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Research Paper – Male Eating Disorders

Did you know that there are up to twenty four million people in the United States with an eating disorder? Did you know that one in every eight is male? Well, neither do most Americans. The men that we have statistics on are only the ones that have come forth for help. However, there are suspected to be hundreds of thousands of other men going through them. They are thought to be too embarrassed to go out and get help because it is thought to be a “teenage girl” problem. They get more judgment and less support than their female counterparts. Male eating disorders are a growing epidemic that gets swept under the rug and forgotten, but need severe attention.

Part 1: Significant Causes

Definitions

Although there is a wide range in the type of people suffering from eating disorders, there are two main types. Anorexia is marked by the aversion to food consumption. Someone with anorexia deliberately skips meals and explains that they are not hungry. Bulimia is characterized by a cycle of bingeing and purging. Bingeing is when a large amount of food is consumed in a short amount of time, which is then followed by purging. Purges can consist of induced vomiting, taking laxatives, or compulsive exercise. Someone with bulimia may also fast for several days after a binge so they can get back to their ideal weight. (Zelman)

Gender Roles

Society has been asking what the cause is behind men developing eating disorders. “Some experts point to the changing role of men in society.” (Omelianuk ¶ 13) In modern times women have gained more power. Many men will come home to women with a paycheck double his. There are now more women in powerful business and leadership positions. These women have started to look for the perfect man. This male figure is supported much like the idealized woman figure is. The perfect man is frequently portrayed in movies, television shows, and is also looked for by other women. Men are the new subject being lusted over and normal guys, just like teen girls looking at magazines, are fighting to fit a “perfect image.”

Sports

Men that are involved in sports are more susceptible to eating disorders. Many sports such as wrestling, gymnastics, and football have weight requirements. In wrestling 93.8% of participants are at risk of an eating disorder. Reason being is when you wrestle you are up against someone in your own weight class, and by being of a lower weight it can become easier to win. This is also similar in gymnastics, 41.6% of athletes are at risk to get an eating disorder. (Dobie pg 7 ¶ 9) By them being able to compete at a smaller weight they have an easier time implementing routines, and then winning. However, in football the weight of a player is not the issue making most of the players gravitate towards bulimia. In the cycle of bingeing and purging endorphins are released causing a “pumped up” feeling, that the brain gets addicted to. It is this endorphin rush that 39.3% of football players are seeking. (Zelman)

Other Contributing Factors

While athletes are a dominate group of males that suffer from eating disorders, there are other personality traits that identify which males are more susceptible. As psychologist Robert

Olivardia of Texas explains, these traits seem universal across the genders. These traits include overachievers, perfectionists and people pleasers. “However, it is not only personality traits that can contribute to one’s likeliness of having an eating disorder. Bullying or teasing about a person’s weight can also lead younger males to begin the cycle of eating disorders.” (Olivardia ¶ 11) Preexisting medical conditions such as OCD, ADHD, depression and substance abuse also contribute. In a study of 135 men at the Massachusetts General Hospital revealed that men with eating disorders also have substance and alcohol abuse problems. In men with anorexia they commonly abuse cocaine or crystal meth because of the appetite suppressant effect. Men with bulimia commonly abuse alcohol, marijuana, and other hallucinogens. In both of these groups men are likely to use steroids to increase their muscularity. (Wientrab)

How It All Relates

As society moves on the culture in which we live changes. The expectations of the people change, and the accepted body images change. With these new differences people try to fit themselves into the new categories of normal, and they also begin looking for the new definition of normal in a partner. All of this pressure can create a snowball effect can happen causing one thing to lead to another and making the end result more serious, for example an eating disorder.

Part 2: Attempts to Solve Problem

Therapy

There are various different types of therapy someone with an eating disorder can go through. Some of which are cognitive behavioral, humanistic, and various treatment programs. Cognitive behavioral therapy is when they work with a counselor to change their thinking about what they are going through. It’s breaking their mental connection with their disorder and introducing a new perspective that is healthier for their body. For example, an athlete trying to

make weight in a sport, they show them how to make healthier choices that will get them in that weight class without going back to their disorder.

The humanistic approach is when a patient goes to a therapist and talks about their disorder. They elaborate on why they think they have it and then they create their own plan on how they want to get rid of their disorder. They continue to go through therapy when they implement their plan so the therapist can see their progress or adjust their plan. (Searle)

Treatment Centers

There are many treatment centers that specialize in eating disorders, but the majority of them only caters to women or has a mostly female population. The few men that go there can feel that they are not treated equally or not welcomed by the women and staff. This poses a problem for the men that are seeking help. However, men that do go to these centers respond to the treatment just as well as women.

Self Help

Self help is a treatment that often goes unnoticed. Self help is, by definition, when someone takes the treatment of their disorder into their own hands without going to a treatment center or a therapist. These people's disorders are often not very extreme and usually easy to overcome. There's no statistics of people who go through self help because they don't go out and publicly get help. It's often a very quiet thing because there is nowhere that it is documented and it is often kept quiet by the person from embarrassment. Those who go through self help often realize what they are doing is wrong, like Alec Anderson, and do something about it. Alec was a struggling gay teen who was trying to maintain a body image similar to that of his older sister. He said "For some reason, I felt like I was supposed to be the same size as my sister. If she was just a size smaller than me, then I felt fat." At first Alec just decided to skip a few meals, then it

progressed into a meal or two a day. At his worst stage, he would skip all meals and when he felt faint he would sustain himself by eating a couple cubes of cheese. Unlike most men with eating disorders, Alec realized how serious the problem was. Alec was lucky. He pulled himself out of it with self help. (Anderson)

Drugs

Men and women involved with an eating disorder use drugs for the side effects that deal with food. These drugs could include things like anti-anxiety drugs, anti-depressants, and food supplements. (Lample ¶ 4 – 8)

Society

Although society shows a very large concern for women with the disease and tries to solve the problem for them, there is little concern for the male side of the problem. The media now features women of various sizes and portrays them in a positive way. For example, plus size models are now features in more magazines like, *Sports Illustrated*, and they are shown in popular television programs such as *Mike and Molly* and *Glee*. There are also television shows attacking the problem of binge eating and obesity on shows such as *Heavy* and *The Biggest Loser*. These feature both women and men.

All of these treatment can be effective, however these treatments only help on a one by one basis or if someone has come forward for help. There are still millions of people, men and women, all over the U.S. that are left out of the solution. They also still are prejudice against men and the male population is forgotten once again.

Part 3: Solution Proposal

Possible Complications

On the other side of the issue, people that know about this will claim that in males, eating disorders are not eating disorders at all. Coaches or athletes may argue that it just comes with the sport. They say that bingeing, purging, and forced starvation is just another way to make a weight class. Taking this side of the argument is the same justification as those who take steroids. The athletes that take steroids say they are just doing it to get better at the game. We all know that steroids are against the rules in most sports though. Many professional sports associations or the events like the Olympics will suspend an athlete who participates in steroids. So the same logic that we look at steroids, should apply to eating disorders in athletes. They're both wrong.

Publicity

Everybody

has seen or heard of a viral video. The best way to spread a message is publicizing the cause using popular avenues such as *facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Tumblr*, *YouTube*, *Pintrest*, billboards, television, printed media, and text forwards. These are things that most people use daily. A prime example of this is the KONY 2012 project. One person posted a video and issued a challenge and within weeks, the majority of the U.S. knew about it. A way that male eating disorders could gain publicity is by putting up billboards and posting on *YouTube* and *facebook*. Just doing that, the dominoes will start to fall. People can like and retweet so the message will be spread.

Goals

The goal of spreading the message about male eating disorders is to eventually make the problem go away. If we get the message out there that male eating disorders is so much of a

problem, then we can get people involved and concerned about the issue enough to accomplish this task. There is power in numbers, and if we all do our best to support the issue, we can end eating disorders once and for all.

As you can see above, male eating disorders are a serious problem that deserves attention. Many women don't see this as a problem and many men don't even understand what they have. Even doctors don't look or even know the symptoms of the different eating disorders in males. This message needs to be known so that everybody can get help. The men that seek help for their disorder deserve to have proper care that can get them back to being healthy. Our society has already taken a stand for women with this problem, and now it's time for men to get the same help. The resources are out there, now it's time for us all to help out.

Annotated Bibliography

RD, LD, Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH,. “More Men Developing Eating Disorders” WebMD WebMD, 25 Oct. 2005. Web, 29 Feb. 2012
<<http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20051024/more-men-developing-eating-disorders>>

This article introduces the emerging problem of male eating disorders. It discusses the common factors that lead to males developing these problems. The article also discusses the treatment options that are available to people suffering from eating disorders.

Baghdijan, Alice. “Rise in Male Eating Disorders Tip of Iceberg—UK Charity.” Reuters Media. 13 Jul 2011: n.p. SIRS Issues Researcher: Web. 27 Feb 2012

This journal article was telling us how the percentage of male eating disorders total and the ratio to women has increased so dramatically over the past decade. The article also explains how it is a problem because “not all general practitioners recognize the symptoms in males” (paragraph 5) and they are not getting treated.

This work was kind of useful. It was very current, it was printed in July of 2011, but it was printed from research in the UK. So not from America. This also shows that this problem is worldwide. The Newspaper this was printed for was a legitimate UK media center. It was a good work to study.

Dobie, Michael. “Losing Weight, Losing Lives.: Newsday (Long Island, NY). Dec. 28 1997: A4+. SIRS Issues Researcher. Web.05 Mar 2012.

In the beginning this article attributes eating disorders to sports, specifically wrestling. Then it explains the harmful effects it can do to your body. After that it begins to talk more about the individual problems of people with eating disorders and has ratios of sports and eating disordered men like how 93.8% of men in wrestling are prone to eating disorders. After talking about wrestling and coaches it goes into comparing men and women. And a search for understanding and gives info and further explanations of the disorders.

This was a good article to research because it was strait with the problems that we were trying to find. This article was printed in “NEWSDAY” which is a well known newspaper in Long Island, NY so the credibility is legitimate. This paper was extensive and informative. Even though it was printed in late 1997 it was a good article to use.

Lample, Samuel S. “Eating Disorders: Not Just a ‘Woman’s Problem’.” Addiction Professional. May/Jun 2009: 22-25. SIRS Issues Researcher. Web 05 Mar 2012

This Journal begins by introducing the involvement of males in this disease. It talks about the women: men ratio and how many males known of the disease. Then it begins to talk about eating

disorder's relation to substance abuse. It concludes with an explanation of a popular treatment called Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

This was a good article to research, it was quite recent, printed in June 2009, and it not only gave information, but treatment and other helpful guides for the paper. This paper was written by an Addiction Professional and this paper also gave 14 different references where he got his information from.

Omelianuk, Scott. "Understanding Male Anorexia." *Swing*. Oct. 1995: 78-81. SIRS Issues Researcher: Web. 05 Mar

This article starts out with a well known story of a gymnast who becomes anorexic and eventually dies, then goes on to tell of the problem of the men and that they're embarrassed. They also receive less sympathy because women feel it's the men's fault. The article then goes on to explain the cause of the male eating disorders. The article claims it's because the quick change in gender roles. It also attributes it to sports.

This article was printed in a popular magazine called SWING so it has credibility, but it is quite dated. The article was printed in late 1995. It was spot on to the topic that we were researching though so in the end it was quite helpful.

Weintraub, Karen "It's a Guy Thing, Too" *Boston Globe*
14 Nov. 2011, G. 13. SIRS Issues Researcher Web, 27 Feb. 2012

This article demonstrates the underrepresentation of men with eating disorders. The experts that were interviewed are doctors, professors, and psychologists who all work in the field of eating disorders. These individuals discuss the common traits of males with eating disorders. This source is credible because it includes professionals from various fields all with coherent views. These individuals have been involved with this subject for long periods of time, and they observe the changes in our culture that contribute to this problem.

Anderson, Alec. Personal Interview. 7 March 2012

I started the interview by asking things that would help me understand what caused him to become anorexic. He told me many things like how his image of himself was too heavy and he wanted to lose weight. I then asked him questions that gave me information that he knew on others like if he knew of anyone else with the disorder or where he went to get help. I then finished the interview by asking how he got over it and asking his advice to give to someone going through this disorder.

The person who I interviewed was a kid named Alec Anderson. He was a good source to do information on because he had personal experience with anorexia. This was a live person interview from experience so there is much credibility here.

Searle, Kim. Personal Interview. 7 March 2012

Kim Searle is a psychology teacher at Copper Hills High School. She received her BS in psychology from Utah State University in 1986, and her counseling certification from USU in 1987. In the years of 1986 and 1987 Searle was a counselor at Bear River Mental Health. After which she became a counselor at Rivendell Psychiatric Hospital for Children and Adolescents until 1989. She also has a MS in Educational Administration at the Grand Canyon University in 2007.