

Examining body dissatisfaction in young men within a biopsychosocial framework

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Received 26 July 2007; received in revised form 27 December 2007; accepted 28 December 2007

Abstract

This study examined biopsychosocial factors related to body dissatisfaction in young men within multivariate and moderator contexts. A female sample was included as a gender comparison. Male ($n = 111$) and female ($n = 236$) undergraduates filled out self-report questionnaires assessing body mass index (BMI), media influence, a history of weight-related teasing, and socially prescribed perfectionism, along with various indices of body dissatisfaction. Perceived pressure from the media was consistently related to body dissatisfaction in men whereas multiple biopsychosocial variables accounted for body dissatisfaction in women. Socially prescribed perfectionism and a history of weight teasing each moderated the relationship between BMI and male body dissatisfaction, identifying men low in body dissatisfaction. Findings indicate that applying a biopsychosocial framework to the study of body dissatisfaction in men is useful and suggest the need for including other factors, such as male peers and sports involvement, in understanding contributors to male body image.

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Keywords: Body dissatisfaction; Media influence; Teasing; Perfectionism; Body mass index; Gender

Introduction

Research on body dissatisfaction among males has gained momentum in recent years (Grogan, 2007; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Evidence indicates that rates of body dissatisfaction are increasing among males (Garner, 1997) and that body dissatisfaction is associated with unhealthy weight-control behaviors, disordered eating, and decreased self-esteem in males (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Story, & Perry, 2003; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004).

Arguably, within the body image literature, more is known about female body dissatisfaction than about male body dissatisfaction, and more is known about the consequences of body dissatisfaction than about the factors associated with and contributing to negative body image (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; van den Berg et al., 2007). In the current study, we examine factors associated with male body dissatisfaction using a biopsychosocial framework, which has been proposed as the most comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding body image (Ricciardelli, McCabe, Holt, & Finemore, 2003). While our focus is on elucidating contributors to male body dissatisfaction, we also include a female sample to provide a gender comparison.

Body image is conceptualized as having a multi-factorial etiology, including biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors and there is theoretical and

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empirical support for examining these domains in the study of male body image (Field et al., 2001; Jones, 2004; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative research highlights societal and interpersonal domains of influence on men's body image (Adams, Turner, & Bucks, 2005; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Morrison, Morrison, & Hopkins, 2003; Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005). In the current study we consider how the biological factor of body mass index, the sociocultural factors of media influence and weight teasing, and the psychological factor of perfectionism relate to various indices of body dissatisfaction for men. These factors were chosen because of their reliable relations with body image (e.g., body mass index) or as a way to expand the research to include theoretically compelling variables that have not yet been examined in a biopsychosocial context (e.g., perfectionism). Since little is known about what the interplay of these variables would produce (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004) and since, conceptually, psychosocial factors would seem to moderate the relation between body mass index and body dissatisfaction, we also test for these interactive effects.

Assessing body dissatisfaction in males

One problem noted by McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) in their review of the male body dissatisfaction literature was the use of assessments that were more relevant to females than males. For example, since girls and women generally desire lower weights but boys and men are divided between those who want to lose weight and those who want to gain weight (e.g., Cohane & Pope, 2001; Frederick et al., 2007; Neighbors & Sobal, 2007), body dissatisfaction assessments focusing on wanting to lose weight will not capture the full picture of male body dissatisfaction. Similarly, commonly used measures like the Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmsted, & Polivy, 1983), which asks about satisfaction with different body parts, do not ask about parts of the body of particular relevance to men (e.g., upper torso). The use of traditional silhouettes also has limitations since they do not provide gradations of muscle. Although the Somatomorphic Matrix has improved upon this, poor test–retest reliability is a constraint (Cafri, Roehrig, & Thompson, 2004). McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) argue for examining shape dissatisfaction in addition to weight dissatisfaction, and global assessments of body dissatisfaction have been deemed an appropriate way to assess body dissatisfaction in both genders. In the current study, we examine weight concerns, shape concerns, and overall appearance self-esteem.

Media influence

The potential for media influence on body dissatisfaction for males has increased along with the documented increases in the depictions of lean, muscular male bodies in the media, compelling more research on the impact of the media on men (Farquhar & Wasylkiw, 2007; Morry & Staska, 2001). Males depicted in Playgirl centerfolds and even action figure toys have become more muscular over recent years (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001; Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999), and there has been an increase in the use of lean, muscular male bodies in advertising and magazines (Frederick, Fessler, & Haselton, 2005; Pope, Olivardia, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2001), meaning that men and boys are increasingly subjected to media images of a body ideal for males that is becoming increasingly unattainable. Men appear to be aware of this ideal, selecting muscular bodies as their ideals and as what they think women view as ideal (Jacobi & Cash, 1994). Furthermore, in laboratory settings, men are negatively affected by exposure to these male body ideals from the media, demonstrating increased body dissatisfaction and more negative mood (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Grogan, Williams, & Conner, 1996). Most work on media influence has focused on the concept of internalization of body ideals depicted in the media, with evidence for internalization being associated with body dissatisfaction in males (Chen, Gao, & Jackson, 2007; Jones, 2004). In contrast, Presnell, Bearman, & Stice (2004) did not find support for ideal-body internalization predicting increases in body dissatisfaction among boys. To date, no one study has jointly examined the multiple ways that the media can influence men's body image, for example, via providing information and exerting pressure, in addition to fostering internalization.

Weight teasing

Weight-related teasing has emerged as another important factor in understanding body dissatisfaction. Experiencing teasing while growing up reflects receiving negative commentary about oneself during a vulnerable period of development and identity building. Concurrent and past appearance-related teasing is associated with body dissatisfaction and increases in body dissatisfaction for boys and men (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Haines, & Wall, 2006; Gleason, Alexander, & Somers, 2000; Paxton, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2006; van den Berg et al., 2007; Vartanian, Giant, & Passino, 2001). Indeed, Vartanian

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