

Bulimia

(Continued from page 1)

are usually close to a healthy body weight."

Cocklin said people don't realize the methods of losing weight — purging, sleeping, diuretics and laxatives — can be shown to be ineffective.

For example, people believe that diuretics will release their bodies of all excess water. But in reality, after a period of time a diuretic will cause a person's body to naturally retain the water, Cocklin said.

Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital's Dr. Steve Litter said eating disorders such as bulimia occur when dieting and preoccupation with slimness become extreme.

"Bulimia is composed of compulsive eating binges followed by the purging of food," Litter said. "It can lead to severe dental problems, kidney failure or cardiac arrest."

In the short run, bulimia can cause dizziness, weakness, moodiness, insomnia, swollen glands, irregular menstruation or loss of hair and nail quality, Cocklin said.

In the long run, bulimia can cause stomach and esophagus pain, tooth decay because of stomach acid from vomiting, constipation or loss of normal bowel functions, malnutrition, electrolyte imbalance or death, Cocklin said.

Bulimia is most common in females, she said, but is not absent in males.

"On A&M's campus, about 98 percent of the patients who are treated for bulimia are females," Cocklin said.

Women must earn respect through their physical appearance in America today, Cocklin said. It is a "sick society" that makes women deal with this, she said. In today's society, she said, women are condi-

tioned to be slender and look good at all times.

Litter said bulimia is more common than most people think.

"On any given college campus about 25 percent to 30 percent of the females have at one time engaged in some kind of bulimic activity," he said. "It becomes a noticeable problem with women during the high school and college ages because of all of the pressures to be beautiful."

Cocklin and Litter agreed that bulimia is definitely predominant in females.

"My personal theory is that in the past, men have had more outlets to prove themselves, such as work or athletics," Litter said. "However, a woman's main outlet to prove herself was through her beauty. That is why women are more concerned with their weight and appearance."

Bulimia usually becomes most ap-

parent during the college years because it is such a stressful time, Cocklin said. Bulimia almost always starts at the end of high school or the beginning of college, she said, because eating has been learned as a way to cope with problems.

An Overeaters Anonymous member who asked to be called "Jane" said the College Station OA group offers a student meeting every Thursday night in the MSC.

It is a small group because most students still believe they can cure themselves, she said. Students are usually not desperate enough to get help.

But there are a variety of ways, directly and indirectly, a bulimic may find help. Bulimics go to Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital in three different stages, Litter said.

About one-third of his patients come to him and admit that they have bulimia, he said. Another one-third of his patients come to the hospital for another reason, which he discovers is triggered by bulimia. The remaining one-third of his patients come after their family members or friends have contacted him, Litter said.

Cocklin said bulimics usually disguise their problem as a more "acceptable" problem.

The length of time someone is actually affected by bulimia differs in each case, Litter said. He has had patients with bulimia for more than 25 years before they were treated.

The anonymous A&M student quoted earlier suffered from bulimia for more than four years before she got help in the recovery program.

"I always thought I could stop when I wanted to," she said. "Until one day I realized I couldn't fake it anymore. I finally realized I needed help and I couldn't do it by myself."

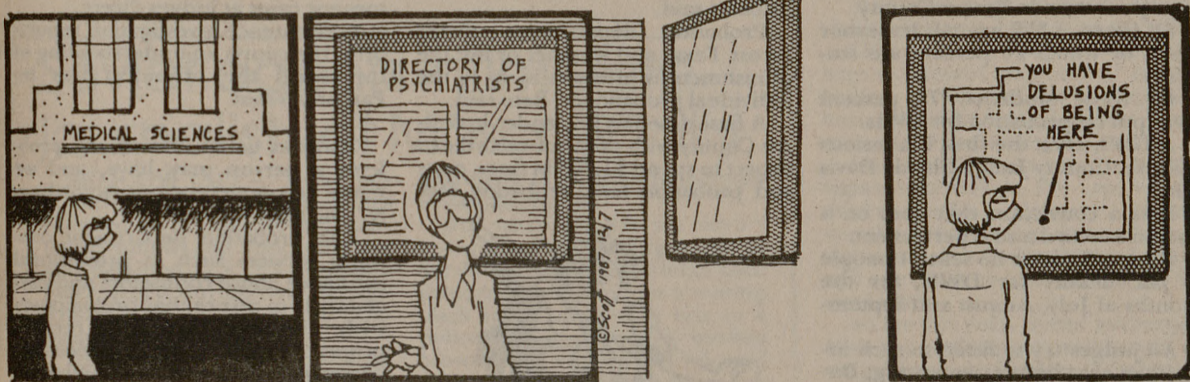
The student went to many extremes to hide her eating pattern. Some days she spent as much as \$30 on food, she said.

Cocklin said it is not uncommon for bulimics to make five or six stops a day at different food stores. This is a way of hiding the amount of food they buy at one time, she said.

One of the student's roommates, who also wished to remain anonymous, said the bulimic roommate thought she was hiding the problem from the people she lived with, but she was unsuccessful; they suspected it all along. They recognized that her eating habits were not normal, but they did not know what to do, the roommate said.

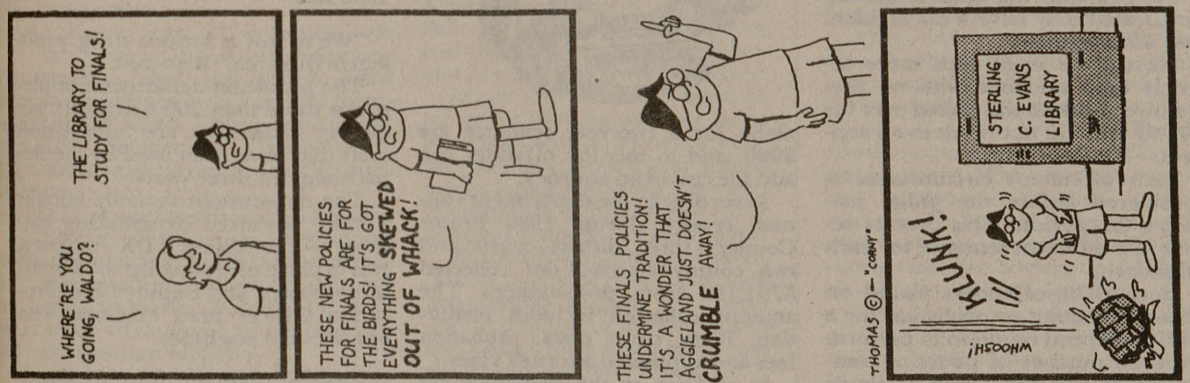
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