

Eating disorders involve self-mutilation, self-hate

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Staff Writer

Nearly 80% of women diet. 50% percent of American women are on a diet at any given time. 50% percent of 9 year-old-girls have been on a diet. Startling statistics like these, have faces and voices; mine is one.

My name is Chamaine Larson and I am a staff writer here on *The Print*. Satire is my strong suit, so instead of flat out saying society is wrong in its view of weight, I commended society for making me feel fat. I received a lot of positive feedback from readers, so I feel like my point came across. While making my point, though, I wasn't able to pay close attention to a very widespread and severe issue: eating disorders.

I myself have suffered three different types of eating disorders—overeating, anorexia and bulimia. What causes eating disorders? Society and the media, food and eating, relationships with friends and family, and the issue of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, are all contributors to eating disorders. Low self esteem is the key element to setting a

disorder into action.

At the age of eleven I was raped by a neighbor who I trusted. I was a very sheltered child who was self conscious about my developing body and I knew nothing of sex. I never received counseling after the rape happened; basically no one talked about it, so it didn't happen. And the fact that I had to walk past the man who did it on my way to school every day, didn't help.

To this day I am overcoming eleven-year-old logic: the act of sex was violent so sex is bad; babies are bad because they come from sex; being attractive is bad because then

men
will

want to

have sex. Not until the summer that I graduated from high school did I fully comprehend these issues.

My worst misconception was that if I was overweight no man would be interested in me, so I wouldn't be victimized again. I became an overeater; if I was approached by a guy or one even smiled at me, I would go home and gorge myself on a bag of potato chips, a half gal-

lon of ice cream and 2 king size candy bars, and then I'd still have dinner. By the time I graduated from high school I weighed 210lbs. and had successfully avoided guys. The whole time I was an overeater I didn't realize it; I thought I was normal. I had no idea that I had a defense mechanism.

The summer after graduation I went with my father to work at a fire camp; I was one of three women sur-

rounded by 500 guys, and was forced to realize that not all men are bad. I let

down my guard and became more comfortable around men. By the end of August I had lost 55lbs.

I received my first kiss that sum-

mer, and my first boyfriend. That's what triggered my second eating disorder. I had realized that I was an overeater so I tried to correct my eating habits, but at times I would fall back into the old habit and overeat. I was extremely hard on myself and as a form of punishment, I'd make myself vomit.

I was bulimic for about 3 months, then started learning about a thing called self-confidence. It was actually kind of a revelation. I had just vomited and was rinsing my mouth in the sink, when I caught a glimpse of a girl in the mirror out of the corner of my eye. The girl in the mirror was not me.

There was no sparkle in her eye. No intelligence shone, no personality. I realized my reflection wasn't me; there was no worth. I stayed comfortable with my weight until I decided that my future should take me into the Air Force. They have weight standards, and I was five pounds over. This brought on anorexia. I walked five miles a day, ate very little, and slowly became a wreck. I wasn't a pleasant person to be around: I'd have severe mood swings

and major depression. I would be questioned daily about my weight from the recruiter and my parents. I started to see my self-worth as a number. That's when I had another revelation. I didn't want to compromise myself for anyone. I acquired an attitude about my weight. I wasn't going to change.

I decided to take a different path, one were I wouldn't lose myself. I enrolled in school and now instead of focusing on my looks and my weight, I'm focusing on my mind because your looks will fade quicker than your mind, hopefully.

All of my disorders stemmed from ignorance and impatience. I have consciously decided that societal standards will not influence the person I'm becoming. I grow every day with my experiences and my ideas.

My dress size does not measure me; only I can measure myself and I don't use a scale. If losing weight is your objective, figure out why and for whom. Please be healthy. If becoming happy is your goal, explore more than your body, and realize that no one can measure you except you. You only have one life—you decide how you're going to live it.

Why do we conform

MANDI LINSTROM
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She's the girl with the pretty blue eyes and shy smile you pass every day after your second class. She's the girl who sits next to you in biology, history, or math class. She's the girl who works at your favorite coffeehouse. She's the neighbor that you say "hi" to whenever you pass her relaxing in her yard.

She's also one of the millions of girls who suffer from a poor body image spawned by the unrealistic standards set by influences like the media, countless celebrities, and the fashion industry—just to name a few. She is the face of bulimia, anorexia, and compulsive over-eating or exercising. Sometimes she is even the face that stares back at you in the mirror.

I know what it's like to be that girl. I was that girl, and sometimes I still am that girl. Every day I wake up, and usually the first thought that comes to my head is "How am I going to feel about my body today?" The answers always vary—sometimes I feel like I am untouchable and on top of the world, but other times I feel sluggish and depressed and think that my body will never be good enough. Whenever I feel that my body is anything less than beautiful, the real question I should be considering is not "Do I look fat?" but "What or who is it that my body isn't good enough for?"

This obsession, which seems to

be consuming more girls every day, began for me after my junior year in high school. I had always been overweight, and finally, without really trying, I lost almost sixty pounds. Comments flowed like crazy from my friends' and family's mouths, like "My, I don't even recognize you!" and "I always knew you had such a pretty face! How did you lose so much weight?"

The truth was, I changed my eating habits, watching what I ate and gradually beginning to work out. It was practically effortless—just a simple change in my attitude towards eating—at first.

Then something happened. Somewhere along the line, I began to feel that, if I could gain so much recognition through losing weight and be labeled as a worthy person, if I lost more weight, I would become an even more worthy person. Guys would like me more, I would have plans every night because I would look sooooo good and be much more appealing to both sexes, and I would be able to wear a size five—or something even smaller. Thus, my weight obsession was born, and began to consume my once "normal" life.

I remember when I reached my lowest point. I began to feel as though I was drowning in a pool of self-hatred; I couldn't even breathe because the thought of food choked all of my thoughts. I would swear off food, because heaven forbid that I ate something that had calories, and starve myself for up to three days. Then I would binge on unbelievable quan-

ties of food to compensate for my hunger. I would eat and eat and eat and then eat some more. The more fattening the food was, the better.

My worst episode was on a Sunday afternoon, over a year ago. I lied to my parents and said I was going to the gym, but instead I

drove to the store and bought three or four doughnuts. After I polished those off, I went to another store and bought five candy bars and ate them in my car. Then I went through the McDonald's drive through and ordered two cheeseburgers and fries. Finally, I went home, sat by the toilet, shoved my fingers down my throat, and wished that God would do me a favor and take me away while I slept, because I didn't want to have to wake up the next morning and face my worst fear and my worst enemy: my very own body.

This continued for almost a year, on again, off again, for months at a time. Finally, something clicked within me one day about seven months ago.

I looked in the mirror, and I saw something I hadn't seen before. Or maybe I had seen it, but was so obsessed with the appearance of my physical body that I didn't

care. In the same mirror, I saw a tired girl who had so much potential but was letting something trivial like food stand in her way. I saw the real me, the me on the inside and not just the outside, for what seemed like the first time in months. I saw the same me that had been there sixty pounds ago, but was desperately trying to be covered up by some outside force. I saw the me that my parents and friends loved, no matter what size. Most importantly, I saw the me that I once loved.

I have come so far in those three years of my life, which seem like a miniature revolution—from feeling guilty for being overweight to feeling guilty for eating food when I was hungry. Now I feel guilty for having to have had those feelings. I just told my best friend about my bulimia and anorexia only a month or so ago. I was so ashamed.

Now I am past the shame, and I feel an emotion even far more consuming—anger.

How does society manage to get away with telling millions of girls to stop at no extreme in order to be skinny? Why is this accepted and even perpetuated through the images we see on television or in magazines? Why can't we be told that we are more valuable than the size of our clothes and can be regarded as pretty and beautiful even if our ribs don't protrude? Why is a girl unable to feel adequate just because she isn't as skinny as she thinks she should be?

Unfortunately, negative body image is a battle fought daily by many girls and women who are

asking themselves these same questions. I can't give the answers for those who suffer from eating disorders, because I don't have them. What I do have is the growing confidence that I am more than just a pretty face or a "normal" size—I am a human being. And I deserve to feel like one every minute of every day, and to not be degraded by the images and expectations that bombard me throughout society. I know God never intended for so many girls to feel such a deep loathing for their bodies, for He never would have created a human body with any intentions falling short of spectacular.

Finally, if any of you can relate to my experience and are currently be struggling with your own body image, I ask you to look long and hard in the mirror. Try to confront your own worst enemy. The battle isn't over yet.

FACTS

- 75% OF WOMEN DIET
- 95% OF DIETS DON'T WORK
- 90% OF WOMEN WOULD LIKE TO LOSE WEIGHT
- ONLY 16% ARE CLINICALLY OBESE