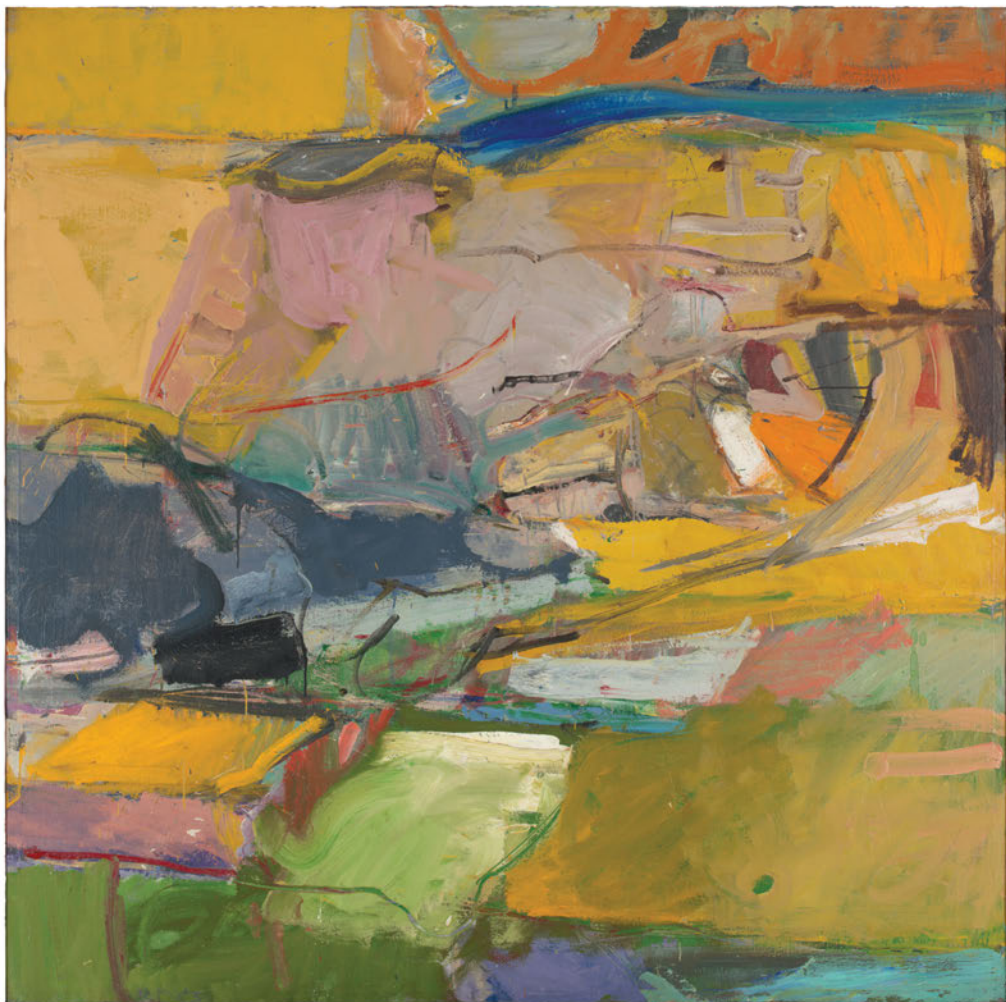


Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH



TOM WOOLDRIDGE



Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males

Because anorexia nervosa has historically been viewed as a disorder that impacts women and girls, there has been little focus on the conceptualization and treatment of males suffering from this complex disorder. *Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males* provides a structure for understanding the male side of the equation combined with practical resources to guide clinical intervention. Presented using an integrative framework that draws on recent research and organizes information from multiple domains into a unified understanding of the interconnected issues at hand, this informative new text provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and treating a widely unrecognized population.

Tom Wooldridge, PsyD is an assistant professor at Golden Gate University, where he chairs the Psychology Department. He is also an Executive Director at the National Association for Males with Eating Disorders (NAMED), a member of the editorial board of *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, and publishes widely on eating disorders, particularly as they manifest in males, as well as other topics including pro-anorexia forums and the uses of technology in psychoanalytic treatment. He is a candidate at the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California and in private practice in Berkeley, California.

Praise for *Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males*

Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males provides a fresh, broad, and clinically sophisticated approach to anorexia nervosa in general, and to males with anorexia nervosa in particular. This outstanding new book engages the reader from the first page to the last. Several novel concepts that add perspective to the field are presented for the first time. After a review of all the current approaches to the treatment of anorexia nervosa (and the references are superb), the author critically examines these approaches and proposes an approach to engagement and alliance with patients. He clarifies with patient examples the ambivalence of patients suffering from anorexia nervosa, allowing the reader to step in the shoes of the patient cognitively, culturally, and physically. His discussion of negative vs. positive constraints is nowhere else treated with this clarity and clinical utility. The chapter on Cyberspace with its comparison of the risks vs. benefits of pro-ana sites for males is provocative and speaks with compassion to the alienation of males with anorexia nervosa. No other source addresses so well the spiritual framework and milieu of anorexia in males. Don't expect a simplistic "how-to" guide, but do expect a comprehensive, fresh, and challenging new view of anorexia nervosa in males that brings an integrative approach to the understanding and treatment of anorexia nervosa in males. A potential classic that takes away your breath with its freshness and applicability, touching on topics not found elsewhere. Strongly recommended for all clinicians and families.

—Arnold Andersen, MD, professor emeritus of psychiatry, University of Iowa, former director and founder of Eating and Weight Disorders Program, University of Iowa, Johns Hopkins Hospital, author, *Making Weight: Men's Conflicts with Food, Weight, Shape, & Appearance* and *Eating Disorders: A Guide to Medical Care and Complications*

This groundbreaking book illuminates the less explored, but nonetheless problematic issue of male anorexia. Wooldridge identifies existing treatments to anorexia and finds them wanting with respect to the treatment of males and calls for a new, integrative approach that specifically speaks to boys and men. Infused with tasty morsels of research and theory, he compellingly posits an approach using a multi-faceted framework with accessible clinical vignettes that help us think in adaptive ways – not only to the complexity of this disorder, but to how we can help our patients recognize their hunger and relational yearnings to eat and be fed, as they learn – with our help – that they can speak about the often unspeakable.

—Jean Petrucelli, PhD, director and co-founder of the Eating Disorders, Compulsions and Addictions Service, William Alanson White Institute, editor of *Body-States: Interpersonal & Relational Perspectives on the Treatment of Eating Disorders* and co-editor of *Hungers and Compulsions: The Psychodynamic Treatment of Eating Disorders and Addictions*

Tom Wooldridge's *Understanding Anorexia in Males* is a thoroughly researched, sensitively focused, and lively systematic review of all treatment modalities essential for guiding therapy in the 21st century.

Readers will particularly resonate with and learn from the clinical examples and actual dialogues between patient and therapist that Dr. Wooldridge boldly includes in each chapter. This gem is an essential reference for all who aim to understand and to assist men in their recovery from a severe eating disorder. Highly recommended to students, family members, and patients who want to learn more about the subject, too.

—Kathryn J. Zerbe, MD, FAED, author, *The Body Betrayed: Women, Eating Disorders and Treatment and Integrated Treatment of Eating Disorders: Beyond the Body Betrayed*, clinical professor, Oregon Health and Science University, training and supervising analyst, Oregon Psychoanalytic Institute

Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males: An Integrative Approach fills an empty hole in the eating disorder literature, shedding light on a subject that we have ignored for far too long. With a historical and cultural perspective Tom Wooldridge contextualizes male anorexia, challenging the myth that men are immune to eating disorders, and describes how their unique experiences of ambivalence, shame, and stigma keep them in the closet. The multidimensional integrative treatment approach provides a framework to identify and address systemic, biological, cultural, spiritual, and psychodynamic factors and their interactions in the illness process as well as in treatment. Case material enlivens this well-written and clinically useful resource for anyone who wants to understand male anorexia – and that should be every practicing clinician, specialist or generalist. It's about time to make men with eating disorders more visible to both the public and professional communities so they can be identified and treated. Wooldridge does just that in this excellent and timely book.

—Margo Maine, PhD, FAED, CEDS, a founder and adviser of the National Eating Disorders Association and founding fellow of the Academy for Eating Disorders, Maine, author of *Treatment of Eating Disorders: Bridging the Research–Practice Gap; Effective Clinical Practice in the Treatment of Eating Disorders; The Body Myth; Father Hunger; and Body Wars*, recipient of the 2015 NEDA Lifetime Achievement Award, member of the Renfrew Clinical Advisory Board and the Renfrew Foundation Conference Committee

Tom Wooldridge has written a masterful review of males with eating disorders that will be a resource for those working with this population for many years to come. Wooldridge's book provides an "integrative model" for understanding this under-identified and appreciated illness in boys and men. His expertise comes through without question, addressing treatment issues compassionately and comprehensively. A must-read for clinicians working in the field.

—Theodore Weltzin, MD, FAED, CEDS, regional medical director, eating disorders, Rogers Memorial Hospital

For many years, anorexia nervosa has been conceptualized as a "female" illness, a misnomer which has stymied illness recognition and treatment, in addition to stigmatized males with this illness. With research slowly recognizing the increasing prevalence of anorexia nervosa in males, several key questions arise. Do males with anorexia nervosa differ from females with this illness? How do we recognize anorexia nervosa in males? How do we treat this syndrome in males? Dr. Wooldridge's illuminative compendium *Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males* provides a comprehensive guide to working with anorexia nervosa in males. Dr. Wooldridge's renowned expertise in this area offers a unique window into understanding the cultural, biological, systemic, and spiritual underpinnings of this syndrome in males. Further, the core focus on clinical applications throughout bring the complex theories to life, and make them immediately relatable to readers. I will definitely be recommending this book to colleagues and patients, and I think this will serve as a milestone publication in our field.

—Stuart B. Murray, PhD, assistant professor,
University of California, San Francisco, co-executive director,
National Association for Males with Eating Disorders

Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males: An Integrative Approach is a first of its kind, and a much needed treatment manual that integrates various psychotherapeutic approaches to address this growing life-threatening disorder. To date, there exist only a few professional articles that focus on the treatment of males with anorexia and a few books aimed at muscle dysmorphism. This new volume is a comprehensive, up-to-date work, which is a major contribution to understanding the diagnosis and treatment of anorexia among men.

—Ray Lemberg, PhD, editor of *Eating Disorders: A Reference Sourcebook*, co-editor of *Current Findings on Males with Eating Disorders*, associate editor, *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*

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An Integrative Approach

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First published 2016
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-94930-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-94932-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-66913-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by HWA Text and Data Management, London

For Caroline

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Foreword

Leigh Cohn

Very few people get anorexia nervosa, and most who do are female. So, why is this book important? Because millions of males develop eating disorders (Wade, Keski-Rahkonen, & Hudson, 2011) and there are no current treatment manuals devoted to them. Ever since eating disorders first manifested as a field in the 1970s and 80s, males have been marginalized.

A brief look at the past 50 or so years shows the evolution of this dynamic. In the Introduction of this book, Tom Wooldridge mentions the earliest clinical descriptions of anorexia nervosa, which include cases of boys and young men, with examples from the 1600s to the 1860s. Then he writes, “Over the next 100 years, however, males are almost unmentioned in the literature.” So, let’s pick up the story from there.

In the 1960s, individuals with anorexia nervosa were treated in medical or psychiatric settings, and only severe cases were diagnosed. Both genders were treated, though then, as now, the majority of cases were female. A cultural revolution was beginning in the United States and other Western societies, which included both the Feminist Movement and the Twiggy Era, when the Marilyn Monroe-esque, full-figured shape gave way to thinness as the standard of idealized beauty. The diet industry flourished, and it almost exclusively targeted women. At that time, men were still encouraged to be fit and muscular, as they had been since the iconic Charles Atlas booklets became the rage in the 40s, but a new, lean hippie look was starting to emerge.

The psychological issues of anorexia nervosa were only beginning to be explored by psychiatrists such as Gerald Russell and Arthur Crisp in the United Kingdom and Hilde Bruch and Karl Menninger (who is less known for his work in this area) in the United States. Treatment modalities usually focused on weight restoration, family issues, trauma, and depression. However, more and more young women were showing up in hospitals, and their obsession with thinness began to tilt assessments away from merely looking at percentage of weight lost and amenorrhea.

Another curious symptom was also noticed in the mid-70s: individuals were using self-induced vomiting for weight loss. While this was a widely

known technique for jockeys and wrestlers – I personally remember wrestling teammates throwing up in the showers in the late 60s – it was being employed by young women. Although this behavior was thought to be “an ominous variant of anorexia nervosa” (Russell, 1979), before the end of the decade “bulimarexia” was described in *Psychology Today* by Boskind-Lodahl and Sirlin (1977) and by Russell, who introduced bulimia nervosa in the academic literature (1979). These publications only examined women.

No one seemed too bothered that guys were “puking to make weight,” but when young women were telling stories of binge eating enormous amounts of food and then sticking their fingers down their throats – several times every day – the world started to take notice. In the intervening years, the numbers of women presenting with bulimia spiked, but the reasons for this sharp increase in prevalence are not certain. Most eating disorders specialists would agree that sociocultural pressure to be thin, combined with feminist messages of personal empowerment, had a lot to do with it.

I remember how the shift in cultural awareness occurred, because my wife, Lindsey Hall, and I published a booklet about her recovery from the binge-purge syndrome (1980) and began giving workshops on college campuses and eventually writing books on the topic. A year later, she became the first person to appear on national television discussing bulimia, as information about eating disorders began appearing in the media. Soon after that, we founded the *Eating Disorders Bookshelf Catalogue*, and for the next 35 years, we reviewed virtually 99 percent of the books published in the field. Additionally, I saw the phenomenal interest in the books we were marketing, and direct mail campaigns to college counselors and health centers had staggering results compared to industry standards.

Essentially, every book that came out through the 80s viewed eating disorders primarily as women’s problems. *Fat is a Feminist Issue* by Susie Orbach, *The Obsession* by Kim Chernin, and *Making Peace with Food* by Susan Kano were among the most popular titles. Likewise, eating disorders in the general vernacular took on a feminist perspective, as did many treatment approaches. As an editor and publisher, I encouraged authors to use feminine pronouns, and I admit that I was just as convinced as everyone else that men needed to take a back seat.

When *Males with Eating Disorders* by Arnold Andersen came out in 1990, it was met with little fanfare or attention. Andersen routinely contributed chapters to professional text anthologies, but his was the *only* book devoted to this population until the 21st century. In the mid-90s, I noticed an alarming increase in phone calls to our book company from men with eating disorders, parents of sons who were struggling, and wives concerned about their husbands. I spoke to a television producer who had been bingeing and purging since high school, a physician who exercised addictively and was concerned about his low weight, an office worker who topped the scales at over 400 pounds as the result

of uncontrollable binge eating, and a friend who became obsessed with eliminating dietary fat from everything he ate. I heard from Lindsey that the son of a couple we knew was seeing a therapist for anorexia nervosa, which was embarrassingly denied by his father when I asked how the son's recovery was progressing. Eventually, I concluded that a self-help book for males was sorely needed, and I approached Arnold Andersen and Tom Holbrook, who ran the only men's eating disorders program in the country, to collaborate.

When *Making Weight* (2000) hit bookshelves, coincidentally, *The Adonis Complex* (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000) came out at the same time, and I was convinced that males with eating disorders would begin to see parity in recognition and treatment. Both books received significant attention in the national media, but sales were definitely not spectacular. Most therapists weren't seeing many male patients, and most articles and websites stated that 90 percent of cases involved females, a statistic taken from Andersen's studies in the 80s. We upgraded that figure in *Making Weight*, estimating the incidence of males with eating disorders to be in the 25–30 percent range, which was confirmed in 2007 (Hudson, Hiripi, Pope, & Kessler, 2007). Nonetheless, that old 90 percent female:10 percent male ratio has stubbornly persisted on the Internet and even in many academic articles. For over 15 years, I spoke about males and eating disorders at professional conferences, colleges, prep schools, and hospitals, spreading the word; but my talks were generally met with ambivalence – except there were usually a couple of guys who approached me afterwards to share their own struggles.

When we released *Making Weight*, there were over 1,000 books related to eating disorders in print, yet less than 1 percent focused on males. Similarly, when I conducted a PubMed search for the term “eating disorders” in abstracts from journal articles written before 2000, there were 3,168 results, but the term “males” was included in only 5.4 percent of them. Even today, I can count the professional books published on males and eating disorders on one hand, and the ratio of journal articles on males has increased by a mere 2 percent over the past 15 years. Access to specialized treatment for males has also been sparse, and though most eating disorders therapists may have had a few male patients, there has been little professional training in this area. Unfortunately, a typical layperson's response when I mention my own work with males and eating disorders is of surprise, “Oh, I thought mainly teenage girls get that disease.”

In 2014, Ray Lemberg and I coedited *Current Findings on Males with Eating Disorders*, which included “An Overview of Anorexia Nervosa in Males” by Tom Wooldridge and Pauline Lytle. Although the book provides a fairly comprehensive summary of research, it only has a couple of treatment chapters. So, really, this book by Wooldridge, *Understanding Anorexia Nervosa in Males: An Integrated Approach* is the first clinical manual for a grossly neglected population. I've had an opportunity to work

closely with Tom on the executive board of the National Association for Males with Eating Disorders, and I have been impressed by his knowledge of the subject and superb writing skills.

Why is this book important? It is leading the way for therapists to grasp the unique concerns of males with anorexia nervosa and to help them recover from this insidious eating disorder. In the near future, I hope to see more books that address bulimia, binge eating disorder, male body image, and the myriad of clinical issues that boys and men face. Undoubtedly, we will also see books devoted to eating disorders in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community, which has been nearly entirely ignored in the literature. I'm not advocating gender neutrality when it comes to understanding and treating eating disorders, because men and women have fundamental differences. That's why we must have treatment handbooks that address more populations than just women and girls. For now, this book is a good start.

Leigh Cohn, MAT, CEDS is the publisher of Gürze Books, Editor-in-Chief of *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, coauthor of several books, and President of the National Association for Males with Eating Disorders.

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