

Disorder can strike anyone

Anorexics need to control food, self-perspective

By Dorothy Pritchard
Daily Nebraskan Staff Writer

Gloria has just come to college. It is her first time away from home. In high school, she was a straight-A student; a little overweight, but always active. Lately, friends have noticed that Gloria has lost a tremendous amount of weight. They often say behind her back that she just "doesn't look well" anymore.

Gloria is not real, but like one of many women nationwide, she may be suffering from an eating disorder, anorexia nervosa. The disorder is characterized by several disturbances in a person's self-perception of their body image, a misinterpretation of "hunger," and a sense of being "unable to change anything," according to the director of the Mental Health Clinic at UNL.

Karen Kelly said the physical consequences of anorexia nervosa are severe weight loss (25 percent or more), a skeleton-like appearance, dry skin, anemia, cessation of menstruation and low body temperature.

Although anorexia nervosa is something we'd like to think "doesn't really happen" to us or anybody we know, the disorder can strike anyone, Kelly said. The disease is more widespread than most people realize.

What's at the bottom of the potentially fatal disorder?

"Preoccupation with bodies, weight and food are only the symptoms," she said. But the "real issues" are self-esteem and self-concept. Our culture tells us thin is in, and women get caught up with the sense of power they have over their bodies. By losing weight they think they're doing some-

thing other people can't do. There is pressure to be perfect, to be a superwoman, and if they can't control anything else, they can concentrate on their weight."

Many anorexics have a need to "live up" to family expectations and fear they are not good enough in comparison to others, even

though their goals may be unrealistic. Most anorexics are outstanding students and perfectionists, whose preoccupation with food begins with some change in their life, such as puberty or going away to college.

Although men also develop anorexia only 5 percent or less of

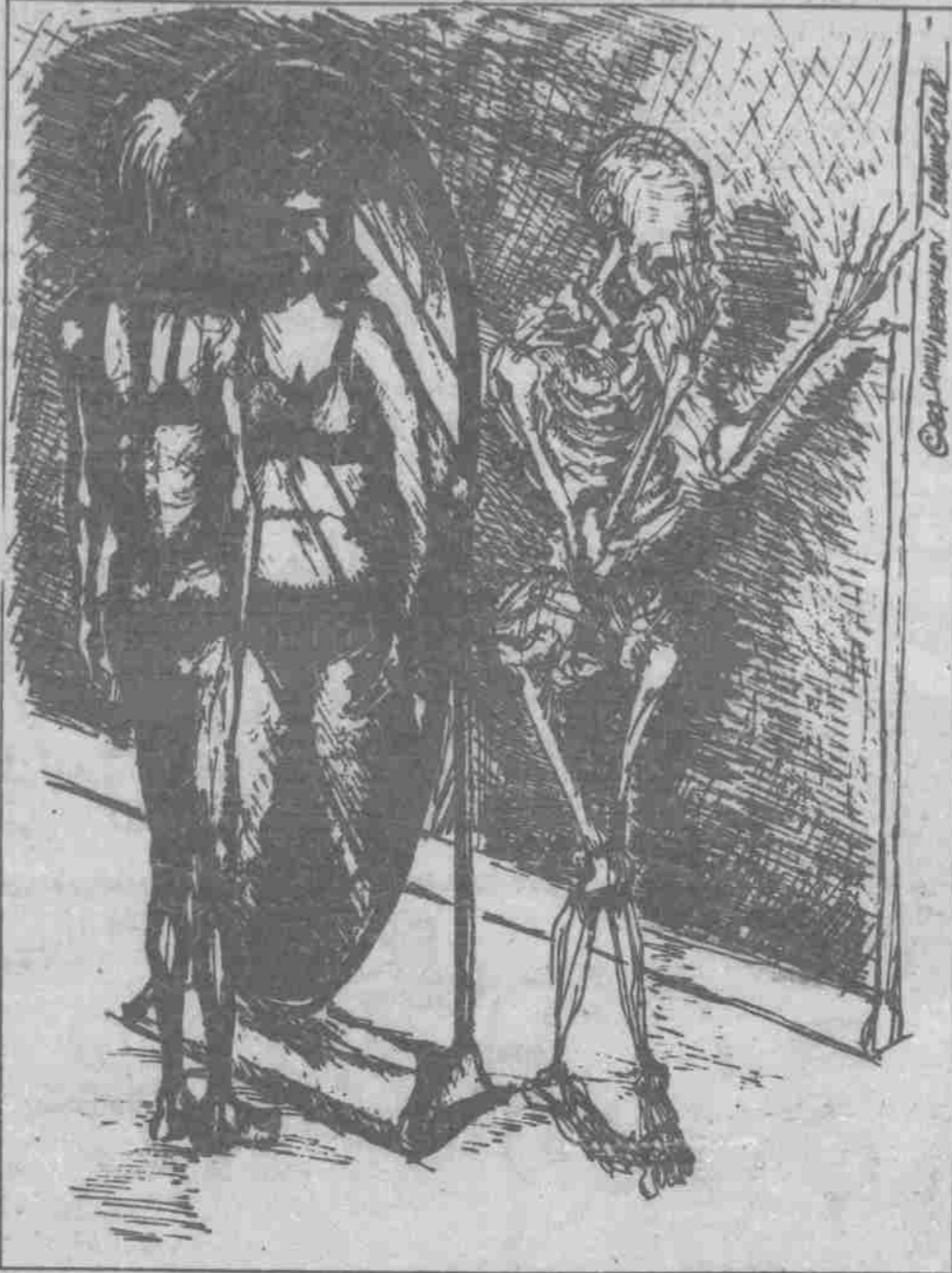
all anorexics are men, Kelly said. "Men who develop anorexia are usually athletes who are trying to lose weight for specific reasons, such as wrestling. They don't have the narrow ideals that are set for women," Kelly said.

There is no cure for anorexia nervosa. To be effectively treated the anorexic must want to be well.

"They need to gain control over their relationship with food and change their self-perspective," Kelly said. "Psychotherapy is as

important as the physical recovery. The attitudes must change or the problem comes right back."

Counseling for people with eating disorders is available at the Mental Health Clinic on campus, or by calling 472-5125. Group therapy and individual therapy also are available at the Psychological Consultation Center, Burnett Hall 111, or by calling 472-2351. The Community Mental Health Center of Lancaster County, 471-7940, also can provide counseling.



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