

HEADLINERS

Public Image Ltd.

Fat, thin, stacked and packed. Does body image still have a hold on young people and old? Headliners reporters investigate.

It's not just girls who are obsessed with their body image. Today boys are increasingly becoming hooked on the need to fit that ideal chiselled image.

Jed, a youth worker from London said he has seen this with young men he has worked with.

"The boys were not eating properly, starving themselves to keep down their body fat and then training incredibly hard in the gym.

"I actually have experience of someone who was so obsessed with the image of what a man should look like - very muscular - that they ended up doing things like injecting steroids."

This is confirmed by psychologist and counsellor of young people, Katherine Cox.

"I work with a lot of young people and I come across a lot with eating disorders and not just females but increasingly young men, with anorexia, bulimia and over compulsive eating. There is an increase with men that are working out compulsively and taking part in steroids abuse. I also think young people are using drugs and alcohol to try and avoid eating to get them thinner."

People have become media savvy in the 21st Century. We know the media and advertising try and tell us what is beautiful and how to achieve it. However it seems there are other issues behind young people altering their body image.

Jed said. "There are some young people who are not happy with the way they see themselves. Sometimes the way you see yourself is down to your upbringing. If you have a family around you who make you feel good about yourself while you're growing up they reinforce that you are unique and everything about you is good.

But some young people don't have that kind of experience and that is what can make them vulnerable to things like advertising.

"I know it is an easy thing to pick on, but everywhere you go people are trying to sell a look and that is hard to resist especially when you are bombarded by it. It's about current fashions, music, but a lot of that comes from models that don't look how most people look."

Headliners went onto the streets of Islington to find out whether size really does cause a problem for young people, and Zenobia, 16, saw a positive side to having a fuller figure.

"Well it's alright. I'm fat but you get big breasts. After all what you are you can't really change.

"I think magazine and fashion models influence the way people look. But people want to follow that look because those people look hot and nice. I think my look has been influenced more by the people around me. If you hang around in a skinny group then you want to be skinnier, and if fat girls are in your group then they would want to be skinny too. It's who you hang around with."

Alma, 15 said. "I think it's to do with the person. They want to change because it's an issue for them. Perhaps if they are big and feel unattractive, they might want to get in shape because they are scared if you become big you will be unpopular."

Out of all the young people we interviewed aged between 14 and 19, they all knew the health risks surrounding the issues of body image. B-eat, a national charity that provides information, help and support for people affected by eating disorders, currently estimates the number of people receiving treatment for anorexia or bulimia to be near to 90,000 in the UK, while many more people have eating disorders undiagnosed, in particular those with bulimia nervosa.

While we know the risks, it still seems that people will take them to obtain the body image they want. So how would the news media try and address the problem?

ITV News Programme Editor Alex Chandler believes the most effective way of connecting with viewers is by shared experience.

"A report including a candid and no holds barred account of the consequences of changing one's body image is probably going to have greater impact than anything else," said Alex.

"We try to build reports around people rather than issues in the hope that the connection is more readily made with people at home."

The people we have spoken to, young and old, mostly believe that your perception of the way you look and the importance of body image in your life changes as you get older.

Psychologist Katherine Cox, speaking about her own personal issue with body image, said. "I think I've gone from my body being my enemy to becoming my friend. My body allows me to do the things I want to do, and being healthy for me now is far more important than looking ideally beautiful. I would be lying if I didn't say I'd swap my body for a tall slim Hollywood actress. It's still not perfect but it is not a problem in my life anymore."

Sophie, a youth worker at Body and Soul said. "I'm good now that I am a bit older. It didn't really happen until probably 20 plus."

A young person from Body and Soul said "I love my body. I'd like to tone my belly a bit, but I wouldn't change anything else."

The need to live by the rules of the body image game seems to wear off as you get older. However even the ones that say it doesn't matter anymore, would still like to make little changes.

This story was produced by Akram Bwanika, 15, David Omara, 15, Habben Michael, 16, Dexter Kunaka, 18 and Zena Belo-Osagie, 19.



1 comment

Great idea

Hi,
It was a great idea for us to read along to, and a really really good articles!
Chisara (age 9) from North London, 05 January 2010 20:15

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