

## What's for Dinner and Who's at the Table?

By Dylan C. Carter

What are you having for dinner this evening? A simple question for some, but a source of anxiety and stress for many others. Eating disorders are mental illnesses including Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge-Eating disorder and several others. While often portrayed as “silly problems” or “just a phase”, in popular media, it is estimated that 9% of the US population will experience an eating disorder in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> These disorders can result in further health complications throughout the entire body, notably, the shutting down of the cardiovascular system, intestinal obstruction or infection, and reduced brain function due to the lack of nutrients and energy.<sup>2</sup> Within the United States, 10,200 people die each year as a direct result of their eating disorder.<sup>1</sup>

Eating disorders are commonly thought to be the behavior of straight, white, cis, women, and this belief has been reinforced and repeated both in the media as well as in the research conducted on the disorders. More inclusive studies show us that this is a false image that is harmful to all people living with eating disorders. While black students are 50% more likely to binge and purge, and Asian-American students report higher rates of food restriction, purging, and muscle building\* than white students, people of color are diagnosed and receive treatment half as often and medical professionals are much less likely to ask people of color about any possible symptoms.<sup>1,3,4</sup>

Additionally, members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to experience eating disorders at much higher rates than their cis, heterosexual peers. Lesbian and bisexual women report binge-eating at twice the rate of heterosexual women, and trans people are four times as likely to report disordered eating when compared to cis people.<sup>5,6</sup> Of the 25% of eating disorders attributed to men, 42% identify as gay despite accounting for only 5% of the total male population.<sup>5</sup> Gay men report bingeing at a rate seven times more and purging at a rate twelve times more than heterosexual men.<sup>5</sup>

The play *No Further...* exists at an intersection of identities, pushing us to consider a different, often more realistic, image of the people who live every day with eating disorders. Tift brings together a group of people across lines of gender, race, sexual orientation, and age to show that eating disorders are complex illnesses but behind that illness is an individual, a person, who deserves to be recognized.

\*While muscle building is typically thought of as a regular, healthy activity, it can sometimes cross into disordered eating. This is most often seen in teenage males, stemming from a self-image of being underweight. This type of disordered eating typically involves eating more (bingeing) or differently to gain weight or bulk up. This type of disordered eating is characterized by rigid diet, obsessive over-exercising and extreme preoccupation with physique.<sup>8</sup>

## Sources

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