

Young White Female

That's the stereotypical image people have of the eating disorder sufferer. However, eating disorders do not discriminate. They affect people of every age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. For example, The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness states that "eating disorders currently affect approximately 25 million Americans, in which 25% are boys and men." According to this estimate, 6.25 million males suffer from anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder.

The National Eating Disorder Association gives statistics on the ED symptomatology experienced by African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American and Native American women, revealing that these minority populations are suffering at increasingly higher rates. Disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and other measures were not so different from white girls studied.

Harboring the attitude that these diseases exist only among a certain population does a huge disservice to so many who are desperate for help but also reluctant to seek help—out of fear or shame, or because of cultural mores, or because their struggle is minimized by the professional community.

Even the young white female does age. Many women in my practice who are in their 30's, 40's, 50's and beyond, share eating disorders that began in adolescence. Other women do not experience full-blown symptoms or even any disordered habits until middle age. Often, life transitions such as marriage, pregnancy, grief and loss can trigger a relapse.

The National Eating Disorders Association chose *Everybody Knows Somebody* as its theme for ED Awareness Week this year. This campaign brings public attention to the critical needs of people with eating disorders and their families. National attention is brought to the severity of these bio-psycho-social illnesses with potentially devastating, life-threatening consequences. While there is hope and recovery is possible, without early intervention many people suffer with long-term effects.