Body Image and Domestic Violence Issue

Some of us relish making hard decisions—they enjoy the intense pressure, and perhaps faux-omnipotence, that comes with difficult arbitrations. Conversely, some don’t walk, but run away from having to choose. Alas, we at the Holistic Healer are in the latter group. We just couldn’t choose whether to center this issue on domestic violence, because February is Domestic Violence Month, or body image, because Body Image Awareness Week is coming up in a few weeks. So we decided to do both...but are they really that different? They’re both forms of violence; one represents a violence caused by those close to the victim, and the other represents a violence against oneself. And, without a doubt, there are BOTH very pertinent issues to be aware of on campus.

Body image involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies. It’s not static—but ever changing: sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. It is not based on fact. It is psychological in nature, and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is not inborn, but learned. This learning occurs in the family and among peers, but these only reinforce what is learned and expected culturally. In this culture, we women are alternating between starving and gorging, purging, obsessing, and all the while hating, pounding and wanting to remove that which makes us female: our bodies, our curves, our pear-shaped selves.

Interestingly, Only 2% of women around the world describe themselves as beautiful; while, 81% of women in the U.S. strongly agree that “media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can’t ever achieve.” No discussion of body image would be complete without emphasizing the importance of self-esteem. Self-esteem is an important part of building and maintaining a positive body image. It is also vital to your overall well-being. As such, it is not surprising that 75% of girls with low self-esteem report engaging in negative activities when they are feeling badly about themselves. The feelings of inadequacy are so pervasive that 61% of college aged women routinely talk badly about themselves, which in turn only serves to further decrease self-esteem.

In honor of National Eating Disorder’s awareness week, we will be hosting a film festival dedicated to increasing awareness about not only, Eating Disorders but also body image and self-esteem. Eating Disorders are defined by extremes, whether it be extreme reduction in food intake or extreme overeating. 5% of college aged women become anorexic, or bulimic. Eating disorders are more prominent in women, but male eating disorders are more common than many think. Most estimates suggest that ten percent of those with eating disorders are men, but these estimates may be low. For example, a study from the University of Toronto estimates that one in every six people diagnosed with anorexia nervosa is male. With a mortality rate of about 6%, anorexia ranks as a top health concern for college students.

As mentioned in our Editor’s note, in this issue we are attempting to inform you about two significant issues facing our society today, body image and domestic violence. In both cases, it is important to note that ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM! Domestic violence is a type of abuse. It involves injuring someone, usually a spouse or partner, but it can also be a parent, child or other family member. Domestic violence is a serious problem. It is the most common cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44. Victims may suffer physical injuries such as bruises or broken bones. They may suffer emotionally from depression, anxiety or social isolation. Men are sometimes thought to be exempt from both body image issues and violent victimization, but the truth is that men are at risk for both. In fact in 100 domestic violence situations approximately 40 cases involve violence by women against men. An estimated 400,000 women per year are abused or treated violently in the United States by their spouse or intimate partner. This means that roughly 300,000 to 400,000 men are treated violently by their wife or girl friend.


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Body image week
Calendar of events

First Annual College of Charleston Body Project Film Festival

Where: Maybank 100
When: 7:00 pm

Monday, February 16th: Thin
Tuesday, February 17th: Real Women have Curves
Wednesday, February 18th: TBA

-Giveaways from Stella Nova
- raffle prizes
- snacks and more!!!

Health Newsletter of the College of Charleston
Counseling & Substance Abuse Services
175 Calhoun St.
Charleston, SC 29424
Abused men struggle to have their plight taken seriously

By Bill Thompson, Post and Courier*

In a culture still captivated by macho imagery and its stereotypes, the abused man is in an impossible bind.

Shame, denial and the threat of ridicule from a society that scoffs at their plight are some of the reasons men resist admitting they are victims of physical and emotional abuse by the women in their lives.

"There are several reasons our culture rejects the idea (of male abuse): the physical size of men compared to women, the mistaken belief that a woman can’t injure a man physically and that men are always able or willing to defend themselves; the embarrassment associated with being abused. For men, it’s very humiliating to even admit they are in an abusive situation," says psychologist Kimberly Taylor, author of the forthcoming Trapped in Silence: Abused Men and the Women who Abuse Them (Mill City Press, 2009).

Statistics released in 2000 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that while an American woman is the victim of physical abuse every 21 seconds, men are not far behind, at one instance every 37 seconds. Yet many dismiss abuse of men as a trivial aberration compared with male abuse of women.

With co-author Dr. Claudia Cornell, a marriage and family therapist, Taylor’s goal is to break the silence and push through the prejudices that render men reluctant to seek the help they need.

Domestic abuse of men does not necessarily involve a life-threatening situation, but a hostile environment that wears men down mentally and emotionally. That said, one never knows when behavior can cross the line and become dangerous.

The perception of abused men as weak or ineffectual could not be further from the truth, says Taylor, program manager with the Corona, Calif., office of Alternatives to Domestic Violence. "The opposite is true. They are not weak, they are in a very difficult situation."

Out in the open

In counseling sessions, the authors discovered that men who are abused by women often share similar, admirable traits, not the least of which is a prohibition against striking a woman, regardless of provocation, even in self-defense.

"The trouble is, they weren't raised knowing what to do when the woman is hitting them," Cornell says. "Because of the stigma attached to this problem, many men are reluctant to come forward. These men are often stable, moral, successful men. In fact, many of the abused men we know of are highly respected members of the community."

In the majority of cases they studied, Cornell and Taylor discovered that the abused men had been cautioned early on by a friend or family member who knew the woman. Too often, the men had discounted these warnings.

"Some men don’t realize they are being abused unless it gets physical," adds Taylor. "There are lots of available resources we mention on our Web site, WomenAbusingMen.org, which provide a list of symptoms and actions that constitute abuse.

"We see a large number of women who are receiving counseling for their physical abuse of men in their lives. They've been criminally charged by the court in some cases and ordered into counseling. But the wives of the men we interviewed for the book had not been ordered into counseling because their physical abusiveness had not been reported and the police had not become involved. But the majority of what these men experienced was emotional and verbal abuse, which was very detrimental to them."

Men who will stay in an abusive relationship for many of the same reasons battered women do are counseled to address a problem early, and put their concerns on the table.

"What we want men to know is that they do not have to take (abuse). And we want her to know she has no right to do it," Cornell says. "There is a lot that goes on in abusive relationships that's not even illegal. But it's a problem on both sides; both sides need help. The problem runs a whole lot deeper than people think, and we must look at it straight on and deal with it."

For the entire article, go to http://www.charleston.net/news/2008/dec/22/hidden_outrage65679/
An epitaph for the Laura Griffin Run

Most local people consider the annual New Year’s Day polar bear swims, held concurrently on Sullivan’s Island and Folly Beach, as the ultimate test of cold-weather toughness. The Yankees in the crowd may scoff, but many view these events as the one chance to prove that, no, Charlestonians aren’t spoiled by the alternating sweltering heat and mild balmy-ness the climate provides, and, yes, our souls are strong enough to bathe in the frigid waters of the Atlantic Ocean, wearing nothing more than perhaps that leftover Halloween costume from the back of the closet.

However, as a test of arctic sturdiness, the Laura Griffin Run trumps a dip in the ocean any day.

Sure, you stay dry in the LGR (at least the years it’s not raining). But do you know how there are probably only a few days in winter that are REALLY cold, like frost/ice/freezing pipes cold? Well, as if it were some bizarre law of physics that Dr. Dukes never taught his PHYS 111 class about, the run invariably falls on one of these handful of days.

The 13th and (unfortunately) final year of the LGR was, of course, no exception. In fact, mother nature decided to end the run on an especially frigid bang, offering up an ice-cream-headache low of 15 degrees Fahrenheit. Perhaps it warmed up to 20 or so by the 8am start time; nonetheless, the conditions were, to put it colloquially, no joke, son! The 300-ish runners (a rough, eyeball estimate) can be considered real American heroes, cold-blooded men and women of valor. I think they deserve a medal...

Of course, there’s more to the run than the cold; the staff and volunteers on the race course did a great job of ensuring a safe, scenic, well-laid out route. The Health Expo afterwards was especially enjoyable. Eighteen organizations set up tables with information, demonstrations, and free goodies, Tri- dent School of Massage was offering free massages, and a host of athletic and performance groups put on some phenomenal presentations. In fact, I had no idea a human could spin on his or her head for more than a few seconds, until Pat Brown of Capoeira Charleston proved me wrong.

Laura Griffin, former Director of the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention at the College of Charleston, died January 22, 1996 as a result of a hit-and-run accident on the Battery. The run in her name was dedicated to healthy lifestyles, the prevention of substance abuse, and pedestrian safety, and proceeds for the run went towards C of C student scholarships. It is a shame that, after 13 years, the run is being laid to rest. However, Laura’s memory, and her cause, will always linger on.

A “Stimulating” Granola

I love politics...I hate politics...

Well, um, you see, my original plan for this column was to write about Mahatma Gandhi and how his teachings relate to domestic violence and the violence of a negative body image. Gandhi is one of my personal heroes. I even once harbored plans to get a tattoo of the man on my rib cage…but seeing that a. it would be my first tattoo, and b. I’m slightly squeamish around needles…and pain…I realized that I should ease into body art with something a little less intense.

But with a new president waiting to expunge his significant political capital, a Dust-Bowl sized economic crisis, and talks of a stimulus package that could (possibly, maybe) save us all and give us all jobs after we graduate, my love-hate addiction to politics is compelling me to comment. Sorry, Gandhi

I suppose, though, there are equal parts love and hate in this situation. First, the love – Obama has the right general idea for what is needed moving forward. Dispelling the “voodoo” that economic growth for the wealthy “trickles down” to the populace (thanks a lot, George “tax cuts work” Bush), his stimulus package pushes for a dose of Keynesian, bottom-up public spending that has a shot, at least, at re-starting the economy. The comparisons to Depression-era FDR policies are not all together inappropriate…Conversely, Obama has asserted that gi-normous deficits are unsustainable, and, after a few years (hopefully the economy will improve), serious efforts to balance the budget need to be made. This is comforting for me and the rest of us twenty-somethings, who’d rather not have to pay back public debt in Chinese Yen for the rest of our lives.

Now for the hate – not all spending is equal. As it stands now, the stimulus plan is slated to cost $825 billion. While there are some necessary things (such as aid to states and cities, money to shore up Medicaid and unemployment benefits, etc), and some good things (such as education programs and a few clean energy programs), the bill mostly touts the status quo, especially with regards to energy and the environment. It does not offer the fresh, transformative thinking that Obama promised in his election campaign. For example, according to a NY Times editorial, “there is money for fixing roads, but not for high-speed railroads.” These infrastructure changes can, literally, become “cemented-in” as an integral part of our transportation system, precluding development of other forms of mass transit and carbon-free transit for decades to come.

 Likewise, in a recent commentary, Michael Oppenheimer bemoans how little of the “clean energy” spending goes towards transforming the national electric grid, adding “only a complete overhaul of our electricity grid will make renewable energy a reality.”

It’s not just energy or the environment, too; there is little that is really fresh or bold in the package. The NY Times editorial laments this fact, but they assert that these are “arguments for another day.” I beg to differ; where else BUT in the largest spending bill in US history can Obama truly break from the past and offer a transformative environmental policy, an overhauled education system, universal health care, etc, etc? From a new president with an exponential amount of support and political capital, I was expecting something a little…bolder…Maybe I’m wrong. What do you think? You can check out some solid reporting and commentary on the stimulus here (from the NY Times)
So-Called “Obese” Pets Held to Unrealistic Body Standards

JAMES ISLAND—To the casual eye, Tippy might appear to be a regular Labrador. He loves sunbathing at the James Island County Park, watching squirrels, and getting loads of attention from passersby.

But Tippy is not a normal dog. By veterinarians’ standards, he is 65 pounds overweight.

"I don't care if people say he's chubby," said Tippy's owner Katherine Mathers, gently scratching the dog's protruding belly. "So what if he doesn't look like the dog in the Iams commercial? What's more important: having a perfect body or being happy? I love him whether he's 25, 50, or even 150 pounds overweight. In fact, I think he's the cutest dog in the world."

"Yes, you are!" said Mathers, waving the remaining half of her cookie in front of Tippy's nose.

Mathers is not alone in defending her pet. Amid a slew of commercials for new diet dog and cat foods, many owners say that their pets are being held to impossibly high animal-body standards.

"I don't care what anyone says, my Sassy looks good," said Janice Guswhite, owner of a Persian longhair that cannot climb the stairs to her home's second floor without becoming short of breath. "Who's to say how big a cat is supposed to be, anyway?"

The American Veterinary Medical Association is trying. The organization recently announced that nearly one-fourth of all U.S. cats and dogs are overweight, and they say ignoring pet obesity could have dire health consequences.

"Many pet owners might think it's cute when Sparky lies next to his food bowl all day because he doesn't have the energy to walk away from it," said Dr. Ken Janokovski, spokesman for the AVMA. "But overweight animals are susceptible to a host of illnesses."

In spite of the possible health risks, many owners of so-called obese pets insist that a few extra pounds can't hurt their dogs, cats, or guinea pigs.

Pet body-image activist Miriam Grimer said owners shouldn't let doctors dictate their pets' weight.

"It's insulting that 'experts' are telling our pets how to live," Grimer said. "Our pets are perfectly fine with the way they look. No animal should be forced to live up to the unobtainable standard of beauty on the cover of a magazine like Cat Fancy."

Preferring terms like "plump," "stout," and "curvy," Eric Willis said he's proud that his 110-pound golden retriever has "a little something on the hindquarters."

"No one's going to tell me that Tippy isn't beautiful the way he is," Mathers said. "If he wants to lose weight, that's fine. But he doesn't have to do it for me, or the vet, or even my husband, who doesn't want Tippy allowed in the living room because of his intestinal troubles. I think Tippy's perfect, even if he can't fit through his doggy door anymore."