…oughts, musts, and shoulds… unbreakable laws…determine my daily behaviour*; (5) *…perfection…strive…to attain…*; (6) *…salvation…trying a bit harder…yesterday*; (7) *…calorie counters… inspired word of God…memorise…*; (8) *…bathroom scales…indicator…daily successes and failures*; (9) *…hell…living in it [hell]*; (10) *…a wholly black and white world…the losing of weight…recrimination for sins…the abnegation of the body…a life ever fasting*
Metaphors	Control is a god; The world is black and white

SYNTACTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 2

CRITERIA

Transitive Structures	(1) *…the only force mighty enough [Control] to bring order to the chaos that is my world*; (3) *…then they would hate me almost as much as I do*; (4) *…as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behaviour*; (5) *…strive to attain it*; (7) *…memorise them [calorie counters] accordingly*; (9) *…I sometimes think that I am living in it*
Transactive Structures	(1) I *believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to chaos that is my world*; (2) I *believe that I am the most vile, worthless, and useless person ever to have existed on this planet*; (3) I *believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots*; (4) I *believe in oughts, musts and shoulds as unbreakable laws*; (5) I *believe in perfection*; (6) I *believe in salvation*; (7) I *believe in calorie counters as the inspired word of God*; (8) I *believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures*; (9) I *believe in hell*; (10) I *believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting*
Passivisation	Not applicable.
Relational Structures	(1) Control [is] *the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos of my world*; (2) I *am the most vile, worthless, and useless person…*; (4) *…oughts, must and shoulds [are] unbreakable laws…*; (7) *…calorie counters [are] the inspired word of God…*; (8) *…bathroom scales [are] an indicator of my daily successes and failures*

Imperatives	Not applicable.
(Implied) Conditionals	Not applicable.

WEBSITE 3(b): *ANA PRAYER* (p2)

http://thinspo.conforums.com/index.cgi?board=rel&action=display& 'num=1145771956.

Date of access: 5/7/2006).

(1) I confess to gluttony and weakness.
(2) I confess that I doubted your ability to save my wretched soul.
(3) Please forgive my lack of faith.
(4) Help me to resist Mia the Devil and the temptations she places before me.
(5) Make me pure, holy and clean.
(6) Please embrace me and make me perfect.
(7) You are my saviour, my mother and (sic) always willing to take me back even when I have blatantly left you.
(8) Please erase these sins from my soul and help me stand up to Mia the Devil…
(9) Mia taunts you dear Ana, and tries to draw me away from serving you.
(10) Help me make a reply to Mia.
(11) Help me stand firm.
(12) Amen

SEMANTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 3

CRITERIA

Propositions	(1) *I confess to gluttony and weakness;* (2) *I confess that I doubted your ability to save my wretched soul;* (7) *You are my saviour, my mother and (sic) always willing to take me back even when I have blatantly left you;* (9) *Mia taunts you dear Ana, and tries to draw me away from serving you*
Lexes	(1) *…confess…gluttony…weakness;* (2) *…doubted your ability…save my wretched soul;* (3) *…forgive me…lack of faith;* (4) *…resist Mia the Devil…the temptations she places before me;* (5) *…pure, holy and clean;* (6) *…embrace me… make me perfect;* (7) *…my saviour, my mother…willing to take me back…blatantly left…;* (8) *…erase these sin from my soul…help me stand up to Mia the Devil…;* (9) *Mia taunts you dear Ana…tries to draw me away from serving you;* (10) *Help me make a reply to Mia;* (11) *…stand firm…;* (12) *Amen*
Metaphors	(4) *Mia the Devil;* (8) *Mia the Devil;* (9) *Ana, Mia;* (10) *Mia*

SYNTACTIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS – WEBSITE 3

CRITERIA

Transitive Structures	(2) *I confess that I doubted your ability to save my wretched soul;* (3) *Please forgive my lack of faith;* (4) *Help me to resist Mia the devil and the temptations she places before me;* (6) *Please embrace me;* (7) *and [you are] always willing to take me back even when I have blatantly left you;* (8) *Please erase these sins from my soul and help me to stand up to Mia the Devil;* (9) *Mia taunts you dear Ana, and tries to draw me away from serving you;* (10) *Help me make a reply to Mia*

	(1) *I confess to gluttony and weakness;* (2) *I confess that I doubted your ability to save my wretched soul;* (5) *Make me pure, holy and clean;* (6) *…embrace me and make me perfect;* (7) *You are my saviour, my mother…;* (11) *Help me stand firm*
Passivisation	Not applicable.
Relational Structures	(2) …wretched soul…; (3) …lack of faith…; (4) …Mia the Devil…; (7) You are my saviour, my mother…; (8) …sins from my soul…Mia the Devil
Imperatives / Verbs of Obligation	(3) Please forgive my lack of faith; (4) Help me to resist Mia the Devil…; (5) Make me pure, holy and clean; (6) Please embrace me and make me perfect; (8) Please erase these sins from my soul and help me to stand up to Mia the Devil; (10) Help me make a reply to Mia; (11) Help me stand firm
(Implied) Conditionals	Not applicable.

The above tables represent an exhaustive analysis of a selection of the quotations that appear in Websites 1 to 3 in terms of the discourse model of Kitis and Milapides (1997). As the table illustrates, the quotations reflect the discourse strategies identified by these researchers at the semantic and syntactic levels. As stated earlier, additional strategies have been included in the discourse model. These are "Imperatives/Verbs of Obligation" and "(Implied) Conditionals" at the syntactic level of analysis.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the three Pro-Ana websites, certain conclusions have been arrived at on the semantic and syntactic levels. These may be summarised as follows:

5.1 At the semantic level

"Ana Psalm"	**Key phrases**: strict is my diet; surely calorie and weight charts will follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the fear of the scales forever	Anorexia should be pursued with the same devotion, commitment and fear of wrath in the same way that the God of the Old Testament demands of His people.
"The Thin Commandments"	Just as the Israelites of the Old Testament had to live by the Ten Commandments that Moses brought with him from Mount Sinai, so the anorectic obeys Ana and her Ten Commandments of staying thin.	
Key phrases: "Ana Beliefs" I believe;	Similar to the Christian Credo in many churches that the congregation repeat after or say with the minister as a sign of outward faith.	
vile, useless, unworthy, hell;	The anorectic's self-concept and self-image are almost never positive; self-loathing is prominent and many hate their own existence.	
unbreakable laws, salvation, inspired word of God, recrimination for sins, abnegation of the body, life ever fasting	These lexical items bring together a strong religious overtone and are found in the Bible. Ana has true religious implications for anorectics. This is not only a lifestyle; it is a religion.	

| "Ana Prayer" | **Key phrases:**

confess;

Soul, please forgive, help me, Devil, temptations, sins, serving;

Pure, holy, clean;

Saviour, mother | This lexical item highlights an important theme: Pro-Ana websites have become modern confessionals. The Pro-Ana online community has become the congregation with Ana as the priest(ess) to whom the anorectic can pray to. Only Ana can forgive her sins;

Theses lexical items have strong connotations with the purification of medieval saints by starving themselves;

Ana has become the female equivalent of Christ by saving the anorectic's soul (by helping her to abstain from the Devil Mia/Bulimia), symbolising the evil contrast of what Anorexia is. Ana is also the Holy Mother Mary, who looks after her devoted children and through whom one can also pray. |

5.2 At the syntactic level

Language usage as means of conveying ideological ideas

Websites 1 – 3 clearly indicate that the Pro-Ana writers use the quotations in such a way as to suit their anorectic ideology. This ideology is particularly evident in the use of certain word orders. For instance, in Website 1, "[My diet] maketh me to lie down at night hungry", "diet" is in the position of agent, performing a specific action. "Diet" is therefore transactive. This suggests that this lexical item (diet) becomes pivotal in the understanding of the anorectic's thought processes and what she gives priority to: Her diet of starvation has become her only true religious experience.

It is also evident from these websites that the Pro-Ana writers make extensive use of the foregrounding of specific words in the quotations to emphasise their ideological stance. Transactive as well as transitive structures enjoy particular focus in the quotations. Passivisation (as seen in Website 2, "Being thin is more important than being healthy") is another linguistic device that Pro-Ana writers use for ideological reinforcement. However, in this particular case, another proclivity becomes evident: When the Pro-Ana quotation is compared with the original text (in this case, "Ana Psalm"), many alterations on the part of the Pro-Ana writer become clear: She has left out important punctuation, such as the capital letter at the beginning of each line, commas, colons, and semi-colons.

Another alteration is the fact that she has failed to contextualise ANY of the quotations from any of the websites. That means that no text references have been given to aid the reader to read more of the original text, and so place the extract within its original, and perhaps different, context. This is significant as each website has been compiled by a different Pro-Ana writer. Thus, the phenomenon of decontextualisation becomes a tendency of the Pro-Ana community evident in all the analysed websites. Of course, a limitation of the scope of the research is that a larger research sample would have been helpful to show that the decontextualisation phenomenon is prevalent in the Pro-Ana community.

Pro-Ana writers are inclined to use quotations that convey imperatives/verbs of obligation and implied conditionals. As can be seen from the tables of Websites 1-3, the quotations were chosen specifically for a certain target group who will understand them within the specific, unmistakeable context of the anorectic lifestyle.

Imperatives/verbs of obligation and implied conditionals point to a specific action to be taken; the Pro-Ana reader is reminded of the right action that she has to take in order to succeed in her anorectic habits. Several times, particularly through implication, the reader is reminded of the repercussions and inevitable sanctions if she does not stick to her anorectic lifestyle. In this sense, the quotations can be likened to religious or moral directions, pointing the anorectic in the "right" way. A typical imperative is "Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty" (Website 2, "The Thin Commandments"), while a verb of obligation is evident in "I believe in oughts, musts, and shoulds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behaviour" (Website 3, "Ana Beliefs"). None of the linguistic devices employed through the imperatives create an overwhelming sense of empathy.

The quasi-religious language contained in the Pro-Ana texts seeks to clothe the serious or even fatal commitment to Pro-Ana with a kind of spiritually uplifting dimension. However, in using such language, the authors of these sites fail to pay sufficient attention to the literary diction of such religious texts and thus present their own Pro-Ana variants in somewhat immature linguistic fashion, even to the point of their texts sounding like parodies. This necessarily undermines the credibility of the language, but not the intention or the hazards, of Pro-Ana websites.

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