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Body Dissatisfaction and Males: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Within society it appears that dissatisfaction with one's body is seen as a female-exclusive problem. However, limited research on men and body dissatisfaction suggests that men do experience body dissatisfaction, and these rates are increasing over time. The present literature review seeks to tie together consistent themes seen within these studies, and proposes a model based on these connections that may explain the growth in prevalence rates over time. Two theories, threatened masculinity theory and self-discrepancy theory, are also applied within the model. The model presented within this review can help give new direction to future research on men and body dissatisfaction. By improving research, we can help eliminate the stereotype that body dissatisfaction is a "female-exclusive" issue and men who experience clinical levels of body dissatisfaction can receive the treatment they require.

Keywords: Body dissatisfaction, male, muscularity, media influence, threatened masculinity.

Body Dissatisfaction and Males: A Conceptual Model

There has been a wealth of research that has explored the link between media exposure and body dissatisfaction in females (see Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002 for a meta-analytic review). However, research that has examined links between media exposure and male body dissatisfaction is limited. It is possible that many researchers view body dissatisfaction as primarily a female issue due to many of these studies not including men within their sample. However, evidence shows that men do experience dissatisfaction with their bodies, and this dissatisfaction is growing over time (Garner, 1997). The goal of this review is to create a model that explains this growing body dissatisfaction that is occurring in males.

For the purposes of this review, the term body dissatisfaction can be defined as a discrepancy between an individual's perceived ideal body shape and their perceived actual body shape (Grieve, 2007; Farquhar & Wasylkiw, 2007). The word "perceived" is used within this definition because an individual may view their body differently than what their body really looks like. An example of this is that a person who is muscular and large may perceive themselves to be small and skinny. An individual who is experiencing body dissatisfaction feels that their body does not look in a manner that they find to be ideal.

It appears that within research body dissatisfaction is viewed as a "female issue". The majority of existing literature on body dissatisfaction is focused on White females, with many studies excluding men from the samples (3,639 articles found). Studies on media and body dissatisfaction were also focused on females as well. Research pertaining to body dissatisfaction in men appears to be in its early stages, as most studies found were conducted within the last 20

years. There were also no prior models assessing the drastic increase in body dissatisfaction within men found within current literature.

Within society, body dissatisfaction is also stereotyped as a “female issue”. There appears to be a social taboo about men speaking out about their image concerns (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). Men who are experiencing dissatisfaction may also avoid talking about or seeking help for body image issues in order to avoid appearing “gay” or “girlie” to their peers (Hargreaves & Tiggeman, 2006). Because males are being forced to remain silent about their body dissatisfaction, it is difficult to convince the public that it is an important issue.

It is important that more research is conducted on males and body dissatisfaction because, contrary to these stereotypes, it appears that men are experiencing body dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is also appearing to increase over time as well. *Psychology Today's* Body Image Survey in 1972 indicated that 15% of men felt dissatisfied with their body (Berscheid, Walster, & Bohrnstedt, 1973). According to the most recent version of the survey, this number has almost tripled in 1997 to 43% (Garner, 1997). Based on this percentage, we can estimate that there are 63 million men in the U.S. alone experiencing body dissatisfaction.

It should be noted that these percentages could be higher than indicated, as men who are feeling extreme levels of dissatisfaction may feel too embarrassed to respond to the survey. The latest version of this survey was also taken 15 years ago, but based on the trends in the prior surveys we can assume that this number has increased since then.

The psychological and physical dangers that can result from male body dissatisfaction also warrant more research to be conducted within this area. Body dissatisfaction has been shown to be a precipitating factor in the development in eating disorders such as binge eating disorder, of which males make up 40% of those who are seeking treatment (Womble,

Williamson, Martin, Zucker, et al, 2001). Eating disorders such as binge eating disorder are also stereotyped as “feminine” in nature, so it is realistic to estimate that the percentage of men in the general population with the disorder is much higher.

Body dissatisfaction has also been found to be a mediator in the development of muscle dysmorphia, a body image disorder characterized by an extreme desire to gain muscle mass and the fear of becoming smaller (Grieve, 2007). Some controversy has been placed on muscle dysmorphia, in that it is seen as an “attempt to pathologize the sport or hobby of weightlifting or bodybuilding” (Olivardia, 2001). However, these behaviors are viewed as disordered when these desires and fears begin to hinder social and occupational functioning. Examples of such hindrances include missing work to work out, avoiding sexual contact with their partner to save energy for working out, and wearing baggy clothes in order to hide their body due to shame (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000).

Behaviors that can result from an individual attempting to reduce their body dissatisfaction can be physically dangerous, even fatal; such as steroid use, extreme dieting, and continuing to exercise when injured (Olivardia, 2001). It is important to note that men with high amounts of body dissatisfaction may still engage in these risky behaviors, despite having the knowledge of the negative consequences that can occur as a result.

The goal of this review is to tie together current research in order to propose a model that can explain this sudden increase in male body dissatisfaction over time. The complete model that is being presented is displayed in Figure 1. Each section of this review will break the model into segments, and will explain the research behind each segment. The first section is titled “Gender Equality, the Importance of Muscularity, and Body Dissatisfaction in Men”, where Threatened Masculinity Theory will be introduced and will explain how recent advances in gender equality

and feminism in the 1970's may be contributing to the increases male body dissatisfaction and the importance of the male physique. The second section, "Growth of the Ideal Male Body within the Media", will look at how the increase in importance of the male physique has led to the growth in muscularity of the media's ideal body. The third section, "Body Dissatisfaction and the Muscular Ideal in Modern Males" will discuss current research on male body dissatisfaction, and its relationship with the media. The final section, "Actual/Own-Ideal/Own Discrepancies: A Mediating Variable" will introduce Self-Discrepancy Theory and present a mediator that can help to explain the relationship between dissatisfaction and the media. Implications of this model and ideas for future research within this area will conclude the review.

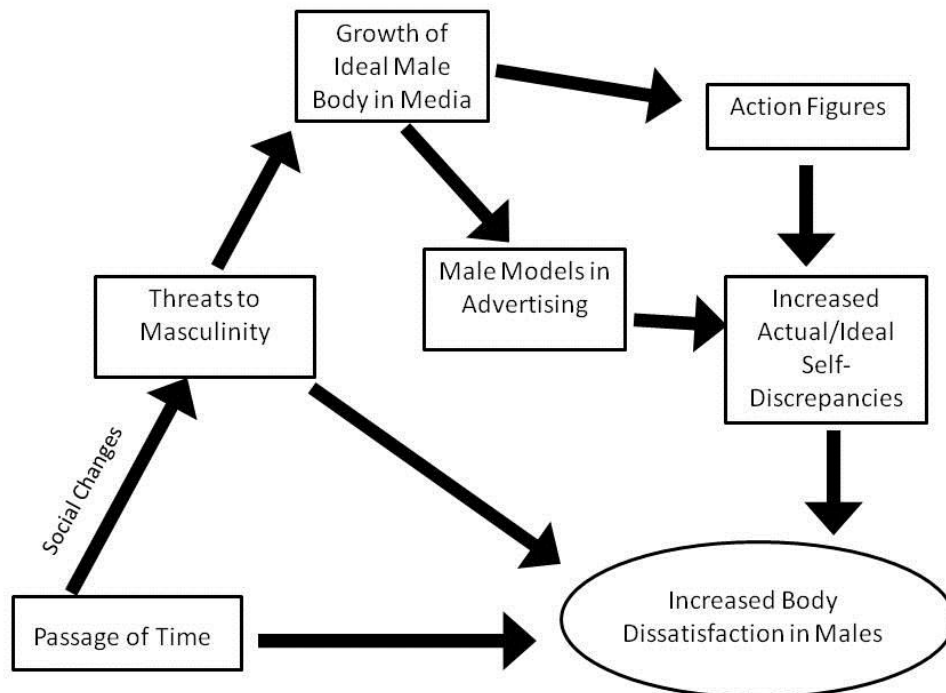


Figure 1: A Proposed Model Explaining the Increase in Male Body Dissatisfaction

Gender Equality, the Importance of Muscularity, and Body Dissatisfaction in Men

From the 1970's to current times, women have made many significant advances within society. More so within this period over other points in history, we see women progressing into social, educational, and work areas once thought to be male-only according to gender norms. The female to male ratio for people attending college has increased from .896 in 1976 to 1.324 in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Within this time period, many educational institutions also opened their doors to women; such as John Hopkins University (1970), West Point Military Academy (1976), and Harvard University (1977). It is possible that these societal changes are related to the increases in male body dissatisfaction, as these trends are occurring within the same period of time.

Threatened Masculinity Theory (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1986; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000) explains that with these societal advances women are no longer as reliant on men to fulfill roles such as “expert” and “breadwinner”, roles that were once avenues for males to assert their masculinity (Mishkind et al., 1986). Losing these roles may be thought of as “failure” for some men, and an increased importance on the male body may be an attempt to regain lost feelings of masculinity (Mills & D’Alphonso, 2007). As these distinctions between female and male roles continue to disappear, men may look more to their bodies as a way to express their masculinity.

Specifically, muscularity is seen as a way for men to distinguish themselves from females as it represents the cultural definition of masculinity: powerful, strong, potent, and dominant (Mishkind et al, 1986). This drive for muscularity may be stemming from feelings of lost control as male-only roles disappear, turning their anxiety toward their own body (Gillett & White,

1992). Based on this theory, we would expect that the increase in body dissatisfaction and importance and muscularity is related to the societal changes occurring during this time period.

A study by Mills and D'Alphonso (2007) had men complete a series of cognitive tasks. When these were scored, they reported that the participant performed worse than a female or another male. Participants who were told they scored lower than a female reported lower levels of social self-esteem and higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Rather than increasing their desired level of muscularity, these men instead perceived their bodies as less muscular compared to men who were told they scored worse than another male (Mills & D'Alphonso, 2007). It appears that failure to a female increases the "drive for muscularity", which may explain why the body grew in importance over this time period.

Body dissatisfaction has also been found to be negatively correlated with feelings of masculinity (McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005), so it is also possible that this perceived failure to females within society directly affects males' views on their masculinity. Body dissatisfaction, then, may result for those men who cannot achieve a desirable level of muscularity in order to feel masculine.

One way that we can test for the increased in importance of male muscularity is to analyze trends within advertising and other media. Pope, Olivardia, Borowiecki, and Cohane (2001) looked at women's magazine advertisements printed between 1958 and 1998 to see if the proportion of undressed males had changed within advertising. It was hypothesized that if the proportion of undressed males increased over time while the proportion of undressed females remained constant, this would signify an increase in the importance of the male body. Results showed that while the proportion of women that were undressed did remain constant throughout

the time period (around 20%), the proportion of men within advertising that were undressed increased from 3% in 1958 to 30% in 1998.

Another trend was found within the content of these advertisements as well. It was noted within the study that the men who were undressed in the earlier issues were put in appropriate situations, like wearing swimsuits at the beach. The more modern advertisements that contained undressed men were advertizing for products that were unrelated to the body; such as telephones, liquor, and other electronics (Pope et al., 2001). Both of these trends suggest that the value of the male body has increase over this time frame.

Current male magazines are also more likely to contain advertisements and articles on weight gain and weight lifting, which suggests the relative importance for males to possess these characteristics within society. This is similar to how women's magazines contain more articles on dieting and losing weight (Grieve & Bonneau-Kaya, 2007). Studies such as this and above show how the male body has increased in importance within society, as men have lost out on other methods to assert their masculinity.

To review this section, it is possible that body dissatisfaction in men has increased over time due to the societal changes that have occurred within the same time period. Men may see their bodies as the sole way to assert their masculinity as other roles considered to be male-only are being taken by females. These societal changes also may have increased the importance for muscularity in men within society. This importance of muscularity should explain why the media's ideal male as grown in size over time as well. This growth of the male ideal will be discussed within the next section of this review.

Growth of the Ideal Male Body within the Media

Before this review looks at research on the media and the male ideal, the Fat-Free Mass Index (FFMI) will be introduced as it is a measure that is utilized in many studies on men and muscularity. The FFMI measure (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000) was developed as a scale to indicate a male's level of muscularity. The formula is as follows:

$$FFMI = \frac{LBM}{H^2} + 6.1 \times (1.8 - H) \quad (1)$$

LBM is lean body mass in kilograms and H is height in meters. Lean body mass is the total body weight minus the percentage of body weight that is body fat. Body fat can be calculated through devices that use electric impedance or body calipers.

The reason that FFMI is an important measure to introduce is that it gives an objective measure as to an individual's level of muscularity. An individual who scores an FFMI of 16 or 17 kg/m² would be labeled as "thin", 19-20 kg/m² would be considered average, and 25 kg/m² is considered the limit of what can be attained without steroids. An FFMI of 26 or higher has been found through research on body builders to be an accurate indicator of steroid use by the individual (Kouri, Pope, Katz, & Oliva, 1995).

In this time period where muscularity becomes the avenue through which to assert one's masculinity, we would expect that the media's ideal male body has grown more mesomorphic (or muscular) over time. The few studies that have looked at the male body within the media over time have found that the males depicted have both gained muscle and lost body fat.

An example of a study that has analyzed the male body within the media is a study by Leit, Pope, and Gray (2001), where *Playgirl* centerfold models were analyzed in magazines

printed from 1973 to 1997. Results showed that FFMI were positively correlated with the print date, meaning that FFMI went up as time went on. On average, these models had gained 27 pounds of muscle and lost 12 pounds of fat within the time span. Of the 115 models observed 8 scored above 25 kg/m² on the scale, which indicates that these models used steroids (one model's FFMI was 31 kg/m²!) (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000).

Since it is tough to generalize *Playgirl* with the rest of the media, other magazines need to be analyzed for this growth of the male body. Another study on male images in magazines analyzed images of males within *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Sports Illustrated* between 1967 and 1997, and also found that the men depicted grew more muscular and had less body fat over time (Law & Labre, 2002).

This study and the Leit, Pope, and Gray (2001) study mentioned before indicate that the media's portrayal of the ideal male body has grown more muscular and leaner over time, even to proportions that are not attainable through natural means. It is possible that media acts to normalize this unnatural body, and that men are being made to feel that they should attain that level of muscularity. It is possible that this unrealistic body is one factor leading to increase body dissatisfaction in today's males.

Another form of media that has seen significant muscular growth over time is the action figure industry. Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, and Borowiecki (1999) studied changes in G.I. Joe and Star Wars action figures from 1973 to 1998. It was shown that there were dramatic increases in muscularity over time with both lines of action figures.

The 1974 G.I. Joe, for example, measures at a 32 inch waist, a 44 inch chest, and a 12 inch bicep at 70 inches tall. These body dimensions would not be difficult to attain for

individuals who are in shape. In comparison, the 1990's G.I. Joe Extreme has a 37 inch waist, a 55 inch chest, and a 27 inch bicep at that same 70 inch height.

To put the 1990's GI Joe into perspective, consider the bodybuilder/actor Arnold Schwarzenegger at his top form. He would measure in with a 34 inch waist, a 57 inch chest, and a 22 inch bicep (Krachenfels, 2003). It is clear that the G.I. Joe represents a body type that very few bodybuilders, if any, can attain. For the average individual, this body type would be near impossible to attain.

Increased detail and definition of muscles were found in the modern action figures as well; such as six-pack abdominals and distinct serratus muscles along the ribs. This level of definition is typically seen in professional body builders and rarely in the average male (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999).

A similar study by Baghurst, Hollander, Nardell, and Naff (2006) looked to find these changes in other lines of action figures within a 25 year span. The action figures analyzed in this study (Batman, Superman, G.I. Joe, Hulk, and Spiderman) were found to have the largest changes occurring in the neck, chest, forearm, and calf. Waist sizes were not found to be significant, indicating that these toys are overemphasizing the V-shape in these action figures by increasing the shoulder to waist ratio.

The reason why action figures have been selected for this model is that they may be acting as an early exposure to the muscular ideal for young males. Action figures are typically marketed to a younger target market, compared to magazines such as *Playgirl*, *GQ*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Due to their unrealistic body proportions, this could be similar to studies that suggest that Barbie acts as an early exposure to the unrealistic body that society sets for females (e.g.

Norton , Olds, Olive, & Dank, 1996). Action figures will be discussed further in the next section.

Based on the literature reviewed within this section, it appears that the male ideal is growing in size as time goes on. These images and figures may make men think that a muscular body type is attainable, when in actuality many of these figures reviewed approach a level of muscularity that may only be attainable through the use of steroids.

The next section of this review will discuss how the evolution of the ideal male body over time has lead to increased levels of body dissatisfaction within men today. This section will discuss studies that have indicated how dissatisfied men have become with their bodies, and will discuss current literature on the direct effects of media on body dissatisfaction.

Body Dissatisfaction and the Muscular Ideal in Modern Males

When body dissatisfaction was defined in the beginning of this review, it was stated as the difference between the perceived actual and ideal body size. Since this review has already established that men are experiencing body dissatisfaction (Garner, 1997), the actual difference between ideal and actual needs to be assessed.

A study by Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, and Cohane (2004) looked to find the difference between actual and ideal body size with 154 college males. It was found that the ideal body for these participants had an FFMI of 24.6 kg/m^2 , which is 3.6 kg/m^2 more than what they perceived their own bodies. This difference in FFMI means that these men desired a body that had 25 pounds more muscle, and 8 pounds less body fat compared to their actual body.

This level of dissatisfaction does not appear to be exclusive to the United States as well. Pope, Gruber, Mangweth, et al (2000) observed similar results as above within college males in

the United States, Austria, and France. The men from all three groups desired a body that had an FFMI of 3.4 kg/m^2 more than their current body, which almost mirrors the Olivardia (2004) study. Judging by these two studies, it appears that men desire a body that is near or exceeding human limits.

It is worth mentioning that the differences between these men's perceived actual and ideal body figure almost matches the changes found within the study on Playgirl centerfold models, where the models gained 27 pounds of muscle and lost 12 pounds of fat over the span of 25 years (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2000). That same 25 year span also falls within the same time period that Berschied et al (1973) and Garner (1997) show that body dissatisfaction had grown significantly over time. One way to interpret these connections is that the evolution of the male ideal within the media is related to the growing dissatisfaction that men are showing toward their bodies, but in order to fully draw this connection the relationship needs to be studied directly.

Compared to the studies on female body dissatisfaction and media exposure, there have been fewer studies that have focused on males. In order to fully assess the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction, more extensive studies need to be conducted. The few studies that were found did show evidence that men who are exposed to the muscular male ideal within the media experience higher rates of body dissatisfaction.

Hatoum and Belle (2004) assessed participants' current media viewing habits (television, movies, music videos, and magazines) and found that reading male-directed magazines, such as *Men's Fitness* and *Men's Health*, was related to the level of how much they wanted to change their body shape. Another study showed that men who are exposed to male-model advertising showed significant increases in body dissatisfaction compared to men who were exposed to

products (Baird & Grieve, 2006). Similar results have been found within other studies on men and exposure to male models (e.g. Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004).

Looking back at the literature that found that action figures have increased in muscularity through time (Pope et al., 1999, Baghurst et al., 2005), it is possible that these action figures could be influencing body dissatisfaction in younger males than the models and advertisements reviewed earlier due to the younger target audience. Currently, only one study has looked at men and action figures specifically, and it was found that only body esteem was affected by playing with a muscular toy, compared to an average sized figure and no action figure condition. Body dissatisfaction was not directly affected by exposure to the muscular action figure (Bartlett, Harris, Smith, & Bonds-Raacke, 2005).

One potential issue with the validity of this study is that the participants were college-aged males, rather than children. Since action figures are primarily targeted toward children, it is possible that the participants in the study did not take the study seriously. Future studies on the effects of action figures on body dissatisfaction should be focused on children for this reason.

Looking at studies with Barbie and females, it appears that Barbie does have an influence on body dissatisfaction. Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive (2006) found that younger girls who were exposed to Barbie showed immediate changes in body dissatisfaction, but no effect was seen in girls older than 8 years old. This was attributed to the older girls already internalizing the “thin ideal”, and that their drive for that body type stems from this internal ideal rather than from the Barbie. Based on these findings, it is possible that action figures may have the same effect on young boys. Action figures have a similar degree of unrealistic body proportions, and a similar target age group. Further study is needed within this area in order to assess this link.

Even with limited research on media and body dissatisfaction in males, there appears to be a link between the two that needs to be studied further. Finding a mediator that explains how exposure to the muscular ideal can lead to body dissatisfaction in men can lead to a better understanding of how the two variables are related. The next section will introduce Self-Discrepancy Theory, which explains a possible mediator that can help explain this relationship.

Actual/Own-Ideal/Own Discrepancies: A Mediating Variable

A mediator can be defined as a variable that tells us why a relationship occurs between two variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Within this model, actual-ideal discrepancies will be presented as a moderator between exposure to the male ideal within the media and body dissatisfaction in males. Self-Discrepancy Theory will be explained first before this relationship is discussed.

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) states that there are three basic domains of the self: the actual self, which represents the attributes that the individual believes they have; the ideal self, which represents the attributes that the individual would ideally like to have; and the ought self, which represents the attributes that the individual believes they should have. There are also two standpoints of self: the self, representing the individual's standpoint; and the other, which represents the standpoint of some significant other within the individual's life. For the purpose of this review, only the own standpoint will be explored. All of the domains and standpoints of the self combine into 6 self-states (e.g. actual/own, actual/other, ideal/own, etc).

The main premise of Self-Discrepancy Theory is that people are naturally motivated to reach a state where their self-concept (actual self-states) matches their self-guides (ideal and ought self-states). If a person experiences any discrepancy between their self-concept and any of

their self-guides, the type of discrepancy will determine the type of discomfort they experience and the size of the discrepancy will determine the severity of the discomfort (Higgins, 1987). It is important to note that not all people follow all of the self-guides, as individual people will consider some more important than others.

Applying Self-Discrepancy Theory toward men and body dissatisfaction, it appears that the discrepancy is between the actual/own and ideal/own self-states. People who are experiencing this type of discrepancy feel as though they personally are not meeting some ideal state that they want to attain. This type of discrepancy leaves individuals vulnerable to feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction, due to feeling as though one has failed to meet their goals (Higgins, 1987). Here, the ideal/own state is the muscular male body shown within the media, and their perceived body physique is their actual/own state. Because the individual feels as though they are not reaching their goal to attain the ideal body type that is pitched by the media, they will feel dissatisfaction towards their own body.

As the media's ideal male body continues to increase in muscularity (e.g. Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001) these discrepancies are growing with it as well. More individuals will perceive their own level of muscularity to fall short of the ideal. This is especially true as the ideal male body approaches and surpasses an FFMI of 26 kg/m^2 which, again, represents the natural limit of muscularity (Kouri, Pope, Katz, & Oliva, 1995). As the ideal body matches and surpasses this level of natural attainment, it is possible that we would see higher rates of men experiencing body dissatisfaction as it truly becomes impossible to attain these types of body figures.

There was only one study found that applied Self-Discrepancy Theory to body dissatisfaction. A sample of 138 female students were recruited to fill out a series of measures assessing their types of self-discrepancies, concerns about body shape, and eating attitudes and

behaviors. Results from this study showed that the presence of an actual-ideal discrepancy was correlated with body dissatisfaction (Strauman, Vookles, Berenstein, Chaiken, & Higgins, 1991). No studies were found that applied Self-Discrepancy Theory to media and body dissatisfaction, but it is possible that for some people the media represents the ideal body type.

Despite limited research on Social Discrepancy Theory and body dissatisfaction, the emphasis on the interactions between one's actual and ideal help to draw a valid connection between exposure to the media's ideal and body dissatisfaction. Further research can act to confirm the connections that have been explained within this section.

Summary

The main objective of this review was to propose a new model assessing the factors that may be causing the increase in body dissatisfaction in males. Social changes starting in the 70's create perceived threats to masculinity. Mills and D'Alphonso (2007) showed that these threats are directly linked to body dissatisfaction. These threats to masculinity also create a new importance on the male body and muscularity, and in turn cause a growth in muscularity of the media's ideal body. As these media depictions of males grow in muscularity, larger discrepancies are created between ideal and actual self-states and this may lead to higher levels of body dissatisfaction in males.

Discussion

Implications

Creating a model for male body dissatisfaction, such as the model presented in this review, can help to normalize the experience of men showing dissatisfaction with their bodies.

As described within *The Adonis Complex* (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), men are suffering from their body dissatisfaction in silence because they are taught within society that body image is a “female’s problem”. As the media’s ideal body continues to grow out of reach, many men may resort to extreme measures in order to resolve their dissatisfaction; such as steroids, supplements, and sacrificing work, social, and family time to work out at a gym. It is important that we make these men feel less isolated, and make it apparent that they are not the only one who feels that they do not measure up. This way, we can prevent problems with body dissatisfaction from evolving into body image disorders or eating disorders.

This model can be beneficial in counseling and therapy for those who are experiencing body dissatisfaction. One of the key points of this model is the perceived importance of body image (specifically high muscularity and low body fat content) to assert one’s masculinity. Clinicians can use this information to show their clients that there are other avenues with which to assert their masculinity besides having a muscular body.

Parents can also benefit from this model, especially from the elements of the model concerning action figures. Since these toys may be acting as an early exposure to the muscular male ideal it is important for parents to talk to their boys about what makes a man masculine, and to demonstrate other avenues through which one can assert their masculinity. It is also important that parents offer other role models for their children to look up to that are more than just muscular.

Ideas for Future Research

This model can also act as a starting point for future research on males and body dissatisfaction. Along with the ideas for future research mentioned throughout this review, this section will give some further additional ideas for future research.

First, more research is needed assessing the link between media exposure and body dissatisfaction in men, as current literature is lacking compared to studies with females. Men have long been thought to not experience body dissatisfaction, based on how males have been excluded in research samples. But based on the limited research that has been presented in this review, it appears that men do experience body dissatisfaction and this dissatisfaction is related to the media's ideal. Further research can verify this relationship.

Research should also be conducted in order to assess the protective factors that can prevent body dissatisfaction. Not all men are showing dissatisfaction with their body, even as the muscular ideal grows in size. Finding these protective factors could prove beneficial for men who are seeking help for their body dissatisfaction.

Finally, future research can look to establish stronger links between each of the pieces within the model presented. An example of such a study could assess whether or not a perceived threat to masculinity (such as the one seen in Mills & D'Alphonso, 2007) creates a vulnerability to the media's ideal male body. The ideal male can be presented in an exposure study, similar to Baird and Grieve (2006).

Conclusions

A model of male body dissatisfaction like the one explained throughout this review would provide a better explanation as to why more men today are experiencing body dissatisfaction compared to men from years past, and why the ideal body has evolved more and

more muscular throughout the years. This raised importance in male body image within society, due to the advances of women within society, may make men feel dissatisfied with their bodies if they feel that they do not reach this ideal.

Men are indeed vulnerable, to an extent, to the ideal body portrayed in the media (Baird & Grieve, 2006; Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002; Hatoum & Belle, 2004) and it is important for clinicians and researchers to recognize this fact. This model may not apply to all men, as not all men are currently experiencing body dissatisfaction. This model instead provides a starting point for further research on body dissatisfaction males, and to assist clinicians treating individuals whose body dissatisfaction has led to other disorders; such as body dysmorphic disorder (Pope et al, 2000), binge eating disorder (Womble et al., 2001), and muscle dysmorphia (Grieve, 2007).

It is important that we eliminate the stereotype that body dissatisfaction is a “female issue”. Through further research and the development of models such as the one presented in this review, the public will become more aware that it is normal for men to experience body dissatisfaction. Once this stigma is reduced or eliminated, more men will seek treatment and the number of men experiencing body dissatisfaction may stabilize or decline in the future.

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