

Boy Oh Boy: What's Next for Our Boys? What Parents Need to Know

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Parents are aware of the signs of eating disorders in their daughters. We understand that body dissatisfaction is rooted in childhood and adolescence. Now, we have to turn to our sons. Certainly young men have traditional eating disorders, but more commonly adolescent boys present otherwise. Boys are being exposed to an enormous amount of body image distortion, where the ideal body is extremely muscular, so instead of feeling too fat, they feel too thin. Take a moment to reflect on these facts:

- In the past 10-20 years, male action figures have lost all body fat- their sizes, like Barbie, are unattainable
- Video game highly muscular figures are bombarding our boys
- Celebrities and athletes have teams of people sculpting their bodies
- Social media provides a forum for boys to discover methods to enhance their bodies and feed their obsession
- In the last decade, there has been a dramatic rise of unclad men in magazines, movies, media etc

- Easy pornography access greatly affects their self confidence and esteem, rendering them vulnerable

Lagging is the research, but unfortunately what research we have is disturbing with a tremendous climb in body image issues for boys.

- 25% of normal weight adolescent boys believe they are too thin
- 33% of middle and high school boys are on protein powders, 10% on supplements and 6% steroids

Particularly at risk are boys who play sports, were bullied, have families that promote extreme health/eating habits, and have social difficulties. Many boys who jump into fitness do not fall into extremism. Those who are extreme and have continued dissatisfaction with their bodies have a great risk of unhappiness in many areas of their lives (anxiety, depression, substance use) and are prone to engaging in practices that can cause harm to their bodies.

As we contemplate how to handle this growing phenomenon, it is most important that we be aware that this issue does exist. Invite open discussion about your son's emotional life, which in our culture is rarely promoted in boys. Monitor supplements, as they are not regulated and can contain a variety of potentially dangerous substances. Create a healthy lifestyle without extremism. Discuss media and the

pressure for the idealist appearance that is so prevalent in our society. Lastly, have the conversation that we all know to be true, being a thoughtful, loving, and whole man is not defined by appearance.