



Brief research report

Sexuality and the drive for muscularity: Evidence of associations among British men

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have documented associations between sexuality and body image, but the directionality of this association is unclear among men. This study examined whether men's drive for muscularity can be considered a correlate of their sexuality. A community-based sample of 292 heterosexual men from London, UK, completed a survey consisting of measures of drive for muscularity, sociosexuality, sexual assertiveness, sexual esteem, and sexual sensation seeking. A multiple regression analysis showed that greater drive for muscularity was predicted by more unrestricted sociosexuality (i.e., a greater proclivity for short-term, transient relationships), greater sexual sensation seeking, and greater sexual assertiveness, once the effects of participant age and body mass index had been accounted for. Possible avenues for intervention based on a sex-positive approach are discussed in conclusion.

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Introduction

Studies consistently show that women are more likely to rate muscular male bodies as physically attractive (e.g., Dixson, Grimshaw, Ormsby, & Dixson, 2014; Swami & Tovée, 2005) and that possessing a muscular body is associated with greater mating success (Frederick & Haselton, 2007). This, in turn, may engender a desire among men for greater muscularity, which is typically measured as drive for muscularity; that is, a desire to enhance one's musculature in order to reduce a perceived discrepancy between actual and ideal levels (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). Studies have shown that men score higher than women on measures of drive for muscularity and higher scores among men are associated with negative health and psychological outcomes (for a review, see McCreary, 2012). While the centrality of muscularity for men's body image is undisputed, theoretical explanations for drive for muscularity have relied heavily on sociocultural models (McCreary, 2012). Recent work, on the other hand, has emphasised the importance of broader socio-political constructs in shaping men's drive for muscularity, including oppressive and patriarchal attitudes (Swami &

Voracek, 2013) and social dominance orientation (Swami et al., 2013).

Sexuality is another construct that may influence body image, but the available literature is limited by its focus on women (for a review, see Woertman & van den Brink, 2012) and outcome-focused measures of men's sexual satisfaction (e.g., Daniel & Bridges, 2013). That is, previous studies have adopted a perspective in which male sexuality is viewed as outcomes of body image, with an attendant focus on variables such as sexual functioning and satisfaction. However, there are reasons to think that men's sexuality may help to shape their drive for muscularity (see Vasilenko, Ram, & Lefkowitz, 2011). For example, sexual prowess forms an important component of dominant stereotypes of masculinity: masculine men are expected to strive for autonomy, dominance, and aggressiveness, including in sexual relationships (Connell, 1995). The drive for muscularity is associated with several aspects of the male gender role, including male-typed traits and behaviours and more traditional gender-typed beliefs (McCreary, Saucier, & Courtenay, 2005), allowing us to hypothesise that the desire to be more muscular should be correlated with sexual prowess. Another reason for a potential association between sexual prowess and the drive for muscularity stems from the possibility that stereotypes of men as sexual risk-takers and decision-makers contribute to a desire for greater muscularity. That is, to the extent that sexual prowess, alongside masculinity, is associated with muscularity, men may come to view the two as congruous. Although there is some

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evidence of a positive association between sexuality and men's drive for muscularity (Filiault, 2007), the relationship is usually framed in terms of sexuality as an outcome of men's body image.

With these issues in mind, we identified several sexuality-related constructs that may be associated with men's muscularity-oriented body image. First, sociosexuality refers to individual differences in people's inclination to engage in short-term or long-term sexual relationships (Gangestad & Simpson, 1990). Being sexually restricted means displaying a propensity towards long-term, high-investment relationships with fewer people, whereas being sexually unrestricted means being open to more frequent, short-term, transient relationships without a need for commitment or intimacy. Previous work has shown that unrestricted men show a stronger preference for heteronormative female body types (e.g., lower body mass indices and waist-to-hip ratios; Swami, Miller, Furnham, Penke, & Tovée, 2008) and have higher self-assessed attractiveness compared with restricted men (Weeden & Sabini, 2007). Previous work has shown that unrestricted men are more likely than restricted men to emphasise their physical appearance (Rammsayer & Troche, 2013); as such, we expected that men who are more unrestricted would show greater drive for muscularity.

We also identified sexual sensation seeking, which has been defined as "the propensity to attain optimal levels of sexual excitement and to engage in novel sexual experiences" (Kalichman et al., 1994, p. 387). Given the centrality of frequency and variety of intercourse to dominant stereotypes of masculine constructions of sexual encounters (Gillen, Lefkowitz, & Shearer, 2006), we expected sexual sensation seeking to be associated with men's drive for muscularity. Finally, we included measures of sexual assertiveness (the tendency to be assertive about the sexual aspects of one's life) and sexual esteem (a positive regard for, and confidence in, the capacity to experience one's sexuality in a satisfying manner), with the expectation that men who scored higher on these traits would also show greater drive for muscularity.

Method

Participants

The participants were 292 heterosexual men recruited from the community in London, UK, of whom the majority were of British White ancestry (90.1%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 years ($M = 28.55$, $SD = 11.41$) and in body mass index (BMI) based on self-reported height and weight from 19.15 to 32.15 kg/m^2 ($M = 24.90$, $SD = 4.51$). In terms of educational qualifications, 32.2% had completed minimum secondary education, 16.1% were still in full-time education, 28.4% had an undergraduate degree, 4.1% had a postgraduate degree, and the remainder had some other qualification.

Materials

Drive for muscularity. Participants completed the Drive for Muscularity Scale (DMS; McCreary & Sasse, 2000), which consists of 15 items measuring an individual's desire to have a more muscular body. Items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Always*, 6 = *Never*) and were reverse-coded so that higher scores represent greater drive for muscularity. Scores on the DMS have been shown to have a two-factor lower-order structure in men (representing attitudinal and behavioural dimensions), but the two subscales also load onto a single higher-order dimension (McCreary, Karvinen, & Davis, 2006). In the present work, the two subscales were strongly correlated ($r = .65$). We therefore followed recent work in calculating a total DMS as the mean of all 15 items. McCreary (2007) reported that the total DMS score has good psychometric properties. In the present study, Cronbach's α for this measure was .90.

Sociosexuality. We measured sociosexual orientation using the Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). This is a 9-item measure that examines dealing with past behavioural experiences, attitudes towards uncommitted sex, and sociosexual desire. All items were rated on 5-point scales and an overall score was computed as the sum of all items. A higher score on this measure reflects a more unrestricted sociosexual orientation, whereas a lower score reflects a more restricted orientation. Penke and Asendorpf (2008) provide evidence of good psychometric properties for this scale. Cronbach's α for the SOI-R in this study was .71.

Sexual sensation seeking. Participants completed the Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale (SSSS; Kalichman et al., 1994), an 11-item instrument that measures an individual's inclination to seek sexual excitement and to engage in novel sexual experiences. Items on the SSSS were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Not at all like me*, 4 = *Very much like me*) and an overall mean score was computed. Higher scores on this scale reflect greater sexual sensation seeking. Scores on the scale have been shown to have good psychometric properties among heterosexual men (Gaither & Sellborn, 2003). In the present study, Cronbach's α for this measure was .77.

Sexual assertiveness and esteem. Participants completed the Sexual Assertiveness and the Sexual Esteem subscales of the Multidimensional Sexuality Questionnaire (MSQ; Snell, Fisher, & Walters, 1993). The former measures the tendency to be assertive in sexual aspects of one's life whereas the latter measures an individual's positive regard for, and confidence in, the capacity to experience their sexuality in a satisfying manner. Both subscales consist of 5 items, respectively, and were rated on 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *Not at all characteristic of me*, 5 = *Very characteristic of me*). Mean scores were computed separately for each subscale (higher scores reflect greater sexual assertiveness or sexual esteem, respectively). Scores on these MSQ subscales have been shown to have good psychometric properties (Snell et al., 1993). In the present work, both subscales had good internal consistency: Sexual Assertiveness, $\alpha = .83$ and Sexual Esteem, $\alpha = .86$.

Demographics. Participants provided their demographic information consisting of age, ethnicity, educational qualifications, height, and weight. The latter two items were used to calculate participants' BMI (kg/m^2). BMI was included as a proxy for actual muscle mass, as McCreary et al. (2006) showed a strong correlation between the two in a sample of university students.

Procedure

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee. Potential participants who fit study criteria (British residents of adult age and of exclusively heterosexual orientation) were invited to take part in a study on sexual relationships by four research assistants (two women, two men) trained in psychological methods. Recruitment was conducted opportunistically in sites of congregate activities (e.g., public parks, train stations, cultural venues, high streets) in Greater London. Recruitment took place through direct approaches by the research assistants on weekdays and attempts were made to minimise selection bias by sampling at different times of the day. Once participation had been agreed, participants provided written informed consent and completed an anonymous paper-and-pencil version of the survey in a quiet location set up for the purposes of the project in the vicinity of the catchment site. We randomised the order of presentation of the above scales, with the exception of demographic data, which always appeared last in the survey. All participants took part on a voluntary basis, were not remunerated for participation, and were provided with a debrief sheet upon completion of the survey.

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