

## MALE BODY IMAGE: THE ROLE OF MUSCLE MAGAZINE EXPOSURE, BODY MASS INDEX, AND SOCIAL COMPARISON IN MEN'S BODY SATISFACTION

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Unrealistic images of male beauty are on the rise (e.g., Baghurst, Hollander, Nardella, & Haff, 2006). However, research on male body image tends to assume that the same theoretical models used to account for body satisfaction in women are appropriate for men (e.g., McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Few have tested the assumption that female-typical models can be applied to men. Three variables have proven instrumental in accounting for body satisfaction in women: (a) exposure to relevant content, (b) BMI, and (c) social comparison (e.g., Blond, 2008). We present an exploratory study, using path modeling, to simultaneously assess the relative impact of each of these on body satisfaction in young men.

### METHOD

Two hundred and six men ( $M_{Age} = 20$ ,  $SD_{Age} = 1.20$ ,  $Range_{Age} = 18-25$ ) from a communication course at a large, Northeastern university in the US received extra credit for their completion of a survey. The mean weight of the participants

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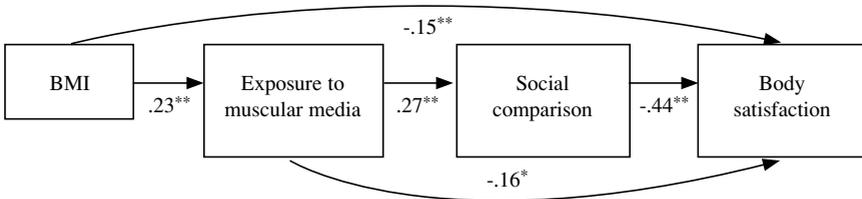
Appreciation is due to anonymous reviewers.

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was 176.8 lbs., mean height of 5'10" ( $M_{\text{BMI}} = 25.3$ ,  $SD_{\text{BMI}} = 2.35$ ,  $\text{Range}_{\text{BMI}} = 20.2\text{-}30.5$ ).

First, to measure BMI, we used the imperial formula. Second, to assess exposure to the images of male beauty as defined by the muscular ideal (Baghurst et al., 2006), we averaged four items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ,  $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) where participants rated how frequently (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*) they (1) read and (2) looked at the fitness magazines *Men's Health* and *Muscle Fitness*. Third, to measure body satisfaction, three items were averaged ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) to assess overall body satisfaction. Participants were asked how much (1 = *never*; 5 = *often*) (1) I like my body, (2) I think I am in good shape, and (3) I am pleased with my physique. Last, three items were averaged ( $\alpha = .91$ ,  $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) regarding how much participants compared their body to others (1 = *never*; 5 = *very much*) to assess social comparison. Items asked were: How often do you think (1) I wish I was in his shape, (2) I wish I looked like him, and (3) I wish I had a body like that.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $RMSEA = .05$ ,  $\chi^2(1) = .20$ ,  $p > .68$

**Figure 1.** Path model for men's body satisfaction.

Two processes (see Figure 1) appear to be responsible for men's body satisfaction. One route is directly from their body size, as measured by BMI, and the other is from BMI through exposure and the subsequent social comparison. This suggests that for men, the actual size of their body has a limited effect on their body satisfaction. BMI appears to be a means by which some men self-select to be exposed to content containing the muscular ideal. The assumption that men and women arrive at body satisfaction via the same processes may be wrong (e.g., McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Our evidence suggests that the models for women's body satisfaction have limited use when assessing men.

*Keywords:* male, body image, satisfaction, physique, muscular ideal, BMI, social comparison.

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