

THE WEIGHT ENDS NOW

Teenage boys open up about their struggles with body image

by merritt redder

Two years later and 90 pounds lighter, SIPA high school student **Duffy Adams**, 12, is a different person than he was when he was an obese 15 year-old. He knows he's not "the fat kid" anymore, but the mirror tells a different story.

"How I look is so distorted to me. It's like having a picture and every-time I look at the picture it gets blurrier and blurrier," Adams said. "As I've come to talk to other people who have lost an incredible amount of weight or people with body image issues, I've seen that a lot of other people also have issues with this."

Adams can't escape the constant thoughts and insecurities associated with his appearance.

"When I look in the mirror, I don't know what I look like. Everything I do is centered around how I look," Adams said.

Adams has struggled with body image issues his whole life, growing up obese and having to deal with incessant judgments from himself and others. He had to grow up in a world with clear expectations for men.

Build a Beach Body!
Shred Your Abs!
GET STRONG!

Phrases used in magazines, urging men to drop everything and get in shape without any regard to simply being healthy.

Recently in the media, there has been a movement of acceptance for all women. Women of all heights, weights, and body types have been appearing in advertisements. The issue hasn't been solved, but a dialogue has been started.

Men, on the other hand, have been excluded from the movement.

"When we talk about body image issues in terms of taking a look at what's advertised in the news today or on billboards, it is mainly focusing on problems with the way women are portrayed. There are definitely problems with the way women are portrayed, but I haven't seen a lot of advertisements criticizing the way they portray the male body," **John Romanski**, SIPA assistant, said.

Boys grow up seeing athletes and actors with toned bodies and large physiques, and are never taught that those people spend hours upon hours perfecting their physical appearance.

"It definitely takes a toll when you see people that you look up to and they all look different from you, and then you feel like you should look like them," Adams said.

Society doesn't realize and acknowledge the day-to-day struggles that boys and men face concerning body image. Expectations have been set that haven't been contradicted yet.

"There's this expectation that boys don't care. A lot of men aren't willing to say that there's a problem because there's this culture of staying silent and manning it out," SIPA high school student **Layne Barron** said.

For so many men like Adams, body image issues monopolize their mind. It affects their daily life and how they live it.

It consumes them.

"It's a constant fight. It's a war that can't be won, but it's a war that can be lessened," Adams said. "It's the worst battle because it's a battle against yourself. There's no clear opponent. So either you let it get the best of you it ruins your days and it controls you, or you think 'okay, the way I'm thinking, everyone else is thinking, I'm perfectly fine, I'm perfectly normal.'"

Social media is a driving force of insecurities for Adams and many other young men. People post pictures at the beach or pool with the beach bodies that magazines encourage, and the self-hatred comes flooding in.

"I think social media plays a huge part in how you feel because before it was the actors, athletes, and model that you looked at and wanted to look like, but now it's people around you. It's your friends that you feel like you should look like," Adams said.

"It's the worst battle because it's a battle against yourself."

While social media does affect Adams, he is also aware of the effort that goes into every post, every caption, every comment. Adams sees the overarching problem that comes with social media:

It makes it real.

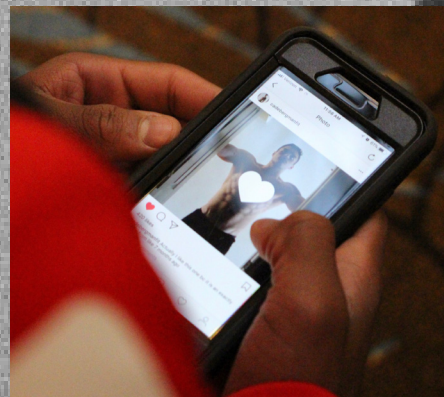
"As good as someone may look in that picture, you have to understand that it's the absolute best angle that they could've gotten," Adams said. "They were sucking in their stomach as much as they could, and they had the best filter. The problem and the relevance of social media is that now you're bringing it into the realistic realm of how you feel you should look. Now you're looking at the person next to you... and you're jealous of them."

MEASURING UP: SIPA high school student, **David Rivers**, 12, stands silent as his bicep is measured. "I feel like if it was a group effort where people start to accept themselves, then everyone else will start to accept themselves. If the media used a wider variety of models, that would help too," Rivers said.

designer livi leseh, mollic ping; photographer olivia wander



NIP, TUCK, AND HIDE: SIPA high school student, **John Jefferies**, 11, prepares for plastic surgery on his face. "There's definitely an emphasis in media on women's body image and almost none on male body image. They can just do the same thing they're doing to emphasize women's body image with males essentially," Jefferies said.



INSTA- ENVY: **Owen Donnelly**, 9, a SIPA high school student, scrolls through Instagram looking for a new bathing suit to buy. "One time I wanted to buy a bathing suit... When I went to the website the model was really in shape. It made me think that I need to get in better shape. Maybe social media could promote more diverse body types," Donnelly said.



LIFTING UP SPIRITS: SIPA high school student, **Nick Dunaway**, 11, hits the gym despite already being confident in his skin. "I think social media is pointless. I like the way I look and that's good enough for me," Dunaway said.