**America’s “Skinny” Obsession**

    Eating disorders are becoming more prominent and fatal in the U.S. nowadays. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that approximately five to ten million women in the U.S. (five to ten percent) and one million boys suffer from eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or other associated dietary conditions. The institute also states that eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. As a direct result of the media, low self confidence, and peer pressure people inhabit, and succumb to, eating disorders just to fit the media’s newest fashion trend: skinny.

    Today's celebrities, whether they are professional athletes, models, or actors, are displaying an unobtainable body image to the rest of the world. Nowadays, the biggest, best-known designers and brands pursue Anorexic models. However, even the "average" model in the U.S. stands about five-foot-eleven-inches and weighs approximately 117 pounds, and the average American woman is about five-foot-four-inches tall and approximately 140 pounds. Even the Barbie dolls that are so popular in the U.S. depict a false image of what a woman should look like: bigger bust and hips, small waist, and long legs. Furthermore, on television shows and in movies, the extremely skinny girls and remarkably muscular guys are the successful, popular, and powerful characters, and the overweight, or even average-sized, people portray the lazy, friendless characters. Because of this stereotype that the media puts out for all people-children, teenagers, and adults-to see, people begin seeing themselves as inferior and in need of a serious body metamorphosis. Even Hollywood icons like Elton John, Paula Abdul, and Jane Fonda, and actual royal figures like Princess Diana, couldn’t escape eating disorders.

An extremely popular eating disorder is anorexia nervosa, in which the individual refuses to eat much-eventually sending the body into starvation mode. It is estimated that 1 in every 200 U.S. women have anorexia. The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders states that 5 to 10 percent of anorexics die within 10 years after contracting the illness, 18 to 20 percent die after 20 years, and 30 to 40 percent ever fully recover. This causes anorexia to have a mortality rate that is 12 times higher than the death rate of all causes of death for females 15 to 24 years old. Anorexia was first documented in 1649 by English physician Richard Morton, and has grown more lethal ever since. Anorexics are classified as people who have a fear of gaining weight, so they eat very little and lose weight rapidly. Anorexia causes the body to start protecting itself from starvation by slowing down the breathing, blood-pressure, and pulse rates. Anorexics’ skin turns dry and yellow, their bones become brittle, a fine hair called lanugo grows all over their body to protect them from the cold, and females lose their menstrual cycle. Overall, not eating enough food ceases the production of potassium, which causes heart problems and cardiac arrest.

Bulimia nervosa is also an exceedingly popular eating disorder in the U.S.; however, unlike anorexia, the person consumes large amounts of food, but vomits, over-exercises, or takes laxatives or diet pills to counterbalance their eating. It’s predicted that 2 or 3 in every 100 U.S. inhabitants struggles with bulimia. Bulimia was first documented in 18th century French literature but wasn’t officially recognized as a disease until 1979. Bulimics follow a pattern of indulging during meals and snacks, then feeling disgusted, which results in the “need” to compensate for the food to lose weight. However, bulimics usually maintain a normal body weight, but suffer the consequences for their self-induced vomiting. Bulimics usually have constant stomach pains, damage to their stomach and kidneys, tooth decay from the exposure to stomach acids, loss of menstrual cycles, loss of potassium (same as anorexia), salivary glands permanently expanding, dehydration, hemorrhoids, and electrolyte abnormalities.

Treatment for eating disorders is available but is far out of reach for many of those suffering because of financial issues, and an untreated eating disorder may very well lead to death. In 1997, a 22-year-old ballerina named Heidi Guenther died of a fatal heart attack as a direct result of her disorder, and the same happened three years earlier to a 22-year-old gymnast Christy Henrich. These girls died because they did not fess up about their problem and seek treatment. Today, statistics show that only one in ten people with eating disorders receive help. Part of that may be because a person pursuing help for their disorder can pay anywhere from $500 to $2,000 per day for inpatient treatment; one month of treatment costs an average of $30,000, and normally a person receives three to six months of treatment. Outpatient treatment, which customarily includes therapy and medical monitoring, extends to more than $100,000 per year. Also, health insurance companies typically don’t cover eating disorder treatment. So all-in-all, when a person has an eating disorder they must either get through it and beat it themselves with the support of their family, or an excessive amount of money needs to be put out for qualified professional help.

Eating disorders have grown to be a serious problem for both men and women in America, but girls 12 to 25 years old are the greatest affected. In order for these illnesses to be taken care of and their mortality rates lowered, the media needs to shine a light on average, healthy girls who have a normal, proportional bodies and weight. Also, treatment for these disorders needs to become more well-known and affordable; otherwise, those struggling will not be able to get the type of help they actually need to kick their eating disorder. America needs to take action and help save the lives of all those out there in America who need some serious help.