

Effects of exposure to muscular and hypermuscular media images on young men's muscularity dissatisfaction and body dissatisfaction

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of exposure to muscular and hypermuscular media images on young men's body images, and the moderating roles of baseline body dissatisfaction (BD) and muscularity dissatisfaction (MD). Men (M age = 21.9, SD = 2.8) were exposed to pictures of muscular (n = 34) or hypermuscular (n = 29) male physiques throughout a 30-min health seminar. In support of the study hypotheses, higher levels of baseline BD and MD were associated with greater post-seminar BD and MD. In addition, MD moderated the effects of the exposure conditions on BD; greater baseline MD was associated with greater post-seminar BD, but only among men who viewed the muscular images. These results speak to the importance of pre-existing muscularity concerns in determining men's reactions to muscular physique images, and suggest that exposure to the *media ideal* of muscularity, and not muscularity per se, elicits body dissatisfaction in men with pre-existing muscularity concerns.

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Introduction

The increased cultural preference for a muscular physique has become a recent topic of interest (Cafri & Thompson, 2004; Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2000; McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004), with many researchers attempting to elucidate why some men desire to be more muscular. According to Cash's (2002) cognitive-behavioral model of body image, cultural socialization is one of four dimensions that shape the development of one's body image. Throughout Westernized cultures, the mass media has been identified as the main culprit for conveying idealized, gender-specific physique standards (Tigge-

mann, 2002). Whether one watches television or reads a magazine, the manifested body ideals are easily recognized – that of a thin, yet toned body for women (Brownell, 1991) and a lean, V-shaped body for men (Leit et al., 2000; Olivardia et al., 2004).

In studies of the effects of media exposure on women's body image, brief exposure to slides, magazine photos, and television commercials showing ultra-thin models has been shown to increase body dissatisfaction (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002), social physique anxiety (Thornton & Maurice, 1997), mood disturbance (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, & Williams, 2000), and weight concerns (Ogden & Munday, 1996) and to decrease self-perceived attractiveness (Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983), self-esteem (Thornton & Maurice, 1997) and confidence (Stice & Shaw, 1994). Conversely, studies of young men suggest that acute exposure to thin male models may not be

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detrimental to men's body image. Ogden and Munday (1996) found college-aged men to report greater body satisfaction and to rate themselves as less fat, more sexy, more toned, more fit and perceive less of a discrepancy between their preferred body size and their actual body size after viewing photographs of thin men in comparison to women who viewed photographs of thin women.

In contrast, studies that have exposed men to the muscular media ideal have shown profound negative influences on young men's body images (Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004). In particular, Leit and colleagues found that college-aged men who were briefly exposed to photographs of muscular men in popular magazine advertisements subsequently reported greater dissatisfaction with their muscularity, but not their body fat, in comparison to men who were shown images of clothing advertisements. In another study, college-aged men who were shown photographs of muscular male physiques reported greater body dissatisfaction after viewing the muscular images, while no change was found among men exposed to a combination of thin, normal weight and slightly obese images (Lorenzen et al., 2004). Furthermore, in one of the only studies to examine the effects of television commercials endorsing the muscular media ideal on young men's body image (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004), men who watched a series of commercial advertisements featuring muscular models reported greater muscularity dissatisfaction and depression immediately following the viewing, in comparison to men who watched commercials containing control (i.e., older, less muscular) models. Taken together, these studies suggest that exposure to muscular media body ideals can increase men's body and muscularity dissatisfaction.

Yet in all of these studies, the experimental, muscular images were of toned, athletic physiques (i.e., physiques typically found in *Men's Health* magazine). It is not known whether exposure to other types of muscular physiques (i.e., hypermuscular physiques found in body-builder magazines) would evoke similar, or even greater body image and muscularity dissatisfaction concerns in young men. This is an important research question that would address whether it is exposure to muscularity per se that evokes male body image concerns, or whether it is exposure to media-based muscularity ideals. This issue was addressed in the present experiment by examining the effects of exposure to muscular and hypermuscular images on men's muscularity dissatisfaction and body dissatisfaction. Given previous research showing that muscular

images have a stronger effect on body dissatisfaction than thin images (Lorenzen et al., 2004), it was anticipated that hypermuscular images would have an even greater effect on young men's body images than muscular images.

However, we expected that some men would be more affected by the images than others. In Groesz et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis of the effects of media exposure on body image, women with a history of body dissatisfaction were more adversely affected by brief exposure to thin media stimuli than women without a history of body dissatisfaction. A study of men's psychological responses to muscular body ideals produced similar results. In particular, high body-dissatisfied men expressed greater emotional arousal when viewing idealized same-sex physique slides than low body-dissatisfied men (Hausenblas, Janelle, Gardner, & Hagan, 2002). As such, our first hypothesis was that men with higher levels of body dissatisfaction would report greater body dissatisfaction and muscularity dissatisfaction following exposure to the media images than men with lower body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, body dissatisfaction was predicted to moderate the effects of the exposure conditions, such that men with higher body dissatisfaction would report greater body dissatisfaction and muscularity dissatisfaction after exposure to the media images.

Baseline differences in muscularity dissatisfaction were also expected to influence men's reactions to the muscular and hypermuscular images. To date, muscularity dissatisfaction has not been examined as a moderator of media exposure effects, despite its salience among young men. Indeed, Olivardia et al. (2004) found a substantial amount of muscularity dissatisfaction within a sample of college-aged men; study participants identified the ideal male as having, on average, 25 pounds more muscle mass than their own bodies. Given the centrality of muscularity to men's body images (cf. Olivardia et al.), our second hypothesis was that men with greater baseline muscularity dissatisfaction would exhibit more body dissatisfaction and muscularity dissatisfaction after exposure to the muscular media images than men with lower baseline muscularity dissatisfaction. In addition, baseline muscularity dissatisfaction was expected to moderate the effects of the exposure conditions, such that men with higher muscularity dissatisfaction would report greater body dissatisfaction and muscularity dissatisfaction after exposure to the hypermuscular images than after exposure to the muscular images.

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