



Young men's endorsement and pursuit of appearance ideals: The prospective role of appearance investment



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ABSTRACT

Appearance investment has been proposed as a risk factor for the development of body dissatisfaction. Despite this, few studies have explored men's investment in their appearance. The aim of the present study was therefore to examine appearance investment as a prospective predictor of young men's endorsement and pursuit of appearance ideals. A community sample of 187 young men participated in a study at ages 21 and 24. Hierarchical multiple regressions revealed that appearance investment, as hypothesized, was a prospective predictor of increases in leanness orientation, media-ideal internalization, and muscularity behaviors. However, appearance investment did not predict increases in muscularity dissatisfaction. The present findings highlight the importance of including appearance investment in sociocultural models of the development of men's body image, and suggest that appearance investment may be an important target variable to consider when designing body dissatisfaction prevention and intervention programs tailored to young men.

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Introduction

Body dissatisfaction in terms of dissatisfaction with muscularity has been identified as a pervasive concern among young adult men in their twenties (McArdle & Hill, 2009; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004), and is associated with various unhealthy body altering behaviors such as steroid use and dieting (e.g., Cafri et al., 2005; Parent & Moradi, 2011). However, so far, very little research attention has focused on the role that young men's personal investment in appearance (that is the degree of psychological importance placed upon appearance) might play in body image outcomes. In the cognitive-behavioral model of body image (Cash, 2011), appearance investment is a central component. Accordingly, among women, appearance investment has been linked to both body dissatisfaction and strivings to attain unrealistic body ideals (e.g., Boersma & Jarry, 2013; Ip & Jarry, 2008; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2011). However, despite the centrality of appearance investment in Cash's (2011) model and the findings among women, men's appearance investment is still an under-examined area (Fawkner, 2012). Furthermore, the few existing studies exploring the

relationship between appearance investment and body image outcomes in men have used cross-sectional designs, and longitudinal studies are lacking. Since early adulthood is an important time in the formation of body image (McPherson, 2012), studies increasing the understanding of young men's body dissatisfaction are crucial. Hence, the present study aimed to examine appearance investment as a prospective predictor of increases in young men's leanness orientation, internalization of media-ideals, and drive for muscularity.

Body Image during Young Adulthood

While the period of highest vulnerability for body dissatisfaction has been suggested to be youth (Bucchianeri, Arikian, Hannan, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Frisén, Lunde, & Berg, 2015), it has also been proposed that body image continues to evolve of the course of young adulthood and throughout the lifespan (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Tiggemann, 2004). There are a number of reasons why body dissatisfaction and body change behaviors might increase among young men in their twenties. Firstly, biological changes during that time period include the decrease of base rate metabolism, which is associated with loss of lean mass (Pauley, 2004). These changes are likely compounded by the adoption of more sedentary lifestyles by young men entering the work force (McPherson, 2012). These biological and behavioral changes in young adulthood make move young men further away from the

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muscular and lean ideals. In addition, pressure towards muscularity has been increasing over the past years in Sweden, as reflected by increases in gym memberships and releases of fitness books (Iwarsson, 2012). Thus, many young men might feel increasing pressures to achieve a muscular physique.

Appearance Investment

Within the framework of the cognitive-behavioral model of body image, different types of appearance investment have been proposed (Cash, 2011). In the present study, appearance investment refers to the motivational salience (i.e., general appearance orientation), and concerns the degree of importance placed upon and attention paid to appearance, as well as behaviors related to maintaining or improving aspects of appearance. Hence, motivational appearance investment includes both the personal emphasis placed on looking good compared with internalized social standards, as well as appearance-related behaviors such as buying nice clothes and grooming (Cash, 2000). It has previously been proposed that more benign forms of appearance investment (such as motivational appearance investment) might not necessarily be maladaptive or have negative effects on body image (Cash, 2005). However, in a society in which appearance is emphasized as a core aspect of identity, and yet the beauty ideal is generally unattainable, (e.g., Furnham & Swami, 2012; Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005), investing heavily in one's appearance may be a risk factor for excessive preoccupations around appearance, and a risk for developing behaviors such as steroid use and excessive exercise aiming to move one's appearance closer to the ideal. Accordingly, among young women, even more benign forms of appearance investment have shown strong associations with unhealthy practices such as dieting and exercise dependence (e.g., Chang, Jarry, & Kong, 2014; Lamarche & Gammage, 2012). Hence, investigating motivational appearance investment in relation to different forms of body dissatisfaction among young men is an important focus.

Muscular and Lean Body Ideals

To be dissatisfied with one's appearance, as well as to place importance upon appearance, has stereotypically been associated with women, and appearance investment has thus previously been associated with traditional femininity (Cash, Melnyk, & Hrabosky, 2004). However, more recently, masculinity has become similarly rooted in appearance norms, and men are increasingly concerned about their appearance (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Ricciardelli, 2011). One possible explanation for men's growing appearance concerns is the fact that, over the past years, the male ideals presented in media have become progressively more lean and muscular (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001; Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999). Also, lifestyle magazines targeting men contain a greater number of images that depict a muscular body ideal compared to magazines intended for general audiences (Lanzieri & Cook, 2013). This muscular ideal is associated with an increased preference for having a muscular body among young men (Frederick et al., 2007; McCreary, 2012), which, in turn, has shown distinct associations with behaviors aimed at achieving a body closer to this ideal (Tod, Edwards, & Hall, 2013). In addition to the muscular ideal, the importance of leanness among young men has been highlighted in previous studies (e.g., Smolak & Murnen, 2008; Tod et al., 2013). Generally, the idealized sociocultural cues of leanness seem to be somewhat less prominent than those of the muscular ideal (Lanzieri & Cook, 2013). However, the dual pathway model that highlights both leanness and muscularity concerns as important components has received support (Jones & Crawford, 2005). To date, it still remains unclear whether young men's investment in appearance might be

associated with increases in muscularity dissatisfaction and related behaviors, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, a leanness orientation.

Internalization of Media-Ideals

Young men's internalization of lean and muscular, and largely unattainable, ideals has been generally found to be a risk factor for the onset of body dissatisfaction (Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002; Thompson, Shaefer, & Menzel, 2012). Sociocultural theory posits that internalization of media-ideals occurs through the repeated exposure to media images and the adoption of social appearance standards as a personal standard (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). These internalized standards then lead to negative self-evaluations and behaviors aiming to change one's appearance to more closely resemble the social ideal. Reviews of the effects of media exposure have suggested that the magnitude of the effects of media exposure may be moderated by participants' characteristics including the internalization of media ideals (Blond, 2008). Still, little is known regarding the factors that might influence young men's internalization of media-ideals or why some men seem particularly affected by these concerns (Diedrichs, 2012). Results from a meta-analytic review of media influences on female body dissatisfaction suggested that vulnerability to media-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction might be increased by psychological variables such as the degree of investment in appearance (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Consistent with this, Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2009) revealed that, among young men, appearance investment was associated with greater vulnerability to body dissatisfaction when exposed to images of the muscular ideal. Thus, men with high levels of appearance investment felt less physically attractive and less satisfied with their bodies after exposure to the muscular ideal compared to men with lower investment in appearance (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009). However, so far no studies have explored the relationship between appearance investment and media-ideal internalization prospectively.

Muscularity Behaviors

As described above, theoretical models of the development of body image concerns and body change behaviors predict that internalization of the male muscular ideal and resulting body dissatisfaction could be related to increased body change behaviors aimed at bringing one's appearance closer to the media ideal (Cash, 2011; Tod & Edwards, 2013). Consistent with this, among young men, appearance investment has been associated with increased drive for muscularity (Davis, Karvinen, & McCreary, 2005; Tod & Edwards, 2013). For instance, Tod and Edwards (2013) found that in young men, appearance investment displayed a medium effect association with the wish to be more muscular. Also, appearance investment was also distinctively associated with the behavioral engagement, e.g., working out and using supplements, to become more muscular (Tod & Edwards, 2013). However, previous studies on the relationship between appearance investment and drive for muscularity have been limited by their cross-sectional designs.

Young men's desires and efforts to attain a muscular and/or lean body have been closely associated with negative outcomes such as eating disorder symptomology (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004), unhealthy exercising behavior (Hale, Roth, DeLong, & Briggs, 2010; Tod et al., 2013), and steroid use (Tod, Hall, & Edwards, 2012). Hence, the development of etiological models supported by prospective data is crucial to advancing our understanding of the pathways leading to body dissatisfaction and body change behaviors in young men. Ultimately, this understanding could contribute to inform body dissatisfaction prevention and intervention programs aimed at this population.

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