

# Eating disorders still common among women

BY SIMONA RABINOVITCH

MONTREAL (CUP) — Twenty-year-old Cynthia is on her diet again. Her consciousness of the subtle changes in her body enables her to guess her weight to the precise ounce without even stepping on the scale. A university student who works part-time at a health club, Cynthia has been obsessed with her weight since she was 17.

"I've gone through a hard time in my life lately, and I'm an emotional eater, so I've been eating like a pig and exercising less," she says over a supper of roasted potatoes and egg white soufflé. "If I don't exercise, I feel fat and guilty."

At 5'3 and 120 pounds, Cynthia's fit physique is the envy of many sweaty bodies at the gym. Her brown eyes expose her defeat as she wages against her own body. In a voice that is almost a whisper, she admits that her body obsession rules her life.

Body dysphoria is an attitude disorder that affects millions of women and girls in Western society. The term body dysphoria is used to describe a woman's distorted view of her body. It is a warning sign for eating disorders, but more significantly, it indicates a harmful self-destructive and disempowering attitude.

Beauty's obsession eats away at a woman's sense of self-esteem, and experts agree that poor self-esteem lies at the heart of

most eating disorders.

This explains why more women than men develop anorexia and bulimia. Montreal dietitian Terry Dimitratos claims the binge-and-purge cycle begins with dieting. Even women who are not overweight diet, for fear of becoming fat.

All this obsessive weight loss effort leads women to associate self-esteem with deprivation.

Because we are expected to be paranoid about the way we look, many women who have crossed the line from obsession into dysphoria don't even realize they have a problem. "I feel fat" has become a litany of womanhood. The smaller the jeans, the greater the soul.

Not only is the longing for razor-sharp curves disempowering, for most women it is simply mission impossible. Less than five per cent of women are capable of achieving the glorified bodies of supermodels without exercising for hours and eating little more than a few celery sticks each day, according to Dimitratos.

"Since most of us compare ourselves to an unattainable ideal, we feel we're not good enough," says Dimitratos. "We need to start accepting ourselves for who we are."

Because she hasn't starved herself in "almost two years," Cynthia feels that she has finally overcome the eating disorder that has twice caused her to try to vomit.

"It didn't work," she says flatly. Seeing herself in the bathroom mirror with her polished fingernail rammed down her throat shocked Cynthia into reality. "Now I know there are other things in life, like family and career, that are more important than my weight," she says.

For women who are obsessed with their physical appearance, the seed of self-loathing is planted early in life. A study by the Dairy Bureau of Canada revealed that 30 per cent of nine-year-old girls and an overwhelming 80 per cent of 12-year-old girls think they should be thinner. Nine per cent of those pre-teens are anorexic.

Nutritionist Lisa Duperneau of the Montreal Children's Hospital works closely with children who are suffering from eating disorders. She says she often treats children showing symptoms of anorexia or bulimia.

By identifying the unhealthy mental attitude at the root of an eating disorder, Duperneau is able to stop the cycle of self-hatred before it manifests itself in physical symptoms.

Controversial feminist author Naomi Wolf argues that the closer women come to power, the more society plays on their vulnerabilities of physical self-consciousness to keep them down.

In her bestseller, *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf explains how the beauty backlash prevents us from moving on to the next phase of the feminist movement.

But don't despair: Wolf reminds us that more and more women are finding power and freedom in sources other than the bathroom scale.

According to 1991 statistics, more than half of Canadians are women. Wolf says this statistic makes women potentially unstoppable. So why do so many women feel like a minority?

Throughout history, men have traditionally been recognized for their skills and achievements, while women have been recognized for their physical beauty, says Dimitratos, who acknowledges that the female standard of beauty has been somewhat self-imposed.

Beautiful, brilliant young women are plagued by self-hatred because they cannot remodel themselves according to a new set of blueprints. Ironically, this insecurity becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-esteem is reduced to nothing. Feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness prevail.

Women are collectively to blame for succumbing to media messages. It's easy to point a finger at everyone else for their own dysfunction: the media, men, mothers, fathers.

By refusing to accept responsibility for their own detriments and, consequently, for their own self-improvement, women are perceiving themselves as passive participants in their own lives. This kind of thinking kicks women in the face as hard as beauty obsession.

The female quest for physical perfection is the bread and low-fat, non-dairy spread of countless industries. "Be younger, slimmer; therefore a better, more worthwhile, desirable person," cry the flawless buttocks of a thirteen-year-old nymph in a Christian Dior advertisement for a cellulite-reducing elixir.

Women must learn to be conscious of these subliminal messages; to look at unrealistic images critically with an awareness of their inherent purpose. And resist.

Self-image is still impossible to ignore. How can women unlearn decades of priorities?

From Betty Boop to Kate Moss, unrealistic body images have been around for a long time. How can women suddenly decide to ignore the media and convince themselves that their self-worth need not be connected to the way they look?

The answer is by accepting that physical appearance is just a small part of female identity. All healthy bodies are uniquely beautiful. Instead of showing off their pouty red mouths, women should flaunt their sharp, witty tongues. Taking responsibility for body obsession and eating disorders is the only way to prevent them.

The key to overcoming this obsession is for women to make love to their self-esteem. Not the shallow, inconsistent self-esteem that comes from beauty, but a deeper self-love that sticks around the morning after.

With true self-esteem comes the strength to act and speak aggressively, the confidence to resist seductive media images, and the power to initiate change.

## Against Animal Testing? Prove it!

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Tens of thousands of animals are killed every year in laboratories throughout the world. Their lives, however, are not being gallantly sacrificed in an attempt to save mankind from any deadly disease. They are suffering and dying to pamper human vanity.

Although most cosmetic products we see today bear the statements "Not Tested On Animals", "Cruelty Free", or "Against Animal Testing", one should not be so easily fooled.

The Body Shop of Canada, through the new Strategic Objectives campaign — "PROVE IT!" — is urging consumers to demand that companies not only state, but provide proof that they do not support any form of animal testing for cosmetic purposes.

Contrary to popular belief, most cosmetic tests performed on animals are ingredient tests and not product tests. A company who claims its products were not tested on animals may have used animal-tested ingredients in those same products.

Animal testing for cosmetic

purposes is considered by many to be unethical, unnecessary, and simply unreliable. Currently, there are about 8,000 cosmetic ingredients available for use which have already been deemed safe. These ingredients can be used by cosmetic companies to produce innovative and effective products with no further animal testing.

Toxicologists are questioning the value of any data generated from tests on animals when they are so physiologically and metabolically different from humans.

The Body Shop's ultimate goal is a worldwide ban on animal testing for cosmetic purposes. Until this happens, they believe that companies and governments are not likely to provide sup-

port for the development of alternative testing.

"If modern science can find a way to send people to the moon," says Body Shop Canada President Margot Franssen, "why can't it develop a more accurate and humane way to test cosmetics than mouse-testing?"

The Body Shop has set up an Alternative Research Fund to provide grants for those working in

the alternative research field. They are donating \$1 from the sale of every Against Animal Testing T-shirt to the fund.

We as consumers are being urged to use our purchase power to take action against animal testing. We must stop passively accepting the subtle lies many cosmetic companies are feeding us. If a company says they are not testing on animals, ask them to PROVE IT!

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