

# Self-reflection on eating disorder



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## Eating Disorder

Growing up, I was chubby until I had the choice of eating what I wanted. I was picked on for it since my cheeks stuck out and family members would always grab them, and it made me feel uncomfortable. I started eating less and would be told: “ Oh your so skinny, you should eat more.” “ How can you not want to eat, food is everything.” Near the end of August, I was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa; which is one type of an eating disorder. After this event had taken place, with the help of medical assistance, I was able to recover but that led me to question: How does an eating do to a person?” and for this reason I chose this topic.

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry there are 3 common types of eating disorders: Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa and Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (AACAP). Before you can understand each eating disorder, you must know what each one means. The National Eating Disorders Association, an American non-profit organization defines Anorexia Nervosa as “ An eating disorder characterized by weight loss, difficulties maintaining an appropriate weight for height, age and stature; and in many individuals, distorted body image” (NEDA). The association defines Bulimia Nervosa as “ A cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating (NEDA). “ ARFID is similar to anorexia in that both disorders involve limitations in the amount and/or types of food consumed, but unlike anorexia, ARFID does not involve any distress about body shape or size, or fears of fatness” (NEDA).

After understanding the definitions of the 3 common eating disorders, it is important to see how it affects a person and the signs. To summarize the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry states that amongst teenagers, anorexia nervosa is most common with females with low self-esteem. Seeing themselves in the mirror shows them a different reflection compared to what they actually look like. For this type of disorder, a teenage female may see herself as appearing fat when in reality she is thin. The low self-esteem makes it harder for her to understand what her appearance is actually becoming. For this reason, the teenager feels powerful and controlling when she is able to reject food when her body demands it. This links back to how I was when I first was able to choose what I wanted to eat rather than my parents picking for me.

I made it a choice to say no to food even when I could hear my stomach rumbling, little did I know at the time that this was going to be the beginning of me becoming underweight before getting back on track. The thing was, because I was teased about being chubby when I was younger, at the time I could not choose or control what I ate, but once I was able to choose what I eat, I felt as though I had power and control of my intake. This allowed me to shut away everyone calling me chubby and by stopping myself from eating even when I was hungry, and I started to notice the cheeks disappearing and my legs becoming smaller. I was so happy that I was losing weight and I began to feel better about my appearance. After a while, I saw myself as being fat even though I was 12 years old and weighed at 77lbs. Seeing the reflection in the mirror put me in a position where I was not ready to accept

how I appeared anymore and wanted to lose more weight because I kept seeing myself as appearing what to me looked “ fat”.

Bulimia Nervosa affects a teenager’s physical health and can cause dehydration, a reduced number of minerals and can damage vital organs that the body needs to function properly. To identify a teenager with Bulimia Nervosa, common signs include eating large quantities of foods with a high calorie and then forcing vomiting or with the use of laxatives. When trying to hide self-induced vomiting, the use of water running in the back is useful for them to cover up the sounds. This can cause damages to the body and can lead to sometimes lead to death if the body is not receiving proper nutrition.

Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder can affect a child or adolescents’ weight, meaning it could both increase and decrease and affect they can also lack nutrition. If eating habits do not improve, it can result in them being put on a supplement to make up for the lack of nutrition and if it still hasn’t improved, a feeding tube may be used for recovery.

Aside from the 3 eating disorders I discussed earlier, there are other types of eating disorders. The other types of eating disorders are: “ Pica, Rumination disorder, purging disorder, Night eating syndrome” (WebMD).

“ Pica is the persistent eating of substances such as dirt or paint that have no nutritional value” (WebMD). Eating substances which have no nutrition to them such as hair, paint, and stones can be dangerous can have effects on a person’s body and health. The groups that this disorder affects is children, individuals who have mental illnesses and those who are pregnant. This type of eating disorder can cause anemia and toxicity within a person and can

also block the intestines and poisoning if the substance consumed increases the toxicity. If a person consumes rough substances, they may be faced with constipation which can be painful.

Rumination disorder is an involuntary disorder in which the stomach muscles push back the food that has already been chewed and swallowed back up to the esophagus and it is then rechewed and re-swallowed again (Rumination Disorder). However, the causation of this disorder can be because of an injury, an illness or stress. After a person has eaten, the food may not digest and half-hour to an hour later the effects of this disorder start showing up. It is involuntary as it is not forced, and neither is the person forcibly trying to vomit. This disorder affects a person in a way in which they can have a burning sensation, problems sleeping, constipation and bloating. The treatment for this disorder depends on the person and what side effects they face. They can make an appointment with a gastroenterologist to further discuss what route they should take to help them.

Moving forward, the next eating disorder is purging disorder. “Purging is one of the various behaviors used by teens and adults with certain eating disorders. Also called Purging Disorder (PD), it’s a method some people use to try and manage weight or cut calories” (Morin, Amy, and Lcsw). This disorder is similar to Bulimia Nervosa however rather than eating large amounts of food and then forcibly vomiting, a person who has a Purging disorder is likely to be eating what is considered to be a normal portion of food a day but forces themselves to vomit to avoid gaining weight. This is commonly seen amongst teenagers. When they cannot force themselves to vomit, they will misuse laxatives to make it a quick process for them to

vomit. Forcing oneself to vomit the food out can be harmful and affect the body negatively.

Purging can cause dehydration within the body and it will show through rough and dry skin. Since the body is not receiving nutrients needed to function as the food is being removed from the body before it is digested, it can cause tiredness, a decrease in minerals and low blood pressure.

“ Night eating syndrome is an eating disorder characterized by a delay in the normal circadian (24 hour) pattern of food intake” (MirrorMirror). Typically, an average person consumes their first meal in the morning and eats throughout the day whether that be through snacks or meals and then has their final food intake in the evening. On the other hand, a person who has a night eating syndrome has their first meal or food intake later on during the day and then eats through the night to fill up for the hours missed of eating during that day. Although I am not diagnosed with this disorder, after understanding what this disorder is, I feel as though when I was trying to gain weight back again, this is something I would do. I would wake up and not want to eat right in the morning and would usually keep myself busy by working, doing homework and cleaning around the house. I would then have my first meal or food intake around 2-3pm. Then I would eat snacks and keep eating food throughout the evening leading into the night as I felt as though since I didn't get to eat in the morning, I would make up for the loss at night and would lose sleep in order to eat to meet my calorie goals for that day.

This disorder can cause serious health problems if it ongoing in the future. Since the food is being consumed throughout the night, it can make it difficult for the person to eat in the morning due to being full. There can be a disturbance in one's sleep as they are losing it due to eating during that time.

A documentary called THIN is one in which a group of women/girls are taken to a treatment facility in Florida in which they are placed under strict monitoring of their recovery from having an eating disorder. Watching this documentary was very hard as it reminded me of how I used to be and how I am thankful that I was able to get back on track without having to stay in a facility. With each meal, a patient is to have two liquids, it can be either water, milk or juice and they are not allowed to pour these themselves, and only a member of staff can. During mealtimes, the women/girls are not allowed to go to the bathroom as they could force themselves to vomit this out and so there are monitored timings for them to have a bathroom break which is 8: 30am, 12: 50pm and 6: 50pm. The patients begin their journey with different stories of how they reached an eating disorder. Throughout the documentary, their weights are fluctuating as they increase at the beginning but they are doing things behind the nurse's back and so they are losing pounds at the same time. The women one by one begin to leave the facility once they are at a healthy enough for their age and height.

In different parts of the world, weight is seen differently and that impacts what effect it has on the people living there. In Korea, the media plays a huge role in how the Korean women see themselves (Soyoung Kim). In the past, those with more weight on them were seen as being superior and rich,

and those who were thin were classified as being in poverty due to the lack of flesh on them in Korea. However, the Western influence on Korea has since changed this view. Models are seen as being skinny, with an hourglass figure and being tall in the United States. This has had a major influence on Koreans as women have become thinner as time has passed due to this influence.

Avis Rumney is a licensed marriage and family therapist and an award-winning author. Rumney has written a book called “Dying to Please: Anorexia, Treatment and Recovery” in which she talks about her own battle with having an eating disorder. Facing anorexia and then going through treatment and recovery is not as easy as it seems to people, and to have someone write about it and share their experience is amazing.

Rumney addresses therapies that a person can go through and how family can help. From her own experience, she has had problems with her family and it led to excessive drinking and eating and so the key point she is trying to point out throughout the book is that to recover, you must find the problem, in her case the family issues (Rumney). When you're stressed out, you don't consider how much you are consuming, and this can go against your weight goals if you are trying to gain, lose or maintain.

As stated by eating disorders Victoria, “Parents, siblings, partners, friends, extended family, work colleagues and others often experience many different feelings as they learn to cope with the effects of the eating disorder on the person and on their own lives. The strain of living with the eating disorder can create tensions and divisions within the family. Each person



involved will be affected in different ways” (Breanna). family and friends can be affected by a loved one going through an eating disorder.

There is a mix of emotions that they can feel in response to the disorder. They may be feeling a bit confused at what made the situation come about, how to cope with it and what to do to help the person safely transition out of it.

An emotion of anger can be caused due to changing of shifts between the person’s behavior and them refusing help when they need it. Someone who is having trouble with eating right and could be in the danger zone could be admitted into a treatment facility which specializes in eating disorders and this can cause frustration due to them not being able to spend time with them as they are away. At the same time, this could cause happiness as they know that their loved one being at a treatment facility will help them recover.

In some cases, parents are often blamed for their children’s eating habits and for this reason they can feel guilty for not being able to stop it when they had the opportunity to. I do not think it is necessarily the parent’s fault as even for me, when my parents gave me the choice to eat what I wanted to with no pressure, it did take a toll on me negatively as I began to reduce how much I ate. But at the same time that was my own choice because of reasons, so I don’t think it is right to blame the parents for this.

To summarize, from my research I have learned how a person is affected by having an eating disorder and I was able to understand the effects that come

with it whether that be physically, mentally or emotionally and what impact it has on relations.

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