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Significance of the Feminization of Male Eating Disorders

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Introduction

Around the time I was formulating my topic for my research paper, I had been learning about the global burden of disease in my global health course. I was particularly intrigued by the fact that one of the highest burdens of disease across the world is mental illness. This surprising statistic sparked my own interest in researching eating disorders. However, I hoped to research the various types of eating disorders through a more narrowed scope, particularly, in a specific culture. As a result, I planned to investigate the reasons why eating disorders are stigmatized as a feminine illness in the American culture, the differences between the different forms of eating disorders between men and women, and the societal influences that cause these varying differences.

Methods

In order to conduct my research, I attended an information session with my fellow classmates in order to learn how to use Olin Library's search tool, Primo. Once I was sufficiently trained on how to use Primo, I was able to find an adequate number of scholarly articles and one informative book to use for my essay. Although I integrated much of the research I found from these articles into my paper, I included the information found in some of the other articles by critiquing them. Doing so allowed me to illustrate that the methods individuals typically use to research, diagnose, and treat male eating disorders are flawed.

Findings

Through writing this paper, I found that one of the main reasons why individuals develop eating disorders is due to the way other individuals are portrayed in popular culture and the media. However, the reason why many male eating disorders go unnoticed is because boys and men adopt behaviors aimed at making their bodies look more muscular and defined. Individuals tend to associate eating disorders with females and therefore only identify eating disorder behaviors in individuals who are attempting to make themselves skinnier in unhealthy ways. The issue is that the media and therefore society idealize men who appear strong and who act strong. This inhibits individuals from detecting eating disorders in males because they expect that men won't develop eating disorders simply because they are men.

Consequently, much of the research conducted on eating disorders uses female subjects. Although this is beneficial for women, doctors do not have access to a wide variety of research on male eating disorders and therefore use these findings to diagnose males with eating disorders. This causes male eating disorders to go undiagnosed. If they are indeed detected, doctors tend to use therapies aimed at helping women, rather than men. This cycle will continue until individuals stop stereotyping men and avoid stigmatizing male eating disorders.

Most Valuable Sources

- *Eating Disorders in Males: Masculinity and Fragility: the Two-Faced Janus of Male Identity*
- "Research Review: What We Have Learned about the Causes of Eating Disorders- a Synthesis of Sociocultural, Psychological, and Biological Research"
- "Treatment of Eating Disorders in Primary Systematic Review"



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