

## Body Images

**Does the media put too much pressure on women to be thin? Sophie Dyer, 16, looks at both the positive and negative messages being sent to young people about body image.**

In the last few weeks celebrities like Courtney Love and Rene Zellweger have been criticised in the media for their dramatic weight loss.

Also a recent BBC survey highlighted that 'half of girls aged eight to 12 want to look like the women they see in the media and six out of ten thought they'd be happier if they were thinner'.

As a young journalist I wanted to get to the bottom of these shock statistics and find out the scale of this problem for myself. I went to my local shopping centre in Bexleyheath and spoke to the public to see what their opinions of this worrying trend were.

"Everyone thinks they have to look like the 'perfect' person, there is no longer any emphasis on being individual." This is the opinion of Miss Drew, a P.E teacher with over a decade's experience of working with young people.

It seems that she has a good understanding of what young girls regard as a healthy body image. This was a theme that I found came up frequently when I asked the public, "How much of an influence do you feel the media has over the society?"

One mother I spoke to expressed her anxiety about the growing phenomenon of the media's huge influence over body image. "I'm not sure it can be improved. I mean, how can you regulate the media? It's just a sign of the times we're living in unfortunately." I was surprised that this issue affected such a broad section of the public, from parents to young teenagers.

Another aspect that has to be taken into consideration is the fashion industry and the influence of catwalk models. The fashion industry usually associates true beauty with being thin. Whether high street or haute couture, nearly all fashion outlets use slim models to advertise their collections.

What are the odds that a famous fashion designer will choose a size 16 model over a size zero? Size zero has been linked to anorexia nervosa and bulimia, as many women have to lose a large amount of weight to become so thin.

The deaths of models have even been attributed to the size zero trend. Luisel Ramos, aged 22, died of a heart attack in August 2, 2006 after apparently trying to survive on Diet Coke and lettuce leaves.

Brazilian model Ana Carolina Reston's death was also linked to the pressures of maintaining slimness; her diet was reported to consist solely of apples and tomatoes, and she died from kidney failure.

Beautiful, extravagant clothes are designed for slim people. In a society that seems so easily influenced by the media, the message that slim equals beautiful could actually end up being dangerous.

However, although celebrities and the media can be blamed for creating this problem they could also actually provide a solution. A range of recent TV programmes has been promoting more positive attitudes towards body image.

On How to Look Good Naked, presenter Gok Wan encourages women to embrace their body shape; Dove's new ad campaign features, larger, older and a more diverse range of models; and Colleen McLoughlin's Real Women also aims promote real women in fashion advertising.

Since it's been established that the media has such a dominant influence over the public, promoting and encouraging a healthy attitude towards body image may help combat these problems.

### About this article

This story was written by Sophie Dyer, 16, for Headliners in partnership with Bexleyheath School

### 8 comments

Super Skinny aint pretty

I think that skinny isn't always pretty, I think 'curvy' girls are prettier, I mean, hey, some girls are born skinny, and I think we all wish we were skinnier sometimes, but don't change the way you eat to one calorie a day or go anorexic, because that makes you fatter as your body stores energy and fats in case of starvation and if you dont eat enough food you will put on weight! So my advice to you is, only if you ARE obese, have strawberries and grapes when you crave something sweet and if you want to put on weight, try eating a little bit more fatty foods, but STICK TO A BALANCED DIET and you won't get yourself in a mess!

Hope this helped (:

Jaime Fahy-McLear (age 12) from Belfast, 12 July 2010 10:12  
who cares

ok I know its the age that everyone thinks that they need to be sexy and the only way that can be done is by being unbelievably skinny but its not true. you should just like your body, you're unique dont forget it. Im not a size zero and will never be but Im glad I wont if I was then I would not like it at all. you shouldnt be obsessed with how you look. Be yourself dont let anybody put you down live your life.

Sarah (age 15) from cumbria, 15 April 2010 21:02

American vs English...

I may be wrong but when people say "size 0", they are actually referring to the American "size 0" since we don't have a "size 0". Instead, the English equivalent is actually a size 8 and so, to the person who said that the "average size is 8-12", size 0 is in that average.

Nhung from London, 13 April 2010 00:26



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