EATING DISORDERS AND WOMEN'S MAGAZINES:
A STUDY OF COVERAGE FROM 1979-1999

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ABSTRACT

Research shows that the number of people suffering from eating disorders in the United States has grown over the past twenty years. Although women and girls are the most frequently afflicted, these illnesses do not discriminate: they affect both females and males, and cross over nearly every age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Many researchers have speculated that media play a role in the existence and perpetuation of anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. With the popularity of “women’s magazines,” that is, those magazines oriented towards women, the question arises: how has the nature of eating disorders been defined in women’s magazines over time and why?

This thesis attempts to answer that question, as well as to explain why changes in the frequency of articles about eating disorders may have occurred using theories of social control and social change. For the analysis, two women’s magazines, Vogue and Ladies’ Home Journal, were selected due to their large circulation and enduring popularity; both have been published for over 100 years. Each issue of each magazine from 1979-1999 was analyzed for articles about eating disorders. These articles were counted for frequency and analyzed for content in an attempt to answer the above question. Some of the items looked for in the content analysis were: the characters being...
represented in each article, the causes mentioned, and solutions to the problem being offered.

Overall, the results showed that there was a significantly greater amount of coverage in the 1990s than in the 1980s; during this time period, Vogue didn’t print an article about eating disorders until 1996. The results also demonstrated that men were all but omitted from the articles; all patients represented in the articles were women. Another important finding was the articles’ focus. Nearly every article focused on the individual in terms of causes and solutions, while none suggested a partial shift in focus to environmental causes and solutions.

The findings of this thesis support the theory that media act as agents of social control. In this case, the infrequency of coverage and lack of environmental focus shifts the attention away from environmental influences such as fashion models and an unrealistic body ideal and lays the responsibility on the individual.

This research study could be further developed by completing a separate study on another illness that predominantly develops in women, such as breast cancer. By analyzing the frequency and definition of another illness, one could have a basis for comparison when interpreting the frequency and nature of the coverage of eating disorders.
Dedicated to the brave souls who have courageously
battled an eating disorder
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In today's American society, too many people are taking to heart the infamous words uttered by the Duchess of Windsor, "no woman can ever be too thin or too rich" (Alexander-Mott & Lumsden, 1994, p.12). People throughout the country are suffering from eating disorders in ever-rising numbers (Szmukler, Dare, & Treasure, 1995, p. 15). Although both women and men are affected by these illnesses, "women account for more than ninety percent of people with eating disorders" (www.4woman.gov). Researchers have speculated that media play several roles in the world of eating disorders. One such role is as an informant: media have covered the issues of eating disorders in various ways over time.

Magazines, especially those with a large number of female readers, have been a source of eating disorders information for many years. Articles are often devoted to the stories of celebrities who have struggled with eating disorders; most readers have been exposed to the stories of singer Karen Carpenter, actress Tracey Gold, and gymnast Christy Henrich. Readers may simply hear the individual story of a person with anorexia or they may be told how to detect the illness and possibly prevent it. Other stories may include resources for treatment and support.
So how frequently is the topic of eating disorders discussed in magazines oriented towards women? Has there been an increase in coverage in the last twenty years? A decrease? Both? How are these stories framed? In what context are they written?

Why is any of this important?

It is extremely relevant to look at the coverage of eating disorders in magazines, especially over the past twenty years. Studies have shown that the number of people diagnosed with eating disorders has risen significantly during this time (Silverstein et al., 1986; Gordon, 1988). It is important to see if media are keeping up with this very relevant health issue and giving it appropriate coverage. Also, bulimia nervosa was recognized by the medical and psychological community as a distinct syndrome in 1979 (Alexander-Mott & Lumsden, 1994; Szmukler, Dare, & Treasure, 1995); it is of relevance to see if media have covered this eating disorder accordingly. It is also of importance to understand why articles about eating disorders get printed in the first place. The context in which an article is written is relevant because it is important to know what role media play in the portrayal of eating disorders. If most magazine articles simply tell the story of an individual struggling with eating disorders, they may be doing a partial disservice to the community by not providing eating disorders information, statistics, prevention, and resources for readers who may be in need. However, if magazines are providing well-balanced stories that include this type of information, they are taking part in raising awareness and offering help to the increasing number of people with eating disorders.

This research project analyzes the coverage of eating disorders in two magazines oriented towards women: *Vogue* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. *Vogue* magazine,
established in 1892, has a predominantly female readership with a current circulation exceeding 1.1 million. According to Writer's Market 2000, “Vogue mirrors the changing roles and concerns of women, covering not only evolutions in fashion, beauty and style, but the important issues and ideas of the arts, health care, politics and world affairs” (1999, p. 794). This perspective, combined with the increasing number of women suffering with eating disorders in the past 20 years, makes it seem likely that this magazine will devote article space to covering the important issues of anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive overeating during this time period.


It seems likely that both magazines will have the opportunity and motivation to print articles about eating disorders given their focus on issues considered important to women. However, the two magazines are quite different in content and structure, and may cover the subject differently.

Individually, I expected Ladies' Home Journal to have more articles about eating disorders than Vogue from 1979-1999. Vogue is a fashion magazine that relies heavily on the fashion industry for subsidy through advertisements. Because models and the fashion industry are often blamed for body dissatisfaction that can lead to eating disorders, I didn’t expect them to print as many stories on these illnesses. I expected the
stories that *Vogue* did print about eating disorders to ignore or refute the argument that models and the fashion industry are a cause of eating disorders in order to support their advertisers, and therefore, their primary money source. *Ladies' Home Journal*, on the other hand, has far fewer fashion advertisements than *Vogue* and relies more heavily on other industries for advertising dollars. I expected this lower level of dependence on the fashion industry to result in: 1.) more eating disorders stories that implicate models and the fashion industry as possible causes, and 2.) more eating disorders stories in general.

To get an understanding of how and why eating disorders acquire media attention, it is important to first understand how media function. A careful analysis of media and the relationship to social control and social change will reveal important information about the roles media play in society and how and why media affect body image.

For this research project, I have three research questions:

1.) How has the frequency of articles devoted to eating disorders changed over time?
2.) How has the problem of eating disorders been defined over time?
3.) How can changes in the nature and frequency of coverage be explained?
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Social Control

There are many theories of social control; the first conceptualization of social control was published by Edward A. Ross in 1901 (Viswanath & Demers, 1999; Gibbs, 1989). His theory looked to institutions as the source of social control; this approach has received criticism for not accounting for unintentional actions or the role of internal behavior. During the 1950s, Talcott Parsons and other classical functionalists began to define social control as a counteraction to deviant behavior (Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue, 1989). In 1952, Parsons defined it as “a motivational process in one or more individual actors which tends to counteract a tendency to deviance from the fulfillment of role-expectations” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p.10; Gibbs, 1989). Although this theory received criticism for its lack of definition of deviance, it is still a conventionally used conception of social control. A few years later, Robert L. Merton, put his own spin on the concept of social control. He suggested that “social actors choose between ‘socially structured alternatives,’” meaning that individuals do have choices in their behaviors, but the choices are established and limited by social and cultural structures (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 10). Ten years later, the concept of social control had gained even
more momentum: according to Viswanath and Demers, the social control model has dominated the field of mass communications since the 1960s (1999, p. 4).

Today, it is difficult to create a definition of social control that will be accepted by most researchers and theorists. One of the most widely accepted definitions considers social control to be “attempts, whether intentional or not, by the state or social institutions to regulate or encourage conformity to a set of norms through socialization or through the threat of coercion, or both” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 10).

An understanding of social control is necessary in order to understand how media play various roles in affecting women’s body image. As an agent of social control, media serve as channels through which social institutions can encourage conformity to a certain body image. In the fashion industry, unusually thin women are most frequently used as fashion models because most designers prefer the way their garments look on tall, willowy women. When magazines include advertisements that feature these unrealistically thin models and then use the same women for their own photographs, they are filling hundreds of pages with women who do not look like the average American woman. When combined with the vast number of very thin female actresses on television and in the movies, we as a society are barraged by images of these thin women. Dominant images, especially those portrayed as glamorous and successful, can easily become a societal ideal; most people want to be considered a success.

At the same time, weight loss has become a $40 billion-per-year industry as people desperately try to achieve this body ideal (www.edap.org). In contemporary American society, overweight people are scorned and considered to be unattractive and less worthy than thin people. All of this combines to create a society in which media
serve as a channel of social control: we, as members of society, can make choices in our body acceptance, but the options we can choose were set up by social institutions. If we are overweight and choose to stay that way and accept ourselves as such, we are choosing to live a lifestyle in which the majority of society will consider us unattractive and less worthy. If we do not accept ourselves and choose to take drastic, even life-threatening measures to achieve the ideal as promoted in media, we may achieve the level of acceptance, worthiness, and admiration as printed in the pages of *Glamour*.

**Social Change**

Social change can be defined as “the difference between current and antecedent conditions in a social structure” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 12). Much like social control, there are many different theories to explain the social change phenomenon. Evolution Theory and Social Differentiation explains social change as a process much like Darwinian evolution: it is a linear process that goes from the simplistic to the complex, and with increased complexity comes increased interdependency among the segments (Viswanath & Demers, 1999). Conflict theories of social change define change in terms of conflict; that is, conflict must be present in order for social change to occur. Functionalist conflict theory sees conflict as “inevitable and persistent,” while Marxist conflict theory envisions “a classless, conflict-free society as ultimately inevitable” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 16; Dahrendorf, 1959; Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue, 1989). Each social change theory has been the focus of criticism, but all contribute some understanding to the process of social change.
It is important to understand that “social systems are not closed – they change over time” (Demers & Viswanath, 1999, p. 419). As mentioned earlier, these changes occur because there is some kind of conflict at work in the social system. Change occurs because “social actors, often mobilized as social movements organizations, have demanded changes” (Demers & Viswanath, 1999, p. 419). When a group of social actors determines that there is some level of injustice in a social system, they may begin their crusade for social change – to rectify the injustice. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The group may publicly protest the injustice, gain strength by gathering new members (often referred to as sympathizers), and raise their collective voice to a level where those in power must agree to rectify the injustice on some level.

Haferkamp and Smelser (1992) were able to define three elements of social change, and Demers and Viswanath added a fourth: 1.) structural determinants of social change; 2.) processes and mechanisms of change, including conflicts and social movements; 3.) the direction of social change; and 4.) antecedents and consequences of change (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 13). The first element looks at the structure of the society in which social change may take place in terms of plurality, heterogeneity, power structures, etc. The second element encompasses the actions and activities that promote social change. The third describes the shifts in power that take place. Element number four establishes what exists before and after the social change occurs.

An analysis of social change is relevant in the understanding of body image and media. Today’s unrealistically thin body ideal is one that few people can achieve while remaining healthy. Many people are frustrated with this body ideal and want to see it changed so that regardless of a person’s size, they can feel attractive, successful, and
worthy in our society. In order to alter the body ideal into one that is more realistic and healthy, social change will have to occur. One way that it could occur is through the actions of a social movement organization. Some steps have already been taken in this direction: a boycott of all Calvin Klein products has been in effect for several years in an effort to convince the company to use healthier, more realistic models. Participants in the boycott hope to affect Calvin Klein’s profits enough to influence their model-selection process.

**Body Image**

As cited in chapter 15 of *The Eating Disorders: Medical and Psychological Bases of Diagnosis and Treatment*, McRea, Summerfield, and Rosen state that the term “body image” refers to “the body as a psychological experience and focuses on the individual feelings and attitudes towards his own body. It is concerned with the individual’s subjective experiences with his body and the manner in which he has organized these experiences” (Blinder, Chaitin, and Goldstein, 1988, p. 177). Pesa, Syre, and Jones further explain the concept of body image by describing it as having two dimensions. The first is the perceptual dimension in which an individual evaluates the size of his or her own body (2000). The individual may overestimate, underestimate, or correctly evaluate the size of his or her body during this process. The second dimension is the affective/cognitive process in which the individual develops attitudes towards his or her body (2000). In this dimension, the individual may have positive, negative, or neutral attitudes about his or her body. These two dimensions of body image are not independent of one another; each may influence the other. People’s perceptions of their body size can
influence the attitudes they have toward their bodies. Conversely, the attitudes they have toward their bodies may also affect the ways in which they perceive their own sizes.

It is important to remember that people's attitudes and perceptions do not exist in a vacuum: all of us function within a society, and all societies have a dominant set of norms and values. In contemporary American culture, there is a female "body ideal" that has been established, and this ideal rests on a base of bodily thinness. According to Pesa, Syre, and Jones, the images of this often unrealistic ideal "become the standards by which the individual defines herself and others. These standards of thinness and beauty may influence an adolescent's perception of her body" (2000, p. 331; Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer, 1999; Baker, Sivyer, & Towell, 1998).

Research shows that body image begins to be established at a very early age. As children grow, they gain an awareness of what their body feels and looks like, as well as how it functions. They learn as toddlers whether they are boys or girls and by the age of five or six, they have a firm grasp of what it means to be a boy or girl. They begin to think and act in ways that are congruent with their sexual identity as established by the society in which they live; this identity also leads them to value the objects and acts that are consistent with a particular gender (Fisher, 1986).

Children learn at an early age that bodily attractiveness can be an asset. They assimilate standards of body attractiveness and quickly learn that attractive bodies frequently elicit different (and often more desirable) responses from others (Fisher, 1986). Their own body images may be affected by these standards depending on how they perceive their own bodies; that is, whether or not their bodies "measure up."
Once these standards of body attractiveness have been assimilated, children begin to hold the same types of biases against certain body types that adults hold. In studies conducted by Kirkpatrick & Sanders, Lerner, Lerner & Schroeder, and Staffieri, ectomorphic body types, which are longer and more slender, were viewed as lonely, sad, weak, and tired, while endomorphic body types, which are more heavy, were seen as bad, lazy, and dirty (Fisher, 1986, p.68). In contrast, the mesomorphic body type, which is more balanced in shape, is ascribed “all kinds of pleasant, good, and rather heroic qualities” (Fisher, 1986, p. 68). This stereotyping of body images is reflective of the norms and values that are most dominant in a society.

Studies show that the transition from childhood to adulthood is filled with changes and alterations in body image. As children enter puberty and their bodies begin to undergo unfamiliar changes, they often lose some of their sense of self image or body attractiveness that they had established as a child. The changes require that they find some new sense of body image in a time wrought with emotional, physical, and social turmoil. This can be a very difficult time for many adolescents.

Issues of body image do not disappear once a person enters adulthood. In 1973, Berscheid, Walster, & Bohrnstedt conducted a study in which they asked readers of Psychology Today to fill out a body image questionnaire. They found that fewer women than men considered themselves “quite” or “extremely” satisfied with their overall appearance (45 percent and 55 percent, respectively). Also, a greater number of women than men considered themselves “quite” or “extremely” dissatisfied with their appearance (seven percent and four percent, respectively) (Fisher, 1986, p.124). In a survey conducted by Glamour magazine in 1984, 75 percent of respondents felt that they were
too fat, although conservative weight tables revealed that only 25 percent of them were actually overweight (Gordon, 1990, p. 70). A similar study by Szukler & Patton found that “80 percent of women will attempt to lose weight at some stage of their lives” (Baker, Sivyer, & Towell, 1998, p. 319).

Body image has a significant impact on the existence and development of eating disorders. In 1962, Hilde Bruch described anorexic patients as having a “disturbance in body image of delusional proportions” (Fisher, 1986, p. 182; Alexander-Mott & Lumsden, 1994; Blinder, Chaitin, & Goldstein, 1988). According to Thompson et al., individuals’ dissatisfaction with their body images “has received the greatest empirical support as a precursor to eating disturbances” (Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer, 1999, p. 43).

The Role of Media

So what role do media play in social control? This question has many answers rooted in a variety of theories. Many early theorists viewed media as “repressive, ideological tools of the ruling class” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p.4). The structural functionalists, on the other hand, believed media to embody “the consensual values and will of the governed, at least to some extent” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 4). This is exemplified in a comment by Merton mentioned earlier in which he stated that people do have choices, but the choices are established by social and cultural structure; media may represent the values and will of the governed, but those values and will are established within alternatives set up by those in power.
Today, most researchers and theorists agree that the primary interest of media is to keep those in power satisfied. Media "construct a reality that generally serves the interests of elites over the masses" (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 4) because those in power provide the money, support, and notoriety necessary to keep media up and running. It is a reciprocal relationship because while those in power supply media with the aforementioned resources, media supply the powerful with publicity, legitimacy through coverage, and support. Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1989) elaborated on this perspective in their discussion of mass media as both an agent of social control and an object of social control. As an agent of social control, media convey the messages that encourage the conformity desired by those in power. However, there are two key assumptions that "underlie the notion that mass media are agents of social control": 1.) knowledge is a basis of social power, and 2.) control of knowledge is central to development and maintenance of power (Demers & Viswanath, 1999, p. 12). By selectively distributing messages according to the needs and desires of those in power, media participate in the controlling of information; that is, they are helping the powerful to maintain their strength. Media benefit from this relationship by continuing to receive necessary financial support from these same power structures. However, this financial dependency allows media to serve as an object of social control: media must conform to the desires of those who provide significant financial support or risk losing critical dollars.

As both agents and objects of social control, media play a role in influencing people's body images. "Research has shown that body image is indeed sensitive to manipulation by images and symbols" (Levine & Smolak, 1996, p. 244). Many theories
advocate the position that media put forth thin ideals which help to lower women's self-esteem; the combination of thin ideals with the lowered self-esteem may then "motivate the development of disordered eating in an attempt to achieve those ideals and restore self-esteem" (Showers & Larson, 1999, p. 660). The question then arises: do media really promote thin ideals and unrealistic body images?

In general, most theories of media and body image find agreement on two key points: 1.) "mass media both promote and reflect body shapes, styles of clothing and other images that symbolize ('embody') complex themes of gender, race, class, beauty, identity, desire, success, and self-control in post-industrial societies," and 2.) "mass media are part of a sociocultural network – including families, peers, scholars, athletics, business, and health care professionals – which generates and legitimizes a host of interlocking effects, primarily in females, that combine with various moderators (e.g., low self-esteem or genetic propensity to obesity) to produce the continuum of eating disorders" (Smolak, Levine, & Striegel-Moore, 1996, p.236).

In chapter 10 of The Developmental Psychopathology of Eating Disorders: Implications for Research, Prevention, and Treatment, Michael P. Levine and Linda Smolak discuss reasons to suspect that media play a role in promoting unrealistic body images. They state that "the epidemic prevalence among postpubertal females of drive for thinness, fear of fat, body dissatisfaction, and unhealthy weight management practices suggests the operation of mechanisms capable of reaching large numbers of people" (1996, p. 238). They suggest that television could very well be one such mechanism; this suspicion is supported by other research. Research also supports the idea of women's magazines operating as one of these mechanisms. Levine and Smolak compare the
potential impact of portraying unrealistic body images with the impact of smoking advertisements on adolescents. Research supports the notion that tobacco advertisements can influence adolescents' perceptions of smoking, typically through the repetition of specific imagery (McKenna & Williams, 1993; Pierce et al., 1991); the use of repeated images can also be seen in the promotion of unrealistic body images.

In a study conducted by Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly, the results concluded that women's magazines contain more messages to be slim and stay in shape than men's magazines. For example, of the 48 issues of women's magazines looked at in the study, there were 63 ads for diet foods. In contrast, of the 48 men's magazines, there was only one ad for diet food (Silverstein et al., 1986, p. 525). In an analysis of the number of articles and advertisements dealing with body shape, body size, or nonfood figure-enhancing products, there were 96 in the women's magazines and eight in the men's magazines. Interestingly, women receive many more messages about eating than do men (Silverstein et al., 1986, p. 525). A similar study conducted by Nemeroff, Stein, Diehl, and Smilack compared the number of weight-loss articles and beauty articles in men's and women's magazines and found that women's magazines had 13 times as many weight-loss articles and almost six times as many beauty articles as men's magazines (Levine & Smolak, 1996).

Another body image issue in magazines is the choice of models who represent the unrealistically thin ideal. A study by Smolak revealed that the average American woman is 5'4'' tall and weighs 140 pounds, whereas the average American model is 5'11'' tall and weighs 117 pounds; most fashion models are thinner than 98 percent of American women (www.edap.org). A study by Silverstein, Peterson, and Perdue (1986) measured the
curvaceousness of models in two women’s magazines from 1901 through 1980 and found that the curvaceousness of the models declined between 1901 and 1930, increased between 1930 and 1950, then declined sharply during the 1960s to a low level that was sustained throughout the 1970s (Levine & Smolak, 1996; Gordon, 1990).

Magazines, however, are not the only culprits: television also contributes to unrealistic body standards for women. Gonzalez-Lavin and Smolak found in a research study that, in the television shows most favored by middle school girls, 94 percent of the female characters were below average in weight (Levine & Smolak, 1996, p. 241). In a similar study by Silverstein et al., “the popular actresses who serve as models for what an attractive woman should look like have become thinner in the recent past” (Silverstein et al., 1986, p. 531).

Because these thin ideals that are represented in media have fostered body dissatisfaction in such a large number of women, Wolszon states that, “merely being a woman in our society means feeling too fat” (1998, p. 542). This pervasive body dissatisfaction has been characterized as a “normative discontent” by Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (Haworth-Hoepner, 2000; Wolszon, 1998). The standards of female beauty which emphasize slenderness as a key feature of feminine identity are so powerful that “even women without eating disorders experience body dissatisfaction” (Haworth-Hoepner, 2000, p. 212).

The British Medical Association (BMA) has recognized the unrealistic body image ideals that are being perpetuated by media. In a May 2000 report, the BMA announced that “the gap between the ideal body shape and reality is wider than ever” and
that “there is a need for a more realistic body shape to be shown on television and in fashion magazines” (www.cnn.com).

Although the unrealistically thin body ideal “may not be promoted only in the media and it may not even originate in the media,” media still play a pivotal role in the perpetuation of this ideal. “Given the popularity of television, movies, and magazines, and the instances when styles adopted by media figures began popular fads (e.g., the hairstyles of Farrah Fawcett or Dorothy Hamill), the media are likely to be among the most influential promoters of such thin standards” (Silverstein et al., 1986, p. 531).

With Americans spending over $40 billion each year on dieting and diet-related products (www.edap.org), the weight-loss industry is a big business that has a lot to lose if American women were to start accepting their bodies at a more realistic size. This could be a contributing factor of these companies’ promotion of the “necessity” of weight loss and a slender body; if women continue to aspire to a body ideal that is unrealistic, they are likely to never achieve that goal and will then pour more money into the weight loss industry.

While serving as agents and objects of social control, media also play a key role in social change: they can promote social change or hinder it. According to Shanahan and Jones (1999), when those in power have a greater level of control over media, media will work to satisfy the needs of the powerful before satisfying the needs of the less powerful in order to maintain their best interests (as mentioned earlier) (Demers & Viswanath, 1999). If those in power do not want change, then media will be more likely to be non-supportive of social change because they do not want to threaten their financial
support. If, however, social change will benefit the powerful, media will be more likely to advocate change.

Merskin’s discussion of media dependence theory states that in social systems where people rely heavily on mass media for information (such as urban-industrial societies), the mass media messages will have a greater effect (Demers & Viswanath, 1999). This has strong implications for efforts at social change: if a group is advocating social change in a social system where most members rely heavily on mass media for information, the likelihood of achieving social change will be lowered because media will be primarily serving those in power. Since the members are getting most of their information from mass media, they will be more likely to view the efforts at social change unsympathetically.

There have been many efforts to affect social change in terms of the unrealistic portrayal of body images in media. Some efforts have focused on mobilizing people to boycott designers and magazines that use emaciated models; as mentioned earlier, Calvin Klein has been the target of a boycott for several years. Unfortunately, when media do not cover a particular social change effort or they cover it in a negative light, it is difficult to spread the word and be taken seriously. Other efforts at affecting social change have involved bringing “real” people back into various media. The creators of Mode magazine went against cultural norms and created a fashion magazine devoted to women size 12 and over; interestingly, it took an “alternative” media to get the average-sized American woman (size 14) regularly portrayed in the pages of a magazine.

So how do the concepts of social control, body image, social change, and media all come together? Using Merton’s description of structural functionalism in which
social actors choose between socially structured alternatives, it becomes clear how media work as an agent of social control. As stated by Demers and Viswanath, “all media serve a master” (1999, p. 419). When media respond to the pressures to serve those in power (typically, those who provide substantial financial support), they deliver messages that will satisfy the powerful; they will be promoting the dominant norms and values as delineated by the “ruling class.” Members of the social system see these messages and although they may feel they are making choices in their actions, the choices have been established by those in power. According to Levine and Smolak, there are many negative effects promoted by media images of unrealistically thin women: glorification of slenderness as a testament to beauty, fitness, and feminine morality; promotion of slenderness as the path to social, sexual, and occupational success for women; open abhorrence of fat and fat women; and advocacy of individuality while restricting standards of physical beauty to a narrow range (1996, 237). Women are left with the socially constructed “choices” of striving for an unrealistically thin body in order to be accepted and successful or be content with their normal bodies at the high price of being unsuccessful and maligned.

In issues of body image, media are perpetuating the unrealistically thin ideal that has been established by industries that provide substantial funding to women’s magazines, such as the fashion, beauty, and weight loss industries. The majority of a magazine’s revenue comes from the advertisements placed by these industries, so magazines must work to satisfy the advertisers’ needs and desires. Beauty and fashion magazines also benefit from large subscription rates; women are eager to learn the latest way to be beautiful and successful. For this ideal to be changed to one that is more
realistic and healthy, groups of people who do not accept the ideal as promoted in the media must combine their efforts and voices to enact social change.

**Expectations**

In light of this review of literature, one might expect certain conditions to exist or events to occur in the coverage of eating disorders in *Vogue* and *Ladies' Home Journal* during the time period 1979-1999. First, one might expect an increase in the frequency of articles about eating disorders in the early 1980s after bulimia is recognized as a distinct syndrome by the American Psychiatric Association in 1979. Second, one might expect the fashion magazine, *Vogue*, to print fewer articles about eating disorders because most of their financial support comes in the form of advertising dollars from the fashion industry, who is often blamed for causing eating disorders.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

With the prevalence of eating disorders in today's American society, it is important to understand the conditions under which these illnesses exist. One step in developing this understanding is to analyze how media influence the existence of anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. In this thesis, I evaluate the coverage of eating disorders in two magazines oriented towards women, *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal*.

The Research Questions

I have developed three research questions that are pertinent to the magazine analysis:

1.) How has the frequency of articles devoted to eating disorders changed over time?
2.) How has the problem of eating disorders been defined over time?
3.) How can changes in the nature and frequency of coverage be explained?

Questions one and two provide the dependent variables for this analysis:
frequency of coverage and definition of the problem over time. Frequency of coverage can be defined as the number of articles written about eating disorders at specific intervals within a given time period: in this case, monthly intervals over a twenty-year period. Definition of the problem refers to how media define the nature of eating disorders: is it a physical or psychological problem? Who is being affected? Is it a societal problem or an individual issue?

Question three encompasses the independent variables: it asks who or what is responsible for the changes in frequency and nature. There are several parties that play the role of independent variable. In 1979, the American Psychiatric Association recognized bulimia nervosa as a distinct syndrome. Celebrities such as Karen Carpenter, Jane Fonda, and Cathy Rigby announced in the late 1970s and early 1980s that they had struggled with eating disorders. Organizations devoted to the awareness, treatment, and prevention of eating disorders developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. All of these variables had an influence on the articles written about eating disorders in women's magazines.

**Measurements**

This research project included two dimensions of analysis: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis answered research question number one by counting the number of articles about eating disorders in each magazine over the twenty-year period. The frequency of these articles was tracked on a monthly basis from January 1979 through December 1999.
To complete this portion of the analysis, the tables of contents for each issue of each magazine were studied for article titles that may indicate a story about eating disorders. The following list represents the type of words that required looking at the actual article for further analysis:

* eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia, compulsive overeating, binge,
  * binge eating, binge-purge, thin, skinny, overweight, food, addiction

The qualitative analysis answered research question number two. For this part of the analysis, articles uncovered by the quantitative analysis were analyzed. This content analysis evaluated each article to answer the following questions:

1.) Who was being identified (as patients and as sources) in the article and how were they being identified?

2.) Did the article attribute eating disorders to physiological, psychological, or environmental causes?

3.) What solutions to resolve the problem did the article provide?

4.) What eating disorders are being covered and when?

To answer question one, each article was analyzed for the characters represented in the story; the characters could be represented either descriptively or as sources. These characters were divided into two groups: patients/populations-at-risk and non-patient sources. For characters that fell into the patients/populations-at-risk group, they were analyzed for four identifiers: gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Characters that were identified as non-patient sources were categorized by the following identifiers: experts, family members, studies, others. The evaluation process counted the
number of times each of these identifiers was mentioned within individual articles. These counts revealed who the predominant characters were in each magazine article; the magazine articles could then be compared over time to see if there were changes in the way in which the characters in articles about eating disorders were portrayed.

To answer question two, each article was analyzed for references to physiological, psychological, and environmental causes. If a physiological cause was mentioned, it was coded as either a reference to genetic causes or to medical causes. If a psychological cause was mentioned, it was coded into one of the following categories: low self-esteem, mental illness (including disorders often associated with eating disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and bi-polar disorder), or trauma/abuse. Environmental causes were categorized as follows: peer influences, fashion models, advertising (such as fashion, weight loss, health and beauty products), family influences (not including abuse or trauma inflicted on the patient), television, movies, women’s magazines, and other magazines.

Question three required analyzing each article for solutions to the problem of eating disorders. References to solutions were placed into three categories: medical/psychological, environmental, and educational. Medical/psychological solutions were coded as: hospitals and treatment centers, treatment or prevention advice offered by organizations (eating disorders activists), early diagnosis, support groups, nutritional counseling, and psychological counseling. Environmental solutions were coded as: realistic fashion models (models who reflect the average American woman), reduction in the number of weight-loss articles in magazines, and increased coverage of eating disorders in the media. Educational solutions were coded as: public seminars about
eating disorders awareness, school programs - provided by an outside source, school programs - incorporated into the curriculum, participation in Eating Disorders Awareness Week, and promotion of eating disorders awareness by organizations (eating disorders activists).

The evaluations as prescribed by questions two and three were performed in the same way as that performed for question one: the number of times each identifier was mentioned was counted within individual articles.

Magazine Selection

The magazine selection process began by determining through research that the vast majority of people affected by eating disorders are women. With this information, it was determined that magazines focused on issues of concern to women would be a logical choice because their primary audience is the population most affected by the illnesses. The next step was to choose the quantity and genre of the magazines. For manageability, I chose to analyze two magazines: one fashion magazine and one general interest magazine. I selected a fashion magazine because contemporary fashion is based around a thin (often unrealistically thin) female figure: today, most fashion models are thinner than 98 percent of American women (www.edap.org). I selected a general interest magazine for contrast; this style of magazine focuses on a broad range of topics each month, such as health, politics, parenthood, careers, travel, and the home. The specific magazines, *Vogue* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, were chosen for several reasons. First, both magazines are well-established and have been published for more than 100 years: *Ladies' Home Journal* was first published in 1883, while *Vogue* printed its first
issue in 1892. Both magazines are still popular today with circulations in the millions; their long-standing popularity made them readily available for research.

As with any selection of magazines, the choices made provided certain limitations. First, the target audiences for each magazine are not identical, which inhibits the ability to make some generalizations about differences in coverage between the two magazines. According to *Writer's Market 2000*, *Ladies' Home Journal* is aimed at the issues of concern to women ages 30-45; *Vogue*, on the other hand, does not have a specific age group denoted as a target audience (1999). Second, although both magazines are well established with comparable years in business, *Ladies' Home Journal* has a circulation of 5,000,000, while *Vogue*’s circulation is only 1,136,000 (*Writer's Market 2000*, 1999). This disparity in circulation and the potential disparity in audience limit the reach of this research project.

Another limitation was the inability to generalize results to other magazines. “Women’s magazines” come in a wide variety: fashion (*Vogue, Mademoiselle*), feminist (*Ms.*), general interest (*Ladies' Home Journal, Woman's Day*), fitness (*Shape*), etc. Even within each genre of magazine there are differences: *Vogue* predominantly covers issues that are of concern to professional women and women in or past their twenties, while *Mademoiselle* predominantly addresses the issues and concerns of women in their late teens and early twenties, such as college life and planning for a career. These differences don’t allow for generalizations to all magazines within a genre, to other genres, or to media altogether. For example, the results of the *Vogue* portion of this research project cannot be generalized to *Mademoiselle* and other fashion magazines; the results apply only to *Vogue*.
The Years Analyzed

This analysis covers a twenty-year time period, from 1979 to 1999. This time period was chosen for several reasons. First, it encompasses two crucial decades in the research and awareness of eating disorders. Second, the final year is 1999, so the data are current and can be used to understand what is happening with eating disorders coverage today. Third, the time period is long enough to include various changes in society but short enough to be manageable.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As mentioned earlier, the number of people with eating disorders has increased dramatically over the past twenty years. With the recognition of bulimia in 1979 and binge eating disorder in 1994 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), people have witnessed a transformation from a society in which there was only one eating disorder (anorexia), to a society in which there are three distinct disorders. The APA has also included in the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) a section devoted to "eating disorder not otherwise specified" in which other forms of disordered eating may be categorized (Frances, First, & Pincus, 1995, p. 330).

The goal of this research project was to see how the coverage of eating disorders in magazines oriented towards women has changed during this critical era. The analysis was conducted in the context of the role media play in promoting thin ideals via social control and how they may participate in social change.

This project analyzed two monthly magazines over a twenty-year period for a total of 480 issues. Each issue’s table of contents was studied for articles with titles that indicated that they could be about eating disorders. Articles that had this type of title were read for content and, if they were indeed about eating disorders, were included in
the article analysis. My analysis started with 41 articles, 17 in Vogue and 24 in Ladies' Home Journal, with titles such as “Body Image” and “The Battle of the Binge.” After reading each article for content, I ended up with 13 articles about eating disorders, two from Vogue and 11 from Ladies' Home Journal. There were five additional articles (three in Vogue and two in Ladies' Home Journal) that mentioned the name of an eating disorder somewhere in the article, but because they were single references or simply a definition, they were not included.

For the quantitative portion of the analysis, which answers research question number one, the number of articles about eating disorders from both magazines was counted for each year from 1979-1999. My first expectation of this research was that the number of articles about eating disorders would increase in the mid-1980s; the quantitative analysis demonstrated otherwise. As shown in Figure 4.1, there were four articles within a five-year period from 1980-1984. From 1985-1989, neither magazine printed any articles about eating disorders. In 1990, there began a steady, although sparse, supply of articles: there were two stories each in 1992, 1996, and 1999; single stories appeared in 1993 and 1995. The greatest increase and highest frequency of articles was in 1992, 1996, 1999, when there were two articles each year; this does not support my first expectation.
It is interesting to note that three of the four articles published in the 1980s were brief articles located in a general health section of the magazine. This means that only one article during that decade, printed in 1981, was a full-length feature article about eating disorders. When compared to the 1990s, in which there were six full-length feature articles about eating disorders, the 1980s devoted significantly less attention to this critical women's health issue.

When this data are separated by magazine, an interesting trend emerges: the first nine articles (1979-1995) were all found in *Ladies' Home Journal*. An article about eating disorders did not appear in the fashion magazine, *Vogue*, during this time period until 1996. It was observed during the analysis of the tables of contents that there were articles during the past two decades in *Vogue* about other illnesses developed predominantly by women, such as breast cancer and cervical cancer. Articles about eating disorders were noticeably absent. During 1996 and 1999, both magazines featured articles about anorexia and bulimia (see Figure 4.2).
To begin explaining how the problem of eating disorders has been defined over time, the qualitative analysis started with an evaluation of each article to see which eating disorders were discussed in the text. Bulimia received the most coverage with seven articles from 1981-1999. In five of the articles (1981, 1983, 1984, 1992, and 1999) it was the only eating disorder mentioned; in 1990 and 1996, it was discussed in articles that addressed other eating disorders as well.

Anorexia was a topic in five of the articles, three of which were printed between 1996 and 1999. The other two articles about anorexia were in 1980 and 1990. Binge eating disorder was first covered during this twenty-year time period in 1990; it appeared as an article topic two more times, in 1992 and 1995. The only article to discuss all three eating disorders was printed in an issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1990 (see Figure 4.3).
Another step in studying the way in which eating disorders were defined looked at how people with eating disorders are portrayed. Each article was analyzed for the following types of characters:

1.) actual patients (interviewed, referred to, or as the author)
2.) populations at risk of developing an eating disorder

The results of part one of this portion of the analysis are shown in Figure 4. According to Crowther et al. (1992), Fairburn et al. (1993), and several other research studies, one million boys and men struggle with eating disorders and borderline conditions (www.edap.org). However, no male patients were represented in either magazine during this time period. As Figure 4.4 demonstrates, 17 women were interviewed or referred to in the articles over the 20-year period, while no men were interviewed or referenced. The data also show that only one article, in 1981, interviewed or referred to an actual patient during the 1980s; in contrast, five articles interviewed or referred to patients in the 1990s. This indicates that interviewing or telling the story of an actual patient (always female) was a phenomenon of the 1990s.
Number of Patients Interviewed or Referred to By Year

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</table>

Figure 4.4

Part two of the character analysis involved analyzing how the article identifies the people who develop eating disorders. Of the 13 articles, seven identified women as a population at risk for developing eating disorders. The first two articles, in 1981 and 1983, identified young women and college-aged women as the population at risk; this same attitude was echoed many years later in 1996. Women of all ages were considered at risk in two articles, one in 1990 and the other in 1999. The articles printed in 1992 and 1993 did not specify a particular age when they discussed risk. Interestingly, there was no pattern in how female populations at risk were identified; there appears to be no trends in this aspect of the coverage of eating disorders.

It is important to understand that, although male patients are a small proportion of the total number of people with eating disorders, they, too, are at risk for developing anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder. In fact, 40 percent of all binge eaters are males (www.wellweb.com). With this in mind, it is shocking to find that males were mentioned as patients of eating disorders in only three of the 13 articles (in 1981, 1983,
and 1990); when they were mentioned, they were part of one-sentence description such as, "Very few [men] develop eating disorders" (Dawson, 1990, p.134).

The next step in understanding how the problem of eating disorders has been defined looked at the causes of eating disorders mentioned in each article. In this part of the analysis, the articles were evaluated and coded for references to physiological, psychological, and environmental causes (see Appendix). Figure 4.5 shows that nine out of the 15 causes listed in the coding scheme were referenced in the articles. By far, the most frequently cited causes were low self-esteem, trauma/abuse, desire for control, and family influences.

![Number of Articles Referring to Each Cause](image)

Figure 4.5

When breaking down the references to causes by magazine, some interesting observations can be made; however, it is important to remember that there were only two articles about eating disorders printed in Vogue. The greater number of articles printed
by *Ladies' Home Journal* provides more opportunities to relate causes to the readers. As Figure 4.6 demonstrates, *Vogue* cited seven causes in its two articles; the only one that was not also cited by *Ladies' Home Journal* is fashion models.

The three causes cited most frequently by *Vogue* magazine (trauma/abuse, control, and family influences) were also three of the four most cited causes in *Ladies' Home Journal*. This demonstrates a level of consistency in the coverage between the two magazines. In addition to the causes cited by *Vogue* (except for fashion models), *Ladies' Home Journal* also referenced peer influences, television, and medical causes in its articles.

![Number of References to Each Cause By Magazine](image)

Figure 4.6

The next portion of the qualitative analysis looked at the solutions offered by the individual magazine articles. The solutions were classified under three headings:
medical/ psychological, environmental, and educational (see coding sheet). The following chart, Figure 4.7, shows the number of times each solution is mentioned. The most frequently cited solutions all belong under the medical/ psychological heading: hospitals and treatment centers, advice from eating disorders activist groups, and psychological counseling. Advice from eating disorders activist groups includes recommendations for treatment and prevention by eating disorders organizations. This should not be confused with the solution classified under the educational category, eating disorder awareness by activist groups, which includes newsletters, other materials, or activities sponsored by activist groups. One important portion of data is that no environmental solutions were provided by either magazine and only one educational solution was provided in a single article. This concentration on solutions within the medical/ psychological realm is indicative of a medical approach as opposed to treating the problem as a public health issue; that is, the solutions provided focus on healing the individual patient and not looking to the environment or education for other ways of treating or preventing these illnesses.
Figure 4.7

Number of Times Each Solution Is Mentioned
The analysis of the problem definition continued with the evaluation of the articles based on their references to signs and symptoms of eating disorders. Once again, there were clearly terms that were referenced much more than the others; laxative abuse, bingeing, purging, and restricted diet were the four most common signs and symptoms mentioned in these two magazines during the past two decades (see Figure 4.8). These four activities are not unique to just one of the eating disorders; they may be present in patients with any kind of disordered eating.

![Number of Times Signs and Symptoms Were Mentioned](image)

**Figure 4.8**

Another type of analysis involved studying the articles to see if any conditions frequently considered to be causes were refuted as benign. The list of conditions used for coding was the same as the list of causes, with the addition of “media in general.” Only two articles refuted a condition as being a cause; they were the two *Vogue* articles. In
one article, the author, who had survived anorexia, states that fashion models were not to blame for her illness. In the second article, two doctors are quoted as saying, "I really don't believe media play such a big role," and "We shouldn't be angry with Madison Avenue..." It is very interesting that the *Vogue* article from 1996 cites fashion models as possibly having an influence on eating disorders, then uses two quotes from doctors to minimize the degree of influence.

The next segment of the analysis involves a study of the physiological consequences of eating disorders in the articles. It is important to see whether or not the magazines are printing articles that discuss these consequences because some of them can be fatal. Figure 4.9 demonstrates that the majority of the articles (eight of 13) cited death as a potential consequence of eating disorders, but the other consequences received little if any recognition.

![# of Articles Citing Physiological Consequences](image)

**Figure 4.9**

The final portion of the qualitative analysis explores the non-patient sources referred to in the articles. These sources may be directly quoted or referred to in the
article; they are divided into four categories: experts (meaning people with professional experience with eating disorders), family/friends, research studies, and others. This analysis reveals who is serving as the sources of information contained within the article. The credibility and trustworthiness of sources can dictate the credibility and trustworthiness of an article. By analyzing who the sources are, we can begin to understand what the author or magazine hopes to achieve.

Figure 4.10 demonstrates the number of times each non-patient source was mentioned per article in Ladies' Home Journal. The quantity of expert sources far outnumbers any other source in the articles; however, four of the 11 articles do not quote any expert sources at all. Three of those four cite friends and family within in the article in lieu of expert citations.

![Number of Non-Patient Sources Cited By Article - Ladies' Home Journal](image)

Figure 4.10

In Figure 4.11, the number and type of non-patient sources per article is illustrated for the two Vogue articles. The article from 1996 had a greater number of sources than
any other article from either magazine (15 sources). It also had the widest variety of sources (three types: experts, family/ friends, and others).

![Number of Non-Patient Sources Cited By Article - Vogue](chart)

**Figure 4.11**

Incorporating Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.10 into Figure 4.12, we get a chart that demonstrates the frequency of all sources, both patient and non-patient in *Ladies' Home Journal*. This provides a full analysis of the types of sources chosen for each article. From the chart we can see that all but two of the articles that use patients as sources also use expert sources in the article. Experts can often provide a counterbalance to an opinion stated by a patient; they may also be able to explain or supplement thoughts presented by patients.
By incorporating Table 4.4 into Figure 4.11, we get the same type of chart demonstrating the frequency of all sources within the *Vogue* articles (see Figure 4.13). The article printed in 1996 had far more sources (19 sources) than the article written in 1999 (three sources).
Research question number one asked, "How has the frequency of articles devoted to eating disorders changed over time?" The quantitative analysis revealed a dramatic change in the number of articles during the 1990s when compared to the number of articles in the 1980s. There were only four articles published in the 1980s, whereas there were nine articles published in the 1990s. The second research question was answered by the qualitative analysis, which revealed that, over the past 20 years, eating disorders have been defined as more of a problem with individual patients than a problem with society; this was demonstrated in the articles' focus on treating the individual patient while providing no environmental solutions. Eating disorders were also defined as a female problem simply by the exclusion of male patients in these articles. To answer research question number three, changes in the frequency and nature of coverage need to be explained. There are several events that may account for the ways in which eating disorders have been defined over time: the recognition of bulimia as a distinct syndrome by the American Psychiatric Association in 1979, the recognition of binge eating disorder by the same group in 1994, and the death of anorexic gymnast Christy Henrich in 1994, all may have had an influence on coverage.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion and Summary

This research project is focused on the coverage of eating disorders over time in two magazines oriented towards women. The data collection process involved reading hundreds of tables of contents and many articles. Articles ultimately included as data were read multiple times for content in the hopes of learning how these two magazines with predominantly female readers structure articles about eating disorders. These structures could, in turn, help us understand what role this particular media play in society. The data collection process was followed by my analysis of the data; the following discussion is interpretations I have made based on the results.

The data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, provided for some very interesting results, some of which did not support my expectations. The quantitative analysis, which tracked the frequency of articles over time, did not support the expectation that “the frequency of articles about eating disorders [would] increase in the mid-1980s in correspondence with the greater diagnoses of eating disorders (presumably precipitated in part by the recognition of bulimia nervosa as a distinct syndrome in 1979 by the American Psychiatric Association).” Although coverage remained fairly steady throughout the first half of the 1980s, the data actually revealed that the largest increase in coverage took place from 1992 through 1996: six stories in five years.
So how might this change in coverage be explained? There are several events in American society that could have precipitated this change in coverage. In 1992 and 1994, actress Tracey Gold was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine as she brought her private battle with anorexia into the public eye to raise awareness about eating disorders. There was also triumph and surrender during this time: the American Psychiatric Association published the DSM-IV which included binge eating disorder as a distinct disorder for the first time in 1994, the same year that gymnast Christy Henrich died of complications from anorexia. She, too, had fought her battle in public. In 1993, The Montreux Counselling Centre, founded by Peggy Claude-Pierre, a mother of two daughters with anorexia, began its residential in-patient program. Her clinic quickly became high-profile and was featured in newspapers and on talk shows and news programs on television. Finally, in 1991, two prominent feminist authors published books that climbed to the bestseller list: Gloria Steinem’s *Revolution From Within*, *A Book of Self-Esteem*, and Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*.

This series of events is a good example of how social change may come about in society. Although these events were not all part of one large social movement, each was generating attention and interest for the cause of eating disorders awareness, treatment, and prevention. When consciousness is raised, more people tend to get involved, and with some coordination and organized direction, a social movement can occur. In this case, these events spawned interest that resulted in an increase in articles about eating disorders in *Vogue* and *Ladies’ Home Journal*. 
The quantitative analysis also revealed an unequal distribution of articles between the two magazines. *Ladies’ Home Journal* printed four articles about eating disorders in the 1980s, while *Vogue* printed none. In the 1990s, *Ladies’ Home Journal* printed seven articles while *Vogue* only printed two. Although the American Psychiatric Association identified bulimia as a distinct syndrome in 1979, *Vogue* did not print an article on eating disorders until 1996 during the twenty-year time period studied. This disparity might support the concept that media “serve a master” and must make sure they appease the powerful, although there could be other factors at play in determining what types of articles are printed. In this case, a possible explanation for the fewer articles about eating disorders in *Vogue* is that they want to keep their fashion advertisers (the source of most of their funding) content. Because the fashion industry is often blamed for causing eating disorders, fashion advertisers may prefer that the magazine does not print articles about an illness for which many people believe they are partially responsible.

The qualitative analysis revealed that more than 50 percent of the articles being analyzed discussed bulimia. Three of the seven articles were published in the 1980s: 1981, 1983, and 1984. Although my first expectation was not supported by the data, there is a slight influence on coverage by the designation of bulimia as a distinct syndrome in 1979. The first article in the set of data is titled, “How to Control Binge Eating,” but the article is actually about bulimia. Two years after the American Psychiatric Association (APA) established bulimia as a separate disorder, this article states that, “Experts now recognize the binge-and-purge syndrome as an eating disorder that affects millions of women.” It appears that this was *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s first story about bulimia.
The qualitative analysis also revealed the startling information that no men were interviewed or referred to as patients in any of the 13 articles. Although eating disorders are predominantly a “woman’s disease” and these articles were printed in “women’s magazines,” both magazines claim to focus on issues that are of concern to women. The incidence of males with eating disorders seems like an issue that would be of concern to women: most women have males in their lives—husbands, sons, fathers, brothers—who they care deeply about. Getting reliable information about a potentially fatal illness that their loved one could develop is quite important.

Another phenomenon that I was not expecting involved the use of eating disorder patients in the articles. As mentioned in the chapter 4, only one patient was interviewed or referred to in the 1980s; the 1990s, however, had 16 patients referred to or interviewed in five different articles. How can this change in the use of patients be explained?

Many of the events mentioned earlier as precipitants to the increased number of articles in the mid-1990s can be used here. High-profile celebrities such as Tracey Gold and singer Paula Abdul went public with their personal stories and received a great response. These two magazines recognized the public’s desire for a personalized, true-life story. Also, this represents a shift in the content of articles about eating disorders: most personalized stories discuss “why” the person developed the illness and what they have done or plan to do to recover. This coincides with the increased solutions provided in each article during the 1990s: in the 1980s, only eating disorder activist groups, psychological counseling, and prescription medications were mentioned as solutions to the problem. In the 1990s, the articles included additional solutions such as hospitals and
treatment centers, support groups, nutritional counseling, and eating disorder awareness through participating in activist groups (see Table 5.1).

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hospitals/treatment centers</th>
<th>E.D. activist groups</th>
<th>Support groups</th>
<th>Nutritional counseling</th>
<th>Psychological counseling</th>
<th>Prescription medicines</th>
<th>Awareness by E.D. activist groups</th>
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Table 5.1
As discussed in the results, the articles' definitions of who is at risk for eating disorders followed no discernable pattern. This could be due to the fact that the DSM-IV (and its predecessors, the DSM-III and DSM-III-R) does not specify a gender or age group when defining the eating disorders. The authors of the articles may then rely on their sources to provide that information to them.

Another part of the qualitative analysis looked at the causes of eating disorders. When plotted over time, there are similarities and differences in the way the causes of eating disorders have been portrayed (see Table 5.2). In the early 1980s, the articles cited many of the same reasons cited in articles from throughout the 1990s: low self-esteem, trauma/abuse, control, family influences. The only notable absences in the 1980s that are present during the 1990s are genetic causes and mental illness. This is primarily due to research and discovery in the sciences of mental health and genetics that has occurred since the 1980s.

The analysis of causes also revealed the surprising fact that the fashion magazine, Vogue, was the only magazine to print an article that suggested fashion models might influence the development of eating disorders. When looking only at this individual article, it seems to weaken the argument that Vogue, as a medium, is serving its master, the fashion industry. The argument seems to regain some strength when the analysis of refuted causes revealed that, in the same article, experts were quoted as saying that Madison Avenue was not to blame and that media do not “play such a big role.” The content of the article was balanced such that media and the fashion industry were not pointed out as culprits, but they were not fully exonerated, either. However, when looking at all of the articles from 1979-1999, the argument of media serving a master
seems quite strong: only once in a twenty-year period (out of 480 issues) did an article mention the fashion industry or fashion models as a possible cause of eating disorders. Consider this in relation to the fact that out of 240 issues of Vogue, there were only two articles devoted to eating disorders, and these were published in the latter half of the 1990s.
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<th>Year</th>
<th>genetic</th>
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Table 5.2
The analysis of physiological consequences over time revealed no unexpected information. The same consequences that existed and were written about in the 1980s were found in the articles from the 1990s. This is easily explained by the fact that the actual consequences have not changed in the past 20 years.

In the final stage of the qualitative analysis, the frequency of non-patient sources was tracked by article, over time. The result of this analysis demonstrated that the use of the family and friends of a patient as a source was a phenomenon of the 1990’s: only one article during the 1980s cited a friend or family member (1980), whereas four articles cited them in the 1990s (1995, 1996, 1999). This use of family and friends as sources coincides with the increased use of patients as sources mentioned earlier. There is a clear shift in coverage in the early 1990s from articles focused on the opinions and statements of experts to articles that capture the individuals involved in surviving an eating disorder: the patient and his or her family and friends.

The results of this research project support the concept of media being an agent of social control. The media, in this case two magazines oriented towards women, are used as agents in the dispersal of information: the frequency of articles they have printed about eating disorders in the past 20 years demonstrates that just because a problem is widespread, expanding, or new, doesn’t mean it will garner the same frequency or quality of coverage as other important issues. Social control is also evident in the way in which the problem of eating disorders is explained. In this analysis, every article focused on the individual patient in terms of explaining the illness and how it should be treated: psychological counseling, support groups, prescription medication, etc. Not one of the
articles suggested environmental changes that could be made in order to lessen the threat of eating disorders; there were no references to using more realistic fashion models, increasing media coverage of eating disorders, or reducing the number of weight-loss articles in magazines. As mentioned in chapter two, Nemeroff, Stein, Diehl, and Smilack found that the women’s magazines used in their study had 13 times as many weight-loss articles as men’s magazines (Levine & Smolak, 1996). Also, none of the articles from Vogue or Ladies’ Home Journal recommended incorporating any public seminars or school programs to raise eating disorders awareness and prevention strategies.

The above tactics keep the focus or “blame” on the patients and attempt to relieve the environment of liability when it comes to causes and solutions. By keeping the articles focused on the individual and how she may seek individual treatment for her illness given the reasons she developed it, attention is drawn away from the fact that perhaps society, media, or the fashion industry plays a role in the development and perpetuation of eating disorders. This is all despite the fact that these magazines have a large presence in our society: as mentioned in chapter three, the combined circulation of Vogue and Ladies’ Home Journal is over 6.1 million. In chapter two, a study by Smolak revealed that most fashion models are thinner than 98 percent of American women (www.edap.org); imagine the number of models in each magazine multiplied by 6.1 million readers.

There exists in our society an unrealistic body image that is extremely pervasive and may be promoting eating disorders. Magazines oriented towards women are systematically minimizing the existence of eating disorders by a sheer lack of coverage; they are also keeping the focus of eating disorders articles at an individual level that
shifts nearly all responsibility away from the environment and onto the patient. As mentioned in chapter two, social control can be defined as “attempts, whether intentional or not, by the state or social institutions to regulate or encourage conformity to a set of norms through socialization or the threat of coercion, or both” (Viswanath & Demers, 1999, p. 10). The thin ideal has been firmly established as an expectation for women in our society; the norm is for women to aspire to it. By not covering eating disorders, media are reducing the visibility of the negative consequences of such an aspiration and, therefore, encouraging conformity to this norm. Because of their financial dependency on advertisers, women’s magazines, especially those oriented towards women, must conform to a different norm: if you print stories on eating disorders, do it infrequently and design them such that the patient is held responsible for developing the illness rather than the social environment, which might implicate the fashion industry. The penalty for deviating from this norm could be a serious loss of advertising dollars.
A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

With the ubiquity of media such as television, newspapers, and the Internet, there is no reason why American citizens cannot be well informed and well versed in critical health issues, including eating disorders. Health issues should be made a priority by media so members of society can make informed choices about their lifestyles and health habits.

Most people who are unhappy with the unrealistically thin body ideal know of others who share their feelings. If these members of society could stand together for support and say, "We refuse to subscribe to this unhealthy ideal; we will be healthy and accept ourselves," then women and men would begin to feel less pressure to conform to such an unhealthy image.

Social control is not absolute; social change can happen.
LIST OF REFERENCES


