

## Body Dissatisfaction of Ethnically Diverse Gay, Straight Men and the Proliferation of Social Media and Fashion Magazines

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Mass media is considered the most pervasive cause of body dissatisfaction (BD; Barlett et al., 2008; Tiggemann, 2011). Over the last several years, an increased number of men have been suffering from BD (Grogan, 2017; Melki et al., 2015). This dissatisfaction is in part associated with social networking sites (SNS) exposure (Barry & Martin, 2016; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Stronge et al., 2015) to ideal male images (Pope et al., 2005) and entertainment media (e. g., fashion magazines) use (Bury et al., 2016; De Vries & Kuhne 2015), which in turn is associated with increased stress, depression, and muscle dysmorphia (Strother et al., 2012). Previous studies have found that 86% of college men age 18-29 use SNS (Leslie, 2018; Smith & Anderson, 2018) and media exposure to muscular male images is in part associated with an increasing number of young men suffering from BD over the last several decades (Pope et al., 2005). A large body of research shows that gay men are more dissatisfied with their bodies than straight men (Morrison et al., 2004; Tiggemann et al., 2007; Yelland & Tiggerman 2003; Kaminski et al., 2005). Gay men are more likely to have false beliefs about the importance of having an ideal physique, diet more, are more fearful of becoming fat (Kaiminski et al., 2005) and desire to have leaner (Smith et al., 2011) and more muscular (Yelland & Tiggerman, 2003) bodies. Studies on gay men, media use and BD have shown positive associations between exposure to media and negative body image (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2016). Gay men were most likely to report negative effects as a result of comparisons to media imagery (Fawkner, 2004) and images that promote thinness (Strong et al., 2001). Media targets gay men as a primary audience to sell fashion products (Gill, 2009) adding more pressure on them to mirror media images (Carper et al., 2010). More importantly, many body image studies conducted on gay men had predominantly White samples (Kaminski et al., 2005; Wichstron, 2006). The current research takes a more focused look at ethnic minority gay men and their body dissatisfaction. The objective of this study was to examine the effects of social and entertainment media (fashion magazines) exposure on BD, social comparison and thin-ideal internalization of diverse gay and straight men.

**Framework and Method.** Social comparison and cultivation theories were applied in this study. Social comparison theory was first developed by Festinger (1954) who suggested that individuals compare themselves to others who are perceived as similar. It has been revised to differentiate between more harmful (upward) comparisons and less harmful (downward) comparisons. Social comparisons are important to study because they are considered precursors to BD. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) posits that long-term exposure to mass media messages and images impact people's views of social reality. Images that promote a thin ideal

may accumulate over time and eventually result in the internalization of those ideals. Young people may believe that the real world actually corresponds to media images (for a review see Harrison & Hefner, 2008). The sample consisted of 526 males between the ages of 18 to 44 ( $M=22.79$ ;  $SD=3.47$ ). Respondents varied in ethnicity, but almost half were Asian/Pacific Islander ( $n=246$ , 44%), followed by Non-Hispanic/White ( $n=106$ , 19%) and Latino/Hispanic ( $n=101$ , 18%), Middle Eastern/Arab ( $n=38$ , 7%), African American ( $n=16$ , 3%). Approximately 77% ( $n=448$ ) of participants were straight and 13% ( $n=78$ ) gay. Three measures were used in this study. The BAT instrument, which measured body dissatisfaction ( $\alpha=.87$ ) and was developed and validated by Probst et al. (1995). The social comparison measure (UPACS & DACS), which included the upward and downward physical appearance social comparison ( $\alpha=.92$ ) validated survey (O'Brien et al., 2009). Additionally, thin ideal internalization scale (3-SATAQ-INT) was utilized (Thompson et al., 2004). Statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS using descriptive statistics and  $t$ -testing.

**Results and Implications.** Findings did fully align with the cultivation theory as on average, frequent SNS users showed significantly ( $t=3.50$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $d=0.29$ ) more dissatisfaction with their bodies than SNS users who do not check sites as frequently. Similarly, men who were more exposed to entertainment media (such as fashion magazines) exhibited significantly ( $t=3.16$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $d=0.29$ ) higher dissatisfaction with their bodies than those with low exposure. Gay men were found to be significantly more exposed to SNS ( $t=1.96$ ,  $p=.05$ ,  $d=0.24$ ) and entertainment media ( $t=2.70$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $d=0.40$ ) than straight men. Gay men (vs. straight men) internalized ideal body types seen in media significantly ( $t=1.99$ ,  $p=.047$ ,  $d=0.25$ ) more. Gay men indicated that they compare themselves to the bodies they see in media such as movie stars ( $t=2.04$ ,  $p=.041$ ,  $d=0.26$ ), pressure themselves to look more attractive ( $t=3.46$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $d=0.42$ ), and feel more pressure from the media to lose weight ( $t=2.47$ ,  $p=.014$ ,  $d=0.29$ ) significantly more than straight men. Moreover, findings did fully align with the social comparison theory as gay men (vs. straight men) tended to compare themselves significantly ( $t=2.67$ ,  $p=.008$ ,  $d=0.32$ ) more to people who they perceive as better looking (upward comparison) than they look and were found to be more dissatisfied ( $t=2.94$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $d=.35$ ) with their bodies. When gay men see a person with a great body they wonder significantly ( $t=2.22$ ,  $p=.026$ ,  $d=0.27$ ) more how their body matches up than straight men do.

This study replicated results that find gay men are more dissatisfied with their bodies than straight men. This then may affect their choices of clothing, as gay men were found more likely to hide their bodies with loose clothing. Increased exposure to social and entertainment media (fashion magazines) affected BD in young diverse males. Entertainment media (fashion magazines) should focus on presenting more realistic, more diverse and more types of male bodies in general. Since young people use SNS so frequently, these sites should be a focus of media literacy programs. The upward social comparison findings about gay men are alarming. This is already a vulnerable population and they have the most distorted ideas about what a perfect body should be. The unattainable images they are internalizing lead to health risks such as unhealthy dieting and possibly other risky behaviors such as eating disorders (ED). Barlett, C. P., Vowels, C. L., & Saucier, D. A. (2008). Meta-analyses of the effect of media

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