



Don't stop till you get enough: Factors driving men towards muscularity



Richard Stratton^a, Caroline Donovan^{a,*}, Shannon Bramwell^a, Natalie J. Loxton^{a,b}

^a School of Applied Psychology and the Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University, Mount Gravatt Campus, Mount Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia

^b Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 December 2014

Received in revised form 21 July 2015

Accepted 21 July 2015

Available online 10 August 2015

Keywords:

Tripartite Influence Model

Drive for muscularity

Male body image

Men

ABSTRACT

This study tested a modified Tripartite Influence Model with 307 men (age $M = 27.05$; $SD = 6.25$). Sociocultural influences (media and male peers) were predicted to be associated with both internalisation of the muscular ideal and body comparisons, which in turn were predicted to be associated with muscle dissatisfaction and then drive for muscularity behaviours. The model was only partially supported. The results suggested that, contrary to what was predicted, muscle dissatisfaction was not related to drive for muscularity behaviours. Instead, internalisation of the muscular ideal was found to lead to body comparisons, which in turn were found to lead to drive for muscularity behaviours. In addition, internalisation and male peer influence were found to lead to muscle dissatisfaction; male peer influence and internalisation were found to lead to body comparisons; and both media and male peer influences were found to lead to internalisation.

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Introduction

It would be interesting to anecdotally ask the seemingly healthiest and happiest men in your life how much of their free time they spend with their mates at the gym or planning out their meals to maximise muscular gains. It seems that some men living in Western cultures are becoming increasingly concerned that their bodies are not sufficiently muscular and are feeling driven to engage in unhealthy behaviours in order to increase their muscularity and in turn reduce their distress (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004; Ricciardelli, McCabe, & Banfield, 2000). There is increasing theoretical and empirical interest in this topic, with researchers attempting to piece together the possible sociocultural, psychological, and behavioural factors that impact on men's body image (Cafri, van den Berg, & Thompson, 2006; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004).

The Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) is increasingly being used to assist in understanding the development of problematic male body change behaviours. The model was originally proposed to map the causal and consequential pathways of female body dissatisfaction after researchers such as Stice and Shaw (2002) concluded that body dissatisfaction was the key mediator through which females go on to

develop eating pathology. The model proposes that three formative influences (peer, parents, and media) have an effect on body dissatisfaction and body change behaviours, and that they predominately do this through two main mediating mechanisms: internalisation of body ideals and appearance comparisons (Thompson et al., 1999).

The male body ideal currently promoted throughout Western society is a lean muscular physique referred to as the mesomorphic body shape, which consists of a v-shaped torso with well-developed pectoral muscles, arms, and shoulders, abdominal muscles, and a narrow waist (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2004; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Olivardia et al., 2004). Boys and men have been found to internalise this mesomorphic ideal as something they personally value and wish to strive towards (Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Bardone-Cone, Cass, & Ford, 2008; Knauss, Paxton, & Alsaker, 2008; Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Ogden & Munday, 1996; Pope, Gruber, Choi, Olivardia, & Phillips, 1997; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). Further, it has been suggested that the mesomorphic build is associated with positive qualities for men such as bravery, health, attractiveness and strength (Ryckman, Butler, Thornton, & Lindner, 1997). These attributes are highly regarded in westernised cultures and therefore provide greater motivation for men to internalise the muscular ideal, develop a drive for muscularity, and engage in body change behaviours in order to obtain the desired physique (Ryckman et al., 1997).

Body comparisons are another important mediator in the relationship between sociocultural influences and body dissatisfaction

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 7 3735 3401; fax: +61 7 3735 3388.

E-mail addresses: richard.stratton@griffith.edu.au (R. Stratton), c.donovan@griffith.edu.au (C. Donovan).

according to the Tripartite Influence Model. It seems that men compare their bodies to those of other men in order to learn more about the ideal shape and size (Karazsia & Crowther, 2010) and that body comparisons in general have been found to significantly relate to male muscle dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity (Karazsia & Crowther, 2010; Smolak & Stein, 2006). A body comparison is more likely to be made when a person considers the desired attribute as important. It is therefore likely that male appearance comparisons will be focused on muscle related dimensions (Gokee-LaRose, Dunn, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Comparisons with others who are perceived to be superior to oneself (upward comparisons) have been found to be associated with increases in depression and anger and decreases in self-esteem. In contrast, comparisons with others who are perceived to be inferior to oneself (downward comparisons) have been found to be associated with increases in self-esteem and positive affect (Major, Testa, & Bylsma, 1991).

The sociocultural factors of media, peers and family put forward by the Tripartite Influence Model as being influential, have also been examined to some extent in men. Media sources including magazines, television advertisements, films, billboards, music videos, and even children's toys have been consistently found to play an integral role in the promotion of the muscular ideal in men (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; Frederick et al., 2007; Leit et al., 2002). Indeed, media promotion and glorification of the muscular ideal is considered central to the development and maintenance of body dissatisfaction in men, as the muscular ideal is equally as unattainable for most men as the thin ideal is for the majority of women (Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Bardone-Cone et al., 2008; Knauss et al., 2008; Leit et al., 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Ogden & Munday, 1996; Pope et al., 1997; Spitzer et al., 1999).

Beyond the influence of media, the Tripartite Influence Model proposes that significant others such as parents and peers also play important roles in promoting body ideals, and it has been found that both parents and peers impact upon male body image (Galioto, Karazsia, & Crowther, 2012; Helfert & Warschburger, 2011; Ricciardelli et al., 2000). However, parental encouragement for boys to control weight and shape seems to be more related to general weight concerns, whilst peer encouragement has been found to have a stronger association with muscle dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity (Galioto et al., 2012; Helfert & Warschburger, 2011). The strong association between peer encouragement and engagement in body change behaviours might be partly explained by the types of conversations that boys report having with their male peers. Specifically, male conversations have been found to focus on muscle building techniques, whilst female conversations have found to centre more on the importance of general appearance (Jones & Crawford, 2006). Muscle dissatisfaction has been found to increase with the frequency of muscle-building conversations that boys have with their male peers, whether these be centred on encouragement or teasing (Jones & Crawford, 2005). It would seem that boys and men interpret all muscle-related conversations with their male peers as pressure to improve their bodies (Jones & Crawford, 2005).

Although a number of studies have investigated various aspects of the Tripartite Influence Model in relation to boys and men, few have examined larger portions of the model and none have investigated it in its entirety. One of the earliest studies to examine the Tripartite Influence Model in a more holistic manner in relation to adolescent boys was conducted by Smolak, Murnen, and Thompson (2005). They found that for adolescent boys aged between 11 and 16 years, the perceived influences of media, parents, and peers, each made unique and cumulative contributions to the degree to which boys engaged in muscle-building techniques such as exercise, weightlifting, and dieting, as well as vitamin, supplement and steroid use to build muscle. Furthermore, engagement in body comparisons significantly mediated the relationship between media,

parents, and peers on muscle enhancing behaviours (Smolak et al., 2005). This study was important in terms of examining multiple factors of the Tripartite Influence Model in relation to adolescent boys, although muscular ideal internalisation was not measured.

A further study by Karazsia and Crowther (2009) found that for male adult undergraduate students with a mean age of 19.37 years ($SD = 1.89$), both muscular ideal internalisation and body comparisons separately mediated the relationship between sociocultural influences and muscle dissatisfaction. Thus, the authors extended the study by Smolak et al. (2005) by including internalisation of the muscular ideal, although media influence was not included and the influence of significant others was measured as a unitary construct without delineation of the impact of parents, siblings and peers. In a later study, Karazsia and Crowther (2010) found that for male undergraduate students, both significant others (measured again as a single 'significant others' variable) and internalisation of the muscular ideal positively related to drive for muscularity both directly and indirectly through muscle dissatisfaction. The study demonstrated the usefulness of the Tripartite Influence Model in predicting drive for muscularity as well as body dissatisfaction, although again, media influence was not included.

A final study conducted by Tylka (2011) with male adult undergraduate students aged 18–42 years ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 3.8$) has probably been the most extensive test of the Tripartite Influence Model conducted to date. Tylka (2011) examined a modified version of the Tripartite Influence Model and found that the influences of media, parents, and peers were positively related to internalisation of the muscular ideal, which was in turn positively related to both muscle and fat dissatisfaction and subsequently disordered eating and muscle enhancement behaviours. Tylka (2011) found evidence that internalisation of the muscular ideal, muscle dissatisfaction, and body fat dissatisfaction each served as mediators in the model. It was found that only pressure from family and media influenced the extent to which men internalised the muscular ideal. Peer pressure was not found to lead to internalisation, but instead was directly and positively related to muscle dissatisfaction. It was also found that muscle dissatisfaction positively related to muscle enhancement behaviours, whilst fat dissatisfaction positively related to disordered eating. Tylka (2011) did not include body comparisons in their model, arguing that internalisation of the muscular ideal and body comparisons are highly correlated, thus necessitating only the inclusion of muscular ideal internalisation.

The aim of the present study was to extend upon the work conducted thus far in relation to the Tripartite Influence Model and its usefulness in understanding male body image issues and subsequent drive for muscularity behaviours (see hypothesised model in Fig. 1). The study recruited an adult male sample where the mean age was higher than that of samples used in previous studies. The mean age of participants in previous samples has tended to be around 20 years. It was thought that a broad age range and higher mean age would better reflect the population of gym-goers, thus adding to the knowledge base and allowing age effects to be investigated.

The present study also extended upon previous research in a variety of ways. First, it aimed to extend the findings of Karazsia and Crowther (2009, 2010) by examining the influence of media that was not investigated in their study. Second, it aimed to replicate and extend the study by Tylka (2011) through investigating the mediating roles of both internalisation of the muscular ideal and body comparisons in the relationships between sociocultural influences and muscle dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity. Finally, the present study extended upon the work of Jones and Crawford (2005, 2006) by placing emphasis on examining the influence of male peers separate from female and parental pressure, due to the suspected role male peers have in the encouragement of muscle building techniques (Jones & Crawford, 2006) and muscle

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