Eating disorders: have social sciences something to tell us?

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Disclosure

• Consultant in methodology and statistics for most pharmaceutic firms
• Not a specialist in eating disorders
• Sometimes skeptical about researches in the area
• Interested in social and human sciences
Social sciences and eating disorders

• An important and heterogeneous literature
• Women’s studies
• Interactionist sociology

“Humans are not simply reacting to social stimuli, they are social actors and adjust their behavior on the actions of other social actors.”
Women’s studies

• Aristotle: women are mutilated males, emotional and passive prisoners of their body functions
• Western societies construct a duality between mind and body, and women are associated with the body and men with the mind
• Femaleness is defined as the opposite to maleness: the more different from men, the more female
• Capitalist interest and patriarchal pressure on women to be thin
• Focus on women's appearance serves to limit the public space they are allowed to occupy

Interactionist sociology

*Ethnographic approach*

1. Diet (physicians, mother, boyfriend, peers are vectors of dietary and bodily norms)
2. Scheme of life (school performance, etc.)
3. Alerters: “something is wrong!” (discretion becomes deception)
4. Hospitalization (internalization of the clinicians views as the only possibility for curing)

L'anorexie, un fait social. Devenir anorexique. Une approche sociologique. Muriel Darmon, La Découverte, 2003,
Is it useful for clinicians?

- About the reliability of such results
- About clinical usefulness in general and in particular
- Clinical interviews of adolescents with subsyndromal anorexia nervosa
- Social activism
Social activism

• The epidemiological notion of “overweight”: a fallacy?
