

# ROAD TO RECOVERY

Students open up about struggling with eating disorders given society's beauty standards.

Written by Julia Moser and Elizabeth Caine, Photos by Grace Davis, Design by Alyssa Peterson

Eating dinner one night with her best friend as a freshman in high school, senior Carlie Johansen received a call from her doctor stating her electrocardiogram, or EKG, results came back significantly low. Johansen's EKG results showed her heart rate was at 45 beats per minute, notably lower than the average for a teenage girl. According to the University of Missouri School of Health, the average should be between 60 and 90 BPM. The results were a symptom of Johansen's eating disorder.

Johansen's doctor wanted to keep her in the hospital for seven months in order to improve her health. However, Johansen said she believed she had enough self-determination to get better with a nutritionist and therapist. Johansen said this moment changed her life and was the turning point for her to reach out and get help.

"It all changed in two seconds because of what I was doing," Johansen said. "I realized I need to start living my life. I was literally dying, and didn't know."

As a freshman in high school, Johansen said she felt the pressure to look stereotypically perfect because that is what she thought guys would like and want from a girl.

At the age of 15, Johansen was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder causing people to obsess about weight and what they

eat. According to the National Eating Disorders Association, it is estimated that 30 million Americans have suffered from an eating disorder at some point over their lifetime.

Disordered eating is when an individual engages in abnormal eating patterns or food behaviors on a regular basis, while an eating disorder is a behavioral condition characterized by severe and persistent disturbance in eating behaviors.

Junior Aly Hofmann struggled with disordered eating since she was 10, which turned into an eating disorder her freshman year of high school. This year, Hofmann was clinically diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

Both Johansen and Hofmann agree that social media influenced them to develop their eating disorders. Johansen and Hofmann said the beauty standard in today's society includes having a small, skinny waist, a flat stomach and a big butt.

"[The pressure of] being the embodiment of physical perfection, and

being a young girl in America's society, we've obviously grown to see that social media has become such a huge factor in our everyday lives and it's not really something we can get away from," Hofmann said.

Johansen said that she would scroll through social media and see models with the stereotypical perfect body as well as people striving to achieve that particular look.

BVNW nurse Becky Imlay said one of the biggest causes as to why people develop eating disorders is from the unrealistic way society paints people. She said social media has created a culture that if you don't look perfect all the time, then that's a bad thing and people dog on you and make rude comments.

"Teens look at this perfection that doesn't really exist. They feel like they have to look a certain

way all the time, and so it becomes obsessive," Imlay said.

Today, Hofmann said even younger kids are on social media and being introduced to the beauty standard.

“It’s so hard when someone is forcing food down your throat, and a lot of people would be like ‘just eat,’ and I hated that because I’m trying my hardest so you telling me to just eat or trying to give me advice is not helping at all.”

-CARLIE JOHANSEN

“It’s just crazy to see how young of an age these kids are and how they’re being exposed to these things so early on,” Hofmann said.

As an 8 year old, Hofmann said she remembers the first time she was ever self-conscious about her body. She said she would find herself upset when her friends would eat a bunch of junk food and not gain weight.

“It’s not normal for an 8 year old to think like that. That was a defining moment of when I first realized that I was having these body image issues,” Hofmann said.

During the worst part of her eating disorder, Johansen weighed only 70 pounds. She said all she would think about was food. She would sit at school lunch and contemplate whether to eat. Johansen said the thought of food took over her mind. Likewise, Hofmann would only eat one meal a day and said she would feel insanely guilty afterward.

Imlay said it is common for people with anorexia to restrict their calorie intake and specific foods, causing them to become underweight. She said some symptoms that often emerge are hair loss, decrease in body temperature, decrease in heart rate and fatigue.

“Your body temperature goes down because everybody needs a little bit of body fat or tissue to maintain your temperature and when you get super thin like that you can’t maintain your body temperature,” Imlay said. “Your heart rate can get dangerously low because you’re just not feeding your body, so it’s definitely restricting.”

Imlay said eating disorders have an

immense impact on people’s mental health as well. She said it can negatively affect their thought processes and distort their view of themselves.

“Your brain just doesn’t function right because you need fats and you need good nutrition for your brain to work right,” Imlay said.

According to BioMed Central (BMC) Psychiatry, based in London, 11% of anorexia nervosa patients experience a full relapse, 19% a partial relapse, and 70% do not relapse. Imlay said that people with anorexia sometimes relapse quickly and a small amount of them develop a chronic condition. She said it is a long term battle that you fight your whole entire life.

Johansen said one of the biggest challenges she faced was people telling her to “just eat.” She said people did not understand what she was going through because it was all in her head.

“It’s so hard when someone is forcing food down your throat, and a lot of people would be like ‘just eat,’ and I hated that because I’m trying my hardest, so you telling me to just eat or trying to give me advice is not helping at all,” Johansen said.

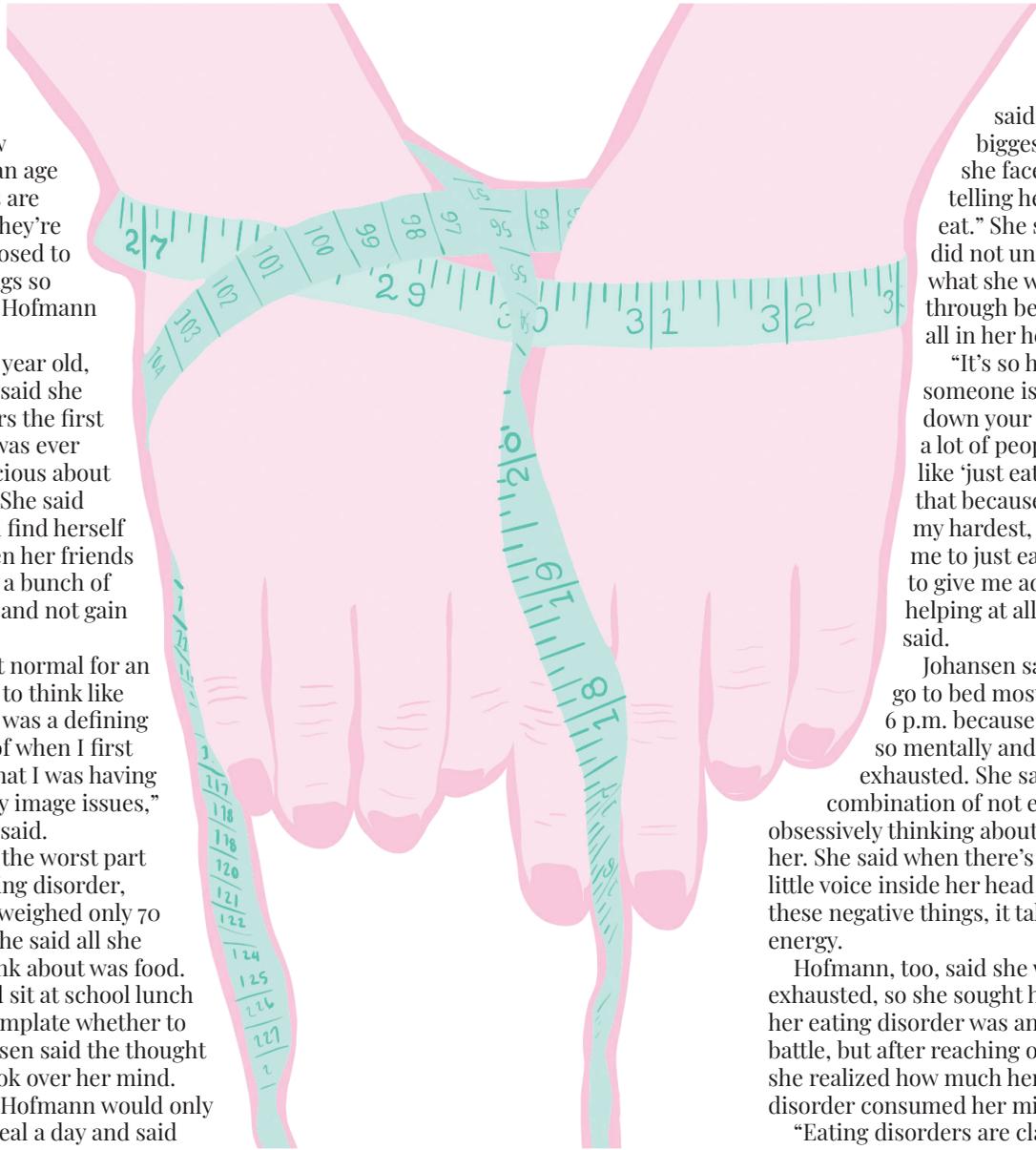
Johansen said she would go to bed most nights at 6 p.m. because she was so mentally and physically exhausted. She said the combination of not eating and obsessively thinking about food drained her. She said when there’s a constant little voice inside her head saying all these negative things, it takes all of her energy.

Hofmann, too, said she was mentally exhausted, so she sought help. She said her eating disorder was an internal battle, but after reaching out for help, she realized how much her eating disorder consumed her mind.

“Eating disorders are classified as a mental illness, which a lot of people don’t know. They think it’s just a body image issue, and oftentimes these eating disorders do go hand in hand with other mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety,” Hofmann said.

Hofmann’s mom, Jamie Hofmann, said she suspected her daughter was struggling with something before she told her what she was going through.

“When we would ask her, she wasn’t at that time ready to admit it, but we were keeping an eye on it,” Jamie said. “There [were] a few things that kept tipping me off and finally I just had to confront her. At that time, I think she was ready to tell me what was going on because she didn’t like what was happening in her life.”



Jamie said although she suspected that Hofmann was struggling with something, it was still a shock when she found out about Hofmann's eating disorder.

"It was a bit of a shock because you think, this kid's got it all together. She's beautiful and she's smart. Why would she feel this way?"

Hofmann is currently in recovery, receiving treatment from an outpatient facility. Hofmann said she decided to get help because she wanted to get her life on track and wanted a better future. She said the outpatient program has been super beneficial and she enjoys the supportive environment.

Jamie said it is a relief that Hofmann is now in recovery and they have been able to find the best resources for her.

"Although we are early in this journey, I am really hopeful and I think we're doing great so far. I'm hopeful because I think we can get through this and I think she will be successful because we have the right tools," Jamie said.

At the age of 15, Johansen went to her mom, Leslie Johansen, and opened up to her about her struggles, stating she was not OK and needed help. As a high schooler, Leslie struggled from bulimia, an eating disorder in which someone binge eats, followed by methods of

self-induced vomiting, purging, or fasting to avoid weight gain.

Leslie said she was devastated because she knew exactly what her daughter was feeling, but she knew she could overcome it. Leslie was surprised because while Johansen was growing up, she said she worked so hard to make sure her daughter never felt this way.

As sad as she felt, Leslie said she believed she was the person who was meant to have the daughter who went through an eating disorder because she knew she could get her through it, no matter how long it took.

"Because of my experiences, I really felt like I knew what she was going through. So it was a little bit easier for me to parent her through it," Leslie said.

From a parental viewpoint, Leslie said she saw all the strength that comes from suffering with an eating disorder. She said the hardest part was watching her daughter struggle, even

though she knew it was going to be OK in the end. "It's so hard to tell a

teenager, 'it's gonna get better,' because we know it's going to happen as parents and adults, but it's just so hard to tell you guys that," Leslie said.

After two years of fighting, Johansen has fully recovered. Her mom said she is extremely proud of her daughter and Johansen is the strongest person she knows. Johansen said that there are still days when she has negative thoughts, but she controls herself.

"The voice is still in your head but it's all about how you deal with it. That's when you know you're better, because that's when you realize it's not healthy and that those thoughts are not good so you need to fight them," Johansen said.

Looking back at her journey, Johansen said she would not take it back as it has made her a stronger person. She said she loves to help people through sharing her story. Johansen posts about her story on social media because she wants people to know that it's OK to be struggling and there's no shame in having an eating disorder.

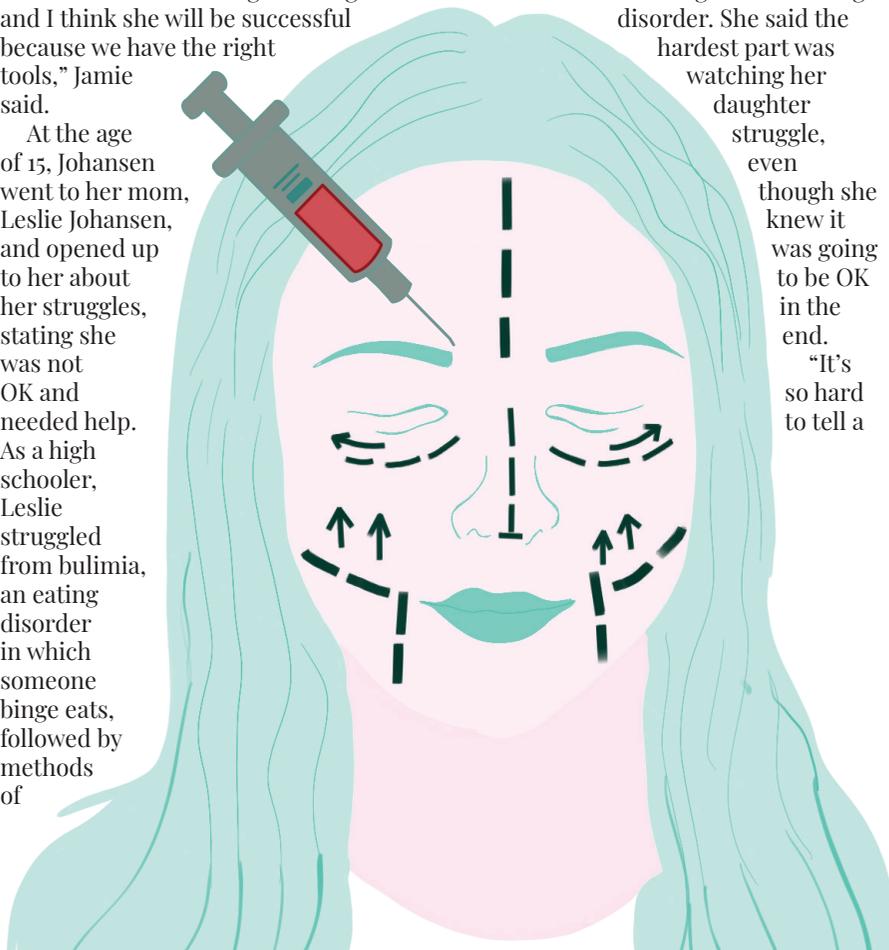
Johansen wants to tell anyone struggling with an eating disorder to keep fighting.

"I would say, just don't give up, because I did sometimes. Just don't give up, it takes time, be patient, it's going to be so worth it in the end," Johansen said.

Hofmann wants people to know that eating disorders are more common than people think. She said both men and women of all shapes and sizes can suffer from eating disorders. Hofmann encourages people to seek help if they need it. She said through finding support, you are going to become a much better person and you are going to be able to reclaim your own life and personality back.

The biggest takeaway Johansen said she gained from all of this, was learning what being beautiful actually means.

"I've learned the definition of beautiful," Johansen said. "I've learned that no one really cares that much what you look like. Now I realize none of that matters, it's your personality that matters. If you're nice and outgoing and you just have a good attitude and outlook on life, that's what's pretty, that's what's beautiful, it's not what you look like on the outside."



*According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons medical journal, 229,000 cosmetic procedures were performed on patients ages 13-19 in 2017.*

# BREAKING DOWN THE NUMBERS

DATA FROM NATIONAL EATING DISORDER ASSOCIATION

LESS THAN **6%**

OF PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS ARE MEDICALLY DIAGNOSED AS "UNDERWEIGHT"

**9%**

OF THE WORLDWIDE POPULATION HAS EXPERIENCED AN EATING DISORDER

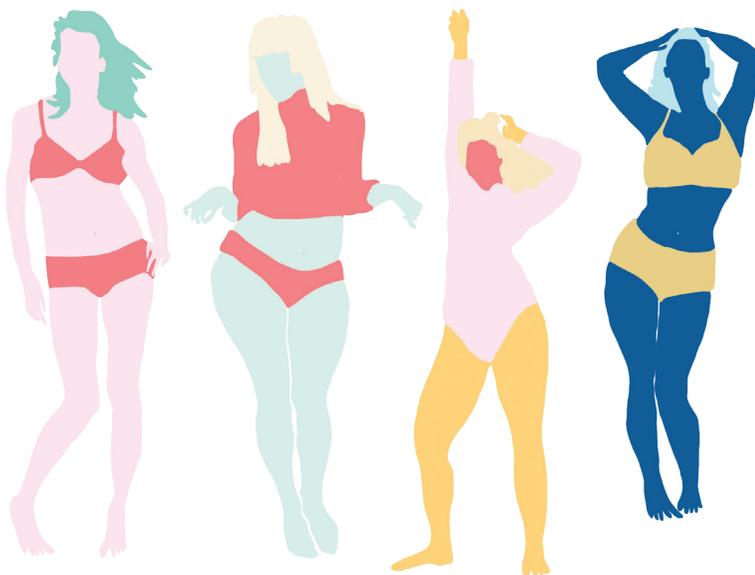
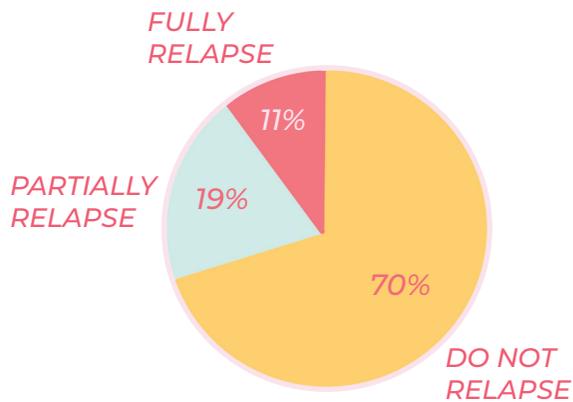
ABOUT **26%**

OF PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS ATTEMPT SUICIDE

EATING DISORDERS ARE AMONG THE DEADLIEST MENTAL ILLNESSES

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA PATIENTS:

\*ACCORDING TO BIOMED CENTRAL PSYCHIATRY BASED IN LONDON



## TO GET HELP:

**Toll-Free Phone Number: 1-800-931-2237**

**Helpline phone hours are Monday-Thursday 11AM-9PM ET & Friday 11AM-5PM ET.**

**For 24/7 crisis support, text 'NEDA' to 741741**