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Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Gay and Heterosexual Men

The Roles of Self-Esteem, Media, and Peer Influence

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This study examines differences in body dissatisfaction among gay and heterosexual men. Specifically, media, peer influence, and self-esteem are explored as potential variables in understanding these differences. Fifty-four Caucasian heterosexual males and eighty-two Caucasian gay males between the ages of eighteen and seventy-three participated in this study. The main findings of the current study are (a) gay men reported significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men; (b) significantly more men report a desire to lose weight than to gain weight, with gay men reporting a significantly smaller ideal weight than heterosexual men; (c) the magnitude of the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction was not significantly different for gay and heterosexual men; (d) media influence was more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men; and (e) the magnitude of the relationship between weight-related peer teasing and self-esteem was stronger for gay males than for heterosexual males. Implications and directions for future research are explored.

Keywords: *body dissatisfaction; adult men; sexual orientation; sociocultural influence*

The constructs of body image and body dissatisfaction have been the focus of considerable research in the field of psychology (Pruzinsky and Cash 2002); however, much of this research has focused on women and their desire to lose weight (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2004; Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000). Recent research has highlighted the need to focus on body dissatisfaction in men (e.g., Andersen, Cohn, and Holbrook 2000; Furnham and Calnan 1998; Pope et al. 2000). In particular, Furnham and Calnan (1998) found that males were "generally dissatisfied

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with their bodies with 69 percent of the participants reporting that their present weight was different than their ideal" (p. 66). Similarly, research has found body dissatisfaction to be related to lower self-esteem (Furnham and Calnan 1998; Green and Pritchard 2003; Olivardia et al. 2004) and disordered eating in males (Keen, Fulkerson, and Leon 1997; Olivardia et al. 2004).

Although increasing evidence suggests that males are more dissatisfied with their body image than was previously thought, the nature and complexity of male body dissatisfaction is also becoming clearer. According to McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001), "researchers and clinicians have recently recognized that there has been inadequate conceptualization and assessment of body image and associated behavioral problems among males. By focusing on the same areas that concern females, many problem areas have been neglected" (p. 374). Recent research has suggested that male body image dissatisfaction is "qualitatively different" from that of females (e.g., Andersen et al. 2000; McCabe and Ricciardelli 2001; Stanford and McCabe 2002) and is not one-dimensional, as previously presumed. For example, several research studies have found that men appear to be equally divided between those who are trying to gain weight and those who wish to lose weight (Drewnowski and Yee 1987; Furnham and Calnan 1998; Silberstein et al. 1988). Indeed, in contrast to the focus on losing weight found in the female body image literature, several studies have found that men perceive the ideal body for men (held by women, and other men) to be "bulkier" than their current body form (Cohn and Adler 1992; Demarest and Allen 2000). Careful attention needs to be paid to the uniqueness of body dissatisfaction in men so that effective prevention and intervention programs can be developed.

Sexual Orientation

An area of particular importance when exploring body dissatisfaction in men, seems to be the construct of sexual orientation. A considerable amount of research has found that in comparison to heterosexual men, gay men report more body dissatisfaction (Beren et al. 1996; Morrison, Morrison, and Sager 2004; Silberstein et al. 1989; Williamson and Hartley 1998). Similarly, gay males tend to be overrepresented among males diagnosed with eating disorders (Anderson 1992; Carlat, Camargo, and Herzog 1997). In a study by Herzog, Newman, and Warshaw (1991), gay men not only reported more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men but also indicated a stronger desire to lose weight when compared to heterosexual males. Compared to heterosexual men, the gay men preferred a smaller body build and feared weight gain to a greater extent. Many heterosexual men, in contrast, desired to gain weight, reporting that weight gain would make them more attractive and closer to their ideal weight.

Why do gay men may report greater body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men? Several theorists (e.g., Atkins 1998; Levesque and Vichesky 2006) have suggested that the gay male subculture emphasizes appearance more than the heterosexual

male culture, resulting in gay men experiencing more pressure to be good looking. Indeed, research has found, in contrast to heterosexual men, gay men put more emphasis on their own physical appearance (Dillon, Copeland, and Peters 1999; Siever 1994; Silberstein et al. 1989) and tend to integrate their own appearance into their self-concepts (Silberstein et al. 1989). Several theorists have suggested that this heightened emphasis on physical appearance characteristic of the gay male subculture may be due to the desire to attract other men (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986; Siever 1994), who tend to emphasize physical appearance more than women when selecting a mate (Feingold 1990; Stroebe et al. 1971). Indeed, in an analysis of "men seeking men" personal ads, Bartholome, Tewksbury, and Bruzzone (2000) found most personal ads emphasized physical appearance. Interestingly, both Williamson and Hartley (1998) and Beren et al. (1996) found body dissatisfaction was significantly related to low self-esteem for gay men but not for heterosexual men, suggesting that physical appearance may be intertwined with gay men's self-esteem to a greater extent than heterosexual men.

Sociocultural Influences

Although the emphasis in the body image literature has been to explore the relationship between body dissatisfaction among females and the perceived pressures to conform to a thin ideal (e.g., Thompson et al. 1999), there has been limited research on the sociocultural influences on body dissatisfaction for men (McCabe and Ricciardelli 2004). Several theorists have highlighted the sociocultural pressures (e.g., media, peers) that men face to achieve a muscular ideal and the resulting body dissatisfaction among men who fail to meet this ideal (e.g., Gillett and White 1992; Mishkind et al. 1986). Mishkind et al. (1986) added that the constructed associations between the male body, masculinity, and power strengthen these pressures. In discussing the findings of a qualitative study of fourteen men regarding body dissatisfaction, Adams, Turner, and Bucks (2005) note, "for many, appearance communicated something about masculinity, particularly in relation to one's strength, prowess and genetic viability" (p. 277). Similarly, Grogan and Richards (2002) found that men described looking good as being related to feelings of power and self-confidence.

Media

The image of the male ideal as presented by the media has progressively become larger and more muscular in the past few decades (Spitzer, Henderson, and Zivian 1999). In particular, analyses of action figures (Pope et al. 1999) and *Playgirl* centerfolds (Leit, Pope, and Gray 2001) have demonstrated a greater emphasis on a larger, more muscular ideal. Hausenblas et al. (2002) suggest these images may be responsible for the rise in body dissatisfaction for males found between 1972

(15 percent for males) and 1996 (43 percent for males). According to Hausenblas et al. (2002), "this idealized standard is pervasive and unachievable for most individuals without excessive dieting, exercise, or both" (p. 569). The inability to achieve a desired weight, physique, or body shape is one of many factors leading to body dissatisfaction. Indeed, Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn (2004) found that males who were exposed to appearance-related advertisements reported significantly greater body dissatisfaction and became significantly more depressed than those who viewed neutral advertisements.

Very few studies have explored whether heterosexual and gay men respond similarly to idealized media images of male bodies. Fawkner and McMurray (2002) conducted focus groups with men on body image and found that gay men, in particular, commented that comparing themselves to idealized images of male bodies had a negative influence on their psychological state and behaviors. Duggan and McCreary (2004) found that exposure to pornographic images of men was positively correlated with social physique anxiety for gay men but not for heterosexual men. Similarly, in a large-scale study of adolescent boys and girls, Austin et al. (2004) found that in contrast to heterosexual boys, gay and bisexual boys reported making a greater effort to look like people in the media. Thus, if gay men, because of their desire to attract other men or because they exist within a gay subculture that emphasizes physical appearance, look to the images presented in the media as indications of what they should look like, then we can hypothesize that gay men might be more vulnerable to images presented in the media than heterosexual males. In other words, the media may influence gay men's body dissatisfaction to a greater extent than that of heterosexual men.

Peers

Several studies have found parental encouragement to lose weight (Ricciardelli and McCabe 2001; Stanford and McCabe 2005) and weight-related teasing from peers predict poor body image and low self-esteem among men (Eisenberg et al. 2006; Ricciardelli et al. 2006; Stanford and McCabe 2005; Vartanian, Giant, and Passino 2001). According to Vartanian et al. (2001), "appearance-related teasing was the most powerful predictor of men's overall body satisfaction" (p. 720). Previous research has made the important distinction between peer teasing and peer modeling of weight-related behaviors. For example, both Vincent and McCabe (2000) and Vartanian et al. (2001) found encouragement to lose weight or weight-related teasing predicted men's body dissatisfaction, whereas exposure to peers' expression of body dissatisfaction or modeling of weight loss behaviors did not. According to Yelland and Tiggemann (2003), gay men reported experiencing more pressure than heterosexual men to improve their physical appearance based on what other people thought or said. Beren et al. (1996) found that in contrast to heterosexual men, gay men reported more emotional distress and sensitivity related to weight-specific teasing. Gay men described being teased about their weight and general appearance

more often as children than their heterosexual counterparts. As such, it could be hypothesized that weight-related childhood teasing and appearance-related pressures from family and peers might be more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem among gay men than heterosexual men.

The Present Study

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted examining body dissatisfaction among women, the unique nature of male body image has been largely ignored. As such, the present study explored body dissatisfaction among heterosexual and gay men. Of the few studies that have been done on male body concerns and self-esteem, the impact of media and peer influence and how these may influence gay and heterosexual men differently has not been explored. This study adds to the research on male body dissatisfaction by (a) focusing on potential distinctions between gay and heterosexual men, (b) exploring the importance of the desire to gain or lose weight in understanding body dissatisfaction among men, and (c) comparing the magnitudes of the relationships among media/peer influence, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction for gay and heterosexual men. More specifically, it was hypothesized that:

1. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Beren et al. 1996; Morrison et al. 2004), gay men would report significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men.
2. Consistent with previous research (Herzog et al. 1991), significantly more gay men would report a desire to lose weight than heterosexual men.
3. Based on previous literature that found physical appearance was intertwined with gay men's self-esteem to a greater extent than heterosexual men (Beren et al. 1996; Williamson and Hartley 1998), sexual orientation would moderate the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction such that the magnitude of the relation between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction would be greater for gay men than for heterosexual men.
4. Based on previous research that found, in contrast to heterosexual men, gay men compare themselves to idealized images of male bodies (Fawkner and McMurray 2002) and make a greater effort to look like people in the media (Austin et al. 2004) and that exposure to media images is related to poor body image (Duggan and McCreary 2004; Fawkner and McMurray 2002), it was hypothesized that media influence would be more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men. In other words, it was hypothesized that sexual orientation would moderate the relationship between media influence and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem such that the magnitude of the relation between experiences of media influence and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem would be greater for gay men than for heterosexual men.

5. Based on research that found gay men reported experiencing more peer pressure than heterosexual men to improve their physical appearance (Levesque and Vichesky 2006; Yelland and Tiggemann 2003) and that this teasing leads to greater emotional distress (Beren et al. 1996), it was hypothesized that appearance-related teasing from peers and the influence of peer modeling would be more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men. In other words, it was hypothesized that sexual orientation would moderate the relationship between peer influence/teasing and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem such that the magnitude of the relation between experiences of peer influence/teasing and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem would be greater for gay men than for heterosexual men.

Method

Participants

Fifty-four Caucasian heterosexual males and eighty-two Caucasian gay males over the age of eighteen participated in this study. The men in the present study ranged in age from eighteen to seventy-three, with a mean age of 32.4 ($SD = 11.68$). The participants came from a variety of socioeconomic classes: upper-class (0.7 percent), upper-middle class (25.7 percent), middle-class (50 percent), working-class (19 percent), and lower-class (4.4 percent). Gay and heterosexual participants were not significantly different in terms of age, $t(134) = 1.65$, $p = .10$, or socioeconomic status, $\chi^2(4, N = 136) = .083$, $p = .99$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited for this study through snowball sampling via electronic mail. An announcement describing the study was sent to various student and community organizations inviting the participants to complete an Internet study. Efforts were made to vary the type of organizations solicited (e.g., academic, athletic, social) such that any potential sampling bias would be limited. The e-mail announcement also asked individuals to forward the announcement to other individuals who might be interested in participating. The e-mail announcement included a link to an online survey. On clicking the link, participants were provided with an informed consent page. Participants were informed that completing the survey indicated their consent to participate. On completion of the survey, participants received a debriefing form, which explained the purpose of the study and provided contact information for mental health resources should they have become distressed by any of the content of the material presented in the survey. To ensure anonymity, no identifying information was collected (i.e., no tracking methods were used to upload

"cookies" or do anything else that might compromise their confidentiality). In addition to the following instruments, participants were asked to provide their current and ideal weight.

Instruments

Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ). The Appearance Evaluation subscale of the MBSRQ (Cash 2000) is a seven-item self-report inventory that assesses satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance. Participants rate their agreement to each item using a Likert-type 5-point scale (1 = *definitely agree* and 5 = *definitely disagree*) in which lower scores indicate satisfaction with one's body and higher scores indicate more body dissatisfaction. Sample items include "most people would consider me good-looking" and "I like my looks just the way they are." The Appearance Evaluation subscale has demonstrated high reliability in previous research with men (alpha = .86; Cash 2000). The internal consistency estimate in the current sample was .90.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). The RSE (Rosenberg 1965/1989) is a ten-item measure of self-esteem that is rated on a four-point scale (1= *strongly agree* and 4 = *strongly disagree*), with higher scores indicating more self-esteem. Sample items include "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others" and "I feel I have a number of good qualities." This scale has been shown to have high reliability (alpha = .96; Furnham, Badmin, and Sneade 2002). The scale also exhibited high reliability in the current sample (alpha = .91). The RSE displayed test-retest reliability, with students Grades 7 to 12 having a test-retest reliability coefficient of $r = .77$ (McCarthy and Hoge 1982). The RSE was also shown to have convergent and construct validity (Hagborg 1993).

Sociocultural Factors Questionnaire (SFQ). The SFQ (Levine, Smolak, and Hayden 1994; Vartanian et al. 2001) is a forty-two-item questionnaire that was broken into three subscales: Media, Teasing, and Peer Influence. The Media subscale contains sixteen items measuring susceptibility to mass media, which participants rate on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disagree* and 5 = *agree*). Higher scores indicate a greater susceptibility to mass media. Sample items of the Media subscale include "magazine ads, pictures, articles, television programs and commercials influence my idea of a perfect body" and "I compare myself to models I see." An additional two items were used to assess media usage (i.e., "How often do you look at or read magazines?" and "How many hours a day do you watch TV?"), where participants ranked the frequency on a five-point scale. The Teasing subscale measures frequency of appearance-related teasing/criticism from family members and peers. Based on previous research that found parental messages to influence body image

differently than messages from peers (e.g., Stanford and McCabe 2005), this subscale was further divided into items measuring teasing from peers (eight items; e.g., "When you were younger, how often did these people tease you about not being muscular and/or physically fit enough?") and those assessing teasing from family (six items; e.g., "How often does your brother [or brothers] tease you about your weight or body shape?"). The Peer Influence subscale, which measures exposure to peer's own body concerns, was further separated into two subscales for the purposes of this study: items measuring exposure to same-sex peer's body concerns (four items) and items measuring exposure to other-sex peer's body concerns (four items). Sample items include "About how many of these people you know would like to be thinner?" and "How often do these people you know talk about weight, weight loss, or building muscle?" These subscales have been shown to have adequate internal consistency (alphas ranging from .73 to .85) in previous samples (Levine et al. 1994). The internal consistency estimates for the subscales in the present sample were acceptable to strong (ranging from .67 to .87), except for teasing from family members, which had an alpha of .52. In previous research, each of the three Sociocultural Factors subscales were negatively correlated with overall body satisfaction (Vartanian et al. 2001).

Sexual orientation. Participants were asked to indicate which of the following best described their sexual orientation: exclusively heterosexual, mostly heterosexual, bisexual, mostly homosexual, or exclusively homosexual. Participants were also given the opportunity to indicate their preferred identity if none of the choices available represented their identity preference. For the purposes of this study, participants who indicated they identified as exclusively heterosexual or mostly heterosexual were considered heterosexual, whereas those who identified as mostly homosexual or exclusively homosexual were considered homosexual. Because of the very small number of respondents who identified as bisexual, these participants were not included in subsequent analyses. Future research should attend to this gap in the literature.

Results

Preliminary Data Analysis

Body dissatisfaction was significantly correlated with self-esteem and teasing from peers but not significantly correlated with frequency of media use, teasing from family members, or other-sex peer influence separately for both the gay and heterosexual male subsamples. Media susceptibility and same-sex peer influence were correlated with body dissatisfaction for the gay participants but not the heterosexual participants. Correlations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for and Intercorrelations among Major Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Body dissatisfaction								
2. Self-esteem	.44***							
	.41**							
	*.51****							
3. Media frequency	.09	.12						
	–.03	**.04**						
	.12	*.20*						
4. Media influence	.26**	.20*	.16					
	–.04	**.00**	**.17**					
	*.23**	*.37****	*.14*					
5. Teasing peers	.37***	.33***	.06	*.32***				
	.29*	**.08**	**.10**	**.05**				
	.32***	*.51****	*–.01*	*.28**				
6. Teasing family	.07	.06	.18*	.14	.17			
	.03	**–.04**	**.22**	**.22**	**.29***			
	.11	*.12*	*.17*	*.17*	*.14*			
7. Same-sex peer influence	.34***	.17	.16	.60***	.52***	.04		
	.10	**.01**	**.12**	**.34***	**.49*****	**.20**		
	*.35***	*.33***	*.14*	*.57****	*.44****	*–.00*		
8. Other-sex peer influence	.10	.16	.14	.16	.20*	.19*	.48***	
	.14	**.01**	**.08**	**.21**	**.26**	**.28***	**.63*****	
	.11	*.26**	*.19*	*.22*	*.22*	*.13*	*.52****	
Mean	2.87	1.83	2.71	2.72	2.78	3.21	1.86	1.67
Standard Deviation	.90	.59	.68	.80	.67	.69	.51	.58
Range	1.14 to 4.86	1.00 to 4.00	1.00 to 4.50	1.00 to 4.75	1.00 to 4.40	1.00 to 4.75	1.00 to 4.00	1.00 to 3.17

Note: The top figure in each cell (Roman type) is for the total sample. The middle figure (bold type) is for the heterosexual subsample. The bottom figure (italic type) is for the gay subsample.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 2
Means of Major Variables for Gay ($n = 82$) and Heterosexual Subsamples ($n = 54$)

Variable	Subsample	*M*	SD	*T*
Body dissatisfaction	Gay	3.07	.91	–3.34***
	Heterosexual	2.56	.79	
Self-esteem	Gay	1.82	.57	0.34
	Heterosexual	1.86	.61	
Media frequency	Gay	2.77	.63	–1.16
	Heterosexual	2.63	.75	
Media influence	Gay	3.04	.73	–6.37***
	Heterosexual	2.22	.63	
Teasing peers	Gay	1.95	.52	–2.44*
	Heterosexual	1.73	.48	
Teasing family	Gay	1.70	.60	0.44
	Heterosexual	1.65	.56	
Same-sex peer influence	Gay	3.03	.61	-5.80***
	Heterosexual	2.41	.59	
Other-sex peer influence	Gay	3.18	.72	0.58
	Heterosexual	3.25	.65	

Note: $df = 134$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Hypothesis 1: Sexual Orientation and Body Dissatisfaction

To explore whether the gay and heterosexual subsamples differed in reports of body dissatisfaction, an independent-samples *t* test was conducted to compare mean scores on appearance evaluation for gay and heterosexual men. As predicted, gay men reported significantly more appearance evaluation dissatisfaction ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.91$) than heterosexual men ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.79$), $t(134) = –3.34$, $p = .001$) (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 2: Sexual Orientation and Ideal vs. Current Weight

Sixteen percent of the participants reported they wanted to gain weight, whereas 77 percent reported they would like to lose weight. When comparing heterosexual and gay men, 20 percent of heterosexual men wanted to gain weight and 72 percent wanted to lose weight compared to 13 percent of gay men who wanted to gain weight and 79 percent who wanted to lose weight. Although more gay men reported wanting to lose weight than heterosexual men (79 percent compared to 72 percent, respectively) and more heterosexual men reported wanting to gain weight than gay men (20 percent compared to 14 percent), these results do not indicate significant

differences between gay and heterosexual men, χ^2 (2, N = 136) = 1.26, p = .532. Interestingly, self-esteem was significantly correlated with body dissatisfaction only for those men who reported a desire to lose weight (r = –.49, p < .000) but not for men who reported a desire to gain weight (r = –.04, p = .85).

Hypothesis 3: Self-Esteem and Body Dissatisfaction

Hypothesis 3 stated that sexual orientation would moderate the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction such that the magnitude of the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction would be greater for gay men than for heterosexual men. This prediction was tested using a hierarchical moderated regression, as recommended by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004). The moderator variable, sexual orientation, was dummy coded (West, Aiken, and Krull 1996), and the scores on the self-esteem and body dissatisfaction measures were standardized (i.e., z scores were calculated such that the mean score on each measure was equal to 0 and standard deviation was equal to 1).

The criterion variable was scores on the RSE. The predictor variable (scores on the Appearance Evaluation subscale of the MBSRQ) was entered at Step 1. Sexual orientation, the dummy-coded potential moderator variable, was entered as the predictor at Step 2. Finally, at Step 3, the predictor was an interaction (product) term of the variables in Steps 1 and 2. A statistically significant increment in R^2 at Step 3 would provide evidence of a moderator effect (Baron and Kenny 1986). Contrary to what was hypothesized, the moderated regression analyses did not show a significant interaction between body dissatisfaction and sexual orientation in predicting self-esteem (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 4: Media, Body Dissatisfaction, and Self-Esteem

Independent samples t test indicate that gay men reported significantly more media influence than heterosexual men (see Table 2). To test the hypothesis that media influence would be more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men, a series of hierarchical moderated regressions were conducted. The moderator variable, sexual orientation, was dummy coded, and the scores on the media, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction measures were standardized. In the first regression, the criterion variable was scores on the RSE. In the second regression, the criterion variable was scores on the Appearance Evaluation subscale of the MBSRQ. The frequency to which the participants reported consuming media was entered at Step 1 as a covariate. The predictor variable in each of the regressions, entered at Step 2, were the scores on the Appearance Evaluation subscale of the MBSRQ. Sexual orientation, the dummy-coded potential moderator variable, was entered as the predictor at Step 3. Finally, at Step 4, the predictor was an interaction (product) term of the variables in Steps 1 and 2.

Table 3
Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem (SE) from Body Dissatisfaction (BD) and Sexual Orientation (SO)

	Criterion: SE				
Step and Predictor	β	cum. R^2	adj. R^2	R^2_{inc}	F_{inc}
1 BD	.44***	.19	.19	.19	31.95***
2 SO	.48***	.22	.21	.03	4.18*
3 SO * BD	.01	.22	.20	.00	0.001
	Overall $F(3,133) = 12.21$***				

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Consistent with what was hypothesized, after controlling for media use, sexual orientation significantly moderated the relationship between media and self-esteem as well as media and body dissatisfaction, such that the relationship between media and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem was significantly stronger for gay men than it was for heterosexual men (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 5: Teasing, Peer Influence, Body Dissatisfaction and Self-Esteem

Independent samples *t* test indicated that gay men reported significantly more weight-related teasing by peers and same-sex peer influence than heterosexual men (see Table 2). To test the hypothesis that weight-related teasing and peer influence would be more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men, a series of hierarchical moderated regressions were conducted. The moderator variable, sexual orientation, was dummy coded, and the scores on the teasing, peer influence, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction measures were standardized. In the first set of regressions, the criterion variable was scores on the RSE. In the second set of regressions, the criterion variable was scores on the Appearance Evaluation subscale of the MBSRQ. The predictor variable in each of the regressions, entered at Step 2, was the scores on either the Appearance-Related Teasing from Peers subscale, the Same-Sex Peer Influence subscale, or the Other-Sex Peer Influence subscale of the SFQ. Given the lack of significant correlations between appearance-related teasing from family for both gay and heterosexual subsamples, this subscale was not included in the following analyses. Sexual orientation, the dummy-coded potential moderator variable, was entered as the predictor at Step 3. Finally, at Step 4, the predictor was an interaction (product) term of the variables in Steps 1 and 2 (see Table 5).

Table 4
Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem (SE) and Body Dissatisfaction (BD) from Media Susceptibility (MS) and Sexual Orientation (SO), Controlling for Media Use

	Criterion: SE					Criterion: BD				
Step and Predictor	β	cum. R^2	adj. R^2	R^2_{inc}	F_{inc}	β	cum. R^2	adj. R^2	R^2_{inc}	F_{inc}
1. Media use	.21*	.05	.04	.05	5.59*	.07	.01	.00	.01	0.61
2. MS	.17	.07	.06	.03	3.63	.25**	.07	.05	.06	7.76**
3. SO	–.13	.09	.06	.01	1.74	.19	.09	.07	.03	3.33
4. MS * SO	.45***	.28	.25	.19	30.48***	.95***	.93	.93	.84	1,411.92***
	Overall F (4,135) = 11.10***					Overall F (4,135) = 391.52***				

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 5
Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analyses Predicting Self-Esteem and Body Dissatisfaction from Appearance-Related Teasing, Peer Influence, and Sexual Orientation (SO)

	Criterion: Self-Esteem					Criterion: Body Dissatisfaction				
Step and Predictor	β	cum. R^2	adj. R^2	R^2_{inc}	F_{inc}	β	cum. R^2	adj. R^2	R^2_{inc}	F_{inc}
1. Peer tease	.37***	.11	.10	.11	15.47***	.37***	.13	.13	.13	20.18***
2. SO	–.12	.12	.11	.01	1.84	.19*	.17	.15	.03	4.92*
3. SO * PT	.66*	.15	.13	.03	4.41*	.03	.17	.15	.00	0.01
		Overall F (3,135) = 7.43***					Overall F (3,135) = 8.51***			
1. Peer-same	.17	.03	.02	.03	3.78	.34***	.12	.11	.12	17.89***
2. SO	–.13	.04	.03	.01	1.81	.15	.14	.12	.02	2.73
3. SO * PS	.58	.06	.04	.02	3.25	.47	.15	.13	.02	2.40
		Overall F (3,135) = 2.99*					Overall F (3,135) = 7.83***			
1. Peer-other	0.16	.03	.02	.03	3.63	1.0	.01	.00	.01	1.44
2. SO	–0.01	.03	.01	.00	0.02	0.28***	.09	.07	.08	10.83***
3. SO * PO	3.96	.04	.02	.01	1.64	–0.04	.09	.07	.00	0.02
		Overall F (3,135) = 1.76					Overall F (3,135) = 4.10**			

Note: SO = sexual orientation; PT = appearance-related teasing from peers; PS = same-sex peer influence; PO = other-sex peer influence.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Contrary to what was hypothesized, the only regression that showed a significant interaction was peer teasing and self-esteem. In other words, the relationship between weight-related peer teasing and self-esteem was significantly stronger for the gay male participants than for the heterosexual male participants. However, sexual orientation did not significantly moderate the relationship between same-sex peer influence or other-sex peer influence and self-esteem or body dissatisfaction, nor did sexual orientation moderate the relationship between peer-teasing and body dissatisfaction.

Discussion

Recent research has highlighted the need to focus on the unique experience of body dissatisfaction in men (e.g., Andersen et al. 2000; Furnham and Calnan 1998; Pope et al. 2000). The current study adds to this research by focusing on potential distinctions between gay and heterosexual men and by exploring the relationships between media, peer influence, teasing, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction for gay and heterosexual men.

The main findings of the current study were (a) gay men reported significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men; (b) significantly more men reported a desire to lose weight than to gain weight, however gay and heterosexual men were not significantly different in their desire to gain or lose weight; (c) body dissatisfaction was significantly correlated with weight-related teasing from peers, media susceptibility, and same-sex peer influence for gay men, whereas only weight-related teasing from peers was significantly correlated with body dissatisfaction for heterosexual men; (d) contrary to what was hypothesized, the magnitude of the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction was not significantly different for the gay and heterosexual subsamples; (e) media influence was more strongly related to body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for gay men than for heterosexual men; and (f) the magnitude of the relationship between weight-related peer teasing and self-esteem was stronger for gay males than for heterosexual males.

Body Dissatisfaction among Men

Compared to previous research (Furnham and Calnan 1998), which found that 69 percent of men reported that their current weight was different than their ideal, more than 90 percent of the current sample reported a desire to either gain or lose weight. Interestingly, in contrast to previous research that found men equally divided between wanting to gain versus lose weight (e.g., Drewnowski and Yee 1987; Furnham and Calnan 1998; Silberstein et al. 1989), the majority of the participants in the current study reported a desire to lose weight (77 percent) rather than gain weight (16 percent). This finding is also in contrast to research that suggests most men see the ideal male body to be “bulkier” than their current form (Cohn and Adler 1992; Demarest and Allen 2000).

It is possible that the mixed findings described previously are confounded by the construct of muscularity. According to Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn (2004), "males are subjected to a *culture of muscularity"* (p. 8) with the ideal prototype of the male body as portrayed by the media becoming progressively more muscular over the past few decades (Leit et al. 2001; Pope et al. 1999). A growing body of literature on men's body image has emphasized the importance of assessing muscularity when researching men's body dissatisfaction (e.g., Cafri and Thompson 2004; Olivardia et al. 2004; Ridgeway and Tylka 2005). Traditionally, it has been assumed that working toward this more muscular figure involved gaining weight; however, it is equally as possible that men who indicate a desire to lose weight might be striving for a more trim, "cut," muscular figure. As Ridegeway and Tylka (2005) speculate, "men could perceive that a low percentage of body fat could help them display their muscle mass" (p. 210). Ridgeway and Tylka (2005), indeed, found that men tended to discuss muscularity and leanness in conjunction with each other. Further research needs to be done to elucidate these potential distinctions.

Although the desire to gain or lose weight does not necessarily indicate body dissatisfaction due to individual differences in the level of concern ascribed to one's weight, post hoc analyses indicate that the further from their ideal a person a reported being, the more body dissatisfaction they reported ($r = .57$, $p < .000$) and that those who want to lose weight report significantly more body dissatisfaction ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.90$) than those who want to gain weight ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .60$), $t(134) = 3.48$, $p = .001$. Interestingly, self-esteem was significantly correlated with body dissatisfaction only for those men who reported a desire to lose weight but not for men who reported a desire to gain weight. These results suggest that men who see themselves as being over their ideal weight experience greater body dissatisfaction than those who see themselves as being under their ideal weight and that this is related to poorer self-esteem for those who see themselves as overweight. Similarly, in contrast to previous research that has found the bigger men were, the higher their self-esteem (Tiggemann 1994), post hoc analyses indicate that this was not the case for the current sample ($r = .13$, $p = .12$). Again, it is important for future research to include an assessment of muscularity when exploring the relationship between weight gain/loss, body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem.

Sexual Orientation, Body Dissatisfaction, and Self-Esteem

Although both gay men and heterosexual men were equally likely to report that their ideal weight was less than their current weight, post hoc analyses indicate that gay men reported a significantly smaller ideal weight ($M = 168.68$, $SD = 24.29$) than heterosexual men ($M = 180.57$, $SD = 28.25$), $t(134) = 2.61$, $p = .01$, supporting previous research that found gay men value a more slender body than heterosexual men (Herzog et al. 1991). Further research is needed to determine whether this slender ideal represents a difference in a preference for a more lean, muscular body (versus a more bulky, muscular body) or if the ideal is simply focused on weight.

Consistent with the preponderance of previous research (e.g., Beren et al. 1996; Morrison et al. 2004), gay men reported significantly more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men. Yet in contrast to previous research (Beren et al. 1996; Williamson and Hartley 1998), the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem was not significantly different for gay and heterosexual males. Thus, gay men are more likely than heterosexual men to report body dissatisfaction; however, when men are dissatisfied with their bodies, it affects their self-esteem regardless of their sexual orientation.

It is possible that these findings are indicative of trend, in the midst of changing roles for men, where physical appearance is becoming more important in men's self-esteem (Pope et al. 2000). Much of the previous research that documented an increased emphasis on physical appearance among gay men was conducted more than a decade ago (e.g., Hatfield and Sprecher 1986; Siever 1994; Silberstein et al. 1989), with more recent research finding heterosexual men discussing looking good as it connects with masculinity, feeling powerful and self-confident (Adams et al. 2005; Grogan and Richards 2002). Similarly, in a recent study of adolescent boy's body image, Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006) found that boys perceived body image to be a "feminine" or "gay" issue, suggesting that the body image of heterosexual men may indeed be related to their self-esteem but that men may resist directly admitting such an association for fear of being considered feminine or gay.

Sociocultural Influences

Media. Although reported frequency of media use was not significantly different for gay and heterosexual men, gay men reported a greater susceptibility to mass media representations than heterosexual men. In other words, gay men seem to be assigning a greater importance to media in determining their own sense of self and physical attractiveness than heterosexual men. This finding supports previous qualitative research in which gay men stated that they compare themselves to idealized images of male bodies (Fawkner and McMurray 2002) and make a greater effort to look like people in the media (Austin et al. 2004).

Similarly, gay men who reported being more influenced by mass media representations were also more likely to report negative feelings about their own appearances and poorer self-esteem. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004) suggested that "in order for [the images presented in the media] to impact body dissatisfaction among men, the forms that they represent need to be internalized" (p. 682). In other words, viewing media is not enough to create body dissatisfaction in men; men must also internalize the value of these images as important to their own self-concept. It is important to note that this relationship between media influence, body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem was significantly stronger for gay men than for heterosexual men, suggesting that media influence (but not necessarily frequency of use) is

integral to understanding the higher rates of body dissatisfaction and poor self-esteem of gay men. Future research may want to explore the relationship between type of media consumed and body dissatisfaction/self-esteem. For example, Duggan and McCreary (2004) found that gay men reported significantly more consumption of pornographic images (magazines, videos, Internet images) than heterosexual men. It is possible that gay men are more likely to look at these images as a way of gauging what they must look like to be attractive to other men, thus letting these images influence their satisfaction with their bodies and self-esteem to a greater extent.

Peers. In contrast to Stanford and McCabe's (2005) research with adolescent boys, weight-related teasing from family was not significantly related to body dissatisfaction for either the heterosexual and gay participants; however, weight-related teasing from peers was significantly related to body dissatisfaction for gay and heterosexual men. This finding is consistent with Vartanian et al. (2001), who found appearance-related teasing to be "the most powerful predictor of men's overall body satisfaction" (p. 720). It is possible that teasing from peers and family play different roles over the developmental course.

Consistent with previous research (Beren et al. 1996; Yelland and Tiggemann 2003), gay men reported significantly more weight-related teasing from peers and more exposure to same-sex peer's body concerns than heterosexual men. Although the relationship between weight-related teasing and body dissatisfaction was similar for heterosexual and gay men, the relationship between weight-related teasing from peers and self-esteem was stronger for gay men than for heterosexual men. These findings suggest that weight-related teasing has a greater impact on gay men's general self-esteem than it does for heterosexual men. Pope et al. (2000) suggest that gay men who have suffered teasing from peers about their lack of a muscular body may interpret this as a questioning of their masculinity or a statement that they are not seen as "real men." Thus, future research should explore the nature of peer weight-related teasing experienced by gay men as it relates to their self-esteem. It is also interesting to note that in contrast to previous research with heterosexual samples (e.g., Vartanian et al. 2001; Vincent and McCabe 2000), exposure to peers' expression of body dissatisfaction was related to gay men's own body dissatisfaction (consistent with previous research, this was not found for heterosexual men). This finding underscores the importance of exploring the unique experience of body dissatisfaction in gay men.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Because much of the literature on sociocultural influences on gay and heterosexual men's body dissatisfaction and self-esteem is preliminary, further research needs to be conducted using more diverse samples, instrumentation, and/or methodologies. In particular, future research needs to include an assessment of muscularity,

in addition to questions about weight, when asking men about their ideal and current body forms. The current study measured desire to gain or lose weight by asking participants to report their current weight and their ideal weight. However, it seems possible that it is not weight that matters specifically but how bulky, muscular, or toned individuals perceive their bodies. Tylka, Bergeron, and Schwartz (2005) have recently developed a measure that looks promising in its ability to assess men's body attitudes in terms of muscularity, thinness, and height.

Participants in the current study were restricted to Caucasian males and were primarily middle-class college students. Future research should incorporate more diverse populations in terms of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Future research should also explore potential age differences in men's body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Preliminary research (e.g., Fawkner and McMurray 2002) suggests that as men get older, their "standards for body evaluation and body dissatisfaction diminish" (p. 155). Thus, future research should sample from more community sources rather than relying primarily on student populations.

Similarly, it would be interesting for future research on body dissatisfaction in gay men to assess internalized homonegativity, or comfort with one's own sexual orientation, as it may relate to the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. In particular, in contrast to the current findings, Williamson and Hartley (1998) found a stronger association between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction for gay men than for heterosexual men. They proposed that this association might be the result of an interaction between internalized homonegativity and a gay male subculture that emphasizes appearance and thinness. It is possible that the current finding that self-esteem and body dissatisfaction were not more strongly related for gay men than heterosexual men reflects a more integrated sense of self in regard to sexual orientation among the gay men in comparison to Williamson and Hartley's sample, in part because of a slightly older sample (mean age of the current study was 32.4, compared with Williamson and Hartley's 19.5).

In terms of sampling, a significant portion of the participants for the current study were solicited through e-mail and participated in completing the survey online. Although this method of data collection may reach a more diverse subsample of gay men, including those who may still be closeted, further research is needed in comparing the results of online data collection methods with results of other methods of data collection.

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