

LIVE

Relating rather than imitating

health notes

QUESTION:

Why does it seem like women, and not men, are the ones who have more eating disorders or body image issues? Don't men have a lot of pressure to look good too?

ANSWER:

Yes, men have pressure to look good too but not in the same way or with the same societal pressure that women do. Next time you are in a store that sells magazines, look at the number of magazines devoted to women's fashion and beauty. Women are being bombarded with these messages everywhere they look and they far outnumber the messages that men receive throughout the day to "look good, thin, and young."

However, I don't want to leave the impression that eating disorders and body image issues are created within us simply because of the magazines we



see or read. Let's look at this a bit more psychologically.

One of the primary coping differences between men and women is that women tend to deal with problems by internalizing them, while men tend to externalize more. This is why women come for therapy saying they are depressed and anxious, and men come to therapy saying they are angry or dissatisfied with someone else.

I know I am simplifying the

issue here, but only to make the following point. Another way to put this is that women tend to turn their feelings inwards on themselves, taking on a lot of blame for lots of things (relationships, children, etc.) and as a result, feelings (like fear, shame or loss) begin to slowly turn into depression and anxiety.

Since women cannot keep everything neatly tucked inside them, it often comes out in external ways such as eating disorders (focusing on food) or body image (focusing on physical appearance). So this is where the magazines support this internalized way of coping because it "normalizes" women's focus on eating and body image.

Men tend to let their feelings out, in healthy and unhealthy ways, and so they don't need to develop eating disorders and body image issues to deal with the feelings inside

them. Men get into problems with their feelings when they do not deal with their feelings at all and externalize everything. At the extreme, this is when men become abusive to others and create an emotional environment where they blame others for all their feelings and act them out in controlling and violent ways.

So, what is the common issue here for men and women? It is that we are not as a society very good at allowing people to have feelings and then get support for those feelings? If we were, we might spend more time relating to each other and less time trying to imitate the very unreal world of magazine models.

Julia Staub-French, M.A., R.C.C., is director of clinical programs at Family Services of the North Shore. Questions? Write onthecouch@familyservices.bc.ca or call 604-988-5281.

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someone who has gone above and beyond the call of duty providing support to cancer patients. Info: www.bccancer.bc.ca or 604-877-6000, ext. 6216.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Anorexics, Bulimics and Overeaters Anonymous: Meets Wednesdays, 7 p.m. and Saturdays, 9:30 a.m., at Avalon Women's Centre. Info: 604-913-0477.

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous: Meets Mondays, 7:30-8:30 p.m. at the Alano Club, 176 East Second St., North Vancouver. Info: 604-626-2242.

Cancer Connection: Canadian Cancer Society has peer volunteers offering one-to-one information and emotional support to people living with cancer. Info: 1-888-939-3333.

Caregiver Support Groups: The second and fourth Wednesday of the month, 12:30-2:30 p.m. or the first and third Thursday, 7-9 p.m., North Shore Community Resources, 201-925 Marine Dr., North Vancouver. Info: 604-982-3320.

Caregivers Journey: Learn coping skills, practical strategies and community resources for looking after someone with an illness or disability. Share your experiences with other caregivers who feel the same as you do. The course is free but registration is required. Call North Shore Community Resources at 604-982-3320 or e-mail at cindy.bouvet@nscr.bc.ca for information on dates and times.

Co-dependents Anonymous, a 12-step fellowship for people with relationship difficulties, holds weekly meetings on the North Shore. Info: 604-515-5585.

Compassionate Friends of the North Shore: A support group for bereaved parents meets the second Wednesday of every month, 7:30 p.m. in the upper lounge of North Lonsdale United Church, 3380 Lonsdale Ave., North Vancouver. Info: Cathy at 604-926-6513.

Dual Diagnosis Anonymous, a support group for persons recovering from an addiction and mental illness, meets every Monday evening at Lions Gate Hospital in seminar room C (behind the cafeteria). Info: Larry at 604-980-4152.

Eating Disorders: A support group for parents meets twice a month at Lions Gate Hospital. Info: Susan at 604-926-6100 or Kathy at 604-925-3032.

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