

“**G**aining weight was the worst possible thing that could happen,” says 17-year-old South Eugene High School senior Sophie Kreitzberg. Returning from a 500-mile walk along Spain’s Camino de Santiago, Kreitzberg had never been so thin. “I got so much attention,” she remembers, noting that she experienced her first romance, was cast in plays and that social interaction was just easier as a thin woman.

“My grandmother cried because I was so beautiful,” Kreitzberg recalls.

But school loomed, with its long hours confined to a desk. Although she had twice-daily water polo practice, Kreitzberg was no longer walking a daily marathon. Her body, like every other human being’s, has a set point for weight, to which it was eager to return.

The perfectly appropriate fat that makes Kreitzberg’s body healthy crept back, sending Kreitzberg into a spiral of shame, restriction and binge eating. The basics of human health, exercise and diet became insurmountable mysteries as Kreitzberg sought balance in a culture that exalts unrealistically thin bodies.

Kreitzberg’s story plays on repeat in our high school and college classrooms, with different dramas and details but the same moral every time: We are teaching our girls to be ashamed of their bodies and mistrust their own hunger. At best, they live with this shame and frustration coloring their lives; at worst, other factors combine to expand their dissatisfaction in full-blown eating disorders.

To make sense of why this is still happening in 2015, for all our enlightened Eugene culture, I sat down with some young women, spoke with eating-disorder survivors and contacted health professionals. I learned we are all complicit in this sabotage.

MEDIA GROTESQUE

“Do you know anyone who is happy with her body?” I ask. Four healthy young women, all athletes, 17 and 18 years old and excellent students, look back at me in the question’s wake. Finally, Raina Kamrat answers, “No. I literally don’t know a single person who is happy with her body. I have some friends who are sometimes satisfied. But there are always bad days.”

It is easy to point a finger at the media for this body distress. The girls know the images they’re sold are unrealistic. Margaux Boehm spoke about the crazy Photoshopped images magazines pass off as real people. “So many people watch the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show,” Eavan McKenzie says. “Those models look like they haven’t eaten for weeks!”

While girls are savvy and have been taught to mistrust these images, the media still takes its toll. “A lot of people say they’re not influenced, but we’ve been forced these images of the ideal body for our entire lives, for generations,” Kamrat says. “We’re surrounded and bombarded by expectations.”

“The media, with the unattainable, computer-enhanced models and public figures, drives some individuals to try and meet the standard they perceive to be real. When it’s not achieved, guilt and self-degradation result,” says Laurene



**SOPHIE KREITZBERG
BATTLED NEGATIVE
BODY IMAGE**

Larson, a therapist and Oregon’s International Association of Eating Disorder Professionals research chair.

And there’s money to be made from that guilt and self-degradation. “The beauty industry makes billions of dollars. If they put these unrealistic images out there, women are going to spend money to meet them,” says Kimberly Klose, clinical director at RainRock Treatment Center.



**MARGAUX BOEHM SAYS UNREALISTIC MEDIA
IMAGES PRESSURE YOUNG WOMEN**

A harrowing 1999 study conducted in Fiji shows the impact of television on body image and eating disorders. Dr. Anne E. Becker of the Harvard Eating Disorders Center surveyed girls on Viti Levu as television was introduced to the island, and for several years afterwards. A culture where healthily fleshed figures were the ideal suddenly saw its young women become weight conscious.

Within three years of the introduction of television, 69 percent of girls on Viti Levu reported that they had been on a diet, and 15 percent were using vomiting to control their weight.

Kreitzberg, Boehm, McKenzie and Kamrat are all dedicated to fighting a media that seeks to profit from women’s body shame. Since recovery, Kreitzberg has presented about body positivity at the Youth Empowerment Symposium. Boehm is outspoken in her criticism of retailers that cater to fantasies of unattainable beauty standards.

But there is more to body shame than Photoshop and airbrushing.

TRACKTOWN TROUBLES

“In Eugene you can’t be fat, like those other Americans,” Kreitzberg says. “We equate larger bodies with laziness. A thin woman is successful.”

Boehm notes that in Eugene, being thin is synonymous with being healthy. Larson says, “Thinness has been equated with health, which is not scientifically accurate. Good cardiovascular health is more important than weight and, in fact, restrictive eating or binge eating, especially when followed by purging, devastates health.”

Emi Stewart, 20, is an athletic young woman who is in recovery from a six-year bout with eating disorders.

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