

Reaching for the Stars for Self—Growth Causes of Eating Disorders

Linda Schmidt - Zeta Epsilon #2344 - Overland Park, KS - 1987

Ann Gabrick, Director of the Eating Disorder Unit of Menorah Medical Center in Kansas City, Missouri spoke to our members on the causes of eating disorders.

There are three types of eating disorder: Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia, and the Compulsive eater. Twenty-five percent of the population today has at least one of these eating disorders. The problem is more widespread than otherwise believed. The reason the problem is difficult to detect is the people who have these eating disorders are all functional people and do not belong in the psychiatric ward of a hospital

Some of the characteristics of anorexia are low self: esteem, perfectionist behavior, over achiever, feeling of lack of control in life, emaciated appearance (at least 25% loss of total body weight), a great fear of obesity, feelings of control over the body, distorted body image, mood swings (tyrannical), and denial of the problem (sees self as fat). The bulimic has most of the same characteristics, along with normal weight, feels that self worth is dependent on low weight, experimentation with vomiting, laxatives, and diuretics, embarrassment, dishonesty and lying, tooth damage (gum disease), electrolyte imbalance, chronic-sore throat, and possible rupture of the heart or esophagus.

More women than men have these types of eating disorders. The youngest case Ann had in her unit was a girl that was eleven years old. She has also had women around 60 years old. Generally, most of the people she has treated are in their 20's to early 30's.

The compulsive eater eats for emotional reasons — low self esteem, depression, anger, and boredom. This type of eating disorder affects *men*, women and children of all ages. Some of the characteristics of the compulsive eater are low self esteem, loneliness, depression, overweight, lack of energy, and heart problems directly related to being, overweight.

Society bombards us with being body beautiful. Children, on up to adults see models in magazines and people on television projecting the image — “to be beautiful you must be thin, thin, thin”. Ann has seen a real problem with junior high, high school, and college age people constantly worried about their weight. When asked what the average size clothing is most answered a size 3. The average size clothing today is a size 14. Fifth and sixth grade students are more educated about the eating disorder problems that seniors are. We must educate the children early in life.

In most cases the/person with an eating disorder is this way because of an emotional trauma of some sort: abusive parent, death of a loved one, sexual abuse as a child or adult, etc. At first you see the physical effects caused by the emotional problem. As was mentioned before, these people are functional and appear normal, but have the severe emotional problems which must be dealt with. The person must learn what is causing the problem and deal with that in addition to either gaining or losing the weight, whichever is needed. If an eating disorder is allowed to progress without treatment it may become a life threatening problem. Such problems can best be treated in a structured medical environment.

The treatment first focuses on acceptance of the problem, and finding the cause. Therapy is very important. The person must then learn to resume' normal eating and self—control, self approval, and improved self image, learn to accept personal limitations, and to learn to control anger and guilt. The success rate is usually good after treatment after they learn a real sense of control.

Ann opened her talk up for questions from our group. The members of our sorority are beginning a weight loss program, and asked for some tips. Ann gave us this help:

- You should eat three well balanced meals, eating the most during the early day.
- Keep a journal to write down what you eat, when you eat it, and how you feel at the time you are eating it.
- This will give you insight as to why you eat; i.e. anger, depression, boredom, and you will know what to deal with.
- Also, begin an exercise programs the best time to exercise is in late afternoon or early evening before dinner. Exercise not only helps you physically, but also emotionally.
- If you are angry or upset with someone, write down your feelings. This is an excellent way to deal with the problem.