Chapter 4

"Eating is a Cultural Affair" — What Causes Eating Disorders?

pp.112-116
Chapter 4: “Eating is a Cultural Affair” — Body Image and Health

- The Obesity Epidemic
- Disordered Body Image and Eating Behaviors
- Eating Disorders
  - Anorexia nervosa
  - Bulimia nervosa
  - Binge eating
  - Orthorexia nervosa
  - Selective Eating Disorder (SED)
  - Pica
  - Others

- What Causes Eating Disorders?
- Applications
trying to determine the cause of eating disorders is a great example of the holistic nature of anthropology . . .

(remember that from Week 1?)
eating disorders involve . . .

socio-cultural

biophysical

psychological

components . . .
eating disorders involve . . .

and one can occasionally throw in a little linguistics and archaeology to boot
“Eating Disorders are about feelings, not food.”

The Eating Disorder Foundation

www.eatingdisorderfoundation.org/EatingDisorders.htm
“Eating Disorders are about feelings, not food.”
Eating Disorders Awareness Sticker

http://bumperstickers.cafepress.com/item/eating-disorders-awareness-sticker-oval/7048402
Theories of Eating Disorders involve . . .

- biological explanations
- psychological explanations
- sociocultural explanations
- feminist orientations explanations

(Banks 1992; Thompson et al. 1999b)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 113
Theories of Eating Disorders . . .

• biological
• psychological
• sociocultural
• feminist orientations

(Banks 1992; Thompson et al. 1999b)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 113_
Biological explanations usually focus on abnormal hormonal balance and other biochemical changes observed in people with anorexia.

- of special interest are changes in a tiny portion of the brain called the hypothalamus that regulates appetite and weight control.
Womb hormones 'lead to anorexia'

Babies who go on to develop anorexia may be programmed in the womb by their mother's hormones, evidence suggests.

Women are usually much more likely than men to have the eating disorder, but a University of Sussex study found men with a female twin were more at risk.

This suggests the hormones released to aid female development may be key.

Commenting on the Archives of General Psychiatry study, a UK expert said other factors in childhood and adolescence remained important.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7124697.stm
Biological explanations usually focus on abnormal hormonal balance and other biochemical changes observed in people with anorexia.

- Brain scans show that people with anorexia have high levels of certain proteins secreted during stress that may indirectly block appetite.
Anorexia visible with brain scans

Sophisticated scans have revealed the eating disorder anorexia is linked to specific patterns of brain activity.

Even young women recovering from anorexia who have maintained a healthy weight for over a year had vastly different brain activity patterns.

The findings in the American Journal of Psychiatry point to a brain region linked to anxiety and perfectionism.

The University of Pittsburgh authors said the understanding might help with the development of new treatments.

The work could also explain why people with anorexia nervosa are able to deny themselves food.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7120564.stm
Scientists have produced evidence that the eating disorder anorexia nervosa is linked to disrupted brain chemistry.

They have shown a form of the disorder is associated with an alteration of the activity of serotonin - a chemical linked to mood and anxiety.

The University of Pittsburgh team hope their work could lead to the development of new drugs and psychological treatments.

The study is published in Archives of General Psychiatry.
Birth problems link to anorexia

The likelihood of developing an eating disorder in adulthood may be increased by having had a complicated birth, an Italian study suggests.

Maternal anaemia and placental problems were among the conditions which increased a child’s risk of developing anorexia nervosa, researchers found.

Other complications were linked to the development of bulimia, the Archives of General Psychiatry paper suggested.

UK experts said a maternal eating disorders could also be a factor.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/4577338.stm
Biological explanations usually focus on abnormal hormonal balance and other biochemical changes observed in people with anorexia.

- other substances that stimulate appetite and reproductive hormones are abnormally low in anorexics.

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 113*
Biological explanations usually focus on abnormal hormonal balance and other biochemical changes observed in people with anorexia.

- Most experts believe excessive weight loss and restrictive dieting cause these changes.
Biological explanations usually focus on abnormal hormonal balance and other biochemical changes observed in people with anorexia.

- however, menstrual changes have occurred before weight loss began in some girls, suggesting that brain chemical abnormalities may contribute to the development of anorexia in some teens.

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 113*
Theories of Eating Disorders . . .

- biological
- psychological
- sociocultural
- feminist orientations

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 113
among the most common theories is the view that anorexia is a symptom of other psychiatric problems, especially anxiety disorders, and obsessive-compulsiveness.
emotional problems are very common among people with anorexia and bulimia . . .

however, it is unclear if these cause eating disorders or result from them

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114*
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result from them ???

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
phobias and obsessive-compulsiveness usually develop before the eating disorders begin . . . whereas anxiety attacks tend to occur afterward

(MDConsult 2002)

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*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 114
approximately one-third of people with bulimia and two-thirds of those with anorexia suffer from obsessive-compulsiveness . . .

persistent, recurring thoughts and repetitive routines associated with dieting and weight gain

(MDConsult 2002)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114*
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(MDConsult 2002)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
they may . . .

• exercise excessively
• weigh every bite of food
• cut food into small pieces
• chew each morsel a specified number of times

(MDConsult 2002)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
Other psychological characteristics associated with eating disorders are . . .

• narcissism
  • sensitivity to criticism and the need for a great deal of admiration from others

• borderline personality disorders
  • difficulty controlling anger
  • fears
  • impulses

(MDConsult 2002)
*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 114
depression is also common among people with eating disorders . . . but it is more likely to be the result rather than the cause of the problem.
depression is also common among people with eating disorders . . .

treating the depression rarely cures bulimia or anorexia . . .

but weight gain often relieves depression

(MDConsult 2002)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
re parent-child relations . . .

bulimia and anorexia nervosa appear to be more common among children raised in a critical family environment . . .

especially when parents encourage them to diet, tease them about their weight, or try to dominate them in other ways

(Lunner et al. 2000)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114_
Chapter 4: “Eating is a Cultural Affair” — Body Image and Health

re parent-child relations . . .

Teens who suffer from bulimia are more likely than teens without the disorder to report that their mothers invade their personal privacy and relate to them in a jealous or competitive manner.

(Rorty et al. 2000)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
Chapter 4: “Eating is a Cultural Affair” — Body Image and Health

...re parent-child relations...

bulimia is also more common among girls whose fathers are detached...

perhaps making them feel worthless

(Rorty et al. 2000)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
bulimia is also more common among girls whose fathers treat them in a sexual or seductive manner.

(Rorty et al. 2000)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 114
many studies show increased eating disorders among teens whose parents show excessive concerns about their weight, eating, and appearance.

(Rorty et al. 2000)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
Dad blamed for eating problems

By Jaclyn Parry
Producer/Director of Born Survivors: My 22 Stone Dad and Skinny Me

Emma has an unusual person to blame for her problem with food - her father.

In just 12 months the 15-year-old lost 14lbs (6.35kg), dropping from a size 12 to size 4.

At over 22 stone (160kg), her father Grant is clinically obese and Emma has admitted that it was his weight problem that triggered her under-eating.

Her parents were powerless to help her until six months ago, when

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7824298.stm
children who are sexually abused are also much more likely than those who are not to develop disordered eating patterns.

(Neumark-Sztainer et al. 2000)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114
In contrast, young people raised in cohesive families with good parent-child communication are less likely to develop these problems.

(Thompson et al. 2000)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 114
Theories of Eating Disorders . . .

• biological
• psychological
• sociocultural
• feminist orientations

(Banks 1992; Thompson et al. 1999b)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 113
Sociocultural theories propose that the value Western societies place on thinness and self-control leads to eating disorders.

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 114*
the three major contemporary debates

- **Biological Determinism vs. Cultural Constructionism**
  ("nature vs. nurture")
  ("learned vs. inherited")

- **Ideationism vs. Cultural Materialism**

- **Individual Agency vs. Structuralism**
  ("free will" vs. "power structures")
Is our environment to blame for the obesity epidemic?

By Shari Roan Los Angeles Times

Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Here's an interesting thought: What if you're not to blame for your weight problem?

What if the fault could be laid squarely at the feet of food manufacturers and marketers, grocery store managers, restaurant operators, food vendors — the people who make food so visible, available and tasty?

Several recent studies, papers and a popular weight-loss book argue that eating is an automatic behavior triggered by environmental cues that most people are unaware of — or simply can't ignore. Think of the buttery smell of movie theater popcorn, the sight of glazed doughnuts glistening in the office conference room or the habit of picking up a whipped-cream-laden latte on the way to work.

To make Americans eat less and eat more healthily, they contend, the environment itself needs to be changed — with laws regulating portion size, labeling or the places where food can be sold or eaten. That would be much easier, the researchers add, than overcoming human nature. The theory that our society — not us — is to blame for our overall expanding waist size is garnering support from health and nutrition experts. To recap the statistics: In the past 25 years, the number of obese Americans has increased from 14.5 percent to 32.2 percent. Two out of three adults are overweight, as are 19 percent of children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
numerous studies have shown that exposure to images of ultrathin models can lead to body dissatisfaction and unhealthy eating behaviors . . .

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 115
Italy bans 'No Anorexia' poster

Italy's advertising watchdog has banned an ad campaign for a fashion label showing a naked anorexic woman, saying it breached its code of conduct.

The image "commercially exploited" the illness, the advertising body said.

The image, bearing the words "No Anorexia", was first displayed during Milan Fashion Week in September.

It was shot by controversial Italian photographer Oliviero Toscani, who called the ban "censorship" and said he was considering legal action.
Madrid bans waifs from catwalks

Madrid fashion week, one of Spain's most prestigious shows, is banning underweight models on the basis of their body mass index (BMI).

UN health experts recommend a BMI of between 18.5 and about 25, and some models may fall well below the minimum.

The Spanish Association of Fashion Designers has decided to ban models who have a BMI of less than 18.

Unhealthily skinny models at last year's fashion shows led to protests from doctors and women's rights groups.

The association agreed to use the BMI - a calculation based on height and weight - in response to local government pressure.

It suggests that 30% of would-be participants fail this test and this year's fashion week, which begins on 18 September, will offer medical treatment to excessively thin models.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5341202.stm
Milan models to have catwalk code

By Mark Duff
BBC News, Milan

Italy’s fashion capital, Milan, has announced a new catwalk code of conduct to protect young models vulnerable to anorexia and exploitation.

The move follows the ban slapped on so-called skinny models by the Spanish government earlier this month.

The new code was launched as the city marked the start of Milan fashion week and will take effect in February.

This fashion week opened with a parade of more shapely women, specially dressed by designer Elena Miro.

Anorexia 'phenomenon'

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5374862.stm
France targets anorexia in media

The French National Assembly has passed a groundbreaking bill which seeks to criminalise the promotion in the media of extreme thinness.

The bill targets pro-anorexia websites and publications that encourage girls and young women to starve themselves.

It will affect websites, fashion houses, magazines and advertisers.

If approved by France's upper house, those found to have encouraged severe weight loss could be fined up to 45,000 euros and face three years in prison.
France Seeks To Curb Extreme Dieting

European countries have faced pressure to better protect and regulate the health of fashion models.

By Molly Moore, Corrine Gavard, The Washington Post  Published on 4/16/2008

Paris — France, the country that defined haute couture, on Tuesday launched Europe's most aggressive assault yet on the promotion of ultra-thinness by the fashion industry, advertisers and Web sites.

The French National Assembly approved unprecedented legislation that would make the promotion of extreme dieting a crime punishable by up to two years in prison and fines of up to $47,000.

“It's time for public action against this scourge,” said Valerie Boyer, the bill's author and a member of France's ruling party, who said that as many as 40,000 French people, mostly young girls and women, suffer from anorexia.
sociologists and anthropologists point out that the cult of thinness and disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia are found predominantly in Western societies.
but that is changing with the globalization (i.e. Westernization) of other cultures . . .
Health
'TV brings eating disorders to Fiji'

The traditional Fijian form is a "robust, well-muscled body"
Fiji, a nation that has traditionally cherished the fuller figure, has been struck by an outbreak of eating disorders since the arrival of television in 1995, a study has shown.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/347637.stm
Eating disorders rise in Zulu women

Girls want to look thinner and more fashionable

The eating disorders, anorexia and bulimia are often considered white, western illnesses.

But concerns are mounting in South Africa as the number of eating disorder cases reported amongst black women is on the rise.
Anorexia takes hold in India

Jill McGivering
BBC Asia analyst

Most people in India struggle to get enough to eat - one estimate is that 60% of India's women are clinically malnourished.

But psychiatrists in urban areas are reporting cases of anorexia nervosa, the so-called slimming disease that can cause sufferers to starve themselves to death.

In a country where many go hungry, anorexia is unknown to most

Most people in India have still not heard of the condition but Delhi psychiatrist Sanjay Chugh says he has seen an explosion in anorexia cases over the past few years.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2978216.stm
A slimmer body has been the norm in the United States and Canada for almost a century, and this idealization of thinness may serve as a counterbalance against the tendency to gain weight in societies with abundant, stable food supplies where people can gain weight easily and obesity is common.

*Cf.*, Ch. 4 of *The Cultural Feast*

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 114
according to sociocultural theorists, the media plays a powerful role in transmitting the cult of thinness . . .
You are in: Health
Friday, 31 May, 2002, 23:17 GMT 00:17 UK

Television link to eating disorders

The problem has also been identified in the West

Doctors say they have found further evidence to suggest television programmes encourage eating disorders among teenage girls.

It follows a major study examining the impact of the introduction of television in two towns in the Pacific islands of Fiji.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2018900.stm
Seeking 'thinspiration'

By Jacqueline Head
BBC News

Pro-anorexia websites offering tips on extreme dieting are nothing new, but their growth on social networking sites is a disturbing new twist and brings them within reach of a wider audience.

As a conversation opener, it's as blatant as it is troubling.
BBC probe into anorexia websites

An investigation by a BBC Wales programme has revealed sinister online groups are threatening the lives of youngsters with eating disorders.

BBC Wales Week In Week Out programme reveal that anorexia sufferers are being sent messages and images urging them to continue starving.

Youngsters are encouraged to celebrate anorexia as a lifestyle, not a disease.

There are thought to be hundreds of "pro-ana" websites glamorise thinness and give tips on deceiving doctors.

The sites are being blamed for undermining the recovery attempts of extremely vulnerable sufferers.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/4245109.stm
television, radio, magazine, and other print messages use anorexic models whose pictures have been airbrushed and computer-altered to create unachievable standards of beauty.
“Along with disparaging fatness, Americans are scared of fatness because it can sneak up on anyone.”

“It is nearly impossible to read a newspaper or watch a TV program without hearing something new about the growing rates of obesity in the United States.”
you’ve seen that with

The Two Fat Ladies
“[The] fantasy world where no woman carries any extra weight impacts how real women perceive their bodies. They see so many unrealistically slender bodies that they begin to assume that their bodies should be similarly thin. This feeling is aggravated because American culture is inundated with ways to slenderize, many focused on women.”

“Every diet book possible fills bookstores. Health clubs and gymnasiums inundate cities and towns from coast to coast. TV shows and tabloids are replete with ways to diet.”

“Losing weight obsesses our culture . . . so [women] feel that they must strive for thinness, whatever the cost.”

- anorexia and bulimia are rampant because women feel such a desire to lose weight
- even if a woman is not anorexic, she is still apt to wish to lose five or ten pounds

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Anorexia visible with brain scans

Sophisticated scans have revealed the eating disorder anorexia is linked to specific patterns of brain activity.

Even young women recovering from anorexia who have maintained a healthy weight for over a year had vastly different brain activity patterns.

The findings in the American Journal of Psychiatry point to a brain region linked to anxiety and perfectionism.

The University of Pittsburgh authors said the understanding might help with the development of new treatments.

The work could also explain why people with anorexia...
“In a society where women’s eating is constantly under scrutiny, one of the tragic end results is anorexia and bulimia.”

“...the Ladies were resolutely anti-diet. ...”

“In their world, one did not have to worry about following the latest diet.”

Writing about the death of Robert Atkins, "the diet guru" Clarissa wrote . . .

“The legacy of today’s ultra-thin ‘heron chic’ models — and of celebrity diet gurus — is anorexia . . .”

Sherrie A. Inness, Secret Ingredients, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 177
some social scientists blame a capitalistic society for the increase in anorexia and bulimia . . .

- weight-control products
- diet industry ($33 billion)
- cosmetic industry ($20 billion)
- cosmetic surgery industry ($300 billion)
- fitness industry

(Colditz 1992)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 115
HEALTH CARE REFORM

"STAKEHOLDERS" TABLE

WHAT ABOUT US?

http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2201659/posts
“These industries have developed a ‘sure-fire’ formula for success: Standardize a thin idea of beauty that the majority of women can never attain, but make it look so appealing that they actually seek it out. The pursuit of thinness and the subsequent failure of most women in this pursuit construct an indefinite marketing of consumers.”

(Gerov and Williams 1999:121)
“profit motives” are archetypal examples of . . .

- **Biological Determinism vs. Cultural Constructionism**
  (“nature vs. nurture”)
  (“learned vs. inherited”)

- **Ideationism vs. Cultural Materialism**

- **Individual Agency vs. Structuralism**
  (“free will” vs. “power structures”)
Theories of Eating Disorders . . .

- biological
- psychological
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- feminist orientations

(Banks 1992; Thompson et al. 1999b)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 113*
feminist scholars have also entered the debate, proposing that eating disorders are a natural response to pathological societal pressures to be thin rather than a manifestation of psychiatric illness.

(Bordo 1993; Thompson et al. 1999)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.,* p. 115
although the feminist scholars recognize that many men are concerned about their weight, they argue that body imagery has special meaning for women

(Bordo 1993; Thompson et al. 1999)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., pp. 115-166_
• women grow up knowing that attractiveness is a key to attracting men

• they expect others to evaluate themselves in terms of their appearance and begin to watch their own bodies as outside observers

• women also learn that dieting and appetite control are necessary to achieve society’s standards of beauty

(McKinley 1999)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116
feminists note that today’s women are conflicted because they are socialized to seek equal opportunity in education and employment but, at the same time, must maintain the sexual identity of a pleasing wife and mother . . .

(Bordo 1993; Thompson et al. 1999)

*The Cultural Feast*, 2nd ed., pp. 115-166
the result is . . .

- confusion
- body dissatisfaction
- low self esteem
- ambivalence about eating

(McKinley 1999)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 116
by restricting their rate, women gain a sense of control that is otherwise thwarted in a male-dominated society

(Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Thompson et al. 1999)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 116
“anorexia nervosa is considered a rebellion against misogynistic societal norms that demean women by objectifying their bodies, and the anorexic’s decision to lose weight is seen as a symbolic protest against . . . “

• male domination
• a rigid sexual division of labor
• “the traditional female role”
  [presumably the white middle-class female role]

(Banks 1992)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.,_ p. 116
other feminists argue that eating disorders represent anxieties about success and femininity

starvation stops menstruation and delays their bodies’ maturation, “allowing them to return to the less threatening prepubescent body and avoiding becoming a sexually mature, autonomous person in a world they see as dangerous for women”

(Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Thompson et al. 1999)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 116
of course, each of these theories has its shortcomings . . .

no single theory, for instance, explains why only a small proportion of women develop eating disorders whereas others gain excess weight or stay within healthy limits

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed.*, p. 116
most likely, a combination of factors, such as young people’s susceptibility to social pressure or their feelings of worthlessness or shame, mediate the effects of media exposure to cultural ideals of thinness

(Banks 1992; Murray, Waller, and Legg 2000; Thompson et al. 1999)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116_
the study of twins who are raised together and twins who are raised separately . . . suggests that a combination of biological, psychological and sociocultural factors work together to create eating disorders

(Bulik et al. 2000)

The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116
twins studies suggest that a combination of genetic factors and environmental factors contributes to the development of eating disorders . . .

• parental influence
• peers
• etc.

(Bulik et al. 2000)

*The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116*
As a result . . .
researchers are testing
comprehensive models that examine
the combined effects of people’s . . .

• global psychological makeup . . .
• social pressure . . .
• body image
• levels of dissatisfaction on people’s
  actual weight and disordered eating
  practices

(Thompson et al. 1999)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116_
As a result . . . researchers are testing comprehensive models that examine the combined effects of people’s . . .

- global psychological makeup . . .
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  - body image
  - levels of dissatisfaction on people’s actual weight and disordered eating practices

(Thompson et al. 1999)

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116_
The bottom Line: All of these factors are involved . . . and more . . .

- global psychological makeup
  - self-esteem
  - emotional problems
  - susceptibility to external feedback

- social pressure
  - media exposure
  - teasing by relatives, peers and friends

- body image

- levels of dissatisfaction on people’s actual weight and disordered eating practices

_The Cultural Feast, 2nd ed., p. 116_