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In focus: a hopeful look at self-starvation

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Author and actress Rochelle Newman left audience members stunned in their seats Sunday at the Santa Monica Playhouse after the close of her one-act show, "Hip Bones and Cool Whip," an inside look at her own life-threatening relationship with anorexia nervosa.

Newman carried her listeners throughout her story, speed-shifting between the different impacting characters of her life such as a self-absorbed and overweight but loving mother, a high-horse German doctor, and a vicious overriding inner voice.

On a roller coaster through her worst and best moments, she enabled the audience to grasp the truth behind eating disorders, which is what Newman had originally hoped for.

"I do it for the people who have dealt with the disorder and the people who haven't because it's important for them to understand that, yes - it is an illness," Newman said.



Danilo Bukvic / Corsair

In "Hip Bones and Cool whip," a solo performance, Rochelle Newman acts out her own battle with anorexia nervosa on Sunday, March 30 at the Santa Monica Playhouse

Rochelle Newman is from New York City where she has performed in several productions both on and off Broadway. She is a founding member of the Pegasus Theater Company of New York and has written both one-acts and full length plays.

Although "Hip Bones and Cool Whip" is serious in content and contains countless, heavy battles between herself and an evil-sounding subconscious, Newman was also able to incorporate humor through her spicy, colorful language and sarcasm.

"I wrote it to be about laughing," explained Newman. "Because I can look back on it now and be able to laugh. But its important to understand it because most people don't."

One audience member of the play, 18-year-old Nicholas Deems commented:

"I know some girls who have had anorexia and I never really understood it until now. [The play] helped me to see what was going on in the mind of the people who have the disease. And it wasn't a depressing play because it had such a good comical side to it."

"I thought the play was just marvelous," said Stoutamire Vera, another "It was so different than anything I have ever seen. [Rachelle Newman] just came out and started talking with all those different voices. She made it so I could really see the characters.

Warning signs of anorexia nervosa

- Deliberate self-starvation with weight loss.
- Fear of gaining weight.
- Refusal to eat.
- Denial of hunger.
- Constant exercising.
- Greater amount of hair on the body or the face.
- Sensitivity to cold temperatures.
- Absent or irregular menstrual periods.
- Loss of scalp hair.
- A self-perception of being fat when the person is really too thin.

Source: familydoctor.org

She certainly had my attention the whole time and it made me so much more aware of the challenges that these people go through.”

However, what many don't see is that 'these people' could be our next door neighbors, our fellow classmates, or the people we interact with on a daily basis, especially here in college.

“With all the transitions and decisions one faces in college, it's hard to feel in control of anything. And there's so much talk about food and not eating, it's really easy to slip into [anorexia] because the disease gives you that sense of control. So people need to be aware of the messages.”

One way to better understand those messages is visiting websites such as nationaleatingdisorder.org, paysonroad.com and pale-reflections.com.

The play is written and performed by Rochelle Newman, developed by Mark Travis and directed by Carlos Carrasco.

“Hip Bones and Cool Whip” is playing Fridays and Sundays through April 20, at 7 p.m., at the Santa Monica Playhouse, 1211 17th Street. Admission is \$10, for information and reservations call 310 394-9779. For more information about the show visit www.hipbonesandcoolwhip.com.

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