

Warning: The issue is addressed in a general manner in the article. Still, there are continuous mentions of food and eating disorders and may contain some specific examples. If you are sensitive to such topics, please proceed cautiously.

Eating Disorders: Deeper Than Meets The Eye **by Ece Hasgül**

Food is the thing we eat to get calories, to fill our bodies with nutrients so that we can keep on living. However, we adhere much more meaning to it than the first and primary reason that we consume food seems irrelevant. Food is a big part of cultures, customs, and social interaction. Whenever there is a big celebration or a gathering, there is always food involved. As it is an instinct that we eat because we want to survive, putting it into one box to fit is unnecessary.

We eat because we need energy, but answers to what and when to eat probably doesn't relate to our survival in the modern age. We can actually argue that it has so little to do with it. We eat when we are stressed, when we are happy, when we are sad or angry. There are certain things called "comfort foods" that we like to eat in terms of when we feel anxious and need emotional support. We address meanings and memories to some foods that it even becomes a tradition in a family or in a country. Our relationship with food is not simple in any terms, and for many it is not healthy.

There are so many people suffering from eating disorders, the relationship with food becomes very toxic because of many factors such as beauty norms, the need for acceptance, stress. It shows in various ways for various people too. Most commonly known are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa as they can have the most extreme effects on the body and lead even to death. However, there are more eating disorders than it seems to the eye. Some people do not eat because of the fear of gaining weight, some throw out what they have eaten before they can digest it. Others can eat non-stop and consume 10000 calories in a span of minutes -for comparison, an adult consumes 2,000 calories per day on average varying according to bodies and physical activities-, another group of people can be obsessed with only eating healthy and not consuming any carbohydrates.

Not only skinny people are the ones who have eating disorders, normal-sized people, and "fat" people can also have unhealthy relationships with food. Although it is portrayed by the media as someone who is very skinny is anorexic or bulimic and someone fat has a binge eating disorder, it is not easy to guess from the outside. Someone who might look completely healthy and has strong muscles may actually have anorexia, and someone very skinny may go through binge eating episodes very frequently, leading to extreme exercises and throwing up. People who carry similar symptoms may have different body types. And some individuals do not even fit one of the disorders as they have different symptoms from many.

Although they are very common, it is harder to see and acknowledge eating disorders because we are exposed to similar behaviors portrayed as normal in many ways. Since we are familiar with the idea of “eating so little” and seeing thin bodies as an indicator of beauty. That is also why eating disorders are most common among young girls. They are the group who are most exposed to the idea of being skinny equaling beauty and believe that it will determine their place in society. Also because they are likely to be going through puberty and don’t have strong personalities and stable mentalities, they are more likely to be swayed by such ideas. Needless to say, eating disorders are very real regardless of ages and gender. An adult can go through the same, although probably having different causes.

Society’s expectation and the pressure that is put on the teenagers both by their peers, adults, and media leads them to a place where they have distorted images of their own body, which is always different than their ideal regardless of how it is seen from the outside. Even though it may be seen as they eat little, in the case of anorexia, they might have obsessions regarding their food, their mind being surrounded by the thought of food constantly. Likely to label some foods as “bad” and “good”, they may go beyond that and be even scared to eat high-calorie foods such as chocolates, nuts, fatty meats. These extreme reactions are sometimes even rewarded by society, as they indicate the strong willpower of the individuals. As they are appreciated by others, people may not even see the damage they cause to their bodies and the unhealthy mentality they have.

On the other hand, what others think is not the concern of these people anymore. What they care about is reaching their goal and it is hard to stop when it becomes a habit. Treating eating disorders are complicated and methods may vary from one to other likewise to the how disorder developed. It is very crucial to get professional help from someone. Change in one’s own way of thinking and seeing themselves is the most important part, acknowledging the problems comes first. It may take a long time, and relapses are expected throughout the treatment. Even after a long time, in a period of time, you don’t need any help, the traces may be left in one’s mind. Nevertheless, it is not something that cannot be overcome.

Between us, cultures, emotional attachments, and media; food becomes a complex and very prominent part of our lives and identities. Sometimes, it leads to an unhealthy understanding of it. It is important to remember that eating disorders are valid and not something to be joked or envied about. There are many more symptoms and various disorders that this piece of writing doesn’t cover and it affects many individuals, and families even though it cannot be identified with a simple look.