Laura Cariola (Ed.), **Eating Disorders in Public Discourse: Exploring Media Representations and Lived Experiences,** 2023, Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 362 pp., $98.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
Dalton Bouzek
University of Oregon

Eating disorders are far from well understood by the general public, and one's media diet may play a crucial role in their interpretations and solutions. ***Eating Disorders in Public Discourse: Exploring Media Representations and Lived Experiences***, edited by Laura Cariola, explores this problem at the confluence of language, media, and culture from a variety of global and positional perspectives to shed light on past and present problematic eating disorder (ED) framing, representation, and the resulting discourse. Media practitioners and multidisciplinary scholars stand to benefit from these illuminations the most, while those living with EDs may find this work as a launching point for empowerment.

As EDs are widely varied and fluctuate from one person to the next, the contributors in this book necessarily adopted a mixed-methods approach to primarily examine the role of language and its relation to EDs. Thus, this interdisciplinary team of researchers emphasizes that their methods and subsequent findings contribute equally to the body of knowledge of EDs, without privileging one methodology over another. The varied research methods used in this piece reflect the idea that since EDs are extremely varied and multifaceted, they require a variety of avenues to uncover persisting and novel barriers to ED solutions and recovery. Accordingly, the range of positivist to constructivist interpretations of ED discourse is one of this piece's biggest strengths, as it recognizes the need to tackle the multifaceted issue with a Swiss Army Knife–like array of perspectives and tools.

The book opens with a thorough yet succinct description of various EDs and their prominence in both men and women, before juxtaposing these disorders with their media representations through the lens of media effects theories, such as cultivation, as well as sociocultural conditions that underly EDs. Language is again highlighted as a central theme after these illuminations, leading to the stated goal of this work: "The way language is used in print and social media has been recognized as a powerful vehicle in shaping our attitudes and beliefs about mental health problems, and through it, keeping stereotypes, prejudices and stigma alive" (p. 15).

The subsequent chapters are broken down into two parts, the first being a series of case studies examining ED media representation and discourse in traditional Western media outlets, and the second being an exploration of online communities and highlighting the voices of those living with EDs regarding their experiences. Thus, Part I serves as a preface to Part II in that it examines historical ED discourse in
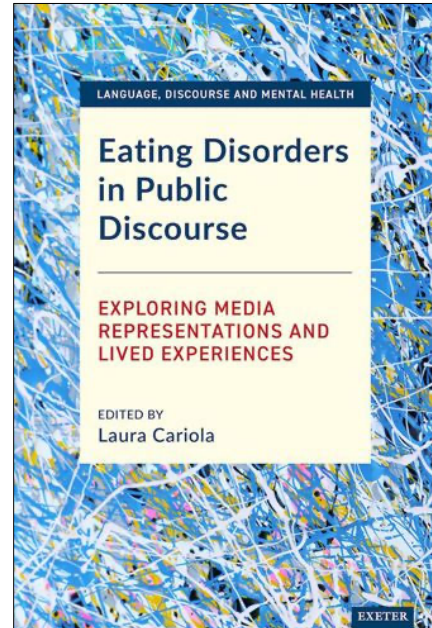
less popular mediums, such as newspapers, as a way to perhaps delineate where representations and misrepresentations of EDs in the media come from, and lay the groundwork to better understand how media creators with lived ED experiences frame their own stories.

Part I describes the frames, narratives, and language traditional media use to explain and explore EDs from a third-person perspective. These first seven chapters use mixed-methods approaches, such as metaphorical analysis of EDs in Spanish and English language newspapers (found in chapter 1), and frame analysis of the term "anorexia" in popular press in the United Kingdom (found in chapter 4). The chapters in this section do not follow one another chronologically, nor do they explicitly weave together to construct an overarching metanarrative of the studies. That said, the chapters in Part I succeed in shedding light on the problematic and proliferated use of words and metaphors that seemingly help maintain stigmas and spread erroneous information to the general public, though they do not particularly incorporate the voices of those living with EDs as the chapters in Part II do. Thus, Part I essentially lays out a body of "evidence" (the editors use this term specifically in their opening and denote that they use the term broadly to describe their findings in hopes of creating real policy change) that popular media representations of EDs fundamentally are problematic in their word choice and framing, as well as potentially playing a key role in perpetuating EDs and their related constructed identities. This evidence is relatively comprehensive in scope, ranging from ill-advised framing of EDs as "animalistic," as well as exploring seldomly talked about male experiences with EDs.

Part II nicely builds off of Part I's identification of problematic framing, word choice, and narratives that traditional media constructs around EDs, and focuses on showcasing the effects of these harmful depictions and descriptions via primarily first-hand accounts. Grounded theory is especially prevalent in this section, with a noticeable influence of Hall's (1973) ideas of encoding-decoding and Gramsci's (1971) conception of the "sub-altern," underscoring how communities of those living with EDs and adjacent to them construct their identities, frame their struggles, and respond to the frames and narratives delineated in Part I. This section excels at highlighting voices from "all sides" of ED discourse, treating both pro- and anti-ED positions as equally important byproducts of the different realities that media representations of these disorders cultivate. Similarly, the intersectional and interdisciplinary perspectives and methods in this section come to the fore as frameworks from psychology and traditional media studies theories blend nicely to attempt to explain the complex outcomes and cycles perpetuated within online ED communities. For example, chapter 12 leans heavily into theories regarding family dynamics and the subsequent discourse from parents regarding their child's EDs to paint a powerful picture of the extent to which EDs impact more than just those who live with them.

The book wraps up with a synthesis of discussions from the contributors and emphasizes the elasticity of conceptions of EDs from the lenses of the medical community, the media, and personal experience. Perhaps one of the key takeaways from the analysis of ED discourse in both sections is that these same methods and understandings can be expanded into investigations of other problematic discourses in a variety of fields. For example, chapter 11's exploration of pro-ED discourse among those living with EDs can serve as a framework to examine other online communities that promote unhealthy behaviors, either physical or mental. Solutions to these issues surrounding ED framing and discourse are not easily achieved, but the work does an admirable job of highlighting key areas of concern, offers some

solutions, both institutional and psychological, and looks toward a future where EDs are talked about more openly without judgment and presented in realistic manners and a society-wide attitudinal shift toward a more holistic understanding of EDs exists. With the overall audience in mind, one noted deficiency was truly capturing ED representation and discourse from those living with EDs themselves. While a few studies delved into first-hand accounts of ED experiences, the voices of these individuals struggled to shine through the more scientific and clinical analyses presented by the authors. With that said, this book still effectively highlights issues and barriers that these individuals face on a broader scale to fully have agency over their representation and voice. Thus, as the authors suggest, and I concur, *Eating Disorders in Public Discourse* is a great launching point toward a future of greater autonomy, understanding, and potential solutions to eradicating the stigma behind EDs.

References

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York, NY: International.

Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse* [Discussion paper]. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.