



# Case of Anne Hart

## BULIMIA NERVOSA

Anne Hart is an 18-year-old, single, Caucasian female, who is in her junior year at a local university. She is majoring in theater. She lives in an off-campus apartment with two female roommates and works part-time as a waitress in a local restaurant. She is very involved in athletics and is on the collegiate gymnastics team, through which she received a scholarship that has enabled her to pursue her goal of attending college. Anne Hart initially reported that she had a largely “uneventful childhood” where she grew up in an intact family along with three older siblings, although she did acknowledge that her parents “didn’t like each other.” She also reported that her parents frequently engaged in loud verbal arguments for “as long as she can remember.” As a result, she noted that her home environment was stressful and chaotic, where minor disagreements tended to result in “shouting matches” between family members. As a result, Ms. Hart reported that she tended to spend most of her time alone in her room or outside the home with friends. She also reported that although she was never without basic necessities while growing up, she was also aware that her parents often struggled to make ends meet, which she believes also intensified their arguments and tensions within the home.

Although Ms. Hart described herself as high functioning throughout her primary and secondary school years, she also noted that she has always been somewhat shy and reserved, with a tendency to be perfectionistic about her academics and unassertive in social relationships. Anne Hart was initially referred for therapy by her collegiate coach when Ms. Hart was observed to appear increasingly more dysphoric, at which time she also started to voice greater ambivalence about her future in college athletics. When presenting for therapy, Ms. Hart acknowledged that she has been feeling

increasingly distressed by her problems. This has been compounded by her strong reluctance to openly share her concerns with her coach or any of her friends, especially in relation to worsening problems with her body image and concerns about maintaining the “right weight” in order to successfully compete alongside her teammates, as well as feeling trapped in remaining on the team given her financial reliance on her collegiate athletic scholarship.

She indicated that her preoccupation with weight began when she was initially encouraged to lose 8 pounds in order to optimize her physical performance in athletics approximately 2 years ago. Although Ms. Hart was successful with that goal, she noted that since then she has become increasingly more preoccupied with her body weight and eating habits, which she believes were further intensified given her major in theater, where she believes there is also an emphasis on physical appearance. Although Ms. Hart reported that purging, in particular, was initially limited to times when she was actively focused on losing weight, she reported that the frequency of binge/purge cycles has progressively increased within the past year, where she now reports that she has purged several times per week in the last few months. Perhaps most distressing to Ms. Hart, she has noticed that the binge/purge cycles have been increasingly triggered at times when she is experiencing general feelings of pressure or distress, such as when dealing with academic pressures, relationship difficulties, and uncertainties related to prioritizing responsibilities and goals.

Ms. Hart was diagnosed with bulimia nervosa and accepted recommendations to participate in therapy focused on eating-related issues.

Clinical Vignette provided by Sandra Testa Michelson, PhD