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Embodying Man: A Phenomenological Study of Body Image and Its Relationship to Masculinity

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EMBODYING MAN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF

BODY IMAGE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MASCULINITY

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

_____

by

D'Andre Coats

May 2015

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
_____

MASTER'S THESIS
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This is to certify that the Thesis of

D'Andre Jovon Coats

entitled

Embodying Man: A Phenomenological Study of Body Image
and Its Relationship to Masculinity

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

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Abstract

Many factors correlate with positive and negative body image issues in American culture today. Both men and women have a potential to struggle with negative and positive views of their bodies. However, body dissatisfaction has become commonly mistaken as an issue only impacting women. The present study sought to understand male body image and how it connects to a man's view of his masculinity. The phenomenological study took place at a small, faith-based, residential campus in the Midwest and examined the experiences of eight male students at this institution. All participants mentioned family members as integral factors in helping them construct personal views of body image and mentioned their body types as indicators of perceived masculinity.

Acknowledgements

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Psalms 127:1…

Many words of thanks and appreciation go to so many people as a result of me finishing this project. First, I am thankful to the Lord for "Building the house" and being provider during this process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

*Why do modern men need to learn about masculinity? Don't we already have it
covered? Aren't we already tuned in, turned on and aligned with truth
in every way that matters? If my own life experience is anything
to go by, the answer is definitely no.* (Skjellum, 2014, para. 3)

Overview

Manhood today encompasses many things. Much of what living as a man entails

has to do with societal mandates. "The changes in society's attitudes toward men's

bodies, along with the changes in men's behaviors regarding their appearance, have

prompted us to examine the role of body image in men's lives" (Mishkind, Rodin,

Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 2001, p. 104). What a man should do, how he should

look, and the things that interest him represent several questions that need examination

when trying to understand masculinity. Much work already has created an understanding

of what manhood in this culture entails (Connell, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2010; Kimmel,

1987, 2008). Research asserts men develop their understandings of manliness from their

surroundings and cultural influencers, such as how men think, what types of jobs they

have, how many girls they sleep with, how much they can drink, and how their bodies

look (Capraro, 2000; Kimmel, 2008). Body image functions as a major factor in men's

perceptions of their own masculinity. In light of these perceptions, the following

question becomes relevant: "What is the standard for male body image?"

Relevance of the Research Topic

Many factors correlate with positive and negative body image issues in American culture today. Both men and women have a potential to struggle with negative and positive views of their bodies. However, body dissatisfaction has become commonly mistaken as an issue only impacting women. Burlew and Shurts (2013) reported, "Historically, issues with body image were usually associated with women" (p. 428). Despite this historic trend, the struggle with body image also has become a male issue in today's culture. Still, because men and women often experience body satisfaction or dissatisfaction differently, analyzing the cause of negative body image in men necessitates a different approach. As the present study focused on male body image, one must understand male body image as a component of men's view of masculinity.

Discussions regarding masculinity often rely heavily on gender norms and stereotypes. Research indicates men and women construct these stereotypes based on strongly held but constantly shifting cultural conditions (Courtenay, 2000). Many factors dictate the definition of masculinity. Because of the previously noted gender norms and stereotypes, which skew views of masculinity, undoubtedly some men might succumb to unhealthy societal pressures. Conversely, some research claims men and boys do not remain passive victims when it comes to their understanding of gender. Rather, research holds they actively construct and reconstruct their views of the dominant norms of masculinity. Men in society today constantly try to figure out how to live up to their gender ideal. Yet, at the same time, men fail because they receive instruction in incorrect ways (Kimmel, 2008). As one outcome of this situation, some men live in a prolonged stage of adolescence and do not feel concerned with the demands and responsibilities of

life. Kimmel (2008) deemed this place "Guyland" and described it as a stage of life between adolescence and adulthood that often spans a decade or more. Kimmel also asserted, "Young men shirk the responsibilities of adulthood and remain fixated on the trappings of boyhood, while the boys they still are struggle heroically to prove that they are real men despite all evidence to the contrary" (p. 4). Consequently, men today need to understand how to view and express masculinity in healthy ways.

Research on male body image (Grogan, 2010; Rasberry, 2008; Wykes & Gunter, 2005), masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2005; Harris, 1995; Kimmel, 2008) and the connection between the two (Hatoum & Belle, 2004; Kimmel, 1987) does exist. The present study further investigated the interconnection of these concepts by identifying how male students at a small, faith-based, residential college in the Midwest conceptualize and connect their personal ideals of body image and masculinity. Specifically, the study identified how male students construct and understand body image and masculinity.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- How do male college students construct a personal view of body image?

- How is a college male's personal view of body image related to their understanding of masculinity?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of the literature provides a broad outlook on the various aspects of

male body image such as comparison, muscle dysmorphia, media influence, and self-

esteem. This literature review also sheds light on various aspects of masculinity, such as

gender identity development, promiscuity, alcoholism, athletics, and media. Finally, the

literature review highlights the connection between body image and masculinity.

Male Body Image

According to the National Eating Disorders Association (n.d.), body image

encompasses beliefs, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about one's body. These

perceptions could become negative, which means one might have a distorted view of

one's body. If the bodily perception remains positive, there exists a higher likelihood of

more confidence and pride. Within body image, various factors determine whether a

positive or negative perception will exist. The most significant factors involve

comparison, muscularity, media influences, and/or self-esteem.

Comparison. In American culture, many societal ideals help establish what

seems "good" or "bad," "attractive" or "unattractive." This pressure appears especially

strong in establishing what Americans should look like. Based on a 1997 survey,

Rasberry (2008) found body dissatisfaction does not entirely link to a desire for health.

In that survey, 15% of women and 11% of men reported they would trade about 5 years

of their lives to reach the weight they desire (p. 424). Wykes and Gunter (2005) argued men less often make social comparisons with other men than women who make similar social comparisons with other women, although both male and female body esteem goes down after viewing models or people of the same gender (Grogan & Williams, 1996).

Although the current study explicitly dealt with traditional college-aged men, significant data alludes to the notion that social comparison may start in early adolescence. Seemingly, boys as early as 8 years old make explicit comparisons to their peers (Grogan & Richards, 2002). "Adolescent boys do engage in social comparison in relation to their bodies; this is associated with negative body image and related behaviors" (Grogan, 2010, p. 761). Various negative impacts of appearance comparisons among males also exist.

Boroughs, Krawczyk, and Thompson (2010) found, "Appearance comparison was one of the strongest predictors of body dysmorphic disorder symptoms, suggesting that men need to be discouraged from making these kinds of comparisons" (p. 761). Men should express caution when comparing themselves to other men, as comparison might, unbeknownst to them, foster unwanted physical effects as well as unhealthy views of themselves. Karazsia and Crowther (2010) suggested men comparing themselves to other men with "ideal body types" often feel dissatisfaction with their own bodies because they internalize what they should look like. This thought affirmed the following assertion made by Grogan (2010): "Overall, the research suggests that adult men may learn about their body ideals through evaluating the bodies of other men" (p. 761). Men may not worry just about achieving cultural ideals for their own satisfaction but also for those other men around them.

The ways in which a man's community perceives body image has a major impact on how that man might view his own body. Therefore, society determines the preferred body image for men, which ultimately proves unattainable for most men and might negatively impact their psychological well-being (Ricciardelli & Clow, 2009). These authors reported judgment from others as one of the negative psychological implications of body dysmorphic disorders (discussed in an upcoming section). One consequence of failing to reach the perceived ideal body image comes as teasing and pressures from peers, especially toward those significantly under or overweight.

Muscularity/Muscle dysmorphia. Along with the aspect of comparison, many men have a desire to have a muscular physique and evaluate their bodies based on their muscle mass or build. Morrison, Morrison, and Hopkins (2003) defined muscularity as the desire to achieve an idealized muscular body type. Even though men have usually shown higher levels of body satisfaction than women in the past, society presents men with a more muscular and unattainable masculine ideal body image (Pope, Oliviardia, Gruber, and Borowiecki, 2000). In order to feel more "manly," men want to appear more muscular; they do not want to look weak. According to Olivardia (2001),

 For men today, muscles –literally-make the man. Although fear of looking like a

'97-pound weakling' is not new, men in the new millennium are becoming

obsessed with their body image in higher number than ever before and in ways

different than from those seen in women. (p. 254)

Increasingly unattainable body proportions presented to men appear responsible for the fact that the ideals have grown more muscular over the years (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001).

Just as women have become subjected to unrealistic standards of thinness, men have become increasingly exposed to largely unattainable standards of muscularity.

The growing trend of the muscular ideal proves unsurprising in light of popular culture idealized portrayals of manhood in toys, advertisements, motion pictures, and music videos (Rohlinger, 2002). As men try to fit the muscular ideal, they become vulnerable to certain complications and risks, such as muscle dysmorphia or MD. Muscle dysmorphia refers to a preoccupation of one's appearance and an extreme distress or anxiety that accompanies those preoccupations (Maida & Armstrong, 2005). Notably, not all men who lift weights and exercise regularly struggle with MD.

However, if men display symptoms of obsession with muscularity, some authors suggested they might struggle with MD (Maida & Armstrong, 2005). Muscle dysmorphia involves a disturbance in body image similar to symptoms of people experiencing anorexia. However, people with anorexia tend to see themselves as fatter than in reality, and those with MD see themselves as smaller or weaker than others might see them (Olivardia, 2001). "Many men with muscle dysmorphia sport very well-defined physiques and have a low percentage of body fat. They may recognize other men are muscular but think they are not, despite similar body dimensions" (p. 254). A muscular ideal not only affects men's social interaction and mental wellbeing but also presents potential health and or medical risks.

Media influences. Similar to the influence of social comparison, mass media has the potential to impact body image in critical ways. "Contemporary American culture heavily emphasizes the human body and its appearance" (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008, p. 279). Especially in television ads, movies, and promotions, today's media tends

to endorse a certain ideal men need to strive towards. According to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli (1994), consistent media representations aid in constructing false representations of reality and over time, and viewers may come to accept these representations as reality. Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn (2004) found media images, such as television ads of the ideal male body depicted as lean and muscular, might have negative effects on body satisfaction and mood.

Media impacts much of the culture today, as evidenced in the study by Schooler and Ward (2006), which found frequent viewers of music videos and prime-time TV feel significantly less comfortable with their real bodies and things like sweat and body hair. However, they also state the prevalence of heavier male characters in shows on television aid in opportunities for more positive comparisons and promote less pressure on body ideals. Media comparisons among men might seem evident; however, some men have become so desensitized to media's effects they do not view it as even slightly influential.

Another aspect impacting how males view their bodies comes with the images portrayed in action figures and other toys. Although most people think of media in technological terms, thinking of the effects various types of media has on men in this culture (i.e. action figures) can prove helpful. The ideals of G.I. Joe and Barbie society tries to make people emulate do not appear biologically attainable for most people. "If Barbie were life-sized, she'd be at 76% of a healthy body weight – a weight consistent with acute hospitalization. And GI Joe would have biceps almost as big as his waist, and bigger than most competitive body-builders!" (Brown University, n.d., para. 2). These examples highlight the unrealistic expectations for body type for both males and females. Barlett et al. (2005) discovered handling highly muscular action figures negatively affects

how a man might feel about his body. Multi-faceted aspects of media have a major impact on male body image; men must become aware of this trend and realize the implications of media in their lives.

Self esteem. Ricciardelli and Clow (2009) found, "Men with lower self-confidence were more likely than men with higher self-confidence to feel that others considered them lazy because of their appearance" (p. 127). The same study found men with lower self-esteem think their appearance decreased their self-confidence. Bombardment with these ideals may lead men to see their own current physical appearance as insufficient. Men today feel less confident about their bodies; therefore, excessive attention focuses on male bodies in the form of weight lifting, exercising, and dieting (Johnston, 2001). Ironically, as already mentioned, these things in excess often lead to muscle dysmorphia and other complications.

Summary of male body image. Many internal and external pressures exist for men to have a certain body type. From early ages, men feel compelled to look a certain way. Body self-perception, dissatisfaction with one's body, internalized ideal body image, perfectionism, low self-esteem, and media pressures significantly impact how men develop or deconstruct body image. Many ideals men strive for come from external factors. Men with negative body image feel they need a certain ideal to feel validated in their gender or to feel that they exude the proper masculine qualities society commands.

Masculinity

A great deal of research addresses masculinity and various aspects of this topic: social learning theory, gender identity development, relevant themes of masculinity, and other pertinent information regarding masculinity.

Social learning theory. Various studies explore how masculinity develops. Bem (1981, 1983) claimed children in the developmental stages learn the cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness through autonomy, family, and work roles various members of their community display. Bandura (1977) delved more into the development of behavior and social learning theory when stating, "Except for elementary reflexes, people are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behavior. They must learn them" (p. 16). Bandura's theory indicates that men behave or act like men "should" based on learned or observed behavior. Bandura also found types of behavior, whether positive or negative, form from response consequences and their functions, such as informative, motivational, and reinforcing functions. In other words, men's actions, motives for the actions, and results of the actions impact how men respond to environments and circumstances.

Men's observation of other men serves as a significant method to experience masculine identity. "The capacity to learn by observation enables people to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information exhibited and authored by others" (Bandura, 1986, p. 47). Additionally, imitation offers a major factor in how men learn masculinity. Some studies showed children readily acquire sex-appropriate responses from imitating their parents and the various tasks parents perform (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Because of this process occurring at early ages, men and women alike become conditioned to behave in certain ways.

Gender identity development. Gender refers to the "culturally shaped expression of sexual differences: the masculine way in which men should behave and the feminine way in which women should behave" (Blackburn, 2005, p. 148). Because gender stereotypes become perpetuated throughout various environments, children, adolescents,

and adults easily conform to ones in which they think correct. From an early age, most men feel, by way of observation or explicit direction, encouraged to "do what men do" and "act like a man and not a woman." Kimmel (1987) stated, "Masculinity is constructed in part by differentiating it from femininity" (p. 16).

As already mentioned, aspects of gender become embedded in children through observation and imitation. They also come from interactions with adults, other children, and their general environments. Along with observation and imitation, gender schemas or networks of the characteristics associated with males and females, form in infancy (Serbin, Powlishta, Gulko, Martin, & Lockheed, 1993). Children can distinguish, categorize, and make assumptions based on gender from early on. Serbin et al. (1993) referred to this categorization as gender schematic reasoning. Harper and Harris (2010) affirmed this finding, asserting young boys learn rewards come from performing in masculine ways and shame and possibly alienation from violating these expectations.

Seemingly, a man's sense of male gender identity stems from various predominate social constructs to which he becomes exposed. Thus, social settings and social cues serve as major factors in how masculine males perceive themselves.

Masculinity defined. Many people and studies have attempted to define and prescribe a solid definition for masculinity. However, many hold several definitions for masculinity. The present study used Merriam-Webster's dictionary definition of masculine: "having qualities appropriate to or usually associated with a man" (Merriam-Webster, 2015, para. 1b). Although using this definition, the study did not intend to assume this definition as exhaustive or ultimate—simply an iteration of the term. The current study recognized masculinity as a social construction and also as an idea subject

to change (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005), which means other factors contribute to defining such a term.

Masculinity presented as a social construct has become more common. Men do not, at birth, express masculinity as their community dictates; rather they learn through social cues and expectations that are reinforced throughout their entire lives (Harper & Harris, 2010,). Generally, these expectations that men face appear strict and demand adherence followed if men desire others to view them as masculine. The consequences for not living up to these expectations typically entail shame, alienation, or reprimands. Pompper (2010) also presented masculinity as a concept evolved over time.

Assessment of a man's degree of masculinity commonly involves evaluating his strength and skill to make certain claims on masculinity. Ricciardelli and Clow (2009) claimed society demands from an early age that boys participate in sports and should show skill, athleticism, and strength, which ultimately help them succeed in work, sexuality, and fatherhood. Some dimensions of masculinity mix with the psychological and social dynamics of masculinity and sometimes imply men cannot actually live up to their gendered expectations (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Chesebro and Fuse (2001) stated, "From a communication perspective, masculinity is the study of the discourses and the effects of the discourses generated by men, unifying men, and revealing the identity and characteristics men ascribe to themselves, others, and their environment" (p. 203). The communities and surroundings in which men belong appear to heavily influence the idea of what masculinity should entail.

According to Harris (1995), all boys are born with capabilities of becoming someone like Charles Manson or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the fulfillment of this

potential might all depend on the amount of love and nourishment—or lack thereof—that they receive. The various predispositions mixed with what examples they see, create a trajectory, which defines their growth. Harris (1995) stated, "Surrounded with expectations about how they, as men, ought to behave, boys have to sift through various demands placed upon them by their culture, their associates, their teachers, their friends, and their family to construct their own gender identities" (p. 9). Men become guided and directed by what manliness entails from an early age. As a result, coming to terms with what manhood means involves a process of meaning making. Certain external factors seem to impact masculinity the greatest. Harris argued,

Concepts of masculinity, which provide beliefs about how men ought to behave, are constructed at many different levels both in society and in the minds of individuals. A masculine ideology generated by news media, artists, teachers, historians, parents, priests, and public figures dominates how men think about themselves. (p. 9)

Therefore, as literature suggests, masculinity develops within various communities by way of social construction; how men perceive their expectation of masculinity shapes how they pursue the socially constructed ideal of masculinity.

Masculinity in media. Understanding masculinity holistically necessitates noting various external factors that may shape masculine ideals. Similar to body image ideals, media greatly influences masculinity. According to Kivel and Johnson (2009),

Television, film, books, magazines, music, and video games not only exist for the purposes of providing pleasure in the context of leisure, but also have the capacity

to impart information and understanding in relation to our gender identities

through the transmission of cultural values and social norms. (p. 111)

Essentially, men react to and emulate what they see in culture, and the media provides a

medium in which men see how masculinity should look. Magazines also play a major

part in how media influences male culture and masculinity. Most people consider

magazines as solely for the entertainment purposes of women, but some magazines target

men and focus on their hobbies or special interests (Ricciardelli, Clow, & White, 2010).

These magazines give men a new ideal to strive toward, which created some tension in

how men think they should react. Undoubtedly, media and culture offer major influences

on how a man constructs his masculine identity.

Promiscuity. Another aspect of perceived masculinity comes with the prevalence

of sexual activity among males. With the emergence of the "hook-up culture" among

college students, sexual promiscuity has changed. Hooking up, or sexual encounters

between strangers, brief acquaintances, or good friends, typically lasting only one night,

occur mostly among the college-age population of 18-25 year olds (Paul, McManus, &

Hayes, 2000). Men who hook up typically avoid steady, committed relationships in order

to escape the responsibility and work those relationships require. They simply want the

benefits of adult relationships, which they view as strictly sexual, without the other

qualities relationships demand (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011). Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, and

Ward (2009) argued hooking up has less to do with guys' relationships with women and

more to do with the same men talking about the sexual activity with other men.

The increase in promiscuity has many social implications. For example, peer

influence and social pressure has major sway in making men feel the need to act

promiscuously. "If a guy isn't preoccupied with girls, then other guys might begin to wonder about him (and his sexuality)" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 169). Because heterosexual males want to live up to standards society and peers place on them, they feel the need to seek out sexual relationships as a means of fulfilling their heterosexual masculine duties.

Athletic culture. Participation in or following organized athletics plays a prominent role in gendered socialization, and participating can have long-lasting effects on beliefs and assumptions of masculinity (Harper & Harris, 2010). The masculine culture has an interest in sports, which creates space for men to connect and develop mutual understanding. Kimmel (2008) posited one potential reason men follow sports: ". . . it's a way to talk with other guys without having to talk about your feelings. It's a certain conversation starter in any uncertain social situation" (p. 128). Sports talk provides a medium through which men can curb their emotional sides and feel manlier because they avoided emotions and stuck to bats, basketballs, and field goals.

Alcohol. No shortage of alcohol consumption exists amongst college students. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2014), drinking impacts college students, communities and families. About four out of five college students drink alcohol, and half of all students binge drink. Several researchers focused solely on college men's drinking habits. Capraro (2000) argued understanding the connection between masculinity, men, and alcohol consumption demands observation of drinking itself among college students as a male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered territory. While college women also drink, "men are more likely than women to say they drink for escapism or to get drunk" (p. 308).

Similar to masculinity, drinking culture and, more specifically, binge drinking culture appears socially constructed and peer pressured among college men. "Getting drunk beyond consciousness may be a way of proving yourself to your friends, your fraternity brothers, or sorority sisters, or showing your teammates that you'd take one for the team" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 105). Masculine ideals often direct men to make decisions they feel they need to make for acceptance, sometimes without considering the costs.

Relationship Between Masculinity and Body Image

Research presents masculinity and body image as connected (Murray & Touyz, 2012; Grossbard, Lee, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2008). Some studies found contradictions in traditionally held stereotypes concerning men and women and their bodies. Kimmel (1987) found, although women have traditionally struggled with preoccupations of body image to help them fit normal models of femininity, men also seem quite preoccupied with a body image ideal that helps them to fit a masculine ideal. Some theorists claim masculinity is almost always thought of in terms of body image. Connell (2005) found,

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority). (p. 45)

Masculinity seems ingrained within body image, and each informs the other in how to act and participate in society. According to societal flow, body image and type serve as indicators by which men claim certain statuses.

Therefore, the pursuit of a body image ideal for men goes well beyond attractiveness. Men aim to gain muscle and bulk mostly because such elements imply strength, dominance, and power—all of which cater to the male gender role (Mussap, 2008). Additionally, some studies hypothesized men pursue a more muscular physique to distinguish themselves from women. Leit et al. (2001) stated, "Women have rapidly achieved parity with men in many aspects of life, including even military roles, leaving men with only their bodies as a distinguishing source of masculinity" (p. 92).

Research suggests some men more aptly pursue a culturally influenced body image ideal due to pressures to fit into a masculine rather than feminine mold. Ultimately, men want to appear distinctively different than women, and one way to succeed is to pursue a more muscular physique, which, in effect, ensures a noticeable differentiation and an accomplishment of masculine status.

Conclusion

Social norms instruct men to embody certain aspects and become characterized by sculpted features. Body image ideals pigeonhole men into thinking they must attain these ideals in order to validate their male DNA. Men and women alike seem exposed to ideals that pressure them to conform. Unfortunately, they almost always fall short of the "perfect" ideals to which society beckons them. Although these ideals prove somewhat unreachable for most, no shortage of attempts exist to attain such standards through change of identity and alterations of the body via "make-overs." Because of the various ideals men feel they need to strive towards, they may feel a sense of inferiority. These ideals provide an incorrect framework on how men feel expected to act from an early age.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Approach

The present study employed a phenomenological qualitative design to determine how male students at a faith-based institution observed their body image in light of their own perceived masculinity. In a phenomenological study, a researcher uses a qualitative strategy to explore the essence of a lived experience as described by study participants (Creswell, 2008). The aim of a phenomenological design "is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Through interviews, the researcher gathered descriptions demonstrating how participants make meaning. The researcher chose this method in order to have the participants partake in a reflective thinking study as a means of measuring lived experiences. Individual interviews utilized open-ended questions designed to give participants the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about the topic, thus giving validity to their experiences.

Participants

The current study involved volunteer male undergraduate students at a small, residential, faith-based, liberal arts institution located in the Midwest region of the United States. Enrollment consists of approximately 2,000 students, 45% male and 55% female.

The researcher selected 8 to 12 male participants who represent a variety of college class levels, ages, and residence halls.

Procedures

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted participants through personal communication or email. Prior to interviewing participants, the researcher conducted a pilot interview to help evaluate the protocol questions and provide feedback regarding its usefulness. Following feedback, the researcher altered the protocol questions and begun conducting interviews. The researcher then asked participants to complete an informed consent form before participating. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews, as well as compiled notes during each interview session. Each interview lasted 20 – 30 minutes depending on participants' answers to the protocol questions.

Data Analysis

After conducting, recording, and transcribing all the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data. The researcher coded the transcriptions, which involved looking for meaning in the data by identifying and sorting it into specific themes (Creswell, 2008). Finally, after analyzing all themes, the researcher interpreted the data and discussed the findings, identifying study limitations and implications for further research.

Chapter 4

Results

The section below presents prominent themes and findings from the study's eight individual interviews. The researcher organized the themes based on the study's two primary research questions: How do college male students construct a personal view of body image? And how is a college male student's personal view of body image related to his understanding of masculinity? Additional themes emerged from the interviews, discussed below after the research questions and subsequent themes.

Constructing Personal Views of Body Image

As noted earlier, social learning theory found people learn behaviors through family, and social and cultural cues. Emphasized by all eight participants, the most popular theme overall emerged as the impact of family, specifically parents and siblings. Participants shared various stories and anecdotes with regard to how family members impacted how they view their bodies. Along with family influences, all eight participants discussed comparison or looking at other men as a way of defining body image.

As another significant theme, six participants mentioned faith or religious beliefs as influential in the way they have conceptualized body image or the ideal body image.

Theme 1: Impact of family. All eight participants discussed mothers, fathers, and siblings as integral factors in how they have come to think about their bodies. The participants shared how family implicitly and explicitly encouraged or discouraged them

to think about their bodies in certain ways. Samuel mentioned his family's intentional conversations on healthy eating because of the high value placed on good diet:

> My mom is a dietician—so growing up, it was always, you know, something that we were talking about and learning about even as really little kids. . . . In my house it was like a pretty healthy conversation I think, and it was definitely one we had very often—what are good foods for you, what does your body need, you know? It's okay to have some of those foods that you really like that maybe aren't great for you all the time.

Such conversations with parents proved common among other participants. Some parents worried about how their sons' bodies started to look and communicated their opinions, which impacted how some participants looked at their bodies. Scott shared:

> My mom also started feeling like she was worried about me. So any time I would go back home [from school] she would be like, "You should go out," and "You should go run," or "You should eat less," or something like that. She just felt worried that I didn't appreciate my body so therefore that is why I'm doing this to myself.

Two participants mentioned their fathers as the main influences in their grasping the idea of body image and how a man's body should look. For example, Brad noted:

> Yeah, I think my dad is probably the biggest factor and the idea of body type that he has always given me. . . . He always told me to put my life in these: the three most important things are first, like, God and your spiritual life, then academics, and then your body. And he was the one who encouraged me to always do push-ups every day and keep my body in check.

Clearly parents play a significant role in shaping how men consider their bodies and body image. However, four participants also noted the value of looking to siblings for clarity and wisdom with regards to how they view their bodies. For instance, Robert said:

> My sister has been really affirming to me and, like, who I am and body image and, like, she has really pushed me to—I kind of hit on this before—my sister has really pushed me to make healthy choices without doing it to try to get the body I would like. So she has told me things like, "[Robert] you are not going to treat your body well if you don't love your body."

The men in the study all articulated how much they learned and assimilated through interactions with their parents and siblings. This learned behavior seemed clear and consistent among all participants in various ways, proving quite important as they thought about how they have come to construct their personal views of body image.

Theme 2: Comparison. As another important part of body image construction, all participants noted comparison or looking at other men as a means of assessing if their bodies fit the ideal. In connection to the theme of family influence, two participants reported comparing their bodies to their brothers' or fathers' bodies. Ethan found comparing his current body to his dad's impacted what Ethan did with his body:

> [My dad] didn't exercise that much cause he was always working, so he would get exercise where he could, but still had a specific body type that I could sort of see growing in myself as I aged and as I got into high school and stuff. So that made me feel good cause obviously I'm younger and just look better than him and that made me want to keep a better body type. Yeah. Cause I was comparing—I felt a little superior to him just kind of in the background of my everyday life.

Several participants also noted living in close community with other men brought about more pressure to compare their bodies to others'. Samuel found:

> There is so much temptation, when you are living with 30 or so guys, especially in [all-male hall on campus] with group showers to have a lot of comparison going on. You know this guy is in really good shape—I don't feel like I'm in as good of shape as him. This guy is really built. . . . And also looking at your friends' [bodies] as, you know, either a standard to get or a standard that has surpassed you.

Some participants stated this comparison to their peers brought on feelings of inferiority. Marcus found this consequence true even when he visited the college before enrolling as a student. He said:

> It seemed like every guy was like 6'2" or 6'3"—tall, slim, and athletic. And that was what I thought college was when I was visiting. I thought to myself, "Oh, this is going to be a struggle cause I don't fit into that category. Even if they are nice to me, there are going to be things they are involved in that I just physically cannot be involved in."

Comparison offers a major influence in constructing ideas of body image for the participants in the current study. All of the men looked to others to determine acceptable body types and to see if they met those standards themselves. This report of comparative behavior aligns with the idea of social learning theory.

Theme 3: Faith/Religion. Faith proved a significant factor for six participants. Some participants noted how many unhelpful things such as comparison and cultural

ideals have shaped their views of their bodies, but their body image has ultimately

seemed shaped for them by their faith. For instance, Wayne noted,

> Our bodies are fallen. They are part of sin nature and God has given us physical
>
> bodies and I don't think we are just spiritual beings—our bodies are an important
>
> thing that God has given us to use to worship him. . . . We are not defined by our
>
> bodies or what others think of our bodies. However, it is something, a gift that
>
> God has given us that we need to maintain well in order to be able to serve him.

Similarly, faith plays a prominent role for other participants in a higher view of the body

and its purposes. Samuel reflected on a poem that addresses this concept:

> The Lord is for my body and my body is for the Lord. Which I thought was a
>
> wonderful thing—it is a vessel that God has given us and therefore it is sacred and
>
> bears the image of God and it, you know, is the vessel almost like a sailing vessel
>
> that we will be with our whole lives.

Participants communicated coming to terms with their bodies and thinking about body

image based on a high view of pleasing God or a spiritual calling to take care of the

bodies given to them. Participants referenced the value in approaching body image as

something they receive ultimately from God.

Connection to Understanding of Masculinity

Along with body image construction, the present study asked participants to

connect their views of body image to their understanding of their masculinity. During the

interview process, the researcher asked participants how they define masculinity. All

eight participants responded uniquely, but commonalities emerged in how the men

conceptualized masculinity and its connection to their personal views of body image. Perception and strength surfaced as themes or ideas from all participants.

Theme 4: Strength. When asked to define masculinity, all participants listed physical strength as a major indicator of masculinity. Most participants who mentioned physical strength referred to the ability to do a task or solve a problem. Scott stated:

> I guess when, like, women would ask me for help [or] I need to do something physically—like, say, help move stuff, or to help push things out of the way, or do something like that—I guess I feel more masculine. Just cause I feel like that is a trait men should have to be able to physically do away with problems.

Other men in this study, when thinking about physical strength, referenced competition or athletics and how having more physical strength in athletics gives them an advantage, which ultimately makes them feel more masculine. Samuel said:

> I matured physically before a lot of my friends. So, in athletics, I kind of dominated the field just by virtue of being physically further down the road than most kids. And especially in football, being able to just kind of do what I wanted was – there is definitely a feeling of superiority that came with that.

With physical strength and ability came the idea of perseverance or mental strength in all participants' conceptualization of masculinity. Quinton felt weak or less masculine when he did not succeed or reach a goal. When asked about such times, he said:

> Times I quit—absolutely—my family is huge on not quitting. But I can—I can think of a million things that I didn't finish or got too frustrated with them and left. It would just haunt me. I would just be, like, "Wow"—I think I felt really un-masculine.

Success and the idea of physical strength seem ingrained in men by their own observations, family, culture, and other outside pressures. Many pressures these participants face appear heightened by expectations, either their own or those of others.

    Theme 5: Perception. Another significant theme discussed by all eight participants related to the idea of perception. The participants shared about experiences in which they perceived a man as more masculine than they felt because of the other man's body type. In connection to strength, most participants perceived other men as stronger or more capable of doing something they (the participants) could not, or perceived themselves as more masculine than others because of their inherent ability. When asked which factors or traits they perceived as more masculine, all eight participants mentioned appearance of confidence, perfection, abilities or strength to do or complete a task.

    For example, Wayne mentioned the idea of appearing perfect as a major part of his community of men. He said:

> I think because of [school's] high status as, like, kind of like a richer private school and also because of the Christian culture – people in the more expensive price bracket, you can often create this façade of someone who needs to have the perfect appearance… and I enjoy dressing up every now and then and looking nice, but both of those together – clothes and the actual physical body and this environment – I think men on this campus could have a tendency to want to appear perfectly.

Wayne and the other participants all mentioned the idea of perfectionism and appearing perfect, a finding that connects to a greater notion of living up to the cultural or perceived

ideal. Cultural ideals, as indicated by the participants of the present study, drive and shape the perception of the body image or type that men should have and also shape how their masculinity should manifest. Robert affirmed these sentiments:

> So everything from like movies, but also like the kinds of magazines that we walk by and the fitness magazines that have the super buff guys. Also, I think our culture in general, like, really puts a very high emphasis on being able to compete physically and perform…I think, yeah, there is a lot of feeling of, like, this is the ideal you should be striving for.

Participants all expressed how their perception of masculinity and body image felt shaped by others and that ideals oftentimes prove unfair and unattainable for most men.

Conclusion

As an overwhelming finding that emerged in the study, men learn about body image and masculinity from parents, siblings, other family members, and other people in general. Self-comparison and faith or religion also emerged as significant factors in how men conceptualize their ideas of body image. Men in the present study also related their views of body image to masculinity by thinking about how strength makes them more masculine and how they perceive other men's bodies.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The following section presents a discussion of the findings in light of previous research, implications for higher education professionals, and the limitations of this research project. The section concludes with recommendations for further research on the relationship of male body image and masculinity.

How Do Male College Students Construct Their Body Image?

Based on research and the responses of the eight participants in the study, male students construct personal views of body image in a number of ways including: influence of family members, comparison to others, and faith/religion.

Family members—whether parents, siblings, or otherwise—have a significant impact on male college students' understandings of what their bodies should look like. Bandura (1977) found most humans learn behavior through modeling. He found, "From observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22).

This idea of modeling proved true for the men in the present study, as their parents, siblings, and other family members painted vivid yet different pictures of what their bodies should look like as men. The current study indicated parents as the main influencers in their sons coming to terms what they should look like. Despite other contributing factors, the men in the study who had more positive body images also had

parents who made more positive comments or seemed committed to more healthy eating habits. The input or advice of parents, siblings, and other relatives regarding body image plays a significant role in how men begin to understand the value of their bodies (Bellew, 2012). Families shape how much or how little men worry about their bodies and how much attention they might give to working out or trying to fit a physical ideal. While not the only contributing factor, families definitely play a major role early on in shaping the body image of college males.

Comparison to others emerged as another major factor in how male college students construct personal views of body image. While the idea of comparison certainly exists within the context of a family, most conversations or notions of comparison given by participants of the study referred to interactions with non-family peers. The male ideal appears an athletic, slender, well-proportioned, v-shaped physique (Fawkner, 2012), which leads men to compare themselves extensively to other men when they themselves do not meet those criteria.

From an early age, children learn the "beauty is good" standard, which means they judge attractive peers more positively and prefer them as friends (Smolak, 2012). The standard indicates that, for desirability in any capacity, a person must meet certain standards of attractiveness. If not met, these standards of beauty can lead to comparison or a deep longing for this criterion. The college males in the current study constantly mentioned how they compared themselves to their peers because their peers had certain status or could receive more attention mostly due to their bodies or levels of physical attractiveness. Fitting in and acceptance provide major reasons for college males comparing their bodies to other men's. Ultimately, having a specific body type allows

men certain privileges: perception as more healthy by societal standards, more respect and attention, and more significance in a world that highly regards physical appearance.

Because the researcher conducted the study at a faith-based college, most participants not surprisingly mentioned or alluded to the idea of faith or religion as factors in their construction of body image. Some participants said their faith has transformed the way they look at their bodies and compare them to others. The participants who asserted their bodies hold spiritual and physical importance also seemed more likely to take care of their bodies and engage in more health-promoting behaviors. In agreement with this notion, Mahoney et al. (2005) found "the stronger peoples' convictions are about the spiritual meaning of their bodies (e.g., my body is holy or my body an instrument of God), the more they may appreciate and accept their bodies" (p. 6). Having a healthier or "heavenly" view of body image benefitted some participants by allowing them to sometimes look past the shallow ideals of the present culture.

How Is a College Male's Personal Body Image Related to His Understanding of Masculinity?

For the participants in the study, body image and masculinity (in terms of conceptualizing their relationship) proved inseparable. Participants found their current body type ultimately influenced, whether they perceived themselves as more or less masculine. Perception and strength emerged as two main ideas that came from students thinking about body image and relating that to their understanding of their masculinity.

All participants mentioned physical strength, which connected to having the ability to complete a physically challenging task. Having strength proved overall quite indicative of male students feeling more masculine. If they could physically complete a

task or move something heavy, they felt as though they fit into the masculine ideal of having power and using it. Research asserts, men want to or do become strong because it implies dominance and power, which many in this culture see to typify the ideal male (Mussap, 2008). A couple men in the study also affirmed the idea of attaining strength as a means of distinguishing themselves from women (Leit et al., 2001). Some participants alluded to striving to fit an ideal body image that affirms their masculinity so others perceive them as less feminine. Similarly, participants indicated physical strength not only distinguished them from women but also gave them an elevated status in their respective communities. For instance, others asked them to do more tasks, they felt perceived as more attractive, and they could participate more in extra-curricular activities such as sports or clubs.

As already mentioned, perception proved a major factor in all eight participants' construction of body image, with regards to how masculine they perceived their own bodies, as well as how masculine they perceived the bodies of other men. All participants talked about either perceiving themselves to possess certain ideal traits or perceiving that they lacked qualities that aligned with the ideal body type. Perceptions of other men with perhaps more culturally ideal body types made the participants resort to perfectionistic body image construction as a means of trying make their bodies stand out as well. This notion of perfectionism demands that men meet unrealistically high standards of accomplishment in order to earn the respect of other men around them (Adams & Govender, 2008). Ultimately, college men learn from other men what body types make them appear more or less masculine and what they need to do to reach these standards.

Implications for Higher Education Practice

One of the study's most significant findings emerged as the role family members played in how college male students constructed their ideals of body image. Although students attend college after significant time spent with family, institutions have the opportunity to either reinforce or reshape good, healthy ideas of male body image. They have great potential in redeeming unhealthy practices or ideals of body image. Effective methods of correcting or educating male students on healthy body image may include presenting relevant research regarding this topic and providing opportunities for conversation. Ultimately, though, higher education institutions need to point male students to an ideal of healthy body image. In that regard, the ideal for healthy body image for male students includes understanding the importance of their bodies, making healthy eating choices, and appreciating of the body type they have, rather than comparing and trying to achieve someone else's body type. Similarly, the ideal body image should have more to do with body esteem or self-satisfaction with one's body than the physical shape of the body.

Male students on college campuses need to understand the implications for unhealthy body image and its influence on perceptions of masculinity. Because healthy choices and healthy body image connect to higher self-esteem and overall wellness, college males must consider how taking care of their bodies, in turn, leads to more positive views of masculinity.

Male faculty and staff members have an important role in this regard because they need to become instrumental in providing space for men to process how healthy body image manifests and how masculinity corresponds with this idea. In fact, all but one

participant mentioned a male family member who influenced them and helped them conceptualize body image and masculinity. Consistent with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), male faculty and staff members must remain aware that male college students may closely observe them as role models. Thus, male students could greatly benefit from these men inviting the students into conversations about how male staff members conceptualize healthy body image and masculine ideals. These role models should also present body image as fluid and dynamic. Body image and ideas of masculine ideals become shaped by mainstream culture regardless of the influence of these role models. Nonetheless, male faculty and staff members in higher education have the opportunity to foster healthy, responsible conversations for the purpose of changing some of the unhealthy ideals and thoughts.

Campuses must promote programming for their student body allow for a diverse representation of body images. Ultimately, programming should not perpetuate harmful, unneeded stereotypes that men hold about other men with regards body image. On the contrary, thoughtful programming that promotes the true ideal of internal body esteem and satisfaction can alleviate these harmful stereotypes or poor self-image.

The events specifically designed for men should go beyond the traditional sporting and video game outings and should include honest, open conversations as well. One specific event might include an open forum for male students, faculty, and staff on a campus to come together to collectively identify what they view as correct, healthy body image. Following this discussion, using research and Scripture (if applicable to the setting), the campus men can decipher which ideas presented actually prove healthy and dispel any wrong ideas of healthy body image. This program would educate males on

campus and allow them to correct any behaviors associated with unhealthy body image

construction. Additionally, institutions should attempt to have more conversations with

males geared towards healthy body image. These conversations should indicate healthy

body image might look physically different for every male, but the standards of healthy

eating and bodily care should hold true for all men. Finally, institutions need to seek

more intentionally to understand the importance of conversations on body image.

Unhealthy body image has the capacity to inflict serious damage on both males and

females on college campuses. Institutions need to continually provide and enhance

learning opportunities for students to understand the importance of body image as a

means of helping those students flourish. Practically, institutions could adopt wellness

and body image stances in their mission to indicate they hold this topic as a priority.

Likewise, institutions could attempt to build wellness centers that provide physical space,

as well as altering menus in the dining facilities to reflect desires for students to pursue

ideal body image and wellness.

Limitations

Although the present study followed specific, appropriate phenomenological

design procedures, several limitations exist. First, the sample size of the study remained

limited to eight college-age males. Therefore, the study's participant pool does not

completely represent the institution studied or the larger population of males. Second,

the researcher had a prior knowledge or relationship with several participants, which

affected the level of participant transparency. Finally, because the researcher also

identifies as male with an interest in understanding how male college students construct

personal views of body image, he may have brought prior biases into the investigation.

Suggestions for Further Research

Because the researcher conducted the study at a small, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest, future research should expand the scope to compare results from non faith-based institutions. Other areas of potential further study would entail examining the impact of various additional factors such as participation in athletics or mentoring impacts body image and masculinity. Finally, studying the role female peers play in helping male students construct personal views of body image could prove a useful addition to existing research. A few members of the current study mentioned female peers as instrumental in their construction of body image and relating it to masculinity; an study to find out the broader implications might therefore prove needed and interesting.

Conclusion

Constructing personal views of body image and relating that to one's self-perceived masculinity remains an important process in the lives of male college students. Though important, this process can also prove difficult to navigate, especially because family, society, and inner pressures may each present different ideals and standards for these men to meet. College male students must have opportunities to process what healthy body image entails. Equally important, they can benefit by interacting with other males and particularly higher education professionals about what having a healthy view of one's body means. While the present study does provide a partial snapshot of male college students, male body image, and masculinity, there remains a need for additional research to care adequately for the complex needs of men on college campuses.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1) Introduction

   a) Welcome
   b) Informed Consent
   c) Nature of the study
   d) Procedure
   e) Freedom to withdraw or decline to answer
   f) Confidentiality
   g) Consent form

2) General information questions

   a) Age
   b) Class

3) Protocol questions about body image

   a) How would you define body image?

   b) In your opinion, what is healthy body image

      i) What, in your opinion is an unhealthy view of body image
      ii) What experiences in your life have helped you understand what positive and negative body image is?

   c) How did childhood and/or teenage years play into what you now think about your body image/type?

      i) What is your perception of the body types of men on this campus?
      ii) Do you think men on this campus have an overall healthy/positive view of their bodies? If so, why? If not, why not?

   d) Has your body type ever made you feel superior to other men? Inferior? How so?

e) For you personally, what are some things you do like about your body?

f) What are some things you don't like about your body?

4) Protocol questions regarding the relationship between body image and masculinity

a) How would you personally define masculinity?

b) In connection to this, do you think there is a body type that is masculine? Is not masculine?

c) Describe certain situations in your life where your body has made you feel more masculine?

i) Less masculine?

d) Are there any other aspects of body image you feel are directly connected to masculinity?

e) Further invitation, "Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience with masculinity or male body image?"

f) Is there anyone else that you would recommend for me to interview?

g) Express appreciation for participation

Appendix B

Informed Consent

THE EMBODIMENT OF MAN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
MASCULINITY AND MALE BODY IMAGE

You are invited to participate in a research study of body image and masculinity in male college students. You were selected as a possible participant by way of recommendation from your hall director, random selection or recommendation from another student. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you many have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by D'Andre Coats, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development Program at Taylor University. You must be 18 to participate in this study.

STUDY PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to understand how male college students decide what their view of body image is, and how it connects and/or relates to masculinity.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:
If you agree to participate, you will be one of 8-12 subjects who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:
If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things: Participate in a 45-60 minute interview in a private study room or conference room on Taylor University's campus. During the interview, you will be asked 8-10 questions. The interview will be recorded with digital recording software. After the interview is over, an email will be sent to you asking you to confirm the accuracy of the information gathered from your interview as well as asking you to verify that the themes found by the researcher are accurate.

RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:
While on the study, the risks are:
Potentially being uncomfortable answering the questions asked during the interview. The questions will call the participants to personally reflect and use introspection, because of this, it might be the first time you have shared or considered any of this information. To

minimize the potential risk, feel free to refuse to answer any of the questions asked during the interview.

SUBJECT'S CONSENT

In consideration of all of the above, I give my consent to participate in this research study.

I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records. I agree to take part in this study. Also, I assert that I am at least 18 years of age.

Subject's Printed Name: _____

Subject's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining   Consent:_____ **Date:**_____