

## Media Images of Men: Trends and Consequences of Body Conceptualization

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In the current investigation, the authors examined how men are presented in popular media and the effects of such presentations on male adolescents' self-evaluations. In a content analysis of male models in advertisements of *Sports Illustrated*, Study 1 showed that media ideals increasingly emphasize aesthetic versus performance attributes of men. In Study 2, male adolescents ( $N = 107$ ) were randomly assigned to view either images of male ideals emphasizing aesthetic attributes, images of male ideals emphasizing performance attributes, or neutral images. Results showed that viewing media ideals that emphasize aesthetic attributes contributes to negative self-evaluations whereas viewing media ideals that emphasize performance attributes contributes to positive self-evaluations. These findings suggest that body conceptualization, and not simply body type (i.e., muscularity), plays a role in how men feel about themselves and their bodies.

*Keywords:* body image, media ideals, body conceptualization, body dissatisfaction

Historically, body image research primarily focused on the concerns of women (e.g., Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002); however, recent findings suggest that men are also experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction with their physical appearance (e.g., Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004; Garner, 1997; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004). These findings suggest that men desire a body that is high in muscularity and/or low in body fat (e.g., Pope, Gruber et al., 2000; Olivardia et al., 2004). The dissatisfaction that arises from the discrepancy between actual and ideal physiques is associated with a number of physical and psychological health problems, including the use of performance-enhancing substances, disordered eating, depression, and low

self-esteem (Olivardia et al., 2004; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004).

One possible explanation for the high levels of body dissatisfaction among men may involve social comparison processes and media messages. That is, men may be comparing themselves to idealized images presented in the media and finding that they fail to live up to the cultural standards. Indeed, media images of men are more muscular and lean than ever before (e.g., Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999; Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2000) and research shows that viewing such images contributes to body dissatisfaction (e.g., Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Humphreys & Paxton, 2004; Leit, Gray, Pope, 2002; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004). However, research has not thoroughly addressed the underlying processes involved in the development of body image concerns among men. An understanding of men's self-evaluations in relation to cultural ideals presented in the media is necessary to explain rising body image concerns among men.

Early research suggested that the criteria used by men and women to evaluate their physical selves differed, with physical attractiveness determining women's self-worth and instrumentality determining men's self-worth (e.g., Lerner, Orlos & Knapp, 1976). Many argue that

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the importance of physical attractiveness for women's self-evaluations arose because of the salience of cultural ideals in the media that promote viewing women as objects (e.g., Kilbourne, 2000). Although the cultural ideals of men have not historically focused on appearance (Franzoi, 1995), our premise is that rates of body dissatisfaction among men have increased because men compare themselves to media ideals that increasingly promote aesthetic versus instrumental attributes. Thus, the purpose of the current investigation is to document changes in the conceptualization of media images of men and to examine how the conceptualization of men influences self-evaluations. The findings from these studies should contribute to an understanding of why today's men are reporting substantial levels of body dissatisfaction.

### Evidence of Body Dissatisfaction

Many of today's men demonstrate high levels of body dissatisfaction. In fact, dissatisfaction with one's overall physical appearance has tripled among men in the past 30 years rising from 15% in 1972 to 43% in 1997 (Garner, 1997). Moreover, body dissatisfaction is not limited to young men but rather shows up across multiple age groups including adolescent men (e.g., Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004), college men (e.g., Olivardia et al., 2004), and older men (e.g., Franzoi & Koehler, 1998). Unlike women, who are primarily concerned with their level of body fat, men can demonstrate concern with both their level of body fat and their level of muscularity (Olivardia et al., 2004). When each concern is measured separately, men report wanting large increases in muscularity (25 pounds) and decreases in body fat (8 pounds; Olivardia et al., 2004). These findings have also been found cross-culturally. Pope, Gruber, et al. (2000) have found that men from three countries (i.e., United States, France, and Austria) demonstrate a high preference for an increased level of musculature.

Body dissatisfaction is a concern because of the physical and psychological consequences associated with the pursuit of physical ideals (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). For example, men comprise approximately 10% of the eating disorder population (i.e., anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Additionally, 3.3% of

surveyed men engage in binge-eating behaviors at some time in their lives (Garfinkel et al., 1995), and 5.4% of surveyed adolescent boys demonstrate an exercise dependency (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004). Men also engage in a number of risky health behaviors to manipulate their body weight, including smoking and dieting to reduce body fat (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), and using performance enhancing substances to increase muscle (e.g., creatine, anabolic steroids; Olivardia et al., 2004). In fact, 2.9% of 12th grade boys use steroids to alter their body composition (National Institute of Health, 1999). Moreover, psychological consequences such as low self-esteem and depression occur when men are dissatisfied with their appearance (Olivardia et al., 2004). Given the negative consequences associated with body dissatisfaction, researchers have focused on the role of cultural ideals presented by the media in creating unrealistic standards of comparison.

### The Role of the Media and Social Comparison

In his social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) proposed that people strive to evaluate themselves, and in the absence of objective criteria, will compare themselves to others. When people compare themselves to others that are worse off, they are likely to feel satisfied. In contrast, when people compare themselves to others who are better off, they are dissatisfied. Thus, if a man compares himself to men with superior physiques, he is likely to feel worse about himself. Men in the media (e.g., models, actors) are easily available comparison targets. Research shows that the physiques of these targets have become increasingly muscular and lean across time (e.g., Pope et al., 1999; Leit et al., 2000). For example, *Playgirl* centerfold models have gained 27 pounds of muscle and lost 12 pounds of body fat from 1973 to 1997 (Leit et al., 2000). Moreover, the centerfolds of the latter years (i.e., 1994–1997) have body types that are unnatural and unattainable without steroid use (Leit et al., 2000). Other, more mainstream, magazines (i.e., *Men's Health*, *Men's Fitness*, and *Muscle & Fitness*) have also found a high level of musculature demonstrated by recent models (Frederick, Fessler, & Haselton, 2005). Frederick et al. (2005) also

note that a more muscular ideal is presented in men's magazines than in women's magazines (i.e., *Cosmopolitan*), suggesting that men may be exposed to images that cause them to overestimate the ideal body that is required to appear attractive.

Changes in the male form are not limited to print media for adults, but are also obvious in the toys presented to children. Action figures of the 1990s are more muscular than their earlier counterparts of the 1970s (Pope et al., 1999). For example, G.I. Joe's biceps have increased from a 12.2-inch circumference to a 26.8-inch circumference in 30 years, resulting in a bicep larger than any body builder in history. Thus, G.I. Joe may be sending a message of unattainable beauty to young men equivalent to the unattainable form Barbie presents to young women (Pope et al., 1999).

The consequences of changes in media ideals are also clear. Correlational studies show that there is a positive relationship between viewing media ideals and body dissatisfaction (e.g., Botta, 2003; Morrison, Morrison, & Hopkins, 2003; Morry & Staska, 2001). For example, reading health and fitness magazines (e.g., *Flex*, *Men's Fitness*, and *Muscle & Fitness*) positively correlates with the pursuit of muscularity (i.e., desire to achieve an idealized muscular body type; Morrison et al., 2003). Additionally, reading fitness magazines predicts internalizing societal ideals and eating disorder symptomatology (Morry & Staska, 2001), and more intentions to take pills or supplements to gain muscle, and commitment to becoming muscular (Botta, 2003). Interestingly, when readers focus on the content of the magazine (i.e., articles and information in the magazine), they are less likely to engage in bulimic and anorexic behaviors, and are more likely to be satisfied with their bodies compared to when readers focus on the body size and shape of models. Focusing on the appearance of models leads to an increased drive to be thin, increased anorexic and bulimic behaviors, and an increased drive for muscularity (Botta, 2003). Where readers focus their attention is particularly consequential when reading sports magazines. When male adolescents do not compare themselves to images, reading sports magazines will increase body satisfaction. Conversely, reading sports magazines decreases body satisfaction when male

adolescents do compare themselves to the models (Botta, 2003).

Evidence of the consequences of viewing media ideals is not limited to correlational investigations; recent studies (e.g., Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Humphreys & Paxton, 2004; Leit et al., 2002; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004) support a causal relationship between the presentation of media ideals and body dissatisfaction among men. This line of research clearly shows that viewing media ideals, even briefly, can have negative effects on both mood and body satisfaction. For example, male college students who watched a TV show that contained appearance-based advertisements (i.e., commercials containing young, muscular, and lean men) showed an increase in depression and muscle dissatisfaction compared to students who watched a show containing neutral ads (i.e., commercials containing middle-aged men completely clothed; Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Male models within the pages of magazines also have a similar effect. When college men viewed slides of advertisements containing men from popular magazines and clothing catalogues (rated as high in muscularity and attractiveness), they showed a greater discrepancy between their actual and ideal body shapes than participants who viewed control nonhuman advertisements (Leit et al., 2002). The negative impact of viewing media ideals is attributed to social comparison processes that result in viewers' realization that they fall short of the ideals. This is further supported by research that compares the effects of viewing images of ideal bodies to the effects of viewing images of average men. Viewing images of muscular men causes men to have a decrease in body satisfaction, whereas viewing images of average men (thin, normal weight, and slightly obese) does not have deleterious effects (Lorenzen et al., 2004). However, Arbour and Ginis (2006) suggest that a preexisting concern of one's personal level of musculature plays a key role in determining if exposure to muscular ideals will elicit body dissatisfaction.

### Body Conceptualization

One issue arising from the extant research examining the media's role in male body dissatisfaction concerns how the body is conceptualized. Because research typically has exam-

ined the effects of viewing ideal bodies on self-evaluations, it is not clear whether the negative consequences are due to discrepancies between one's own physical self with that of muscular and lean models or if media representations promote different qualities of the male physique. In other words, are the consequences of viewing media ideals attributable to the physiques of the ideals or due to how the ideals are conceptualized?

Franzoi (1995) proposed that there are two basic ways to conceptualize the body. The first way is termed "body-as-process" and is defined as viewing the body as a functional machine whose instrumentality is of greater consequence than its beauty (i.e., the purpose of large muscles is to have increased strength). The second way to conceptualize the body is termed "body-as-object" and is defined as viewing the body as comprised of discrete parts that are evaluated based on aesthetic qualities. Thus, an individual would see the visual appeal of having large biceps without recognizing the ability of strength. We believe that how a body is visually presented in the media promotes different conceptualizations of the body. How the body is conceptualized in the media is likely to have implications for what consumers attend to and what forms the basis of their self-evaluations. Whereas men have historically viewed their bodies in terms of instrumentality, researchers such as Morrison et al. (2003) contend that there has been a shift toward viewing the male body as decorative. However, this contention has yet to be supported empirically. If present, this shift in emphasis may contribute to why men are experiencing body dissatisfaction because both men and women tend to have less favorable evaluations of their body parts (e.g., biceps, waist, face) than their body functions (e.g., reflexes, strength, coordination; Franzoi, 1995).

Interestingly, there has been more focus on the aesthetic appeal of men in recent issues of popular women's magazines. In both *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, the proportion of undressed men (e.g., without a shirt) has increased from 3% in the 1950s to a peak of 35% in the 1990s (Pope, Olivardia, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2001). This finding demonstrates the growing commercial value of man's aesthetic appeal. Additionally, a large number of men are engaging in aesthetic behaviors such as body hair depilation. The reasons for engaging in such

behaviors reflect aesthetic evaluations and investments (e.g., sex appeal, better definition/muscularity; Boroughs, Cafri, & Thompson, 2005). It appears that men are thinking about their bodies increasingly in terms of appearance rather than instrumentality; however, there are no empirical studies addressing how men are conceptualized in the media.

### Overview of Current Investigation

The current investigation explores two issues related to the body image concerns of men. The first issue concerns changes in body conceptualization of male media ideals and we address this in Study 1 by operationalizing body conceptualization into seven discrete measures to examine how the male body is presented in the media (i.e., body-as-process vs. body-as-object). We expected that across the past 30 years, men's bodies are presented increasingly more body-as-object.

In Study 2, we exposed male adolescents to images that promoted the body-as-object to experimentally examine the effects of body conceptualization on self-evaluations. Unlike previous studies (e.g., Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Leit et al., 2002; Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004), Study 2 includes both a control group containing nonhuman stimuli and a comparison group containing ideal men presented body-as-process. Although we expected that adolescents would socially compare themselves to media ideals regardless of how they are conceptualized, we hypothesized that adolescents would make negative self-evaluations after viewing the aesthetic-focused body-as-object images.

### Study 1

Study 1 examined the body conceptualization of male models in advertisements of *Sports Illustrated*, a popular weekly sports magazine. We hypothesized that over the past 30 years, the conceptualization of the male body has shifted from body-as-process to body-as-object.

### Method

#### Sample

*Description of magazine.* *Sports Illustrated* is a weekly magazine that combines articles and

images of popular sports. This magazine was first published in 1954 and in 2004 had a paid-readership of more than three million (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2004; as cited in Magazine Publishers of America, 2004). We chose *Sports Illustrated* for a content analysis of advertisements because of its predominately male readership of 80% (D. Raskopf, personal communication, July 8, 2005). *Sports Illustrated* is also an ideal magazine to investigate because it is the second largest magazine in America for ad revenue; thus, it includes a high proportion of advertisements (PIB/TNS Media Intelligence; as cited in *Adweek*, 2005). The current sample of advertisements was drawn from a convenience sample of 23 *Sports Illustrated* magazines, representing a time range of 30 years (1975–2005).

*Advertisement inclusion criteria.* We included advertisements that were one page or larger featuring images of a male model larger than one square inch. We excluded male models that appeared under the age of 15 as well as male cartoons from analyses because it seemed unlikely that men would compare themselves to these depictions. The male model could be presented alone or in the company of other men and/or women. If the advertisement contained more than one male model, we coded only the model with the largest percentage of his body in the ad. If body proportions were equal, we only coded the male model in the foreground. If an advertisement was larger than one page, multiple pages were coded as separate ads if they contained additional male models. Of the total magazine pages ( $N = 2533$ ), 40.00% ( $N = 1013$ ) were full-page ads; therefore, for roughly every five pages in *Sports Illustrated*, there were two full ad pages and three pages of content. Of the total full-page ads ( $N = 1013$ ) in the sample of magazines, 32.77% ( $n = 332$ ) met the inclusion criteria. We limited our sample to full page advertisements to enable coding of model attributes by judges.

### *Coding of Male Models*

*Demographics of models.* We identified the models' age and ethnicity for descriptive purposes by having judges estimate the age range of the model (i.e., 15–20; 21–30; 31–40) and indicate the ethnicity of the model (i.e., Caucasian, Asian, etc.).

*Body conceptualization.* Extending from Franzoi's (1995) constructs "body-as-object" and "body-as-process," and the literature examining the presentation of models in the media (e.g., Kolbe & Albanese, 1996; Kilbourne, 2000), we created seven measures to examine body conceptualization.

1. "Level of activity" refers to the amount of activity demonstrated by the model (adapted from Duquin, 1989). Models engaging in high levels of activity would demonstrate the physical abilities of the body (body-as-process) whereas low levels of activity would allow a viewer to focus on the stagnant appearance of a body (body-as-object).
2. "Level of pose" refers to how natural the male model appears in the advertisement. A highly posed model would be evaluated aesthetically (body-as-object) whereas a more naturally captured image of a model would focus less on appearance.
3. "Use of advertised item" refers to how well the model demonstrated the use of the product advertised in the ad. A model who is seen using the ad item would be promoting his abilities (body-as-process), whereas a model who does not use the item in the ad is employed as an aesthetic prop (body-as-object).
4. "Nudity" refers to the proportion of the body that is presented without clothing. A model who is presented with high nudity allows for a viewer to evaluate the body's aesthetic appearance (body-as-object) whereas a body low in nudity does not (adapted from Kolbe & Albanese, 1996).
5. "Fragmentation" is a measure that follows Franzoi's body-as-object construct closely. Fragmentation occurs in an image when the head of a model is excluded, and only one or two body parts are shown (body-as-object; adapted from Kolbe & Albanese, 1996).
6. "Eye-gaze" refers to the direction of the model's view. A model whose eye-gaze cannot be determined (as a result of head turned, eyes covered, etc.) suffers a loss of

subjectivity that would allow for a viewer to serve a more evaluative role when observing the model (body-as-object; adapted from Kolbe & Albanese, 1996). In contrast, a model that has direct eye-gaze (i.e., looking forward toward the viewer of the ad) maintains subjectivity (body-as-process).

7. "Object representation" is the final measure and refers to whether the model's body is used to take the size, shape, or form of a physical object such as the advertised product (body-as-object; adapted from Kilbourne, 2000).

We expected that across 30 years, male models would demonstrate less activity, be more posed, use the advertised item less, expose more nude flesh, be more fragmented, have less direct eye-gaze, and represent more physical objects. Taking these measures as a collective, we hypothesized that the body would be conceptualized increasingly body-as-object across the past 30 years (1975–2005).

We trained three individuals (two blind) as coders to independently classify the advertisements using the coding criteria. To assess interrater reliability, we calculated intraclass correlations between the three judges' scores for the continuous variables. The correlations for three of these variables were found to be adequate: level of activity (.81), use of ad item (.70), and nudity (.80). The correlation for level of pose (.50) was low and therefore dropped from further analyses. Percent agreement was calculated for the categorical variables and was found to be adequate for these variables: fragmentation (100.00%), eye-gaze (93.64%), and object representation (96.08%).

## Results

We classified advertisements from the convenience sample of magazines as belonging to one of four time periods: the 1970s with advertisements from 1975–1979 ( $n = 105$ ), the 1980s with advertisements from 1984–1989 ( $n = 99$ ), the 1990s with advertisements from 1992–1996 ( $n = 53$ ), and the 2000s with advertisements from 2000–2005 ( $n = 75$ ).

## Demographics of Models

The majority of men in the advertisements were Caucasian, 74.40% ( $n = 247$ ). African (Black) men were the second largest presented ethnic group, appearing in 12.95% ( $n = 43$ ) of the coded advertisements. Models appeared to be primarily between the ages of 31 and 40 (34.94%;  $n = 116$ ), and 21 and 30 (28.92%;  $n = 96$ ). Models who appeared over 41 years of age were found in 18.37% ( $n = 61$ ) of advertisements (Interrater reliability was 94.28% for ethnicity and 87.65% for age).

## Body Conceptualization

Our primary hypothesis was that across time, male models would be presented increasingly body-as-object. We used the mean score provided by the three raters as the dependent variable for the continuous measures, and we analyzed these variables with trend analyses. The four time periods served as the independent variable. We analyzed categorical measures with contingency tables using scoring that was agreed upon by at least two of the three coders. Ads that were not coded in agreement by at least two coders were excluded from analysis (i.e., 6.36% of the ads were excluded from the analysis of eye-gaze, 3.94% for object representation, and 0% for fragmentation).

*Level of activity.* This measure outlined the activity level of the model using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*nonactive*) to 7 (*extreme activity*). A linear trend was not found for activity level,  $F(1, 318) = 1.06, p = .30, \eta^2_p = .00$ ; however, a quadratic trend was found,  $F(1, 318) = 3.94, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .01$ . As seen in Table 1, activity level increased to a peak in the 1990s before decreasing in the 2000s.

*Use of advertised item.* This measure evaluated whether the advertised item was in use by the model using a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*). A linear trend was found for the level of ad item use,  $F(1, 317) = 17.00, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .05$ ; and, no quadratic trend was found,  $F(1, 317) = .18, p = .67, \eta^2_p = .00$ . As seen in Table 1, the level of item use decreased steadily from the 1970s to the 2000s.

*Nudity.* This measure examined the percentage of nudity demonstrated by the model. Only full-bodied models were included so to

Table 1  
*Body Conceptualization Interval Measures*

DV	Time period			
	1970s <i>M (SD)</i>	1980s <i>M (SD)</i>	1990s <i>M (SD)</i>	2000s <i>M (SD)</i>
Level of activity	2.46 (1.69)	2.60 (1.90)	3.24 (2.04)	2.55 (1.70)
Level of ad item use	3.94 (2.16) <sub>a</sub>	3.55 (2.15)	2.94 (1.95) <sub>b</sub>	2.75 (1.80) <sub>b</sub>
Percentage of nudity	12.34 (8.67) <sub>a</sub>	23.52 (21.29) <sub>b</sub>	26.33 (18.72) <sub>b</sub>	22.75 (14.71)

Note. Different subscripts denote means that are significantly different using Tukey’s HSD procedure.  $p < .05$ .

control for the proportion of body that could be presented without clothing ( $N = 106$ ). The male body was broken down into 20 separate parts, with each part representing five percent of the whole. We calculated a total percentage of nudity by counting the number of parts presented without clothing. Both a linear trend,  $F(1, 102) = 6.06, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .06$ , and a quadratic trend,  $F(1, 102) = 5.00, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .05$ , were found for the percentage of nudity. As seen in Table 1, the percentage of nude exposed skin increased to a peak in the 1990s before slightly decreasing in the 2000s. In addition, an examination of nude sexualized zones exposed by the models (i.e., biceps, chest, abdominal region, back, and pelvic region) revealed that there was an increase from approximately one in 10 models in the 1970s revealing at least one nude sexualized zone to approximately one in three models in the 2000s.

*Fragmentation.* This measure examined if the model’s body has been fragmented. We coded advertisements dichotomously as either 1 (*containing a fragmented model*) or 2 (*not containing a fragmented model*) using the absence or presence of a head as the key feature. We found significant changes in body fragmentation,  $\chi^2(3) = 7.74, p = .05, \Phi_c = .55$ . As seen in Table 2, fragmentation of the model’s bodies increased in the 1990s.

*Eye-gaze.* We coded each model as having either: direct eye-gaze, underdetermined eye-gaze, or other (e.g., looking at an object or individual in the ad). We found significant changes in the eye-gaze of the models,  $\chi^2(6) = 13.09, p = .04, \Phi_c = .15$ . As seen in Table 2, models have lost subjectivity in recent time periods due to a decrease in direct eye-gaze: the direct eye-gaze of models was highest in the 1970s, but lowered in the 1980s and

1990s. Consequently, there has been a steady increase in models whose eye-gaze cannot be determined since the 1970s.

*Object representation & level of pose.* We coded models dichotomously as either 1 (*representing a physical object*) or 2 (*not representing a physical object*). Due to the low number of models used to represent a physical object ( $n = 3$ ), this measure was excluded from analyses. We coded level of pose using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*naturalistic*) to 7 (*posed*). As mentioned earlier, this measure was excluded from analyses due to poor interrater reliability.

### Discussion

We operationalized body conceptualization to evaluate how the male physique is conceptualized in popular media. We compared four time periods (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s) in a convenience sample of *Sports Illustrated* magazines and found that, consistent with our hypothesis, the body has been conceptualized increasingly body-as-object. Two of the three continuous measures (i.e., use of ad item, level of nudity) showed a linear trend where models of recent years are being presented increasingly

Table 2  
*Body Conceptualization Categorical Measures*

DV	Time period			
	1970s % (n)	1980s % (n)	1990s % (n)	2000s % (n)
Fragmentation	4.77 (5)	7.07 (7)	16.98 (9)	6.70 (5)
Eye-gaze				
Direct	45.65 (42)	27.17 (25)	30.43 (46)	41.43 (29)
Undetermined	21.74 (20)	28.26 (26)	26.09 (12)	34.29 (24)

body-as-object in comparison to their earlier counterparts. In addition, undetermined eye-gaze has steadily increased since the 1970s, and the number of fragmented models peaked in a recent time period (1990s). Although not all measures showed a trend toward the conceptualization of the body-as-object (i.e., level of activity), the majority of measures reveal a change toward the promotion of the body-as-object. It appears that men's bodies are being presented with a focus on discrete body parts and aesthetic appearance rather than function.

The results of Study 1 demonstrate that there have been increases in the aesthetic conceptualization of the body, and that this can be mapped onto the increases in musculature and decreases in body fat documented in media images such as *Playgirl* centerfolds and G.I. Joe action figures (Leit et al., 2000; Pope et al., 1999). Collectively, these changes in male ideals correspond to the increases in body dissatisfaction reported by men (e.g., Garner, 1997). Whereas the physical form of men in media has been examined to determine its negative effects on men's self-evaluations (e.g., Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Humphreys & Paxton, 2004; Leit et al., 2002; Lorenzen et al., 2004; Murnen, Smolak, Mills, & Good, 2003), research has not yet examined the effects of body conceptualization on how men evaluate themselves. Study 2 is designed to address this.

## Study 2

Study 1 provided evidence that men have recently been conceptualized more body-as-object in the media than in previous years. However, it is not clear how viewing such representations cause men to think about their own bodies and whether this leads to body dissatisfaction. Study 2 examined, in an experimental design, the causal relationship between body conceptualization and its effects on self-evaluations. Male adolescents viewed images of idealized men (defined as muscular and lean) who were presented either body-as-object or body-as-process. We expected that male adolescents exposed to images containing idealized men would express negative self-evaluations, and that this would be especially true for participants exposed to the body-as-object images.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 107 male students enrolled in academic grades six through nine (mean level of education = 7.35 years,  $SD = .92$ ) in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada. An information letter requesting participation in a psychological study was sent to three schools and distributed to teachers. Male students indicated their interest by securing parental consent and testing took place at the participants' educational institution. The mean age for the participants was 12.51 years ( $SD = 1.04$ ) and 88.79% ( $n = 95$ ) were Caucasian. For their participation, participants could enter their names in a draw to receive one of four \$50 gift certificates.

### Procedure

We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: idealized men presented body-as-object ( $n = 34$ ), idealized men presented body-as-process ( $n = 36$ ), and images of electronics (i.e., control condition;  $n = 37$ ). Participants were led to believe that the purpose of the study was to examine the content of popular men's magazines. All participants completed the image-and-slogan matching task (as described below) with the set of stimuli from their assigned condition.

*Image-and-slogan matching task.* To expose participants to a single conceptualization of the male body (i.e., body-as-object or body-as-process), we provided participants with 15 slogans. We created 15 slogan templates (e.g., The ultimate \_\_\_\_\_ diet plan) using popular men's magazines as guides (e.g., *Men's Health*, *Men's Fitness*). Participants in the body-as-object condition received slogans that promoted the body-as-object (e.g., The ultimate *abs* diet plan), and participants in the body-as-process condition received slogans that promoted the body-as-process (e.g., The ultimate *energy* diet plan). The terminology that was used to complete the slogans was adapted from Franzoi (1995). We then informed the participants that they would be presented with a series of images found in popular men's magazines. The images used for the study were selected from a larger set of 30 images and rated by 32 undergraduate raters (16 men and 16 women).



We asked raters to rate each image on muscularity, body fat, masculinity (i.e., the qualities and conditions characteristic of a man), body attractiveness (i.e., attractiveness of the man's physique), overall attractiveness (i.e., general attractiveness of appearance), and estimated age so to match the type of men presented in each condition. Each construct was coded on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 7 (*high*) with the exception of age. Raters also rated each image for body conceptualization on a scale from 1 (*body-as-process*) to 7 (*body-as-object*) using five of the same criteria from the coding of magazine advertisements in Study 1 as guidelines (i.e., level of activity, level of pose, level of nudity, fragmentation, and eye-gaze; object representation and use of ad item were not included as there were no ad items in the stimuli photos). For example, a body that would receive a high score on the body conceptualization scale (i.e., *body-as-object*) would be nonactive, posed, with a high proportion of nudity, fragmented, and with nondirect eye-gaze. Ten images were selected for both the *body-as-object* condition, and the *body-as-process* condition based on their significantly different body conceptualization ratings,  $t(29) = 24.55, p < .001$ . The two groups were not found to differ in terms of overall attractiveness and age ( $p > .05$ ). However, the *body-as-object* images were found to have higher muscularity, body attractiveness, masculinity, and lower body fat ( $p < .05$ ), reflecting that certain traits may be inherent to the two conceptualization styles (i.e., *body-as-object* men are perceived as more muscular because they are typically represented without clothing).

For the image-and-slogan matching task, we instructed the participants to match each presented image with a suitable slogan from the list. Images were presented for 30 seconds at a time on an individual computer screen for most participants ( $n = 67$ ), or on a large screen in a classroom for others ( $n = 40$ ).<sup>1</sup> Each image was numbered, and the image number was written beside the appropriate slogan. This task took approximately five minutes to complete. For the control condition, participants completed a similar timed task in which they rated each electronic image on how often it is presented in the media.

## Materials

Following the image-and-slogan matching task, we asked participants to complete a variety of measures to assess psychological consequences of exposure to media ideals. Following completion of the questionnaires, we debriefed participants about the true nature of the study.

*Demographics.* We asked participants to indicate their age, highest level of education, and ethnicity.

*State self-esteem.* We used the Current Thought Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) to measure the state self-esteem of participants. This 20-item questionnaire is sensitive to manipulations designed to temporarily alter self-esteem and is reported to have good validity (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). The questionnaire is divided into three subscales including: performance self-esteem (e.g., "I feel confident about my abilities"), social self-esteem (e.g., "I feel confident that I understand things"), and appearance self-esteem (e.g., "I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now"). Participants rated their extent of agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Scores for performance self-esteem and social self-esteem range between 7 and 35, and scores for appearance self-esteem range between 6 and 30. Higher scores on each subscale represent a high level of state self-esteem. In the current sample, internal consistency coefficients were adequate (performance subscale:  $\alpha = .72$ , social subscale:  $\alpha = .69$ ; appearance subscale:  $\alpha = .81$ ) and comparable to those reported in other studies (e.g., Ward, 2004).

*Depression.* The depression-dejection questionnaire is an 14-item subscale of the Profile of Mood States—Revised (McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1992) that we used to measure a state of depression. We asked participants to indicate how much they were feeling each emotion-item right now (e.g., unhappy, hopeless, discourage, terrified) on a scale of 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*), with a total score range of 0 to 56. Higher scores on this measure represent a

<sup>1</sup> When examining differences between viewing the stimuli on a personal computer or on a large screen, it was found that participants who viewed the control images on a personal computer had a lower appearance self-esteem ( $M = 21.49$ ) than participants who viewed images on a large screen ( $M = 24.58$ ),  $p < .05$ .

higher level of depression. In the current sample, internal consistency was good and comparable to previous studies ( $\alpha = .90$ ; e.g., McNair et al., 1992).

*Behavior.* To determine whether exposure to different body conceptualizations altered behavior, we asked participants to choose one of four fictional magazines. We led participants to believe that a magazine was being offered to them for their participation. The magazine was promoted with the name "Men's Lifestyle," and each issue was only described with three cover slogans. Two of these magazines had slogans that promoted the body-as-object (e.g., Add two inches to your biceps—in 90 seconds; Look thinner instantly with the new diet plan), and the other two magazines had slogans that promoted the body-as-process (e.g., Five ways to speed-up your reflexes; Increase your energy by eating the right foods). The magazine choices were counterbalanced. Participants indicated which magazine they preferred by placing a check mark next to the magazine of their choice.

*Ideal-self.* We used two methods to assess the participants' ideals. First, we asked participants an open-ended question: "If you could change one thing about yourself—what would that be?" Second, consistent with the approach used by others (e.g., Hardin & Leong, 2005), we asked participants to list up to 10 attributes they would *ideally* like to have.

*Media exposure and exercise behaviors.* To examine the general characteristics of the entire sample, we designed a questionnaire to measure media exposure and exercise behaviors. This checklist assessed the amount and type of media participants typically consumed (e.g., hours of TV watched per week) and their exercise habits (e.g., sports played, weight-training behaviors).

It was hypothesized that participants assigned to the body-as-object and body-as-process conditions, both being exposed to ideal-bodied men, would have lower state self-esteem and a higher state of depression than participants assigned to the control condition. However, it was hypothesized that the participants in the body-as-object condition would have the lowest state self-esteem and highest state of depression of all three groups. Additionally, it was expected that participants would choose magazines (behavioral measure) and list ideals that reflected the conditions they were assigned to.

## Results

### *Participant Media Consumption*

Participants reported a large consumption of media from various sources including magazines, TV, and movies. Ninety-two participants (86.6%) reported spending time reading magazines during each week, with 45.1% ( $n = 48$ ) spending an hour or more per week reading magazines. A substantial number of participants also reported watching TV one hour or more per day ( $n = 91$ ; 88.35%), going to the movie theaters once a month or more ( $n = 61$ ; 57.55%), or renting one or more movies per month ( $n = 93$ ; 87.74%).

### *Participant Activity Levels*

Participants reported active involvement in sports and athletics. One hundred and one participants (94.39%) reported participating in at least one sport, and the average number of sports the participants were involved in was 3.05 ( $SD = 1.87$ ). Additionally, 48 participants (46.15%) reported engaging in cardiovascular-type activity (e.g., running, swimming) once a week or more, and 59 participants (55.66%) reported engaging in muscle-building activities (e.g., weight training, push-ups) once a week or more.

We completed one-way ANOVAs to examine participant descriptives and found no differences in media consumption or activity levels across the three conditions ( $p > .05$ ). There was however, a significant difference between conditions for age,  $F(2, 99) = 3.25, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .06$ . Despite random assignment, participants in the body-as-object condition ( $M = 12.85$ ) were older than participants in the control condition ( $M = 12.24; p < .05$ ). It is important to note, however, that there was no significant age difference between the two experimental conditions ( $p > .05$ ; body-as-process condition mean age = 12.45).

### *State Self-Esteem and Depression*

We completed four separate one-way ANOVAs to examine the effect of image exposure (i.e., body-as-object, body-as-process, and control) on the three self-esteem states (i.e., social self-esteem, performance self-esteem,

and social self-esteem) and the state of depression. Participants who completed at least 80% of the items comprising each subscale were included in the analyses. We expected that participants in the body-as-object and body-as-process conditions would have lower scores than the control condition on these scales, and that participants in the body-as-object condition would have the lowest self-esteem of all three groups; however, we found an alternative pattern of results. Means and standard deviations for the self-esteem and depression scales across conditions are presented in Table 3.

For social self-esteem, we found a significant effect for condition,  $F(2, 102) = 4.50, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .08$ . As can be seen in the first row of Table 3, participants in the body-as-process condition had higher social self-esteem than participants in the body-as-object and control conditions. As can be seen in the second row of Table 3, there was a significant effect for condition in performance self-esteem,  $F(2, 102) = 8.61, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$ , such that participants exposed to the body-as-object images had lower performance self-esteem than the other two groups. In addition, there was a significant effect for condition in appearance self-esteem,  $F(2, 102) = 3.27, p = .04, \eta^2_p = .06$ . As seen in the third row of Table 3, participants exposed to body-as-object images had lower appearance self-esteem scores than participants exposed to the body-as-process images but they did not differ from the control condition. Finally, as seen in the fourth row of Table 3, a significant effect was found for condition in depression,  $F(2, 103) = 8.26, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .06$ , such that participants in the body-as-process condition reported lower levels of depression than both the body-as-object and control conditions.<sup>2</sup>

### Behavior

To examine the hypothesis that participants would choose to receive a magazine that promoted the same body conceptualization as the condition they were assigned to, a chi-square contingency table was completed. We found no significant differences between the three conditions,  $\chi^2(2) = 4.21, p = .12, \Phi_c = .14$ . However, when we collapsed the two "body-as" conditions and compared their behavior to that of the participants in the control condition, we

found a significant difference,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.84, p = .05, \Phi_c = .19$ . As seen in Table 4, when the body is made salient (i.e., body-as-object and body-as-process conditions), participants are more likely to choose a magazine that promotes the body-as-object (60.61%;  $n = 40$ ) than when the body is not made salient (i.e., control condition; 40.54%;  $n = 15$ ).

### Ideals

We examined the ideals of the participants in two ways. First, we compared the attributes listed as the "one thing" the participants would change about themselves between the conditions. We expected that participants, when asked to list one thing they would change about themselves, would want to change a personal attribute that reflected the condition they were placed in. Two raters independently coded the participants' responses to this question into one of three categories: pertaining to a physical appearance-based quality (i.e., body-as-object; e.g., muscularity, weight, hair color), a physical performance-based quality (i.e., body-as-process; e.g., strength, sport abilities, energy), or other (e.g., personality characteristics, financial situation). Interrater agreement was 91.40%. Participants who revealed that they would change "nothing" ( $n = 12$ ) were excluded from analysis. We completed a chi-square contingency table to examine differences in responses between the conditions. Although the results should be interpreted with caution because the cell frequency of "performance-based ideals" was less than 5 (Howell, 2007), we found a marginally significant difference between the three conditions,  $\chi^2(4) = 8.71, p = .07, \Phi_c = .22$ . As can be seen in Table 5, participants in the body-as-object condition primarily chose a physical appearance-based quality (71.43%;  $n = 20$ ) to change. In comparison, participants in the body-as-process condition also wanted to change an appearance-based at-

<sup>2</sup> As a result of the significant age differences between the conditions, the analyses for state self-esteem and depression were conducted again after entering age as a covariate. This yielded similar results, with all analyses remaining significant: social self-esteem,  $F(3, 96) = 3.41, p = .02$ ; performance self-esteem,  $F(3, 96) = 6.02, p < .001$ ; appearance self-esteem,  $F(3, 96) = 2.87, p = .04$ ; depression,  $F(3, 96) = 4.72, p < .01$ .

Table 3  
*Self-Esteem Subscales and Depression Results per Condition*

	Body-as-object <i>M (SD)</i>	Body-as-process <i>M (SD)</i>	Control <i>M (SD)</i>
Social self-esteem	26.46 (4.39) <sub>a</sub>	29.19 (4.30) <sub>b</sub>	26.38 (4.76) <sub>a</sub>
Performance self-esteem	25.88 (5.00) <sub>a</sub>	29.94 (3.74) <sub>b</sub>	28.53 (3.53) <sub>b</sub>
Appearance self-esteem	21.36 (4.83) <sub>a</sub>	23.84 (3.47) <sub>b</sub>	23.21 (4.11)
Depression (state of)	9.96 (10.39) <sub>a</sub>	2.67 (3.29) <sub>b</sub>	7.72 (7.88) <sub>a</sub>

*Note.* Different subscripts denote means that are significantly different using Tukey's HSD procedure.  $p < .05$ .

tribute primarily (51.43%;  $n = 18$ ), but not to the same extent as the participants in the body-as-object condition.

We next asked participants to create a list of up to 10 attributes that describe how they would ideally like to be. Two raters independently coded the listed attributes into one of three categories: pertaining to a physical appearance-based quality (e.g., muscularity, weight, hair color), pertaining to a physical performance-based quality (e.g., strength, sports abilities, energy), or pertaining to other qualities (e.g., personality characteristics, financial situation). Interrater agreement was 94.77%. We examined only the first three attributes from the participants' list as these attributes were assumed to be the most desired qualities of the young men. We completed a chi-square contingency table to examine if there were differences in the ideal qualities the participants wanted to have that reflected the condition they were placed in. We found a marginally significant difference between the three conditions,  $\chi^2(4) = 8.37$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $\Phi_c = .11$ . As can be seen in Table 5, participants in the body-as-process condition primarily listed ideals of the "other" category (50.00%;  $n = 54$ ) as did participants in the body-as-object condition (44.55%;  $n = 45$ ). However, participants in the body-as-process

condition listed performance-based ideals secondarily (33.33%;  $n = 36$ ), whereas participants in the body-as-object condition listed physical appearance-based ideals secondarily (29.70%;  $n = 30$ ).

### Discussion

Study 2 examined the causal effects of viewing images that conceptualized the body as either object or process on male adolescents' self-evaluations, behaviors, and ideals. As expected, there were negative effects when viewing the body-as-object. Both performance and appearance self-esteem were low for adolescents assigned to the body-as-object condition. Unexpectedly, the causal effects of viewing the body-as-process were positive. These effects were unexpected because the adolescents were exposed to ideal-bodied men, and yet did not demonstrate any negative consequences to this exposure. Adolescents who viewed such images showed increased social self-esteem, and high appearance self-esteem. These adolescents also had lower levels of depression than the adolescents in the other two conditions.

Overall, the way an ideal body is conceptualized plays a role in the evaluations of male adolescents. Therefore, beyond body types (i.e., musculature and body fat), it appears body conceptualization is an important contributor to self-evaluations.

Table 4  
*Magazine Choice per Condition*

Condition	Magazine type	
	Body-as-object % ( $n$ )	Body-as-process % ( $n$ )
"Body-as"	60.61 (40)	39.39 (26)
Body-as-object	64.52 (20)	35.48 (11)
Body-as-process	57.14 (20)	42.86 (15)
Control	40.54 (15)	59.46 (22)

### General Discussion

We explored body conceptualization in the media and its effects on the adolescent male population in two studies. In Study 1, body conceptualization was operationalized so that the changes in conceptualization of men in the

Table 5  
*Ideals per Condition*

Measure and condition	Ideals		
	Appearance-based % (n)	Performance-based % (n)	Other % (n)
One attribute to change			
Body-as-object	71.43 (20)	10.71 (3)	17.86 (5)
Body-as-process	51.43 (18)	17.14 (6)	31.43 (11)
Control	34.48 (10)	24.14 (7)	41.38 (12)
Ideal attributes (N = 3)			
Body-as-object	29.70 (30)	25.74 (26)	44.55 (45)
Body-as-process	16.67 (18)	33.33 (36)	50.00 (54)
Control	16.36 (18)	37.27 (41)	46.36 (51)

media could be measured. Study 1 is unique because it showed that there have been changes in the way the body has been conceptualized in the media (i.e., more body-as-object) beyond the increases in muscularity and decreases in body fat documented by previous studies (e.g., Leit et al., 2000; Pope et al., 1999). Our results suggest that magazines with a large male readership are marketing far more than advertised products and are placing an increased focus on how a man should look.

Study 2 showed that body conceptualization is consequential for male adolescents' self-evaluations. The uniqueness of Study 2 is its demonstration that body conceptualization, and not simply body type, plays a role in how men feel about themselves and their bodies. Although we expected that exposure to ideal bodies (i.e., body-as-object and body-as-process conditions) would result in negative self-evaluations, the finding that viewing the body-as-process images had positive effects on male adolescents is particularly noteworthy. One explanation for this may be that viewing images of men engaging in various activities may distract the viewer from focusing on the physical appearance of the model. Men may be more likely to be distracted from appearance attributes because they have been traditionally socialized to focus on the instrumental abilities of their bodies (Franzoi, 1995) and may therefore process this information more readily. In contrast, when a model is presented body-as-object, there is no activity to buffer the social comparison processes for appearance, resulting in negative self-evaluations. It is also possible that viewing images of models presented body-as-object facili-

tates social comparison for appearance because of the nudity of the models.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Our findings in Study 1 compliment the research showing men in the media to be increasingly muscular and lean (Leit et al., 2000; Pope et al., 1999) by documenting changes in body conceptualization. There are, however, some limitations of Study 1. Primarily, *Sports Illustrated* is just one magazine and one type of public media. Future research examining the conceptualization of men's bodies in a variety of media such as film, TV, and additional types of print advertisements is needed to replicate and expand on the current findings. Additionally, Study 1 employed a convenience sample of *Sports Illustrated*. Due to the difficulty associated with finding vintage magazines, Study 1 did not have equal time periods nor did it include an equal number of issues per time period. Future research should attempt to locate issues that would allow for the sampling of homogeneous time periods. Additionally, although linear trends demonstrating an increase in body-as-object representation was found for some measures (i.e., nudity, use of ad item), a quadratic trend was found for others (i.e., level of activity). Future investigations may contribute to a better understanding of these trends. Finally, we created seven discrete measures to quantify body conceptualization based on an interpretation of Franzoi's (1995) "body-as-object" and "body-as-process" constructs. Future research may be able to expand or refine the current list of seven measures. For example, additional

measures might include the presence of logos on the body of the model, the flexing of muscle by the model, or the absence of body hair. Despite the limitations, Study 1 is a first step toward documenting changes in body conceptualization for male media ideals.

Study 2 is also not without limitations. First, the changes seen in the dependent measures after viewing the various stimuli images may be a momentary reaction to stimuli presentation and ultimately short-lived. Although we can certainly make assumptions concerning the long-term effects of years of exposure to media ideals, follow-up studies should make an effort to explore this empirically. Second, Study 2 included images that were preselected as representing one of the two ways to conceptualize the body and were subsequently rated by a sample of young adults. Although all images contained a male model with a mesomorphic build (e.g., high on muscularity and low on body fat), the raters perceived the body-as-object models to have a higher degree of muscularity and a lower degree of body fat than the body-as-process images. These perceptions may be due to the high level of nudity in the images of men in the body-as-object condition that would allow for more accurate estimates of muscularity and body fat. One way of controlling for perceived differences in the physiques of the models may be to use the same male model to create both the body-as-object and the body-as-process stimuli images.

Although Study 2 was the first to explore the causal relationship between body conceptualization and its effects on male adolescents, future research should aim to replicate and confirm the finding that body conceptualization plays an important role in how young men make self-evaluations. For example, one interesting direction could explore if one aspect of body conceptualization (i.e., level of nudity, eye-gaze, level of activity, level of pose, or fragmentation) is more influential in promoting the body-as-object than another. That is, because nudity may play a large role in the perception of muscularity and body fat, high levels of nudity alone may result in negative self-evaluations among male adolescents compared to low levels of nudity.

A second direction for future research would be to explore the effects of body conceptualization on various age groups. Indeed, research

shows that various age groups report substantial levels of body dissatisfaction (Ricciardelli, & McCabe, 2005; Olivardia et al., 2004; Garner, 1997; Franzoi & Koehler, 1998). Although the current study targeted individuals in early adolescence, other age groups do face similar pressures and should also be examined. Finally, an additional direction for future research would be to explore the effects of body conceptualization on the female population. Specifically, it would be interesting to determine if conceptualizing the body-as-process would have the same beneficial effects for women as seen in men since women have been traditionally socialized to focus on the ornamentality of their body (i.e., body-as-object).

### *Conclusions*

We began this investigation seeking an explanation for the rising rates of body dissatisfaction among men. Our premise was that men tend to compare themselves to the physiques of men presented in the media, and if true, then one would expect changes in media ideals that correspond to rising rates of body dissatisfaction. Although previous research showed that male media ideals are more muscular and lean than ever before (e.g., Leit et al., 2000; Pope et al., 1999), we hypothesized that it was not the physique that altered men's self-evaluations but rather the promotion of appearance (i.e., body-as-object).

Across two studies, we showed that media images of men do indeed emphasize aesthetic properties of the male body and that conceptualization style contributes to viewers' self-evaluations. Overall, these findings suggest that the processes that underlie the development of body dissatisfaction in men may be complex patterns involving upward social comparison (i.e., comparing one's self to media ideals), attention (i.e., focusing on aesthetic and/or instrumental attributes), and socialization (i.e., determining what comprises self-worth). Whereas the appearance-based plight of women has traditionally been the focus of body image research, this investigation underscores the importance of exploring the impact of media ideals on men. Further research is now needed to examine the relationship between cultural messages and body dissatisfaction and body image disorders among men.

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