



Sleepless nights and an empty stomach were a part of what an STA student endured to achieve the “perfect” body the media promotes.

by MADDIE KNOPKE
mknopke@dartnewsonline.com

photo illustration by TAYLOR STEEN

A 10-ounce bottle of NyQuil, a green box of Sleepytime tea bags, a plastic jar full of yellow disposable ear plugs and last month's *Seventeen* magazine. She pulled a short string to shut off the miniature lamp that also rested on her bedside table.

Shifting from her left side to her right, tossing and turning as usual.

You're not going to fall asleep tonight.

She could stare at the cream ceiling or maybe read over the letters inscribed on the spine of that *Seventeen* magazine, "seventeen.com. . . it's fun to be seventeen. . ."

What time is it?

9:05 p.m. read the illuminated screen of her Verizon flip phone.

Early.

I should've worked out longer.

The guilt wasn't just now setting in.

The guilt was constant.

Tormented by her own shame for eating 20 extra calories or not pushing herself to go those 15 additional minutes on the elliptical machine, she couldn't dismiss the feelings of regret.

She laid on her twin-size mattress, painfully waiting for the NyQuil to kick in.

I know you're hungry.

Stop being hungry.

Looking once again at the phone's digital clock she saw 11:30 p.m.

Tomorrow I'll be better. Tomorrow I can try again.

Yes, tomorrow she would wake up, throw on her plaid skirt, brush her hair into a low ponytail, avoid breakfast with her family, "forget" to pack a lunch and try once again to "successfully" endure the grueling process of anorexia.

Wishing to remain anonymous, this current STA student reveals how, what is now called "thinspiration," affected her battle with anorexia. "Thinspiration" is a combination of the words "inspiration" and "thin." The term is applied to images, charts and blogs created by those who promote an anorexic lifestyle. These multimedia pieces are then viewed by those seeking motivation to accomplish change in their body image. It has been almost three years since she suffered with the disorder during grade school.

"I was the new kid and like, well, I had some friends but not really a best friend," she said.

What began as a simple desire to fit in, slowly escalated to engross almost every aspect of her daily life.

"[The issue] was just everything," she said. "My life was out of control so I turned to the one thing I could control...counting calories and losing weight."

Tabloid magazines lined the racks in front of each check out station at her neighborhood grocery store. Instead of participating in shopping for tonight's dinner, she read a *People* magazine headline, "Half their size!" and glanced at the photos of celebrities with "shocking body transformations." She flipped through *US Weekly* and *Star* only to fix her eyes on further stories depicting the desirable bodies of Hollywood celebrities.

Why don't I look like her?

This question would continue to replay in her mind for the next six months.

"I would compare myself over and over everyday to images of girls I wanted to look like," she admitted. "Now I wish I would've just seen pictures of myself and seen how sick I was becoming. At the same time though, the only thing I used to see in the mirror was imperfection."

With blackened eyes and pronounced cheek bones, a woman holds a delicate pink cupcake

in her hand. A bandage is wrapped around her mouth with the word "control" written on it in bold red letters. This image is among countless others currently streaming on social networking sites.

While "thinspiration" is a fairly recent term and an even more recent trending topic online, she explained that forms of "thinspiration" have existed for years.

"In a lot of the shows I would watch, the characters would always be so skinny," she explained. "Comparing myself to them became encouragement for me to keep starving."

Maybe it wasn't so explicitly defined as "thinspiration" back then, but she thinks it played exact same role.

Victoria Justice, a teen celebrity, sported a blue mini dress and leather jacket on Teen-Nick's "Victorious."

I wish I could pull off that dress like she does.

Selena Gomez wore a sequined yellow top with black skinny jeans on Disney Channel's "Wizards of Waverly Place."

I wish I had that gap between my legs like her.

Blake Lively was dressed in a strapless black gown on an episode of the CW's "Gossip Girl."

My arms will never be skinny enough to wear a pretty strapless dress like that.

They didn't all have the best legs, the softest hair, the flawless face or the flat stomach. But each girl had something--something she wanted. It was each piece of perfection she saw in celebrities, models and even peers that she put together to form the ideal body that she thought anorexia would somehow help her to achieve.

"I just told myself that this was what was most important in my life," she said. "These pictures in magazines and TV shows motivated me to push myself."

It's now activity period on a Tuesday. She types "thinspiration" into the Google search bar on her netbook. The page loads and she

clicks on the first link which takes her to a blog entitled "Ana tips & tricks." She was quiet for a moment.

"See, I've been over [anorexia] for like three years but looking at this

stuff...I don't know, like anyone will start to feel self-conscious. This is toxic."

After scrolling through dozens of photos of teenage girls' "perfect" bodies and quote after quote encouraging one to "keep calm and starve on," she closed the Google Chrome window.

"A lot of girls want to be thinner so they diet and workout and whatever," she explained. "It's when she compares herself to all these pictures of what she wants to look like when it can become dangerous."

She paused for a moment and continued, "She will do anything to get there...trust me, I know what it's like."

She closed her STA netbook and shuffled it into its maroon case. As she stood up, she stopped half way and said, "You know, it just took a lot of honest people telling me to stop that made me realize how much I was hurting myself. That's what convinced me I needed to let go." ★

“The only thing I used to see in the mirror was imperfection.”

the SCARY facts

Only **1 in 10** people with eating disorders receive treatment.

69% of girls in 5th-12th grade reported that magazine pictures influenced their idea of a perfect body shape.

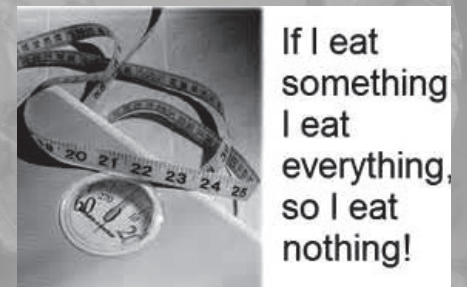
The ideal body type portrayed in advertising is possessed naturally by only **5%** of American females.

50% of girls between the ages of 11 and 13 see themselves as overweight.

Source: South Carolina Department of Mental Health

thinspired

On social media sites such as Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook, there are pages devoted to posting images and quotes to inspire girls to lose weight.



Source: Tumblr