

Deeper problems usually underlie eating disorders

By KIMBER HUFF AND MICHAEL SCHAUB
 THE BATTALION

A college student sits down to lunch with her friends. Today, lunch consists of a small portion of salad and a glass of water. Immediately after finishing, she excuses herself, goes to the bathroom and induces vomiting.

This is not a scene from an after-school special — it is a way of life for many students with eating disorders.

Dr. Jane Cohen, campus nutritionist and health education coordinator, said many college students overemphasize their relationship with food and worry about their weight when they should focus on health.

"When food is limited or overly obsessed about, there is a cause for concern," Cohen said.

This type of unhealthy obsession is defined as an eating disorder.

According to Dr. Debbie Rabinowitz, a psychologist for Student Counseling Services, the two most common types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Rabinowitz said bulimics have a tendency to binge and purge.

"Most often they purge by throwing up, but also by using laxatives," Rabinowitz said. "Even exercise can be a type of purging, when people eat two cookies and then think they have to run five miles."

Rabinowitz said one effect of bulimia is irregularity of hormones and metabolism.

Anorexics, on the other hand, are often so obsessed with weight that they make extreme restrictions on their diet, often cutting down to a few foods.

"They have this fear of getting fat that consumes them," Rabinowitz said.

Cohen said anorexics do not make their food choices based on lack of knowledge.

"Anorexics know a lot about food choices," Cohen said. "Sometimes anorexics are perfectionists and food is something they can control, so they use it instead of focusing on other problems they can't solve."

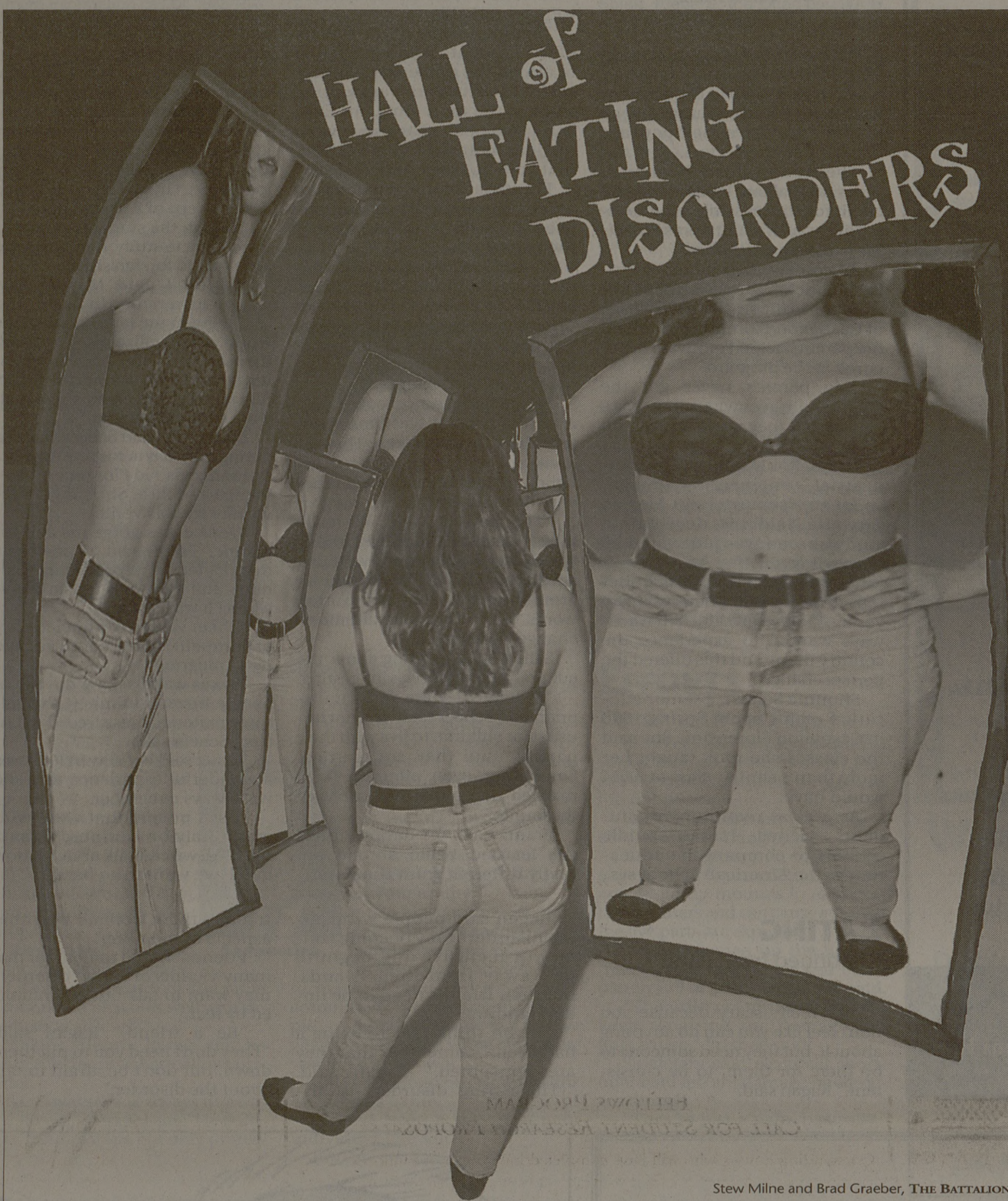
Rabinowitz said possible effects of anorexia include starvation and loss of the monthly menstrual cycle for females.

Both types of eating disorders restrict the number of calories consumed, causing the victim to become tired and irritable, said Cohen.

Some people who have eating disorders fit a profile, Rabinowitz said.

"Eating disorders definitely occur more in women. Well over 90 to 95 percent are in women," Rabinowitz said. "Mood disorders are often associated with eating disorders, depression in particular. It's not always true, but it's a greater than normal percentage."

Cohen said students with eating disorders sometimes say they have no control over their lives, so they control the only thing they can — food.



Stew Milne and Brad Graeber, THE BATTALION

orders sometimes say they have no control over their lives, so they control the only thing they can — food.

"The focus should be on what's causing the problem," Cohen said. "The food is the tip of the iceberg."

Rabinowitz said people with eating disorders often have distorted images of themselves.

"Eating disorders are disorders of the self, of how they perceive themselves," Rabinowitz said. "The restriction (of diet) and the purging are the over-symptoms. What is underneath all that? A need for control, de-

pression family issues, difficulty in romantic relationships."

Sarah Ragan, a junior nutritional science major, is a member of Aggie R.E.A.C.H., a peer education organization that focuses on sexual and nutritional health.

Ragan said because the problem often goes deeper than the actual eating disorder, victims should see a dietitian, a doctor and a psychologist.

Rabinowitz said if a student suspects a friend has an eating disorder, he or she should be supportive and open in expressing his or her concern.

"Encourage them to come to a place like Student Counseling Services and talk," Rabinowitz said. "But you have to be careful not to take on all the responsibility for this person. Ultimately, each person is responsible for themselves. You have to have patience."

Ragan, who has a close friend with anorexia nervosa, said if a student knows someone with an eating disorder, he or she should attempt to understand the problem.

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Having a weight problem means battling compulsion, society's negative stereotypes

Some people get stickers. Others get a high-five and a pat on the back. But whenever I was successful in my potty-training endeavors, I was rewarded with a Hershey's Chocolate Kiss.

To this day, my mom jokes that if she had given me a celery or carrot stick instead, I might not have had a weight problem later in life.

Weight has not always been an issue for me. Old family photos portray me as a wiry little girl with unruly red hair and thick glasses, but a lot has changed in the past 15 years. I have since discovered Salon Selectives and entered the wonderful world of contacts. But now I have a weight problem.

Although there seems to be a cultural stereotype that overweight people are lazy and do not know the first thing about exercise, this is not always true. Compulsive overeating, like anorexia nervosa or bulimia, is classified as an eating disorder. While some people exercise, sleep or read when they are lonely or stressed out, I turn to the only comfort I know: food.

Some people seem to think an overweight person should strive hard to lose weight and get in shape.

While it is true that nothing is accomplished without hard work and determination, some people fail to realize that people who overeat have a problem that goes far beyond the usual craving for chocolate.

Many of us have splurged and eaten a whole pint of chocolate chunk ice cream in one sitting, but how many people can say they have eaten a whole gallon in their room, hoping to God no one walks in? It may sound a little far-fetched, but many compulsive overeaters have been there. Done that.

Columnist



Melissa Price
 Senior journalism major

Got the T-shirt.

One doesn't have to look far to realize we live in a society that values thin, beautiful people. Most men would agree that Cindy Crawford or Demi Moore is more attractive than Ricki Lake, and

most women would say Tom Cruise is a better catch than John Goodman. From billboards to television, we are bombarded with daily images proclaiming that thin and healthy is "in."

Although anyone can lose weight if they put their mind to it, it remains to be said that a person cannot lose weight unless they want to. No matter how much a person may want a loved one to lose weight, no amount of love or support will ensure another person will do it. If one wants to help a friend or loved one lose weight, they should offer to be their workout partner and encourage their friend to go to the gym as much as possible.

It is upsetting to think some people still judge others by the way they look. However, the fact that we base our judgments of others on how much they weigh or what they look like is a part of life that is not likely to change anytime soon.

As we search for potential mates, we do not walk up to someone of the opposite sex and say, "Hey baby! I dig your personality, even though you look like you just got run over by a truck. Wanna go out?"

As an overweight person in a society so concerned with looks, it is still difficult for me to understand why some are so cruel to overweight people. I have been in a club many times and heard, "Hey baby, he wants you!" — knowing it is only a joke. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will always hurt me.

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