



Picture of Health?

Snapshot

LADS + ADS

THE FACTS

**WHO
INFLUENCES
BOYS?**

FRIENDS AND THE
NEW WORLD OF
SOCIAL MEDIA

What's desirable?

MUSCLES AND
MASCULINITY

**PICTURE
PERFECT**

4

**PROPOSED
ACTIONS**

Picture of Health?

AUDIENCE KEY

The research covered primary and secondary boys aged 8 to 18.

Primary:

ages 8 to 11

Secondary:

ages 11 to 18

Lower secondary:

ages 11 to 16

Upper secondary:

ages 16 to 18

Answer options for questions were not asked to primary boys when they concerned more sensitive issues, such as eating disorders, taking steroids, taking laxatives and cosmetic surgery.

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**Advertising's
Think Tank**

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Credos is UK advertising's think-tank, funded by a broad range of advertisers, media owners and agencies. Issues of societal concern involving advertising are high on our agenda as we are committed to an honest appraisal of advertising, identifying its shortcomings as well as its positive features, so that the industry can address them. Our work is guided by an advisory board of industry experts to ensure its relevance, quality and integrity.

Picture of Health? is the latest in a programme of **Credos** work designed to inform and encourage the debate surrounding different aspects of representation in UK advertising.

In 2011 *Pretty as a Picture* looked at representations of female body image and the impact on girls. In 2014 *The Whole Picture* covered ethnic diversity in advertising. Since then, desk research has shown that body confidence is a serious issue for young men as well as women. With little primary research available, the question of whether and how advertising might be a contributory factor was proposed as an area for more research.

This report focuses on an area of common concern – how male models are portrayed in advertising and the media – and in particular, whether boys are aware of digitally enhanced imagery and whether this is impacting their attitudes and behaviour.

We have spoken to boys, teachers, parents and youth leaders to better understand:

- attitudes towards body confidence with particular focus on advertising and airbrushing
- influences and pressures on boys
- awareness of digital manipulation in the media
- awareness of body confidence being an issue for boys
- prevalence of body image insecurities
- practical solutions to issues (if they exist).

METHOD

We commissioned **EdComs** to conduct research with boys, teachers, parents and youth leaders. The research took place between 22nd February and 4th March 2016.

A nationally representative survey was conducted with 1,005 boys (326 primary and 679 secondary) to explore their attitudes towards body image and the role advertising and digital image manipulation play in this.

Alongside this, focus groups were conducted in London, Birmingham and Cardiff with boys aged 8 to 18 and with teachers, youth leaders and parents.



“Picture of Health? looks at the body confidence of boys in the U.K. and how this relates to the images they see in advertising. By talking to those directly involved - the boys themselves - we hope to inform and encourage the debate on the issue.”

Karen Fraser
Director, Credos
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Sources of influence
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What did we find?

Priorities

- Looking good comes low on the list of things that make boys happy and equally low on the list of things that worry them.
- Playing computer games and spending time with friends are far more important for both secondary and primary boys.
- Being bullied is the biggest worry for primary boys, while most secondary boys are worried about exams.

Friends

- It is their friends that are most likely to make boys feel they have to look good, particularly older boys.

- Older boys place a higher priority on their friends' opinions, and 68% cite them as a source of pressure to look good. Unsurprisingly, they're also more conscious of the opinions of people they are attracted to.

Talking body image

- Boys are also far more likely to talk to their friends about their looks than to their teachers or parents...
- ...but are quite likely to laugh off any issues they have, as they are worried they will be made fun of or even bullied.

Parents and teachers

- Although many boys acknowledge that body image is a problem for them as well as for girls, parents and teachers are slower to recognise it.
- Parents and teachers can find it difficult to distinguish any worries from a normal desire to be healthy.

Social media

- The influence of social media is starting early, with even sites

that have a minimum age of 13 being commonly visited by primary school boys.

Advertising and imagery

- Boys don't seem to be very conscious of the influence advertising might be having on them. They aren't very aware of less 'traditional' forms of advertising through social media and are surprised to discover the extent to which male images are manipulated.
- 67% of boys said it was unacceptable to use digital techniques to manipulate body shapes in advertising.

The 'perfect body'

- 42% of boys who think male images are realistic also believe there is a 'perfect body' to strive for, compared with 16% of those who think male images are unrealistic.
- Two thirds of those who believe there is a 'perfect body' also think they can achieve it if they work at it.



HAPPINESS IS A COMPUTER SCREEN

Boys of all ages enjoy playing computer games and sports, as well as spending time with their friends. Looking good doesn't seem to be connected to happiness, with only 9% of boys saying looking good makes them happy.

SCHOOL PRESSURES TOP THE LIST OF WORRIES

School is the biggest cause of stress in boys' lives, with boys feeling under pressure to achieve at school and in exams. Even primary age boys are worried about exams. Unsurprisingly, worries vary greatly by age, with younger boys more worried about being bullied or having arguments with others, and older boys more worried about their future. Only 11% of boys say they are worried about looking good.

What makes them happy?

Primary boys' first choices

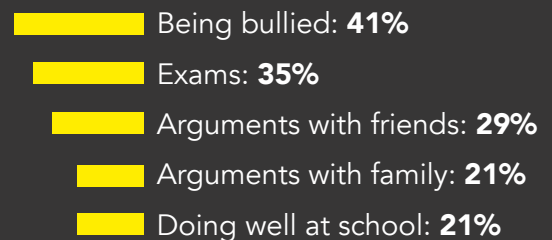


Secondary boys' first choices

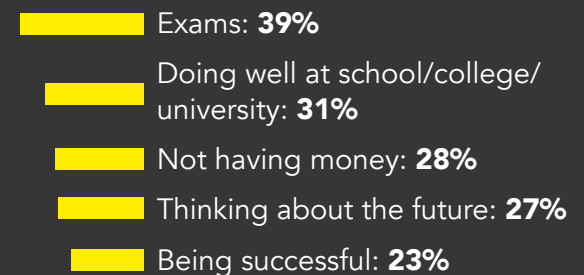


What makes them worried?

Primary boys' first choices



Secondary boys' first choices



YOU'RE NOTHING WITHOUT A FRIEND

Although surrounded by a wealth of influences in their lives, boys look to those closest to them for inspiration – their friends and peers. Over one-third (37%) of boys get ideas on how to look good from them, and a similar proportion (36%) say their friends' opinions of their looks matter the most. Friends provide inspiration not just on how to look, but also how to dress and behave.

Although boys feel pressure to look good from celebrities, social media and advertising, the views and attitudes of their friends continue to be a driving influence in their lives, no matter their age. Nor is this confined to the school playground – with most boys using social media to engage with their friends, they have 24-hour access to their friends' opinions, meaning that peer pressure can be unrelenting.

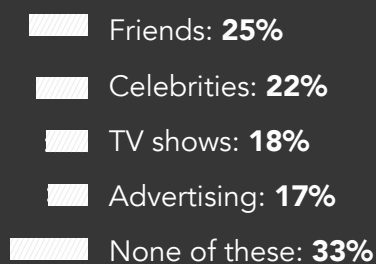
THE FOUR BIGGEST SOURCES OF PRESSURE ON SECONDARY BOYS TO LOOK GOOD



THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

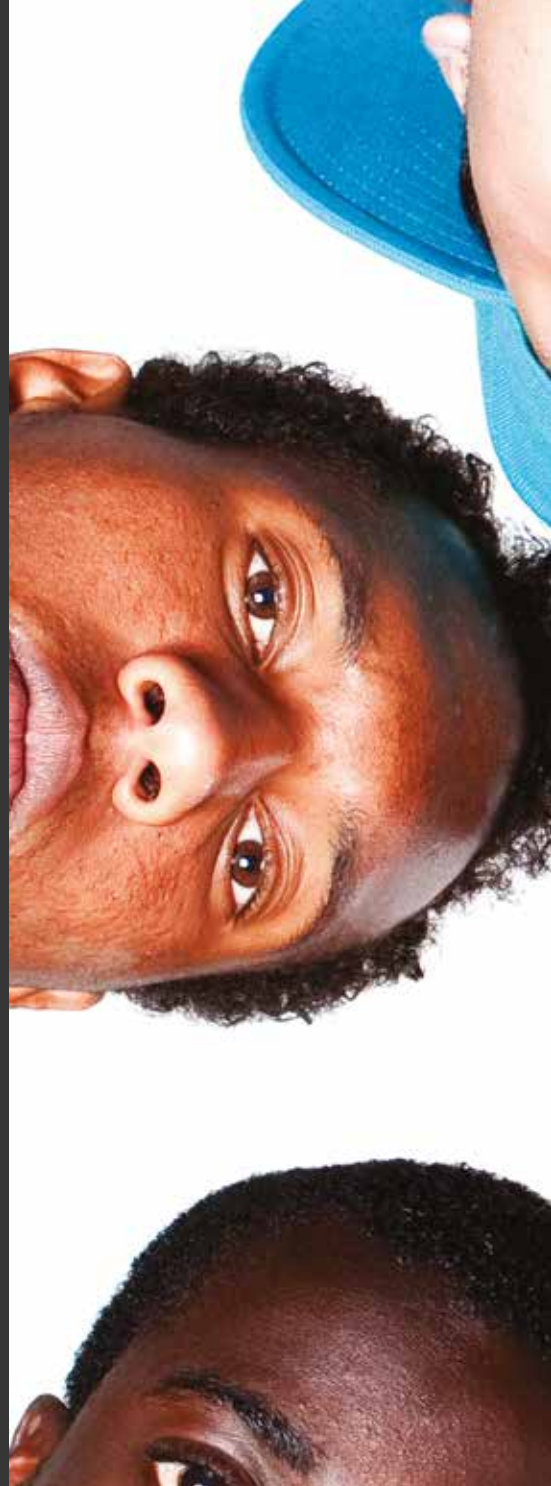
As well as their friends, boys follow athletes and musicians/rappers on social media. They also express interest in reading/sharing inspirational quotes often posted on accounts they follow. They look for tips on how to get in shape and how to model their paths to success on those they admire.

THE THINGS THAT MAKE PRIMARY BOYS FEEL THEY NEED TO LOOK GOOD



“I have friends who wear clothes, people say they don't like it, and you won't see them wearing it anymore.”

(Age 17, Cardiff)





“Some of my friends are really materialistic now. I had a friend who didn’t care until Sixth Form, then people made comments and he just tends to be a sensitive person, so he’d spend his money on watches and accessories to portray an image that he’s a bit wealthy.”

(Age 17, Cardiff)

“A friend of mine, her son joined secondary school and he was beside himself to go into [the fashion store] Hollister. He didn’t fit the clothes. He was nearly in tears. ‘Mum, all my friends that I’ve made are wearing this. I have to wear it.’ It is so they can fit in. It’s all about pleasing everybody else, which is really sad.”

(Teacher, London)

FAMILY INFLUENCE WANES WITH AGE

Younger boys, in primary school, say parents and siblings are a key influence, giving them ideas on how to look and behave. Young boys also view themselves and their peers more holistically, emphasising that everyone is different and that personality matters more than looks.

“I look up to my sister, mother and my father, because my sister’s really intelligent, my father always cares about my personal fitness, and my mother cares about what’s happening in the world.”

(Age 10, Cardiff)

“I feel annoyed at the companies that use [one body type] because everybody is different... just because they are good-looking doesn’t mean they are kind inside.”

(Age 10, Cardiff)

As boys get older, they become more self-conscious and place a higher priority on the opinion of their friends. By the time they are in upper secondary school they become more aware of the opinion of others they are attracted to. Our research suggests, for example, that although the views of girls are often indirectly stated – such as an offhand comment about

the attractiveness of a male celebrity’s body – older boys are very aware of girls’ views and expectations and are keen to impress them. The desire to conform and fit in with peers means dressing a certain way becomes much more important as boys progress to age 18.

“When I go out and I’m with friends that are girls, they do say, ‘He’s tall,’ and they find that attractive. You do think it would be nice to be that height.”

(Age 16, Cardiff)



MINDING THE (COMMUNICATION) GAP ACKNOWLEDGING BOYS' BODY IMAGE ISSUES

Despite the increasing pressure that boys feel, they are reluctant to talk directly about these issues with parents or teachers, believing their problem is minor or they should 'suck it up'. Moreover, with boys less willing to come forward to share their concerns, they can lack a support structure to acknowledge and resolve their issues.

56%

Over half of boys feel it would be difficult to talk to a teacher in relation to their confidence about their looks, and nearly one-third (29%) feel it would be difficult talking to their parents about this.

71%

Nearly three-quarters of boys would feel it easiest to share their concerns with their friends, feeling it would be easy to talk to their friends in relation to their confidence about their looks.

Boys, parents and teachers all acknowledge that boys are more likely to laugh off criticism or make a joke as a cover, instead of acknowledging an issue or seeking advice. Instead, boys who have concerns may try to address them in private without their parents' or teachers' knowledge, for example through exercise.



IT'S DIFFERENT FOR BOYS OR IS IT?

“Boys seem to be bragging rather than having concerns. If there is concern, it’s usually something they keep to themselves. I think I’d be equipped if someone came up to me, but I’ve never had to deal with it.”

(Teacher, London)

“It’s hard with boys. With girls, somebody says, ‘You’re fat.’ The natural reaction is that the girl cries, the other girl feels guilty, and it gets sorted out. With boys, there’s a lot more banter. You can see they’re often hurt, but the expectation is to laugh and shrug it off. There’s a lot of that going on with boys. It’s bullying, but at a different level.”

(Teacher, London)

“There is a potential for [boys’ body image] to be a big issue. I think with a lot of boys, they’re very closed up. They don’t like to talk about things, whereas I think we see it as more of an issue with girls because they’re more open to talking about it... [Boys] feel they would be bullied or made fun of.”

(Age 15, London)





Although traditionally thought of as the exclusive domain of girls, boys are increasingly acknowledging body image issues as a struggle for both genders. Over half of secondary boys see eating disorders (56%) as an issue for both boys and girls. Similarly, approximately half of all boys think dieting

(55%) and extreme exercising (48%) are gender-neutral issues. However, our research suggests that parents and teachers tend to be slower in recognising that body image issues impact upon both genders. For both parents and teachers, it can be difficult to distinguish whether the driving force behind behaviour

change in a boy is a desire to get healthier or issues related to body confidence. Youth leaders, who spend time with boys in more informal settings, say they have noticed an increase in boys' concern over their image, which they largely attribute to the pervasive influence of social media.

“They laugh it off. Just because somebody is laughing it off, doesn’t mean that they’re accepting it. It can hurt them. My son thinks if they’re smiling about it, it’s fine. People smile just to cope with the situation. Boys try and save face, girls like to get in a huddle.”

(Parent, Birmingham)

“My youngest had a bad ankle and couldn’t exercise. When he joined secondary school, he was chunky...He went on to lose his chubbiness. I caught him doing sit-ups and crunches in the morning. It dawned on me that he was doing all this exercise to try and lose the chubbiness. He couldn’t run or play sport, but that’s what he did.”

(Parent, Birmingham)

EXPOSURE TO ADVERTISING

DO BOYS REALISE WHAT THEY'RE DEALING WITH?

Typically, boys associate advertising with the more traditional, overt forms, such as TV commercials, magazine ads and website pop-ups, with fewer mentions of social media.

Although there is recognition advertising happens on a number of platforms on social media, boys are largely unaware of less traditional advertising unless it is explicitly labelled as such.

When boys are made aware of the level of sponsorship that is conducted on social media, they are shocked by it.

“Turns out for that month she had been sponsored by a company that sells [a product] and I didn't notice that because all she did was do a hashtag at the end for what the company was. It's quite sneaky.”

(Age 14, London)

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING

Boys hold advertising in high regard:

- 73% of secondary boys agree that advertising plays an important role in letting them know about products and services.
- 68% of primary boys think adverts are important for telling them about things.

However, over half of secondary boys do admit that they feel pressure to look good from advertising (53%) and many have changed their behaviour as a result of it, indicating that advertising could be having more of an impact on their image than they think:

- 69% of 16 to 18 year olds say they have tried new products after seeing an advert.
- Around a fifth of secondary boys say they have changed their exercise routine after seeing advertising (23%).



Keeping it social

Many boys (57%) reported feeling pressure to look good from social media. Whilst using social media primarily to interact with friends and peers, a fifth were also using it to find out about celebrities (21%).

The impact of advertising on social media is hard to assess, as boys lack awareness and recognition of sponsorship and advertising in social media, and may be under-reporting the impact it has on their body image.

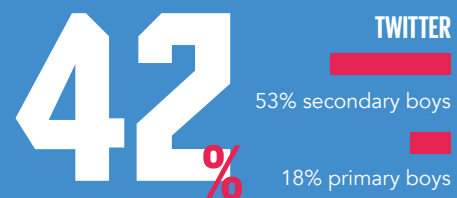
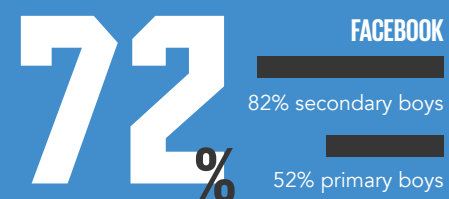
On using Instagram:

“[There are] no ads on my phone. Obviously some companies post things on it but that’s really it.”

(Age 15, London)



THE MOST COMMONLY REPORTED SOCIAL MEDIA SITES USED BY ALL BOYS



Despite the minimum age for accounts on many social media sites being 13, at least a fifth of primary boys have reported visiting them, with over half claiming to have visited Facebook (52%) and YouTube (60%). This suggests exposure to the content on these sites may be happening earlier than anticipated.

PICTURE PERFECT

Our research shows that boys initially report they are aware of digital manipulation. However, on further discussion, many assume that any changes are minor – removing a blemish, tidying a stray hair – and are shocked to discover the extent to which changes are made to male photographs in advertising.

Interestingly, our research highlights that boys are acutely aware of the extent to which female images are digitally altered and feel they can identify when these images have been digitally manipulated. They also believe this manipulation can set unrealistic and unhealthy goals for women and girls.

When shown the extent to which some images can be manipulated in the media, boys were shocked at the lengths gone to in order to alter models' looks, and felt that more should be done to stop showing unrealistic, digitally enhanced images.

WHAT IS A DESIRABLE BODY?

Our research shows a shift in attitudes in what is seen as a desirable body as boys get older, older boys tending to find a toned and muscular body more attractive.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMAGE MANIPULATION

- **80%** of boys are aware of image manipulation in the media.
- **41%** feel the way the media portray men in images they use is unrealistic but...
- ...some secondary boys feel the way the media portray men in images used is healthy (**33%**), and aspirational (**22%**).

After being shown digitally manipulated photos:

- **67%** of boys said that it was not acceptable for brands or products to use digital techniques to change the body shape of a model in their advertising.



1 NATURAL IMAGE

No changes.

Overall, 38% thought this image looked natural, and a third (33%) thought it looked fit (sporty). Secondary boys were more likely to think this image looked healthy compared with primary boys (50% vs 37%) which suggests a slightly more toned/muscular body appeals to older boys.

“I don't think it's that bad. Depends what is being done to the image. For instance, he's muscly. Someone might look up to him. I guess they would start going to the gym, doing more exercise, and more exercise is good. Maybe they might get to look like him but even if they don't, at least they have done some exercise. It has a positive impact.”

(Age 14, London)



2

THINNER BODY SHAPE

Made slimmer and taller. Blemishes and body hair removed.

Overall, although digitally manipulated, 41% thought the image above was natural, suggesting many didn't recognise that it had been altered.

A third of boys felt the image looked too thin (34%), and secondary boys felt the image appeared too weak (33%). Only a fifth overall thought it looked healthy (22%).

3

MUSCULAR BODY SHAPE

Made slimmer and taller. Blemishes and body hair removed. Muscles enhanced and body made into 'V' shape.

Only 5% thought the image below looked natural and 10% thought it looked healthy. Almost half (48%) believed the image looked fake and a third (33%) said it looked too muscly. Primary boys were more likely to reject the additional muscles with 41% saying the image was too muscly.



OVERALL

Although the research suggests some differences in what's desirable between primary and secondary boys, there was a more positive reaction to the non-digitally altered image compared to the more extreme examples shown.

MUSCLES AND MASCULINITY

Our research suggests boys associate muscles with being masculine. Three fifths (62%) selected the image below as masculine. The focus groups highlighted that many boys believe images of muscular males used in advertising can be seen as motivational and inspirational.

This was particularly true for the older boys. Similarly, a fifth of secondary boys believe the way advertising portrays men in images is aspirational (22%) – this is higher for boys age 16 to 18, compared with boys age 11 to 16 (26% vs 19%).



“Boys our age want to be muscly.”

(Age 14, London)

“[Advertising] is kind of good and bad. It can give you motivation.”

(Age 10, Cardiff)

“[When changing an image of myself] I reduced my spots and whitened my teeth.”

(Age 17)

“I made my nose smaller, eyes larger, face thinner and body fitter.”

(Age 18)



CHANGING THEIR OWN IMAGES

Around a fifth of secondary boys said they had changed images of themselves to look better (22%). Boys often did the following to change their images:

- Added a filter or changed the colouring/brightness/contrast of an image
- Removed blemishes such as spots or moles
- Made their teeth look whiter
- Changed their body to look more muscular
- Changed their body to look slimmer

PERFECT BODY

The idea that there is a 'perfect male body' that boys aspire to is not a universally held view among boys. Around a quarter (23%) of boys believe there to be a 'perfect male body', often associated with being muscly, lean and athletic.

How the male form is perceived appears to have an effect on secondary boys' attitudes in relation to the ideal body type: secondary boys who see male images within advertising as realistic are more likely to believe in the 'perfect body' (42%), compared with those that think male images are unrealistic (16%). This suggests digitally enhanced male images are contributing to boys' beliefs relating to perfection in male form.

Boys – both primary and secondary – who worry about what people think of their body, are also more likely to think there is a 'perfect body' (36% vs 15%). This suggests that striving towards an idealised body can lead to stress for some boys.

Teachers and youth leaders are increasingly noticing a trend for boys to be concerned about their physique, seeing it like another fashion trend. Today's look is muscly, with young boys striving to achieve the 'in' style.

“Being really built is a big fashion.”

(Teacher, London)

“If you want to get fit, that's possible. You can just do a lot of running and training.”

(Age 10, Cardiff)

“In the last few years there's been a shift. There's pressure to be really muscly.”

(Youth leader, London)



“I do think that some people might think that they have to have a specific body shape. They should have, like, a fit body type and big biceps.”

(Age 10, Cardiff)

“I don’t think there’s such a thing. Certain people, it’s a lot harder to obtain mass like that and muscle.”

(Age 17, Cardiff)

FANTASY OR REALITY?

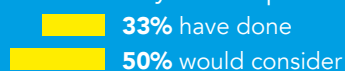
It is one thing to believe that perfection exists, it is another to believe that such a look is achievable. Of those boys who believe there is a ‘perfect body’, two thirds (65%) think it is a realistic target that they could achieve if they work at it. Secondary boys are even more likely to believe this compared with primary boys (70% vs 55%). This belief amongst boys creates an added stress to achieve the (often) impossible.

BLURRED LINES HEALTHY OR EXTREME?

Eat more healthily



Play more sport



Exercise more frequently



The most common steps secondary boys will take, or consider, to try to change the way they look.

Because these activities are usually associated with a healthy lifestyle, teachers and parents often struggle to distinguish what is healthy and what could be a concern. Coupled with the fact that boys tend not to talk about body concerns, extreme behaviour can often be overlooked.

“Also because I don’t like going out at daytime, at midnight I’d go running.”

(Age 16, London)

The high proportion of secondary boys considering muscle building suggests the portrayal of muscular males in advertising and the media is having an impact on boys. The more extreme actions

considered, or in some cases undertaken, by secondary boys to change their looks, paint a bleak picture.

- Almost half of secondary boys would consider exercising with the specific intention of building muscle and bulking up (48%) and a fifth having already done this previously (21%), suggesting a staggering 69% aspire to a muscular physique.
- Worryingly, 10% claim to have previously skipped meals and a further 19% would consider this as an option to change how they look.
- Even more concerning is that 10% would consider taking steroids to achieve their goals and a slightly higher proportion would even consider cosmetic surgery (12%).





BULLYING AND ITS PATH TOWARDS EXTREME BEHAVIOURS

35% of boys reported that they had been bullied and our research shows that boys who have been bullied are more likely to consider using more extreme methods to change their appearance. When comparing secondary boys who had been bullied to those that had not, more claim that they would consider using steroids to change their look (15% vs 6%), skip meals (15% vs 7%) and

consider cosmetic surgery (18% vs 8%).

Changing how they exercise to specifically build up muscle also appears to have been influenced by being bullied, with over a quarter (26%) of those that have been bullied having done this previously compared to only 18% of those who haven't been bullied.

SCHOOL SANCTUARY OR WAR ZONE?

School, where boys are surrounded by other young people, is where boys feel the most pressure about the way their body looks, with just over one-third (35%) of boys feeling this way; secondary boys (38%) are more likely than primary boys (29%) to feel the most pressure at school.

For boys who have been bullied (35%), this pressure is even more intense. Nearly half (45%) of boys who have been bullied feel the most pressure at school, compared with 30% of those who have never been bullied.

THE CHANGING ROOM

The school changing room occupies a unique space in boys' school life. As a 'boys only' area, it is a place where boys can relax and be themselves. However, it's also a place where boys can feel exposed and uncomfortable; nearly one-third (29%) say they feel the most pressure about how their body looks in the changing room. Those who have been bullied are significantly more likely to feel the most pressure in the changing room compared to those who haven't (39% vs 24%).

The banter between boys in the changing room can also fuel insecurities – boys are more likely to comment on their own and others' bodies and engage in what they consider to be harmless teasing or jokes. This, in turn, can create an atmosphere where boys feel more self-aware and insecure than otherwise; some boys even 'forget' their kit to avoid changing in front of their peers. As such, it can be a place of hidden anxiety for some boys.

“It’s a sort of ‘boys don’t cry’ attitude people have in society now. You won’t get a sincere conversation with someone, especially if you’re just in the boys’ changing room for, like, six minutes. What happens in there, if it’s a lot of jokes? There’s no actual advice.”

(Age 15, London)

“We have a few boys in our clubs who won’t bring their kit because they’re overweight, and that’s their way of getting out of it. They’re asked to go to detention.”

(Youth leader, London)



THE CHALLENGE

The general naivety among boys about when they are being advertised to presents a challenge, as many are unaware of non-traditional advertising methods. Many do not associate social media with advertising, but, other than friends, this is the source of highest influence.

Boys have a low awareness of digital manipulation of male images in the media – many associate extreme ‘airbrushing’ with female images only. Whilst a large proportion think they know about imagery being digitally manipulated, many are surprised to see its effect, resulting in almost three-quarters of boys thinking it is not acceptable for brands or products to use digital techniques to change the body shape of a model in their advertising.

Muscular male bodies are seen as desirable and associated with masculinity, particularly for older boys, and are often both aspired to and pursued. Add this to boys’ limited awareness of digital manipulation, and the concern is that boys are pursuing a look that is actually unachievable.

The relatively low awareness of boys’ body image issues amongst parents and teachers, coupled with a culture of boys not discussing their worries, makes it a tough environment for boys to seek support.

OUR PROPOSED ACTIONS

1. The boys themselves suggested the need for more information and initiatives to raise awareness of the different types of advertising and sponsorship across all channels and of the extent of digitally enhancing male images.
2. Schools should run media literacy programmes, such as Media Smart (mediasmart.uk.com), to emphasise the importance of addressing body issues among boys and equip teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to introduce the conversation into lessons.
3. Boys, teachers and parents should be educated about what is healthy, how to identify potential extreme behaviours/issues, how these may differ between girls and boys and where to seek help and advice.
4. Advertisers should use a diversity of male body shapes and sizes to encourage more realistic aspirations among boys.

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