

BATTLING BODY IMAGE AS A MALE



Photo: verywellmind

WAIT, GUYS HAVE EATING DISORDERS TOO?

Generally, disordered eating and negative body image are associated with females. It is immediately assumed that women receive the bad end of the stick when it comes to feeling immense pressure to conform to unrealistic, demoralizing body standards. Women are expected to stay thin and toned, eat healthy diets, eat smaller portions, and always look "good" in the clothing they wear. Men have faster metabolisms right? -- They don't have to worry about their weight, their appearance, and their diets because no one really judges them for what they eat or how they look in clothing right? Wrong. Those are horrible misconceptions.

This harmful bias has left men feeling as though they cannot be sensitive and as though they don't have the "right" to feel pain -- that their struggles with disordered eating and body image are invalid and insignificant. But the pressure of maintaining a perfect physique weighs down on males just as much as it does for females, so it is time to end the negative stigma surrounding male vulnerability. Males should not feel ashamed and as though they must bury their feelings to fit the norm.

According to the NEDA, "about one in three people struggling with an eating disorder is male," and disordered-eating behaviors (bingeing, purging, laxative abuse, and fasting, etc.) are as common among men as they are among women. Yet, our cultural stereotypes and biases leave males scared to speak out and seek help, which has led to males being underdiagnosed and undertreated.

In the 1980s, steroid use became an obsession for many men in the general population. They strived to "improve" their physical appearance to match that of fictional Greek Gods or at the least, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Over time and still to this day, such impossible standards still continue to be ingrained into males' minds, whether it be on social media, between friends, at school, or in the gym. Males, starting at young ages, feel obligated to look "ripped," to workout constantly, and to maintain disciplined diets. Almost everyday, you can hear allegedly "playful" comments in the hallways consisting of guys criticizing other guys for being too "small," "scrawny," or "unfit." As a result, their relationships with themselves become corrupted as they no longer are able to be intuitive with their own bodies.

Males don't have it "easier" than females when it comes to body image. Historically, males have been omitted from research on eating disorders, there has been lack of recognition for eating disorder symptoms by males and their family members, and there has even been bias from health professionals. The stigma that disordered eating is a "female illness" results in harmfully inadequate attention for males. Especially on social media, eating disorder support is directed primarily towards females; the mainstream, toxic perceptions of masculinity destroy emotional consciences. It is imperative that everyone collectively recognizes and normalizes the fact that males struggle and are just as deserving of acceptance and support.