

Men's Construction of Media Impact on Male Body Image in the Context of Heterosexual Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Research has shown that men, like women, are negatively affected by idealized media portrayals. However, there are few qualitative studies that have examined this issue, leaving the literature impoverished of the meaning of male body image to men. Specifically, there is a lack of discursive inquiry. Since romantic relationships provide a unique context for body image construction, the current study examines the ways in which men in relationships linguistically construct and negotiate the media's influence on their own body image. Three interviews and a focus group of two men in heterosexual relationships were employed to explore this topic. Our results show that, while men speak of a negative influence of media on their body image, they do so in such a way that is adaptive and creates protective barriers between the self and the media's messages. These strategies, which at times utilize relationship status, allow participants to construct general, albeit sometimes reluctant, satisfaction with their bodies. These findings, while largely concurring with previous literature, add caveats and may reconcile disparate results from past research by identifying contradictory constructions of media influence on males in heterosexual relationships.

Keywords: Male, Body image, Media, Discursive analysis, Relationships

Although much of the past research on body image has been concerned with women (e.g., Dalley, Buunk, & Umit, 2009; Rodgers, Salès, & Chabrol, 2010), recent findings have suggested that male body image should be given increased consideration. Notably, research has shown that media presentations of the male body have become increasingly lean and muscular over the past few decades (Baghurst, Hollander, Nardella, & Haff, 2006; Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2000) and that viewing portrayals of those muscular ideals can negatively influence men's body image (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Galieto &

Crowther, 2013; Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004). For the purposes of the present study, we will focus on popular media, which has a strong visual component such as television, movies, and magazines.

Many authors have concluded that media does not have as big of an impact on men's body image in comparison to women's (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; van den Berg, Paxton, Keery, Wall, Guo & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007); however, the issue of media influence on male body image is still of great importance. The discrepancy in severity of media effects

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between the genders is postulated to be the result of differential gender socialization, which typically places more pressure on women than on men to be physically attractive, and thus should not affect men as greatly (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007).

However, considering the increasing attention directed to male musculature in visual media (Baghurst et al., 2006; Leit et al., 2000), it is possible that the male body ideal is also having a negative effect on men's body image.

In fact, research indicates that some men are suffering from poor body image in similar ways to women. Like women, who perceive that men are attracted to a thinner female body than they actually are (Bergstrom, Neighbors, & Lewis, 2004), men perceive that women are attracted to a more muscular male body than they actually are (Leit et al., 2000). Indeed, men desire about 30 more pounds of muscle than they currently have (Pope et al., 2000) which provides a direct counterpart to the thin ideal for women and reinforces oppositional gender binaries. Considering these findings, the recent recognition of a sort of "reverse anorexia" (Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, & Phillips, 1997, p. 549) called muscle dysmorphia, in which one is preoccupied with becoming leaner and gaining muscle, comes as no surprise. It could very well be that men's body dissatisfaction is quickly catching up to women's due to the proliferation of idealized media images for men.

Alternatively, findings stating a greater impact of media on women than men may be accounted for by masculinist elements within the male gender role that laud the suppression of emotional experiences and a reliance on aggression and power (Eisler & Blalock, 1991). This may make men more reluctant to expose their concerns about their perceived shortcomings. If this interpretation is true, then men may have always suffered from body dissatisfaction, but are only starting to talk about it more recently, as male gender roles have seemingly expanded to include a preoccupation with physique (Baghurst et al., 2006). Regardless of whether the rate of male body dissatisfaction is going up or if already existing concerns are simply being given more attention, the increase in media idealization of the male body, coupled with newer empirical work suggesting that media may be negatively affecting men, warrants further research.

In contrast to representations in the media, romantic relationships generally have a positive influence on body image. Specifically, partner reassurance (Ambwani & Strauss, 2007), emotional support (Juarez & Pritchard, 2012) and, in men especially, perceived partner satisfaction with one's body (Goins, Markey, & Gillen, 2012) have all been linked to positive body image. Furthermore, people in long-term relationships seem to care less about attaining an ideal body image (Tom, Chen, Liao, & Shao, 2005) and rate their bodies more positively (Pettijohn, Naples, & McDermott, 2010) than those who are single. Taken

together, these findings suggest that relationship status is an important, and possibly protective, context to consider when investigating the impact of media on male body image.

Although the topic of male body image has begun to grow in academic popularity (Leit et al., 2002), there have been few qualitative studies on this topic. A particular type of qualitative inquiry, which is especially scarce, is discursive analysis, of which we could find few examples (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Monaghan & Malson, 2013). Since this method of analysis is concerned with speech as an agent of social action within a context of cultural discourse (Edley, 2001), it is suitable for a study focusing on any issue that is largely social, such as that of media. While previous discursive inquiries have revealed important insights regarding the ways males negotiate social discourses of fatness and muscularity, the findings pertaining to media images have been limited (albeit significant), with men's speech revolving around media directed at women rather than at themselves (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Monaghan & Malson, 2013). Additionally, relationships have not been considered a factor in this constructive process of speech. Thus, the current study is focused around two questions:

- (a) How do men discursively construct the impact of media on male body image?
- (b) How do men discursively negotiate body image in the context of a relationship?

Methodology

Participants

Five males (21-28 years of age) in heterosexual relationships participated in the current study. The study was limited to heterosexual males because some authors have reported higher rates of body dissatisfaction among homosexual than heterosexual males (French, Story, Remafedi, Resnick, & Blum, 1994; Michaels, Parent, & Moradi, 2013; Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1989). Respondents were recruited through posters, online bulletins, and the researchers' social networks, inviting them to participate in either a focus group or an individual interview. Tom (who is Caucasian and has been in a committed relationship for about 3.5 years) and Calvin (who is Caucasian and has been married for about 7 years) partook in the focus group discussion while James (who is Caucasian and has been in a dating relationship for about 3 months), Nick (who did not report his ethnicity and has been in a common law relationship for about 5 years), and Mark (who is Caucasian and has been in a committed relationship for about 2 years), participated in the interview portion of the study.

Data Generation Tools and Procedures

All data generation sessions took place in meeting rooms booked at the University of Saskatchewan. Prior to completing the interviews or focus group discussion, participants were asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire regarding their age, relationship length, and status. Three individual semi-structured interviews, which were approximately 20 to 40 minutes, and an hour-long focus group comprised of two people were used to generate data.

In the three semi-structured interviews, the interviewers asked participants a series of questions about body image in relation to a) the media (e.g. How do you view your own body in relation to the idealized body that media portrays?) b) the importance of body image before a relationship (e.g. How important is body image in attracting a partner before you are in a serious relationship?) and c) The importance of body image in context of romantic relationships (e.g. What do you think your girlfriend's/wife's opinion is on the importance of your body image?).

The focus group questions were organized around participants' views on the following topics: a) body image in society (e.g. In general, how important do you think body image is for men in today's society?); b) body image in media (e.g., What do you think about how the media portrays male bodies?); and c) body image in relationships (e.g. Does body image evolve over the course of a relationship? If so, how?). For the latter two categories, short video clips were played to provoke responses and discussion. For the second theme, body image in media, clips of WWE wrestlers in a staged altercation (sances5555, 2013) and an Old Spice commercial depicting a montage of idealized male stereotypes (John [MrYabbleDabble], 2011) were played. For the last theme, body image in relationships, a clip from the movie *Magic Mike* depicting women screaming over male strippers was played (CELEBS.com).

Analytic Procedures

For the purposes of this study, we adopted the epistemological viewpoint of Crotty's (1998) social constructionism. This viewpoint assumes that meaning and reality are not merely objective truths to observe, but are uniquely constructed by each individual who draws upon an inherited social lexicon.

When analyzing the transcriptions, we applied Edley's (2001) three analytical concepts of discursive analysis. First, the concept of "interpretive repertoires" focused our attention on common descriptions, terms, and metaphors drawn upon from cultural discourse. Second, "subject positioning" drew our attention to the ways that men placed themselves in relation to others within their constructions. Finally, "ideological dilemmas" allowed us to consolidate seemingly contradictory constructions that

participants held simultaneously. Speech patterns fitting into these three concepts were flagged and then grouped according to content.

Analysis

The participants discursively negotiated body image both in relation to and in opposition of what they spoke of as idealized in the media. Overall men constructed the ideal male body as congruent to those portrayed in the media, that is, focusing on the upper-body, emphasizing arms and abdominal muscles, but assigning little to no importance to the lower body. This upper body-focus was expressed in terms of combat and aggression. At the same time, participants described the ideal body as unattainable and even as ridiculous. Participants used their constructions to defend themselves from the threat of media ideals, generally by constructing them as unfavorable (i.e. ridiculous), positioning themselves somewhere between the ideal and the undesirable, or positioning themselves outside of the media's hostile influence. While these defensive strategies lessened the perceived menace of media, participants still spoke about body image concerns that directly related to the media, indicating that even sufficiently coping men are impacted by media idealizations. In terms of the impact of body image in a relationship, most participants constructed an ideal body as extremely important prior to entering a relationship, but became less so during the relationship.

Men's Constructions of The Ideal Male Body

In their construction of the ideal male body image, participants focused on the upper body as the pinnacle of masculinity. This emphasis on the upper body reflected acceptance of media endorsement of muscularity, but was motivated by intentions to be desirable to females. James stated, "I wanna try to be attractive; in general, women find guys more attractive who have big arms." Having a strong upper body was associated with masculinity and female admiration. Tom stated, "Every girl loves big arms, 'cause that's masculine right?" Tom and Calvin were in agreement about the importance of the abdominal muscles as well, stating "It's all about the abs" and "Ladies love the six-pack." Appearing attractive to women was presented as the reason men seek to gain an idealized body. References to the lower body muscle groups were absent, aside from a statement by Tom emphasizing this point, "You're gonna see people working on arms and chest and back and forgetting about their legs." The construction of body

image as important due to social desirability, namely to be desirable to women, may motivate men to appear masculine (as opposed to being controlled by the media); however, it is important to consider how the media has influenced male construction of such masculinity.

The ideal was constructed as physically aggressive and participants employed violent and combative terms when describing the idealized male body in the media. As Tom explained, the ideal looks like "the big tough guy... [who] fucking commands the situation... this big, jacked dude... [who's] gonna beat you up." Tom's focus on toughness, power, and control is echoed in Calvin's description of the ideal as being "hyper-masculine" and "hyperviolent[t]." Additionally, achieving this ideal was described as a harsh process of paring away unwanted parts of the self. Mark's description was that "...you have this cookie cutter, like Brad Pitt," which serves as a template for men to model their bodies after. Similarly, Nick and James, respectively, described needing to keep "trim in certain regions" and to "cut some flab." The repetition of words such as cutting and trimming reflects the notion that one must deny parts of the self in order to live up to an ideal. This notion of cutting oneself for proper presentation is reminiscent of meat cutting where disembodied parts are sold on the "meat market." While this implies that there is social pressure to present oneself in a saleable way, the dominant male gender role also involves attaining power and achievement through aggressive force (Eisler & Blalock, 1991). Using aggressive language to describe the ideal body may function doubly to express negative emotions about this ideal, and/or about their own bodies, while maintaining the characteristic male gender role responses in the face of perceived masculine imperfections.

The participants constructed the ideal male body as elusive. Nick's description was that "there's still, ha, always room for improvement, always room to get closer and closer to it [the ideal] but I don't think you ever quite uh achieve what is outlined in the media." In addition to the infinite process of ideal body achievement, the actual end goal itself was constructed as contradictory, as both lean and bulky. Nick expressed this dichotomous construction within one body saying, "I don't know if it's paradoxical, this idea that you have to have a lot of musculature but still remain really uh sort of thin in the waist and particular places." Not only is it contradictory to be both large and lean at the same time, but it is impossible. Calvin also spoke of separate and opposing ideals:

I would say that there's two separate body images that I see. There's like one where you're big and muscular like that... and then there's one where you're like skinny, and you don't really show your muscles but you have them. Like, if you took your shirt off you'd have abs.

The construction of conflicting ideals, both within one body and between different types of idealized bodies, as unattainable could serve to make actually achieving the ideal seem anomalous and therefore unpleasant, as it is not normally possible to be both bulky and slim at the same time.

In fact, participants did construct the ideal body as being exaggerated and ridiculous, especially in the upper body. Mark described the idealized male body as "just the combination of what women find attractive, and like, the commercialized extreme, like the caricature of what a woman wants." Similarly, the route to achieving that caricatured look, which was said to be going to the gym for many hours a day, was deemed by Tom as "going overboard." It is implied in these statements that the ideal male body is a comical and outrageous commodity. Perhaps constructing the ideal body as a merchandised caricature of masculinity serves the function of making it acceptable, and even desirable, to fall outside of that ideal.

Despite the previous depictions of unachievable standards, participants generally spoke of themselves as having a satisfactory or average body. For example, Mark positioned himself outside of those with a more "muscular build," while still managing to feel "ok about it." Similarly, James positioned himself in between those who are muscular and those who have a less favorable image: "I'm...not exactly a bigger guy, so I don't feel, and I'm not muscular, but I'm not bigger either, which some people might scrutinize, so I'm, I don't feel, I feel like it's different, but it's not a bad thing." While participants generally viewed themselves as outside of the ideal, they also positioned themselves as outside of an undesirable group. Thus, how they positioned themselves allowed them to rest comfortably between the ideal and the flawed, bringing the expectation of the self to a more attainable and realistic level.

Men's Construction of Media's Influence on Body Image

A common metaphor for both the idealized male body, as mentioned above, and the media's influence on body image involved battle and violence. Tom, for example, mentioned, "I guess in today's modern society, what the media blasts at us is muscular, toned, and bronzed." Describing media's method of presentation as a ballistic force implies that media is a dominating factor affecting men's body image. Indeed, this battle metaphor emerged again when participants positioned themselves away from the threats of media. James states, "I think my body type isn't necessarily *under fire*," and Mark concurs, "there's a pretty wide range [of acceptable body types] so I don't feel like I'm being *targeted*." Since battle generally requires two

opponents, an attacker and a defender, it seems that participants saw themselves as coming from the defending stance, which may serve as adaptive for resisting media's damaging effects, while adopting its terms of reference. Indeed, men who were described as overly muscular were constructed as losing the battle. In discussing a friend who spends his time either working or at the gym, Tom stated that "he's one of those guys that've- hypermasculinity has got to him, right?" This idea of hypermasculinity *getting to someone* seems to reflect the consequences of a failed defense. Tom's friend has subsequently been transformed by this attack: "Then you look at him now, he's this huge jacked dude who's trying to be as masculine as possible." The hypermasculinity portrayed in the media is thus constructed as an opponent that one must defend against, yet participants simultaneously launch an attack at those who have presumably succumbed to the media. It seems that participants are critiquing the idealized male body in terms consistent with traditional masculinity, counter-defining what a real masculine body looks like (not *too* muscular, which would indicate some sort of mental loss or weakness).

Another response by participants to this bombardment of images was to position themselves outside of the media's influence. Mark blatantly stated, "I don't think the media has a huge impact on myself" and continued to say, "they've brainwashed the mainstream." Similarly, James stated that he is very "aware of [his] surroundings and what... influences play into... perceptions of [himself]." Tom, too, constructed the media as affecting others but not him, calling it "*your* media," thereby indicating that the media messages were not for him, but for others. Positioning the self as outside of media influence may function as another protective barrier between the self and the unreal expectations outlined by the media, as well as dissociating the self from some of the most negative constructions of media ideals. For example, this defensive attitude may function to dissociate the self from those who want to look like a caricature who has *lost the battle* with media.

While most of the men in our study constructed themselves as aware of and exempt from media pressure, they also spoke paradoxically about feeling pressure from media images. James, for example, said, "I think I'm not, I'm not a, uhh, particularly attractive individual, not that that's under, not that that's under threat. But I do, think about it." Here, he indicates that he is both out of the reach of media and impacted by it, as evidenced by "thinking about it." Similarly, Mark states:

I feel a bit less confident [while shirtless], because I know the image pops to my head, that I'm not really, like, what I should be, kind of thing, but it doesn't linger for too long. I don't know why, but,

um, I'm not too critical of my own body image. But there is definitely moments I feel like my flaws are exposed.

Here Mark also positions himself as a non-subscriber to media influence, yet he describes times when the media does impact how he views of himself. Positioning oneself outside of the media's influence may serve as metaphorical pacifism, removing the need to fend off threats to body image, and nullifying any "losses" one may otherwise be forced to acknowledge.

Men's Negotiation of Body Image within a Relationship

Participants constructed body image as extremely important prior to entering a relationship but decreasing in significance after a relationship is established. According to Calvin, "quite a few of my friends are still single and they don't wanna be like the chubby guy, y'know; that's all like he's chubby cause he's in a relationship." Here Calvin positions himself outside of the circle of his single friends who *don't want to be the chubby guy*, indicating that, because they are single, body image is of utmost importance to them. Tom described the single dating scene as superficial and "purely based on looks." Similarly, Mark and Nick both described physical attractiveness as "probably the most important thing, in terms of getting someone's attention," and "first impression" as being "massive" and of "huge" importance. The emphasis on *getting attention* and *first impressions* also indicates the initially superficial nature of dating relationships. But, according to Nick, "after ... that sort of initial meeting... [body image] gets less important." Similarly, Mark describes "more important things like social skills, humor, and intelligence" as being the real basis of the relationship after the initial attraction. The substance of an established relationship is described in much deeper terms.

Although the superficiality of exalting the psychical was condemned, participants also grappled with its looming importance. Tom's statement reflects this dilemma between the importance of mind and body:

[My girlfriend] will be like, 'well you should look like that,' and then after that she'll be like 'but you know, you have a great personality, you make me laugh, you like cuddling, you give me backrubs and all the other things,' right? So then in her eyes the whole male body image is shedded by the other personal traits of the relationship. Like all the things you do for her, all the past memories, and stuff like that.

In this passage, Tom illustrates the ways that he negotiates the ideal male body desired by his girlfriend. While Tom alludes to similar deeper personality characteristics and actions being the foundation of his relationship, he simultaneously constructs pressure to achieve a body his partner desires; although there is pressure to live up to a standard, the meaningfulness of the standard is lessened by the compensatory power of personal characteristics. James mentioned this dilemma as well, asserting that he is "pretty lucky with maintaining a general, uh, body image that was the same as when [he] started going out" with his girlfriend. He continues to declare, "there is, I think, a sort of commitment to saying, this person hasn't asked me to look good for them, but, um, I'll do it anyway." Being *lucky* to have and *committing* oneself to having a good body indicates that body image is still a worthy asset in his relationship, although it is not *asked for* or verbally acknowledged as important. Both Tom and James deny the relevance of physique and yet still recognize it.

By constructing the ideal body as less of a priority than other facets of a lasting relationship, participants may boost their self-esteem in light of other redeeming qualities. In the context of westernized beliefs about the superiority of thought over substance, this dualism of mind and body may also serve to uphold a moral idealism that bodies are simply shells, or carriers, of the "true" person, or mind. While holding the mind in higher esteem than the body may serve to propagate cultural moral discourse, constructing the body as paradoxically important to the relationship may also preserve smooth social functioning by grounding the participants' idealism in their loved ones' expectations.

Discussion

The current study explored the ways that male participants discursively constructed the impact of idealized male physiques in the media on body image. Additionally, attention was focused on how participants situated this impact within heterosexual romantic relationships. Our findings concur with previous literature indicating that idealized representations of the male body have an impact on men's body image (e.g., Galioto & Crowther, 2013).

Participants spoke about the media as an assaultive proponent of body image ideals, while projecting correspondingly aggressive male ideals themselves. The ideal male physique was described in terms of a strong upper body and capacity for aggression, features which tend to be common sources of both dissatisfaction as well as pride for men (Hoyt & Kogan, 2002; Monaghan & Malson, 2013), and are congruent with gender prescriptions to be powerful and in control (Eisler & Blalock, 1991). Many participants were quick to fight back, an "appropriate" masculine response, by framing this ideal as unfavorable,

referring to it as "caricatured," "unattainable," and "ridiculous," and constructing those who had attained the ideal as having "succumbed" to the media. These findings are similar to those of Grogan and Richards (2002), who observed negative discourse surrounding body building as "obsessive" and likely to induce fat gain when training is ceased.

Another negotiation tactic our participants used to defend themselves was to avoid such ideals completely by placing themselves outside of media's "line of fire." This is analogous to the finding that a group of overweight men negotiated invulnerability to aesthetic assessment (Monaghan & Malson, 2013) and highlights negotiation of a less threatening reality as a common, even healthful, tactic. Despite drawing heavily from unachievable media representations when constructing the ideal body, and remaining somewhat unenthused with their own bodies, participants were able to adaptively criticize media ideals in ways that made it acceptable to fall outside of them.

Potentially troubling, however, was the use of aggressive language towards the self. The notion of "cutting" away undesired parts of the self to improve the body provides a connection to the traditionally female issue of body image disorders, for example, anorexia nervosa (Bergstrom, et al., 2004). Recently, masculine versions of body image disorders have surfaced, such as "muscle dysphoria" (McFarland & Kaminski, 2009), where men (and sometimes women) are driven to disordered eating and exercising behaviours with the preoccupation with losing fat and gaining muscle. While the male gender role has traditionally not included a concern with aesthetics, but rather with function, our results, as well as others (Grogan & Richards, 2002), indicate that some men are indeed basing the value of their bodies in terms of attractiveness. Our participants noted the same rising idealization of male bodies in the "commercialized" and "caricatured" images discussed by scholars (Baghurst et al., 2006; Leit et al., 2000). These findings could be construed as evidence that media may actually be changing the way men conceptualize their bodies. Because self-violence seems to be a trend in men's talk, future studies may do well to investigate the differences between the constructive processes of men who are generally resilient to media's attacks and those who suffer from clinical levels of body image disorders. A similar avenue to explore would be to compare resilient groups to those who may have heightened individual susceptibilities to media's body image effects. It has been postulated that more susceptible groups might include non-heterosexual males (French, et al., 1994; Michaels et al., 2013; Silberstein, et al., 1989) as well as males displaying certain attentional patterns to media images (Nikkelen, Anschutz, Ha, & Engels, 2012). Within these differences may lay pertinent information for successful body image disorder interventions.

The dilemma of being simultaneously affected by media and immune to it is interesting in light of the disparate results in the literature. As mentioned above, some researchers have reported significant effects of media comparison on men's body image (e.g., Galioto & Crowther, 2013) while others have claimed this phenomenon only for women (e.g., Van den berg et al., 2007). Since the men in our study, as well as others (Monaghan & Malson, 2013), reported being both affected and unaffected by media, this could partially account for the discrepancy in previous findings. It could be that both conclusions are at once correct but that the salience of media depictions of the male body may differ, not only depending on individual differences (Michaels et al., 2013; Nikkelen et al., 2012), but also on contextual factors brought out by different research methodologies. It seems that qualitative methods foster a more nuanced view of male body image than the Likert-type items traditionally used in body image research (e.g., Michaels et al., 2013). Given the common trend for men to hold contradictory viewpoints about their body satisfaction, we posit a reconciliation of the past disparate findings and suggest that future research pay close attention to the effect their methodology may have on their results.

Our findings suggest that relationships were used as a protective factor in body image construction. Men posited that body image was an extremely important issue prior to entering a stable relationship, which is consistent with research indicating that confidence in one's body is important to seeking relationships (Amwani & Strauss, 2007). However, during an established relationship, they placed more emphasis on deeper personal characteristics. Research suggests that, while body dissatisfaction exists among single and coupled people, relationships can make having a "perfect" body less important (Tom et al., 2005) and, indeed, while men used many tactics to defend themselves from the aggressive media ideal, they still were generally satisfied with their bodies. However, participants still acknowledged a lingering need to look good for their partner and framed the ideal in terms of meeting the needs of a loved one, instead of the demands of the media. This framing seemed to make the pressure to conform to the ideal more palatable. Since none of the previous discursive inquiries reported relationship status (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Monaghan & Malson, 2013), we cannot attempt to draw any definitive conclusions about the differences between those who are single and those in relationships, but our findings do suggest that the context of a relationship may provide a positive source for men to draw upon when negotiating with media ideals.

Although our study corresponds with previous literature, it adds some important nuances. First, the current findings contribute to the modest qualitative knowledge base regarding men's body image, giving insight into how men adaptively construct the impact of media and

relationships on body image. Second, our results indicating that men hold dual, conflicting constructions regarding media impacts may help explain and reconcile previous contradictory findings regarding the impact, or lack thereof, of media on men's body image (e.g., Galioto & Crowther, 2013; Van den berg et al., 2007). However, our conclusions are limited to the narrow demographic of our participants, namely a young, primarily white, cohort of heterosexual men in relatively short-lived relationships. Future research may examine this topic with men from different demographic groups. Overall, our findings indicate that the growing interest in male body image is well warranted and that further research into this complex topic is needed in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the many factors impacting men's body image.

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