

Blacks battling with anorexia often scrutinized

By Shannah Tharp-Taylor
KRT

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In many ways, Stephanie Doswell is your regular college student in a T-shirt and flare-legged jeans. But she is also anorexic, bulimic and African-American, a combination so rare that it sometimes goes unrecognized.

"If someone sees a sickly, thin white person, they automatically think that they have anorexia," said Doswell, 19. "If someone sees a sickly, thin black person, they don't think that they have anorexia." She adds sarcastically: "Because blacks don't get anorexia."

Anorexia has been thought of as a disease affecting rich, white females since the 1940s because it primarily affects girls from well-to-do Caucasian families.

Recent studies seem to confirm that black anorexics are extremely hard to find. Last month Ruth Striegel-Moore of Wesleyan University in Connecticut reported in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* that although anorexia is believed to affect 1 percent to 2 percent of the general population, none of the 1,061 young black women in their study was anorexic.

But many experts doubt that black anorexics are as rare as studies have suggested, though experts are left guessing at how prevalent the disease is in minorities.

Traditionally, African-American girls have been thought to have some protec-

tion from eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa because of a greater acceptance of larger body size in the African-American community, said Gayle Brooks, an African-American psychologist specializing in eating disorders at the Renfrew Center in Florida.

But this alleged protection from eating disorders appears to weaken as blacks take on the values of the mainstream culture, Brooks says. "I think that there are a lot of African-American women who are really struggling with their sense of personal identity and self-esteem that comes with being a part of this culture that does not accept who we really are," Brooks said.

For years anorexia (characterized by refusal to eat enough) and bulimia (characterized by binge eating and purging) was only studied in white females, leaving gaps in medical knowledge about eating disorders and how they affect minorities.

For example, experts are not sure whether black girls from high-income families are more likely than their poorer counterparts to develop eating disorders, as is believed to be the case for white girls.

Striegel-Moore acknowledges that her study may have underestimated the number of blacks with anorexia nervosa because she had too few girls from affluent black families.

Similarly, psychologists typically search for anorexia in adolescents, the age group commonly found to have the



KRT Photo by Warren Skalski/CHICAGO TRIBUNE
Brenda Carlson's daughter, Kaelyn 20, in framed photo, was a scholar, athlete and pageant winner who died after a 14-month battle with anorexia and bulimia. Carlson, who lives in Comstock, Michigan, has become an advocate for the disease.

disorder in white girls. However, experts question whether anorexia may develop later in African-Americans.

Thomas Joiner, a professor of psychology at Florida State University, tested whether racial stereotypes influence the recognition of eating disorders. He asked 150 people to read a fictional diary of a 16-year-old girl named Mary and rated whether they thought the girl had an eating disorder.

For some the diary was labeled "Mary, 16-year-old Caucasian." For others it was labeled "Mary, 16-year-old African-American."

More people said the subject had an eating disorder when she was labeled white than when she was labeled black.

"Race mattered," Joiner said. "There's the idea in people's minds that African-American girls tend not to get eating disorders. And that influenced their judgments."

Joiner and his colleagues also found that many health care professionals were unable to recognize black anorexics, suggesting that could contribute to missed diagnoses.

"(Doctors) should have their same radar out for eating disorders when talking with an African-American girl as when they are sitting across from Caucasian girls," Joiner said.

Many researchers and clinicians studying anorexia nervosa say that becoming anorexic is less a factor of race and more a consideration of

one's social group.

However, girls from poor families face an additional risk because they are not likely to be able to afford treatment, which can cost as much as \$30,000 for a month of inpatient care.

Doswell typifies some of the issues surrounding anorexia in black women. Her condition was verified through her therapist, Keitha Austin of Newport News, Va., who received written permission to confirm that Doswell is an African-American female with anorexia.

She starts each day with eight melon-flavored gummy rings.

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housing, 22 females and 11 males."

Inman said that those who were informed that they'd have to wait for permanent housing were told that the process could take anywhere from one week, to two weeks, to a semester. For those who still have not been housed, Inman said that the Office of Residence and Life has been "aggressively looking for permanent housing," and "realize the inconvenience, but want them to be assigned as quickly as possible."

Inman made an assurance that the housing office does not make any revenue off of temporary housing payments. Students in temporary housing in Wilson Hall pay \$15 a week to each person in the suite, totally \$60 a week. The sleep on cots in the living room where all of their belongings remain packed up for the most part.

Since enrollment is slated to increase every year, a plan for an addition to Rams Commons is in the works. Until then, Inman said that housing is considering the possibility of expanding spaces in Wilson Hall and in Rams Commons, possibly making room for two to a bedroom in the newest apartment style dorms.

"Right now we're trying to do some helpful things and be as customer friendly as we can."

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supervisor was looking for a way to bring her down when she saw her research efforts were successful.

"Imagine a black person that's supposedly inferior to you, moving around freely in the lab, doing experiments and getting good results," Adams said. "She was mad, and she felt like I should've been working under Finnish scientists. But I wanted to continue working individually."

According to Adams, Finnish police came to arrest her under allegations that she had stolen ten mobile European phones and one digital camera from Holland three days after a verbal disagreement concerning her research with her supervisor.

"I was there (in jail) for three nights. My parents didn't know where I was. Neither did my friends," Adams said.

Adams said that in Finland, the idea of innocent until proven guilty is not a necessary

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Friday evenings. The show airs at 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. She appeared on *Free-Style Friday* for seven consecutive weeks, winning the title of the first female to be entered into the 106th and Park Hall of Fame. The show's operation is simple: Every Friday 106th and Park presents the champion from the previous week and a challenger. They both get 30 seconds with a set of rules to freestyle to an instrumental.

Then a panel of judges chooses the better of the two rappers. The winner's only reward is an invitation to return for the next show's taping.

"The first time battling was a lot different than the next six I was involved in," Grant said. "The first time I knew who the guy was, I had a chance to think of some punch lines. After that I did not know who or what to expect, but they knew who I was."

Although many don't know, Grant's talent isn't limited to rapping — she also sings — the New York native said she had to stand in line for over six hours to try-out on May 19, 2002. It is because of her mother, whom she's named after, that she won a place in the Hall of Fame. At the time she was only 17-years-old and she had to be 18 years to try out.

Grant says she never considered entertainment as a career. "I am not sure if I



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—Lajune Grant

would ever want to be one."

Grant says the university family has been supportive of her success for the most part, but she's had people to downplay her achievement.

"Some people seem to think I want to battle them in the cafeteria or on the

way to my classes, which is not true. I hate when people tell me they could have done it too, cause if they can they should go ahead and do it."

Grant's journey began many years ago and metamorphosed during her tenure on 106th and Park. She was able to rub elbows with some of the industry's most influential personalities including producer Clark Kent, Pharrell, Jazzy Frizzle, and rappers Lil' John and Free.

Although she's received acclaim for being an artist, the 19-year-old Poughkeepsie, N.Y., native wants to have a future behind the scenes in the music industry. She has given herself five years to get where she wants to be, and it looks as if she'll definitely make it, considering the tons of motivation flowing through her.

pretense to arrest. The Finnish police were able to keep her in jail for a maximum of three days under accusation only.

Barrino said she had heard through word-of-mouth that Adams was in jail, and Adams said that her mother had to hire a lawyer and keep in contact with the US embassy in Finland to ensure she was released. Adams said she never had any type of trial, and that the charges were later dropped, but she did have to pay a "service" fine to the Finnish police for

occupying jail space. Shortly after her release, on July 15, Adams made her way back to the U.S. without Barrino. Barrino returned on July 31, the scheduled ending date of the research program.

While Barrino said her study abroad experience made her a more mature and rounded person, and had highlights such as trip to Sweden, Paris and Rome, the downside of the racism she experienced will always haunt her. "Even now we still get asked about our trip to Europe,

and it brings up bad memories," Barrino said. "We are scarred. We were degraded tremendously." Both women say they were disappointed that they were not briefed on race relations in Finland prior to their departure. Adams said the university has offered them an apology for the racial tensions they experienced in Finland. However, there will be an investigation to ensure Adams did not violate the University's Code of Conduct regulations while studying abroad.