

Eating disorders: disease or choice

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This desire for perfection is one of the main causes of eating disorders for both men and women around the world. While there are many different organizations and treatment establishments, the aid required in overcoming an eating disorder is very expensive. Many insurance companies deny coverage for the treatment of eating disorders because they view it as a choice, because the treatment is too costly, as well as the uncertainty of the treatment for each individual patient.

The standards for qualifying as having an eating disorder are very high; it is very difficult to qualify for covered treatment. The government needs to rectify this by providing more health coverage for people with eating disorders, because with the growing impact of the media, the death rate from eating disorders will only increase. The worldwide role model for generations of women, Barbie, does not fall short of perfection. Although, what many girls do not know, are the horrors of what a real, life-size Barbie would be like. Dr.

Margo Maine, in her book, *Body Wars*, reveals the truth behind a human Barbie: "If Barbie were an actual woman, she would be 5'9" tall, have a 39" bust, an 18" waist, 33" hips and a size 3 shoe" ("Barbies" 1). While these characteristics might sound appealing to some women, this "perfect" frame would cause a woman many problems ("Barbies 1). With these proportions, Barbie would not likely menstruate and would need to walk on all fours as if she were a household pet ("Barbies 1). The doll's head, hands and feet are also not to scale ("Barbies" 1).

Seeing someone, such as Barbie as perfection is a true example of a distorted body image. The Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine refers to body image as " a person's mental opinion or description of his or her own physical appearance" (Davidson 690). A falsified body image, the fear of becoming overweight, the refusal to eat foods, and/or binge eating followed by purging through vomiting, heavy exercise or the use of laxatives are all symptoms that characterize the worldwide epidemic of eating disorders (Prescott 104).

Although eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, only 1 in 20 people with eating disorders receive treatment (Kulkarni 1). The lack of federal and state laws encourages the low incidence of treatment (Kulkarni 1). The Federal Mental Health Parity Law only requires health insurance plans (that already offer mental health coverage) to provide the same level of benefits for mental illnesses as for other physical illnesses and diseases (Kulkarni 1). This law does not accept that these insurance plans must provide mental health coverage (Kulkarni 1).

The law also allows states to determine which mental illnesses they will provide coverage for (Kulkarni 1). While some states, such as Arkansas, have laws providing coverage for all mental illnesses, some states limit the coverage to " serious mental illnesses" or a specific list of " biologically based" mental illnesses, such as Iowa (Kulkarni 1). These categories have been used by states and insurance companies to restrict or exclude individuals, including those suffering from eating disorders, from receiving life-saving treatment (Kulkarni 1).