The Growing Number Of Teenage Girls Being Stricken With Eating Disorders Today Essay, Research Paper

An eating disorder is defined as a preoccupation with dieting and thinness leading to excessive weight loss. Ten years ago, the number of teenagers who suffered from eating disorders was less than 500,000. Today, there are more than three million teenage girls, in the U.S. alone, being stricken with diseases such as anorexia and bulimia. The alarming fact is that more than 15% of these girls will die. There are a number of different causes behind the developement of eating disorders. The stress put on young girls by the opposite sex and the fact that young girls face constant exposure to the “be thin” message from television, movies, fashion magazines, and the diet industry. Yet, the number one factor that runs through more than 95% of eating disorder victims is the issue of mental illness.

Day in and day out, young girls deal with so much pressure from the opposite sex. In a poll taken in 1997, 80% of five thousand men claimed they perceive the perfect woman to be tall and thin. They also said that their idea of tall and thin was 5’10, 130 pounds. In reality, that description fits less than 5% of the population. Young men sometimes give girls a terrible self-image of themselves. Sometime, the harmless words of an adolescent boy can lead a girl with low self-esteem to a dangerous eating disorder.

Take a look a one of today’s fashion magazines! The definition of skinny is perceived in every picture. Not too long ago, Marilyn Monroe was the absolute icon of beauty. Today, a Hollywood casting director would tell her to come back when she’d lost some weight. Today’s standards of beauty are anorexic looking models and movie stars like Calista Flockhart of “Ally McBeal.” Twenty years ago, models weighed 8% less than the average woman; today, models weigh 23% less than the average woman. “The pressure to be thin is greater than ever and young girls are being bombarded with images from the media and a culture obsessed with youth, beauty, and thinness.” (Crosby, 2)

Research shows that an issue of mental illness is one outstanding theme that runs through every person with an eating disorder. When a person’s physical, social, emotional, or psychological boundaries are consistently ignored they experience boundary invasion. In teenagers, it frequently becomes an issue of social boundaries. Their parents have authority over almost everything they do. Their weight is one of the only things that they can control. This gives them a feeling of importance and contentment. After the eating disorder has fully developed, doctors say that it is all in their heads. They do not see the frail, thin person that the rest of us see when they look in the mirror. Many psychiatrisits say that a person must overcome this disease on their own and constant harrassment to eat will only push them farther away from recovery.

Although, only some take it to the extreme, every girl experiences problems with their weight at one point in their lives. It is very important to know the warning signs of an eating disorder; such as, preoccupation with food and dieting, excessive exercise, low self-esteem, and depression and moodiness. We also must remember that it is an illness and it will not just go away in time. This is an endless road that only three in five girls will conquer. Unlike cancer and AIDS, there is no hope for a cure to this deadly disease. “Teenage girls need to see beyond their physical appearance and begin to love themselves for who they are and not what they look like.” (Crosby, 3)

1. Costin, Carolyn. The Eating Disorder Sourcebook: A comprehensive guide to the causes, treatments, and prevention of eating disorders. 2nd edition: Lowell House, 1999.

2. Moe, Barbara. Understanding Negative Body Image (Teen Eating Disorder Prevention Book). 1st edition: Rosen Publishing, 1999.

3. Crosby, Johanna. You Can Be Too Thin: Society shapes girls’ body images- in dangerous ways. Cape Cod Times, March 11, 1999.