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An Autoethnographic Study of Gay Male Body Image and Masculinity

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Abstract This proposed research utilizes an autoethnography study of gay male body image and masculinity in the media. This paper details a literature review of gay male body image and masculinity represented in various media. Three research questions were presented to provide a framework on how media presents and communicates images of gay men and masculinity. In addition, I used Signorile's (1997) "cult of masculinity theory" and Trujillo's (1992) hegemonic masculinity as a framework to analyze gay male body image and masculinity.

Keywords Gay Males, Media Representation, Autoethnography, Masculinity constructs, Body Image Perceptions

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1. Introduction

The “cult of masculinity,” as Signorile (1997) described it, refers to the constant pressure that men have to be men, to do manly things, and to have a hyper-masculine appearance. After many years of being stereotyped and stigmatized as effeminate and less manly, many gay men conform to the idealized version of physical manhood muscles. As Signorile (1997) observes, “The cultural influence of this decidedly hyper-masculine clone aesthetic went out to the far reaches of the gay male world” (p.2). Situated within a larger heterosexual culture that was much more ignorant of gay people than it is today, this hyper-masculine, sexually charged image is the most visible aspect of gay male life today. “Indeed, that ignorance of any aspect of gay life, an ignorance inspired by homophobia-contributed to the creation within the heterosexual mainstream of the unilateral gay lifestyle marked by hedonism and excess” (Signorile, p. 3). Signorile’s concept can be easily applied to my own life struggles of dealing with homophobia within the dominant culture.

Growing up in Singapore was difficult. As a male of Indian descent, I had to fulfill several cultural expectations. My mother was very interested in my welfare in school and the fact that I only weighed 55 pounds at the age of 10. The idea of body image did not really bother me until I reached high school. I noticed that the male classmates around me had developed into men. They all had muscular arms, nice huge legs, and deep voices. I never grew that way. I felt weak and threatened by my male classmates and took on the form of a very skinny male who never made any friends. The male classmates feared even talking to me because they felt threatened that they would be less of a man talking to someone weaker in physical appearance. Being “male” to them meant having a muscular appearance. As Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000) note, “Society is telling men now, more than ever before, that their bodies define who they are as men” (p. 4).

From that moment on, I became aware of what my body looked like. I would flip through magazines and compare myself to other men, scrutinizing their muscles and weight. I constantly dreaded that I did not measure up to these men.

My final awakening on body image came to me when I first arrived in the United States. One of my best friends, Brian, taught me the importance of bodybuilding and how it was important in proving my masculinity. The better body a man had, the more successful he would be in terms of finding a mate. I believed that instantly. My whole life changed after I met Brian. I began going to the gym and trying to attain the big muscular body I had always wanted.

I then discovered I was not alone in this ordeal. Other individuals were also engaged in this destructive journey toward physical perfection. I also learned that women also go through the same pressure regarding body ideals, particularly to attain the “slim image.”

The internet has many web pages devoted to eating disorders and body positivity regarding women, but there is very little research about men. Searches throughout the library and journal catalogs turned up a few references to studies concerning body image disorders within the male population; however, they provided very little information regarding sexual orientation.

Phillips (1996), in *The Broken Mirror*, explained body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), which preys on individuals who do not like their looks and appearance. These individuals go to extremes to correct their “problem” bodies, so after a while, they still think they are not good enough. Men and women who are diagnosed with BDD worry too much about their appearance; indeed, they are obsessed with it. Concerning body image, men go to the gym to exercise excessively to attain the ideal body image to prove their masculinity. Others think that their penises are too small and go for corrective surgery. As Phillip notes, “BDD is caused by an unconscious displacement of sexual conflict or feeling of infirmity and a poor self-image” (p.51).

Homosexual men are more at risk of adjusting themselves to cultural ideals of body image. As Lamberg notes, “For those who believe that cultural pressures towards thinness cause eating disorders, homosexuality can be seen as a risk factor that puts males in a subcultural system that places the same premium on appearance in men as the larger culture places on women” (cited in *Male Homosexuality*, 1997, p.6). Whether these gay men are successful or not, research also indicates that these behaviors are psychological.

One possible explanation is that men, heterosexual or homosexual, perceive that they need to be as muscular as possible to prove their masculinity (Signorile, 1997, p. 81). Though we individually accept this ideology, the media increasingly dictate that ideal. As Signorile notes, “muscular and masculine images are aggressively promoted to the

gay male community in advertisements that prop up the ideal through the sophisticated and ever-present local and national gay media" (p.42).

1.2. Statement of Purpose & Research Questions

So then, where does this ideology really come from? Certainly, I did not learn from my parents about body image, so is this just an image perpetuated by the media or the fashion magazines we read, or are these ideas stemming from the gay community? Saying precisely where these cultural demands come from is beyond the scope of this study. As Pope, Phillips & Olivardia (2000) observe, "On the one hand, men are increasingly surrounded by media images of masculine perfection, not just in the gyms, but in advertisements, on television, in the movies" (p.5). Turner (1996) notes that we learn social roles, behaviors, and norms from the media. Images of gay males in the media are one area that can be studied. Therefore, media are undoubtedly a large factor in spreading beauty standards in our culture. Magazines, print, television advertisements, and pornography are important influential factors. Just as women have been objectified and portrayed as one-dimensional sexual figures by advertisers and entrepreneurs, the male body has also had its share of objectification within the media.

Media representations of gays and lesbians are never really about people as human beings. The media have portrayed homosexuals as either being effeminate or hyper-masculine. Of course, these images are often represented through a heterosexual scope. Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000) note that "being gay, in other words, so violates their perception of masculinity that they seek out large, muscular bodies to compensate for their perceived lack of manliness" (p.216).

Media representation of gay and lesbian characters has been portrayed negatively in the media. Schnoebelen argues that media representations about gays and lesbians are never really about gays and lesbians (p.5). "It is often slanted in a way that perpetuates stereotypes about homosexuals to maintain the normalcy of heterosexuality within our culture" (p.5). This increased sense of male insecurity is lengthened within some media, especially the television and magazines, where visual images are portrayed. Pope, Phillips

Olivardia (2000) notes that "if, during your entire life, you're fed a diet of media images that big, muscular bodies are what an ideal man should have, you then believe that is what you are supposed to look like" (p.1). Yvonne Tasker (1993), author of *Spectacular Bodies*, commented that the bodybuilder, often portrayed in cinema, confirms the range of masculine identities that are popular in Western culture. The figure of a male bodybuilder in cinema has a special significance in that it is active and masculine.

Seeing how the media can influence our thinking on body image, I would like to turn my attention to gay male body images in print advertising. Harris (1997), in *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, investigated the body image of a gay male from the 1950s to the present. He concluded that the magazines before *Physical Pictorial* depicted models with sissy-like, scrawny frames and gave the heterosexual community a chance to stereotype homosexuals (p.24). In the 1970s, the transition of male body image began to occur. "The shift from a sense of weakness, futility, and vulnerability to muscle-bound images" (Harris, p.24). This marked the butch fantasy of images in print. The "butch fantasy," as defined by Harris, are images of a cement worker, jocks, and budding bodybuilders. Bronski's (1998) theories coincide with Harris's on constructing a new identity of a muscular, beefy male that was set to replace the scrawny stereotype. "This enormous leap is due to the influence of the gay male sensibility that has encouraged the display and sexualization of the male body" (p.96).

Below are the research questions I propose to determine gay male body image:

1. How does media depict the gay male?
2. How is physical appearance related to masculinity?
3. How is this masculinity related to concepts of masculine hegemony?

1.3. Methodology

To answer the research questions, I propose the use of "the cult of masculinity" theory by Signorilie (1997) and masculine hegemony theory by Trujillo (1991). The "cult of masculinity" theory deals with five characteristics concerning gay male body image, while the masculine hegemonic theory also deals with four concepts of hegemonic masculinity. The "cult of masculinity" theory determines the physical standards of gay male body image. The

masculine hegemonic theory, on the other hand, deals with theoretical explanations of masculine behavior according to society's gender construct. I will then relate the two theories,

Signorilie (1997), in his book *Life Outside: The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, and Muscle*, and the *Passages of Life*, identified five characteristics concerning gay male body image: 1) young; 2) muscular and beefy; 3) height and weight proportionate; 4) portraying masculine behaviors; and 5) perfectly hairless body except for hair in certain areas particularly in the pubic region and underarms. These characteristics conjure up a "cult of masculinity." Using these five characteristics, I will analyze the media, particularly looking for images that portray age, musculature, height and weight proportions, amount of masculine behavior, and amount of body hair.

Along with these five characteristics, I also found the important need to identify hegemonic masculinity, according to Trujillo's perspective, to have a clear understanding of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1990) defined hegemonic masculinity as the rhetorical construction or the manner in which the messages are created that idealizes the culturally accepted form of masculinity (p. 83-84). Hegemonic masculinity is the cultural form of masculinity that directly relates to ruggedness and competitiveness.

Hanke (1990) stated that hegemonic masculinity defines what it is to be a man (p. 232). Trujillo (1991) identified five features of masculinity in the American culture. They include: 1) physical force and control; 2) success in job and business; 3) head of the family; 4) heterosexuality; and 5) frontiersman ship. Through the lens of Trujillo's five characteristics, I will offer a brief explanation of each.

Physical force and control are important in the construction of masculinity. Men, at all times, must be dominant in control. Trujillo asserts that men have to be physically strong and engage in sports and other activities to demonstrate their male prowess and strength to accomplish this sense of control. Occupational achievement is the second form of hegemonic masculinity. In this characteristic, men must have a good job to provide for their families. Schnobelen (2001) notes that occupational achievement has a role in gender stereotypes. Men are supposed to be firefighters, police officers, or soldiers, while women are supposed to be teachers, nurses, and secretaries (p.42).

The third characteristic involves familial patriarchy. Patriarchy, as defined, is the control of women by men in a society. In the traditional Western culture, women have always been in submissive roles in the home and public. The underlying misconception is that women are weaker physically and mentally and are not suited for jobs that men do. Although this ideology is changing, the belief is still in existence.

The "John Wayne" genre explains the fourth characteristic of Trujillo's hegemonic masculinity of frontiersman ship. John Wayne has a very American appeal of masculinity, which indicates whiteness, heroism, and Christianity.

Finally, there is the idea of male heterosexuality in society. A man must be straight for all four characteristics to be accomplished. Being a gay male is seen as unnatural and perverse. "Thus, as a consequence, men are engaged to conform to this notion of heteronormativity, or heterosexuality, as the only socially acceptable form of sexuality and behavior to be hegemonic" (Trujillo, p.292).

In addition, Schnobelen (2001) states that hegemonic masculinity is a gender performance with several characteristics, such as aggressiveness, domination of females, and norms for attractiveness (p.13).

Additionally, there is a need to understand the definition of body image critically. Most of what is studied derives from the work of psychology. Schluder (1935) defined body image as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind; in other words, the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (p.11). Hammacheck (1978) further defines body image. He discovers that body image is an aspect of self-concept. A person's physical self is the outer shell that houses all his inner feelings. As such, it deserves to be recognized and understood for whatever its potential is for eliciting social responses that contribute to an individual's overall concept of himself (p.73). Signorilie (1997) defines body image as a set of rigid standards of physical beauty that every individual must achieve (p.32). Body image is a complex phenomenon that includes physiological, psychological, and sociological components (Parks & Read, 1997, p.593). Body image is a self-perception of what a person looks like, and this phenomenon can change over time. Schnobelen (2001) asserts that this definition is important as it complies with the potential for outside forces to affect one's self-image in relation to his/her body (p.22). "These emotional responses to the outside, body-image-related information aid in shaping a person's body image negatively or positively" (Schnobelen, p.22).

Schnobelen (2001), in his research on the body image of Will & Grace, operationally defined body image and discovered several similarities. "First, body image is an idea or concept that an individual possesses; it is an idea that a person has about his or her own body" (p.23). Secondly, he says that "body image is shaped by outside forces, in

addition to personal beliefs within the individual" (p.23). "Parents, educators, peers and the like all help the body image that an individual has of her/himself" (p.23). Finally, he notes that "body image is a subjective construct, independent from facts or actual physical composition" (p.23). In his research, Schnobelen (2001) talks about the show *Will and Grace*, which emerged in the Fall of 1998. He describes the show of the starting view of gay male body image issues.

He continues by giving several reasons why this show is an onset for the gay male boy image. First, he said that it is the first television series to feature an openly gay male lead character., *Will & Grace* represents something of a mile-marker for gay male representation. In addition, Schnobelen quotes, " *Will & Grace* has enjoyed much commercial success, regularly appearing in the top twenty-five of Nielsen-rated shows through each of the three seasons to date." Finally, he felt the need to use *Will and Grace* as a show because he wanted to tell stories about gay male identity and body image, as this current show focuses on a gay male lead character. His rationale for his research was to show the stories about gay men living in New York City, their masculinity portrayal, and their body image concerns. All this, he says, is imperative for research as there are no gay lead characters in a leading role in any other show.

The purpose of his study was to look at what *Will and Grace* say about gay male body image and masculinity. Using the same framework of his analysis of gay male body image by Signorile and Trujillo, I will use it in my own study.

Now that I have clearly explained the concepts of body image and masculine hegemony, I will move on to explain the analysis of gay male body images and the rationale for studying *Out* magazine.

1.4. Rationale for analyzing images of gay men

An obsession with the masculine appearance is not, of course, confined to gay men. Bronski (1998) argues that "we live in a culture that is slavishly focused on physical beauty and where men are often highly insecure about their masculinity" (p.29).

Feminist writer Wolf (1991) recognizes a similar phenomenon among American women (what she calls the "rites of beauty"). She does not mince words about women's role as a replacement for traditional and oppressive religions. Her critique could just be easily applied to gay men: What has not yet been recognized is that the comparison should be no metaphor. The rituals do not simply echo traditional religions and cults but functionally supplant them. They are literally reconstituting out of old faiths a new one, literally drawing on traditional techniques of mystification and thought control to alter women's minds as sweepingly as any past evangelical wave.... The Rites of Beauty can isolate women so well because it is not publicly recognized that devotees are trapped in something more serious than fashion and socially pervasive than a private self-image distortion. The Rites are not yet interims of what they actually are: a new fundamentalism transforming the West, repressive and doctrinaire (p.32).

Wolf shows, for example, how the cosmetics and diet industries and their promises of a "new you" have a powerful impact on many, if not most, American women. This could also have cultural and media implications for gay males that encourage conformity. Signorile (1997) states that "it homogenizes all gay men today circuit clone with huge muscles, close-cropped hair and shaved and waxed body being its main cookie cutter image today the same way that all Hare Krishna devotees look and dress the same" (p.37). As Schnobelen (2001) observes, the struggle to maintain a masculine appearance is of particular concern for gay men because of the gay culture's emphasis on masculinity (p.4). A common belief within our culture is that gay men are "failed" men (Segal, 1990; Levine, 1992).

Many studies have suggested that gay men are dissatisfied with their bodies. For example, Schneider, O'Leary & Jenkins (1995) conducted a study involving gay men and their bodies. The study found that gay men were somewhat more unhappy with their bodies than straight men. "Fifty-seven percent said they are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their bodies as opposed to 44 percent of the gay men; more gay men reported dieting-70 percent versus 58 percent" (p.120).

The AIDS epidemic has particularly heightened gay men's sensitivity and body image problems. "The frightening image of the wasting syndrome of AIDS, severe loss of muscle and weight with advancing disease has left an incredible mark on the gay consciousness" (Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000, p.218). An additional factor in this equation is the use of anabolic steroids.

Steroids are making a comeback, especially for athletes. "Boys and men who are dissatisfied with their bodies go on to take anabolic steroids, develop eating disorders, and experience other psychiatric disorders about their body image" (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000, p.34). There is a difference between health and obsession. For many gay

men, the question seems to be more academic. Everyone wants to be fit and healthy, but it is easy to become health-crazed. Freiss (1998), in an article from *The Advocate*, pointed out that the media was partly responsible for gay men dying from an overdose of steroids and exercising themselves to death. "Media produces a constant proliferation of body-beautiful icons in the gay press and imagery in porn videos and lately the internet" (p. 20).

In a recent medical survey, Davis (2001) pointed out that steroids can be useful for HIV-infected patients. "Doctors can legally prescribe steroids, but medically, steroids cannot restore a weak immune system" (Davis, p.22). Steroids are basically given to HIV patients to improve their physicality instead of internally. In her study, she calculated that gay men make up at least a million who have used steroids or currently using them.

In an article in *The Advocate*, Walker (1999) said that many doctors are encouraging HIV-positive patients who have normal testosterone to use drugs when they are unnecessary, especially when their own body produces enough to maintain normal body functions. The article also explained that gay men do not see the potential danger that steroids are dangerous, and they are willing to take risks without fearing what it could do to them as long as they look healthy and perfect outside.

There seems to be another option where gay men are now turning to the knife to solve their body image problems. Most gay men often have different ideas of physical perfection, but their ideas always conform to the cultural ideals of beauty. As Woog (1999) observes, in 1998, more than 1 million cosmetic procedures were performed on gay and lesbian patients (p.32). And Phillips (1996) notes that in 1996 alone, research indicates that gay men received 690,361 cosmetic procedures.

What is conspicuously absent in written media, both gay and straight-oriented print media, academics, and everyday conversations, is a consciousness about the state of the body politics and image issues regarding men. Society has been highly aware of "body fascism" (Signorile, p.44) that women have faced for years, and many attempts are being made to instill a positive view within the female population. However, because the objectifiers of women have generally been presented as heterosexual men, body image has, in essence, been a part of a great gender war between heterosexual men and women. What has widely been ignored within these debates is the homosexual element of society. Wouldn't gay men have body image issues as well? With the advent of the feminist movement, body image must be critically evaluated to include every group and subculture in today's society.

Many people, whether gay or straight, argue that gay men are more likely to develop body image problems. "One standard theory is that gay men are more likely to have a feminine gender identity, which is to say they are more likely to be effeminate and to relate to people and situations the way a woman would" (Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000, p. 215). Pope, Phillips & Olivardia (2000) say that the problem with this theory is that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different things. Gay men may prefer other men sexually but not necessarily assume an effeminate position. Of course, there is a certain percentage of gay men who are obvious to the natural observer, but there is a majority of them who show little or no evidence of femininity at all.

As noted earlier, there has been extensive research on women's body images in film, television, and print. But there have been just a few done on men and even less on gay men. The next chapter focuses on research with a general view of body image. This chapter shows the extensive research done with heterosexual men and women but the limited scope of male homosexuality and body image.

2. Review of literature

2.1. General Body Image Research

There has been research on body image conducted in all fields of study, and it has been primarily about the study of women and their insecurities with their bodies. Today, most of us have become aware of all the fat, diet, and exercise issues and concerns of the female body. But there has been little done or known about the male body. Lynch (1990) used a set of drawings in his research to determine the different degrees of muscle mass and body fat. He selected several college men and adult men for his study. Lynch (1990) selected the current figure, which was the ideal muscular figure. He also remarked that the men assumed that the muscular ideal would be most attractive to the women and thought that the muscular ideal would best suit a man (p.6). The research also indicated that adult men were satisfied with their bodies, but college men wanted to be larger in muscle size. This clearly shows that men of different ages perceive ideal figures differently. Lynch (1990) also reported that men below the age of 24 wanted to gain weight and look muscular, while men older than 24 wanted to lose weight (p.7).

Bourke (1996) did a research study on men's body images during World War I. He did a qualitative analysis of male body image during the pre- and post-war periods. He noted that early historians depicted images of working-class men as lighter, leaner, and poorer in health than middle-class men (p.9). In his research, Bourke identified three types of representations of the male body: 1) the adolescent softness of Narcissus, 2) the firm gracefulness of Apollo, and 3) the muscular Hercules. Bourke also indicated that most of the images were predominantly white. "The stature, stance, and muscularity of the male body in the Western culture have been constantly equated with maleness and power, and other races were depicted or showing signs of non-humanness" (p.67).

Parks and Read (1997) conducted a study analyzing image concerns and attitudes toward physical development and exercise. In their research, they found that self-esteem is the primary factor linked to body image (p.593), and poor body image is linked to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. They noted that "if we keep in mind that self-esteem is a general gauge for how positively or negatively a person feels about her/himself, the connection between a poor body image and psychological distress becomes clear" (p. 25). Out of this research on body image comes a new area of research on men and body image.

Jeffries (1994) conducted an experiment in which he used an analysis of 116 prime-time TV programs from 1986 to 1987 on three major networks. He found that male characters outnumbered female characters two to one. Both men and women were featured in service roles, most often 51% of the women and 44% of the men. Men were also portrayed in public administration roles, whereas women's roles were confined to the household (p.350).

Jeffries also looked at music videos and the portrayal of women. He conducted the research by looking at a 1985 sample of music videos aired on Music Television (MTV). He found the depiction of gender roles to be fairly traditional and sexism high (p.351). Jeffries concluded that women are portrayed in condescending roles that emphasize them as one-dimensional sex objects in more than half of the videos, while only a fifth presented women in equal roles (p.352).

A study by Ricciardelli (2001) examined the impact of sociocultural influences, the moderating role of self-esteem, and the negative effects of self-esteem on body dissatisfaction and body change in boys and girls. Surveys were designed to assess body dissatisfaction and body change strategies to decrease weight and increase muscles and self-esteem. The results indicated that boys with low self-esteem were more affected by sociocultural pressures, while girls were more affected because of their self-esteem (p.747).

2.2. Representations of Male Body Images in the Media

Many have argued that media could be a primary source for creating body image problems in both men and women. As Schnoebelen (2001) notes, media presents ideal images and, in turn, normalizes the ideal body through television programs, magazine advertisements, films, etc. (p. 34). "Exposure to ads about beauty products causes adolescent girls to place more importance on beauty-related characteristics in their real-life personal roles; in addition, women who watch ads featuring thin models can have their own perceptions of their own bodies altered" (Wolf, p.157).

Advertisements in women's magazines are not the only indicator of the high dollar value of men's bodies. Bordo (1999) noted that a corresponding industry of men's magazines, largely focused on body appearance, has exploded over the last ten or twenty years (p.65). "The paid circulation of Men's Health has risen from 250,000 to more than 1.5 million in less than a decade" (p.67).

Bordo says that according to a survey she conducted, most of the readers of Men's Health are in their thirties and forties and married. (p.65). "In an earlier era, these readers would have been content to be respected husbands and breadwinners, but as these traditionally masculine roles have eroded, these men are reading articles about tightening their abs, saving their hair, building muscle, and shedding fat" (p.66). "The male body image industries that advertise in men's magazines, like GQ or Men's Health, are quick to capitalize on these new insecurities, are making a killing" (Bordo, p.28).

Bordo (1999) deconstructed an advertisement that shows a young Calvin Klein model. She describes the model using Long's theory of today's gay aesthetics. The model- a young Jackson Browne look-alike- stands there in his formfitting and rip-speckled Calvin Klein briefs, head lowered, and loose dark hair. His body projects strength and solidity; he's no male waif. But his finely muscled chest is not so overdeveloped as to suggest a sexuality immobilized by the thick matter of the body. He has leaner, tauter, and sinuous muscles than Schwarzenegger's bulk- which points to a dynamic tension that incredible hulks lack. Stiff, engorged Schwarzenegger bodies seem to be surrogate penises- with nowhere to go and nothing to do but stand there looking massive- whereas muscles like this young man's seem

designed for movement, for sex. His body isn't a stand-in phallus; rather, he has a penis-the real thing, not a symbol, and a fairly breathtaking one (p. 171).

Such images, as Bordo described, are a progression to contemporary mainstream representations. "Homophobia is at work in this taboo, but so are the attitudes about gender that cut across sexual orientation" (p.171).

Research conducted by Pope, Phillips & Olivardia (2001) reviewed images of Playboy magazine centerfolds from 1959 to 1979. The results indicated that the models had grown steadily thinner over the years. The same research group analyzed the Miss America Pageant and discovered that the contestants had grown thinner over the same period, and the winners were even thinner than the losers (p. 46). "The results of this study helped to confirm the widely held impression that our society has been preaching an increasingly thin ideal body standard to women contributing to the rise for eating disorders among girls and women over the last decade" (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000, p. 47). In relation to the Playboy magazine study, the same researchers looked at Playgirl magazine from 1973 to 1998. "Putting in more specific terms, the average Playgirl centerfold man has shed about 12 pounds of fat while putting on approximately 27 pounds of muscle over the last 25 years" (p.47).

Regarding the ever-increasing body mass throughout the years, Pope, Phillips & Olivardia (2000) wanted to know if these changes in image spilled over into the toy industry. The researchers contacted many collectors of vintage action toys and soon became experts on the evolution of plastic heroes. They decided to select the G.I Joe figure for study because it was the most famous and longest-running American action toy. The G.I. Land Adventurer, introduced in 1964, was a man five feet ten inches tall, with a 32-inch waist, a 44-inch chest, and a 12-inch bicep. Ten years later, another G.I Joe was introduced to the market. His biceps were the equivalent of 15 inches, and his abdominal muscles, hardly noticeable in his predecessor, were clearly defined. His 1992 equivalent was undoubtedly more muscular: a 55-inch chest and a 27-inch bicep. They noted that "his bicep, in other words, is almost as big as his waist- and bigger than most competition bodybuilders" (p. 42). Certainly, G.I Joe suggests that the ideal male body has evolved in only about thirty years from a normal attainable figure to a hugely muscular figure that no man could attain without steroids. Boys are exposed to these figures and form their opinions on what a man's body should look like. Such research is only a sample of the extensive amount of research on male body image; however, fewer studies have examined gay male body image.

A study done by Schneider, O'Leary, and Jenkins (1995) looked at the risk of gay males for developing eating disorders. They recruited 2,000 San Francisco Bay Area people to answer an anonymous questionnaire. The final sample that was used included 75 heterosexual females, 25 lesbians, 75 heterosexual men, and 50 gay men. Their research confirmed that heterosexual females and gay males were more likely to binge eat and have a feeling of lack of control around food. They also found out that gay males exercised more than any other group besides the lesbian population. Heterosexual females desired to lose twice as many pounds as any other group, but heterosexual males were the most overweight and the least concerned about weight issues. This data relates the idea that physical appearance, in fact, most greatly concerned the populations who sought males as sexual partners. This is especially true when it comes to gay males, as they tend to be choosy about body image when it comes to picking out their partners. This also goes back to the attributes that people seek when looking for a sexual partner.

Although most of the studies look at an adult population, a study done by French, Story, Remafedi, and Resnik (1996) examined the effects of sexual orientation on an adolescent population. Their study looked at a population sample of 35,000 students between the grades of seven and twelve. Each of these students completed a survey that asked questions about sexual orientation, body image, and different weight control measures.

The final report included the findings from 212 heterosexual males and 182 heterosexual females for comparison with 81 self-identifying homosexual males and 38 self-identifying homosexual females, and 131 bisexual males and 144 bisexual females. They discovered that homosexual males were much more likely than heterosexual males to report having a poor body image (27.8% to 12%) and admit to frequent dieting (8.9% to 5.5%), binge eating (25% to 10.6%), or purging (11.7% to 4.4%).

Phillips (1996) has dealt with body image problems, especially in women, but later focused his research on men. He studied a particular individual named Alan, who was very obsessed with his stomach. Alan believed he was too fat and compulsively worked out in the gym to attain washboard abdominal muscles. In a longitudinal study, Alan showed an overwhelming increase in musculature and a decrease in body fat. After various therapy sessions, Alan admitted that he was taking steroids because he felt the pressure of oppression and the guilt of his sexual preference.

2.3. Hegemonic Masculinity and Media

Connell's (1990) research is focused on the fact that masculinity is a social construct. Historically speaking, hegemonic masculinity is organized hierarchically and from a process whereby certain attributes ascend to ideological dominance while others are rejected or subordinated (Connell, p.78). His view of masculinity is to be tough, rugged, and heterosexual. Hanke (1990) conducted research concerning hegemonic masculinity within television programs. He notes that this form of masculinity is accepted everywhere, in media and relationships, and all men are expected to attain it. Trujillo (1991) presented five characteristics of hegemonic masculinity: "(1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality" (p.291).

Schnoebelen (2001) studied the gay male body image in the television sitcom *Will & Grace*. He picked an episode entitled "New Will City" to identify and evaluate the messages related to the body image of gay men. In his research, he conducted a textual analysis by using the criteria of the ideal gay male body of Signorile and Harris. Then, he interpreted the identified messages in the context of Trujillo's idea of hegemonic masculinity. Schnoebelen (2001) noted that physical appearance is a standard of hegemonic masculinity. Men must always appear to be tough and rugged and have a muscular body. Indeed, as Schnoebelen adds, masculinity is associated with muscles and body shape, and anybody who deviates from this 'norm' is considered non-masculine.

From this generalized view of body image and gay male body image and its relation to hegemonic masculinity portrayed in the media, it is clear that while researchers have documented gay male body image, more research, and personal narratives must be explored in order to fully understand multi-voice perspectives.

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