

Institutionen för kost- och idrottsvetenskap

# Extrem jakt på hälsa

## En explorativ studie om ortorexia nervosa

av

Linn Håman

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som med tillstånd av utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid  
Göteborgs universitet för vinnande av doktorsexamen i  
idrottsvetenskap framläggs till offentlig granskning

Fredagen den 5 februari 2016, kl. 13.00, Göteborgs universitet,  
Pedagogen, Hus C, Margareta Huitfeldts auditorium

---

Fakultetsopponent: Karin Redelius, Gymnastik- och idrottshögskolan



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET  
ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS

## Abstract

Title: Extreme pursuit of health: An explorative study of orthorexia nervosa

Author: Linn Håman

Language: Swedish with a summary in English

ISBN: 978-91-7346-863-3 (print),

ISBN: 978-91-7346-864-0 (pdf)

ISSN: 0436-1121

Keywords: Daily newspapers, Disordered eating, Exercise dependence, Fitness gym, Fitness participants, Framing, Healthism, Personal trainers, Scientific articles, Sequential mixed method design

Orthorexia nervosa was termed by the physician, Bratman, in the late 1990s. He defined it as an unhealthy obsession with eating healthy food to achieve 'optimal' health. The term has since received attention in science and media, including in Sweden. Yet, orthorexia remains under establishment, as many symptoms, explanations and behaviors are being related to it. This thesis builds on four articles that create understanding of the term and phenomenon. The overall aim is to elucidate, explore and problematize how orthorexia nervosa is described, understood and reported. The thesis follows a sequential mixed method design. The empirical data consist of survey responses from 251 fitness participants, research findings from 19 empirical and theoretical scientific articles, newspaper texts from 166 Swedish daily newspaper articles, and responses provided by 14 personal trainers (PTs) in five focus group interviews. The findings demonstrate two versions of understanding orthorexia. The Swedish newspapers frame and PTs understand orthorexia to include excessive and obsessive approaches to food and eating, unhealthy and excessive exercise, and an extreme pursuit of a fit body. These characteristics create a Swedish popular version, which conflates orthorexia with exercise dependence and differs from Bratman's definition. It further differs from scientific knowledge because this version does not include unhealthy and excessive exercise and does not provide consensus on corporeality. Indeed, the scientific knowledge remains limited and disparate. Nevertheless, both versions can be understood as a consequence of 'aggressive healthism'.