

PERSPECTIVES

OLD GOLD AND BLACK

www.ogb.wfu.edu

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2002

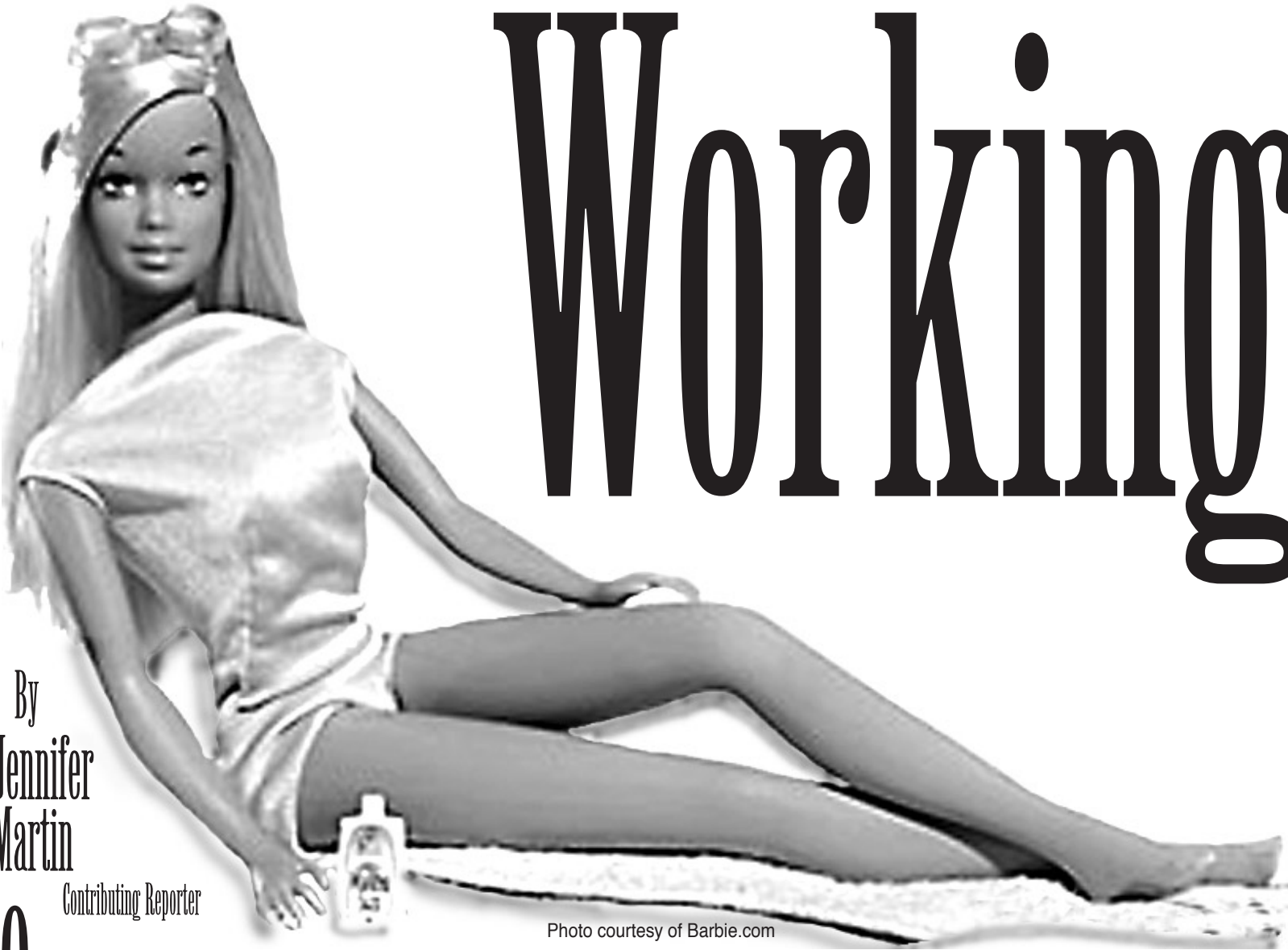


Photo courtesy of Barbie.com

Working themselves to the Bone

By
Jennifer
Martin
Contributing Reporter

On campus, a heightened attention to diet and exercise is obvious. Around 4 p.m., the treadmills of the athletic center are filled. Forget about a workout on the elliptical machines, unless you want to wait half an hour. At 6 p.m. at the pit, most women can be seen ditching the Italian and Mexican food and hovering over the salad bar.

A recent survey of university sorority members suggests that the problem of eating disorders may be far worse than imagined or estimated. Fifty-one percent of women students on campus are involved in a sorority - 1,049 of the 1,994 women enrolled.

According to a survey conducted Oct. 15, 2001, 201 out of 208 Greek women at the university have felt pressure to lose weight, eat less or workout after comparing themselves to others.

Greek women in all sororities, excluding Phi Mu sorority, took the survey at the same time in their respective chapter meetings. The survey asked women about specific pressures they felt, satisfaction with their bodies, activities and diet.

"On other campuses I haven't seen eating disorders as much of an issue ... nor have I seen the problem get better in the last four years," Tricia Richerson, the assistant director of Greek affairs and conference programming, said.

The survey highlights the severity of the potential health and psychological problems festering on campus, particularly among Greek women, and calls attention to the fact that the university is uncertain how to measure how many students are affected or assess what steps need to be taken to help students.

Mark Leary, a professor of psychology, said that a random sampling of 208 participants from a population of 1,049 individuals would be adequate for an accurate representation of the population.

"We know the problem exists. We do not have any statistics on the prevalence of eating disorders at WFU," Natascha Romeo, the university's health educator, said. "We are trying to identify a useful measurement tool which would provide us with good insight into the problem on our campus."

"Students here are geared to perfectionism," Sharon Woodard, an instructor of health and exercise science, said. "They ask, 'How can I be perfect?' Some women say to themselves, 'Well I can be thin.'"

Across the country, the highest incidence of anorexia and bulimia is in environments that stress achievement. Here in an environment fostering high standards of academic, social and athletic achievement - stress is practically unavoidable.

"I worked at the University of Louisville, which is a large public institution, and you see a very different group of students," Richerson said. "They are much more laid back in terms of academic life and don't have the 'I've just got to study and I don't have time for much else' attitude' that seems to exist here."

"If you look at a public school, their general population is much more diverse," Romeo said. "They may not be as overachieving. There may not be that many perfectionists, but at Wake that's how people get here in the first place, and those same characteristics match with individuals that have an eating disorder."

Erin, a junior, said, "There's so much work and so much competitiveness in school things and it translates to everything else."

The same competition seems to occur with regard to exercise. Romeo said, "At the gym when you see a girl working out for two hours, 30 minutes may seem inferior."

"Another problem I've seen at Wake is that many girls will get a bagel and cream cheese and call it a meal," Romeo said.

"It's OK to eat healthily but what determines an eating disorder is the motivation behind it, when eating and exercise becomes an obsession, that's when girls should take a step back," Romeo said. Sometimes student's negative body images are reinforced simply by seeing other "perfect" students on campus.

"When I got to Wake, I'd walk on the quad and around campus and all I saw was thin, pretty girls," said a sophomore who asked to remain anonymous.

"I constantly compared myself," She said. "I started skipping breakfast and eating only little things the rest of the day. I had been treated for an eating disorder in high school so I knew that I was starting to obsess about my eating, but the only thing that mattered to me was keeping my weight off."

One junior came here with no history of an eating disorder. "I was really active in a sport in high school, that was the way I kept weight off," she said.

"I did feel that pressure of wow, every girl around me was beautiful when I first came here, but my first semester I got involved in so many things and I did well," she said.

"It wasn't until second semester my freshman year that the pressure for academics hit me. I started limiting how much food I ate. There was a realization

that even if I didn't have full blown anorexia or bulimia, I was unhappy and too focused on how much I weighed, and too focused on what I was or wasn't eating."

"Because of the very nature of eating disorders, an actual count of the number of women suffering at Wake Forest is difficult," Romeo said. "I mean you can see women that you may believe have a problem, and may be on the borderline but you don't know."

In the survey, the majority of students indicated the university needed to do more to prevent and treat eating disorders, but there is no conclusive evidence about how to go about doing that.

A few options that were repeatedly stressed were ways to use Deacon Dollars at off-campus eateries, more counselors and dieticians if more was known about the service and anonymity could be guaranteed. And students indicated that a lighter workload would help.

"I had the hardest time realizing I had a problem, I just kept saying to myself that I was eating and I was exercising so I was OK, but I wasn't doing anything right," Carrie said.

She said, "It's almost like being an alcoholic, you're never quite over it. For the most part, I have to surround myself with friends, keep myself busy but not frantic busy, and remind myself to not compare."

The university offers counseling and psychiatry free of charge. For counseling, call Johnne Armentrout, assistant director of the counseling center, or Betsy Taylor, a psychologist, at Ext. 5273. Off-campus counselors that specialize in the area are Debra Benfield, a nutritionist, at 659-0590 or Patti Patridge, a counselor, at 659-0590.



Photo courtesy of www.maximonline.com

Magazines like *Maxim* feature models with a body type that is unrealistic for most women.



Danielle Fisher/Old Gold and Black

Tricia Richerson, the assistant director for Greek affairs, said university students seem to be more intense than at other colleges.

51% skipped breakfast or some other meal during the day. 92% were not satisfied with their body.

66% said they are not completely satisfied with their body.

2 of 3 said they felt pressure to stay thin their freshman year. 2 of 10 never think about how much fat a food contains.

26% said they were satisfied with what guys thought of their body.

22% thought the pressure to be involved academically and socially was "almost unbearable."