

Body Image

Body image relates to the way a person thinks about their own body, the way one sees their body and the way they perceive how other people see their body. Healthy body image plays an important role in psychological and physical health and development; it's also highly correlated with positive self esteem, healthy attitudes towards eating habits and self acceptance. Given the importance of healthy and positive body image, it is concerning that body image has been identified as one of the biggest concerns for young people in Tasmania and body dissatisfaction is increasingly affecting young males and females each year.

Traditionally, young girls were at the centre of body image concerns and campaigns and young men were neglected in studies regarding eating disorders and negative body image. Young men and young women both experience body image dissatisfaction and it is a positive step forward that young men are now being included in research and data. While it is true that young men and women experience eating disorders and body image concerns it is important to note that for many the experience is different. Body image for young women is more commonly associated with losing weight and being thin; whereas young men tend to be split with some wanting to gain muscle and be bigger and fitter while others do want to lose weight. One study found that 4.4% of young women studied wanted to be bigger compared to the 46.8% of young men. Given the different natures of body image dissatisfaction for young men and young women, it is important that services equally cater to young women and young men.

Young people are under constant pressure to conform to the unrealistic ideas of beauty through media and advertising. A recent report found that one in five 12 year old girls in Australia used fasting or vomiting to lose weight and one in four young girls wanted plastic surgery. In 2005 the Victorian State Government held an 18 month inquiry into body image and its effects on young people; it found that 68% of 15 year old girls are dieting at any one time. Education surrounding positive body image and the unrealistic representation of bodies in the media needs to begin at a young age to assist in preventing young people growing up unsatisfied with their bodies.



YNOT is committed to:

- Supporting initiatives that help build young people's resilience to body image pressures.
- Supporting the establishment of prevention and early intervention programs to assist young people in the early stages of eating disorder development and provide support before it becomes a chronic illness.
- Specialised services to treat young people with disordered eating or eating disorders particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Promote positive body images in school health classes.
- Supporting initiatives to ensure that media, advertising and fashion industries adopt a more body image friendly practice and support positive body image policies and practices in education and work environments.
- Acknowledging the different nature of body image dissatisfaction for young men and young women and advocating for services to equally cater to both.

Future Vision

A Tasmania where healthy body image is promoted in the media, through advertising and in schools so young people feel satisfied and content in their own bodies. In future it is hoped that education about positive body image is increased to expand the knowledge young people have on these issues.

References

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