

This Week's Citation Classic®

Pyle R L, Mitchell J E & Eckert E D. Bulimia: a report of 34 cases. *J. Clin. Psychiat.* 42:60-4, 1981. [Universiuy of Minnesota Hospitals. Minneapolis. MN]

A series of 34 patients with DSM-III Bulimia was presented. Patients were young females who usually experienced the onset of eating problems by early adulthood. Most had binge-eating episodes on a daily basis, frequently followed by vomiting. A majority also appeared to be clinically depressed, reported an exaggerated fear of becoming obese, and demonstrated problems with impulse control, such as chemical abuse and stealing behavior. [The SSC[®] and the SC[®] indicate that this paper has been cited in more than 405 publications, making it the most-cited paper published in this journal.]

An Early Clinical Description of Bulimia

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We were both pleased and somewhat surprised to find that our paper had been so frequently cited. Interest in the publication resulted from the fact that it was one of the first clinical descriptions of individuals with bulimia. Our paper had been preceded by an earlier description of a related syndrome, "bulimiarexia," by Marlene Boskind-Lodahl¹ and by a publication authored by Gerald Russell in London describing a similar syndrome in a group of former anorexia nervosa patients, a disorder he termed "bulimia nervosa."² Russell's paper is usually cited as the original description of the disorder.

Other publications subsequently appeared replicating the basic descriptive data including age of onset, age of first treatment, and frequency of bulimic behaviors.³ Our original study, and most subsequent reports of series of patients, emphasized the high rate of depression, chemical abuse, and impulsive behavior among individuals in this patient population. These are areas which continue to be of interest to researchers working with bulimia nervosa.

When we originally set out to study bulimia nervosa, we developed the philosophy that we would be able to recruit a research population

by providing treatment. Our treatment programs for individuals with this disorder have evolved over time⁴ and culminated in several treatment studies including two federally funded research treatment grants, one involving a comparison of our cognitive behavioral group psychotherapy program to an antidepressant,⁵ and a subsequent study which examined logistical variables in the treatment of bulimia nervosa.⁶

All three of the authors of the original paper have continued to work in the area of eating disorders, and since the original publication the team has contributed in excess of 90 articles on the topic, as well as two books and 30 book chapters. Currently, three senior and two junior faculty members in our department work in the area.

The development of this research program has always fascinated me (Pyle). When I joined the academic community at age 47, serving as supervisor of the Outpatient Psychiatry Program, I viewed myself primarily as a clinician and secondarily as a teacher, but not as a researcher. I knew that developing research skills would be essential for promotion. In 1978, Elke Eckert, a pioneer researcher in anorexia nervosa, offered to introduce me to the eating disorder population by working with her in treating a group of women who "binge ate and threw up." Data were collected on a questionnaire developed by Eckert based on her work with anorexia nervosa. Anticipating the importance of the area and recognizing my own limitations as a researcher I enlisted the cooperation of James Mitchell, the other coauthor of the paper, who in my mind possessed the skills of an academic role model: high energy and organizational skills and knowledge of research design. The encouragement, mentorship, and assistance of my coauthors led to the submission of the original paper, and following a slight period of trepidation when the journal changed editors and the publication was delayed, the paper appeared. This has led to an exciting research career for all three of us and speaks to the fact that finding new areas of research can provide exciting opportunities for beginning researchers.

1. Boskind-Lodahl M. *The definition and treatment of bulimiarexia: the gorging/purging syndrome of young women*. PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1977.
2. Russell G. Bulimia nervosa: an ominous variant of anorexia nervosa. *Psychol Med.* 9:429-18, 1979. (Cited 620 times.)
3. Mitchell J E, Hatsukami D, Pyle R L & Eckert E D. Characteristics of 275 patients with bulimia. *Amer. J. Psychiat.* 142:482-5. 1985. (Cited 110 times.)
4. Mitchell J E, Hatsukami D, Goff G, Pyle R L, Eckert E D & Davis C E. Intensive outpatient group treatment for bulimia. (Garner DM4 Garfinkel P E, eds.) *Handbook of psychotherapy for anorexia nervosa and bulimia*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985. p. 240-56.
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6. Mitchell J E, Pyle R L, Eckert E D, Pomeroy C, Zollman M, Crosby R, Seim H & Zimmerman R. Cognitive behavioral group psychotherapy of bulimia nervosa: importance of logistical variables. *Int. J. Eating Disorder*. (In press.)

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