With Valentine’s Day fast approaching, we often tend to spread love to others and delineate ourselves from the equation of full acceptance. I am often amazed at the amount of attention that one might deflect upon others needs and desires, yet s/he is willing to forgo their own basic needs according Maslow’s hierarchy. Suffering in silence from an eating disorder or disordered eating is more common than you may think or imagine.

Adding the complexity of college life to the equation of an eating disorder can evoke an emotional overload and become debilitating for individuals predisposed to ED. Thoughts of abandonment, lack of understanding and a diabolical desire for perfection or acceptance is a treacherous cycle that one faces in a world of body-shaming and social norms of idealized beauty. A nip here and a tuck there are all that is needed in the fantastical world of achieving an unrealistic standard that never equates to enough.

How magical would our lives be, if in fact, we were enough? In a world were advertising thigh-gaps, slender noses, bleached skin and hair down to one’s waist, and most importantly for our males—a six pack with muscles for miles—do we forget that there is more to a person than an exterior façade emblazoned by a super-imposed fantasy for sale to the highest bidder. We are not chiseled like Ken or Barbie, yet we desire to enhance ourselves beyond the realm of an idealized standard of beauty, earmarked by media and a celebrity status quo.

The National Eating Disorder Association reports more than 11 million American men and women struggle with eating disorders, but many fail to seek treatment out of shame and/or a lack of support. The universal adage known to many within the vicious cycle of ED is that eating disorders do not discriminate. According to the Centers for Disease Control, it is estimated that 10-15 percent of people diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia are male. Additionally, as many as 10 percent of college women suffer from an eating disorder.

Regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, anyone is susceptible to an eating disorder; in fact, individuals are biologically predisposed to an eating disorder based upon genetics and previous behaviors. Some previous behaviors include 35% of individuals diagnosed with an eating disorder also experienced dependence on alcohol or abuse of other drugs.

In an effort to advocate for a positive body image and provide support for those suffering with ED, recognize the warning signs that may indicate that your friend or loved one has an eating disorder. Remember, the impact of an Eating Disorder affects the entire support system which includes: roommates, family members, friends, and educators. Should you have a concern for a friend, roommate, or family member suffering in silence with an eating disorder, consider intervening by:

- Offering to walk with them to the university Counseling Center to seek help.
- Set aside time to talk and genuinely listen without judgment or any form of condemnation.
- Avoid “you” statements, when expressing your concern for them. For example, avoid saying, “You just need to eat!” Replace your responses with “I” to convey worry.

Intervention and a positive support system are integral to the overall well-being and quality of life for your loved one, friend or family member. Be aware, avoid self-loathing behaviors and provide a strong system of support. If you are interested in an upcoming screening, then please join the Counseling Center on February 24, 2016, from 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. in the RSC, Atrium.
Intervene when you recognize the following behaviors:

- Consistently leaving the table within ten minutes after eating a meal
- Stirring or playing with food rather than eating
- Skipping meals consistently
- Exercising more than 1.5 hours a day more than 4-5 days a week
- Inordinate amounts of conversation about food, weight, the body, and calorie intake
- Consistently tired or fatigued

Additional Resources:

National Eating Disorder Awareness: https://www.neda.org

Binge Eating Disorders Awareness: https://www.beda.org