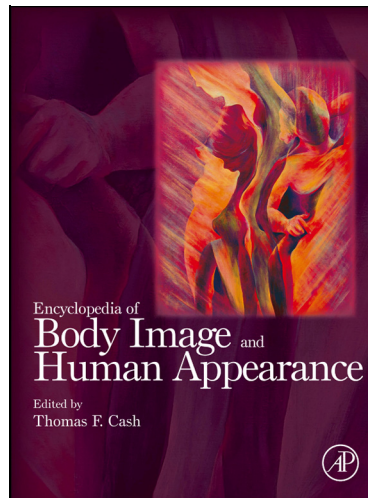


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Body Image and Gender Roles

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Glossary

gender versus sex Many gender role researchers use the term 'sex' to refer to a strictly biological distinction between females and males, whereas the term 'gender' can refer to cultural distinctions between females and males. Thus, gender is the more inclusive term that might be used to make a general distinction between women and men. Most cultures make distinctions between the two genders female and male, and many cultures polarize the two genders, casting them as opposites, as exemplified by the terms 'opposite sex'.

gender role It refers to behaviors and traits that are typically associated with women and men. The specific

nature of gender roles varies across cultures and time periods. In patriarchal societies, traits and behaviors associated with men generally reinforce male dominance, and those associated with women reinforce female submission.

femininity It is the gender role associated with women and generally contains traits and behaviors related to 'expressiveness' and 'communion'.

masculinity It is the gender role associated with men and generally encompasses traits and behaviors associated with 'industriousness' and 'assertiveness'.

Introduction

It only takes a simple look at children's toys to recognize that there are gender-stereotyped cultural body ideals for women and men in North America. The Bratz doll made for girls and the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) action figures designed for boys exemplify the gendered ideals. The Bratz doll is thin, has long hair, long eyelashes, and a sexualized look created by makeup, full lips, and revealing clothing. The WWE figure is extremely muscular and has a facial expression that 'knows no fear'. Although these 'toys' represent exaggerations of gendered body image ideals, the current depictions of ideal bodies in the mass media follow these gendered patterns. In this article, we describe the current body ideals for women and men and their relationship to existing gendered roles that interlock to support a patriarchal, heterosexist society. Women and men who are more concerned with adherence to gender-stereotyped roles are more susceptible to ideal body messages, but women as a group are generally more vulnerable due to their subordinate societal position. We discuss the possibilities of gender role changes that might support both less focus on the body to define 'success' and more realistic, healthier body ideals.

Body Image Ideals for Girls and Women

Since the late 1970s, psychologists and cultural critics have been concerned about the increasingly thin image of women presented in Western popular culture, especially in the United States. *Playboy* models, *Miss America* contestants, and other women depicted in the media have been portrayed as increasingly thin across time, while actual American women have become heavier. Psychologist Dittmar and her colleagues have analyzed the 'thin ideal' and pointed out that models can be as much as 20% underweight. To put this discrepancy in perspective, anorexia nervosa is defined by being 15% or

more underweight. In every form of mass media examined, the typical image of the idealized woman is thin.

The presence of the thin ideal has been associated with increased body dissatisfaction among women, primarily in the form of women striving to be thinner. In fact, one of the ways psychologists measure body dissatisfaction is with the 'Drive for Thinness' subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory, which includes such items as "I am terrified of gaining weight." Girls as young as 6 years old express thinness concerns and know about dieting. And, when girls become women, it is estimated that 90% of them will diet at some point in their lives. Body dissatisfaction and dieting are risk factors for the development of eating disorders that pose a serious threat to women's emotional and physical health. For example, anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

Cultural products and practices in America support the thin ideal. The average young woman getting ready for work or school could encounter numerous products and messages that remind her of the importance of thinness. Her breakfast could be Special K cereal, which has an entire ad campaign focused around thinness. She might not consume solid food at all but instead a Slim Fast shake. In her bathroom, there will be a mirror and most likely a scale reminding her of the importance of monitoring her body. She might have skin products that can slough off cellulite and supplements or vitamins that are purported to encourage weight loss. When it is time to get dressed, she could choose to wear 'skinny jeans', 'Spanx', and other clothing designed to slim. It is unlikely that she will fit into size 'zero' jeans but they do exist for those with a body mass index in the anorexic range. If she glances at a fashion magazine or turns on the television, she will undoubtedly be exposed to thinness messages. If she is walking to school or work, she can put on special shoes that will help her burn more calories. For lunch, she might pack a 'lean cuisine' meal. She will likely feel the need to 'work out' at some point during the day, given the talk about weight she hears, and the workout will be focused on burning calories. Thus, she could be inundated

with thinness messages throughout her day from cultural products alone.

In the last 10 years or so, the thinness message has been paired with an increasingly sexualized image in the media. An emphasis on sexuality has increased on prime-time television and in other mass media, and in such depictions, women are likely to be treated as sexual objects. Depicting the sexy ideal woman involves portraying her in such a way that the features that differentiate her from a man are emphasized or exaggerated. Thus, a sexualized woman has large breasts (out of proportion to her hips, thanks to the thin ideal) that are emphasized and/or revealed by her clothing. She also has long legs that might be emphasized by a short skirt or dress, and by wearing high-heeled shoes. Her thin waist might be emphasized by her clothing. She is likely to have long (blonde) hair, long eyelashes, and full lips. She is not likely to be older than 30. Basically, the ideal sexualized woman resembles a Barbie doll.

Some researchers have argued that the availability of pornography on the Internet has led to a 'pornification' in the culture such that clothing items and beauty practices that used to be seen only in pornography are making their way into popular culture. For example, Victoria's Secret television commercials that air on prime-time television have been the target of criticism since they resemble soft-core pornography in terms of the way the models are scantily dressed and how they move in a sexualized manner. A variety of commercial products help create the sexualized ideal. For example, new types of bras have been invented to create more cleavage. As of November 2010, Victoria's Secret added the 'Hello Bombshell' bra to their collection along with their 'Very Sexy' bra and their 'Incredible' bra. Although Victoria's Secret is bold enough to make it clear that their bras are selling a sexualized look, even at mainstream stores you can buy a Maidenform bra called 'Feeling Sexy', which is a push-up bra with gel inserts, or an 'Extreme Ego Boost' bra by Lily of France, which is also of the push-up variety. Thong underwear is also available in mainstream stores, designed to make it look as if women are not wearing underwear beneath tight clothes. There are a variety of types of high-heeled shoes women can buy that create the long-legged look of the sexualized women. Some of these items are not subtly connected with sexualization such as the stiletto heels available for purchase on the Internet called 'The Pleaser' and another pair called 'The Bordello'.

The precise nature of the ideal portrayed might vary based on the group of women depicted. For example, some differences have been found in media portrayals of women by ethnicity. Hispanic women are underrepresented in popular media compared to their actual numbers in the population, and they are especially likely to be shown in sexualized poses or as children in television commercials. One media analysis found that ads in Black-oriented magazines portrayed women as less sexually objectified and submissive, and more athletic, compared to ads in White-oriented magazines. On the other hand, in rap music videos, Black women are likely to be shown in hypersexual ways including an emphasis on large buttocks. Some theorists have argued that Black women might be hypersexualized as a way to justify the historical sexual exploitation of Black women by White men under slavery. Asian American women are stereotyped as thin and submissive, and with respect to sexualization, there are opposing stereotypes

including the sexualized, submissive 'exotic' woman versus the asexual, controlling 'dragon woman'. In an analysis of the portrayal of women in lesbian versus mainstream magazines, it was found that in lesbian magazines, women varied more in weight and age, were less likely to be shown as sexual objects, and were less commonly portrayed with appearance-related products.

There has been concern that sexualized products are being marketed to young girls. Murnen and her research group completed a content analysis of the clothing available to preteen girls on 15 websites and found that almost one-third of the clothing items had sexualizing characteristics such as shirts and dresses cut to create the look of breasts. At the 'tween' store Abercrombie Kids, the majority of the items had sexualizing characteristics. Teen girl idol Miley Cyrus, who became famous through her start on the Disney channel, was in the news in 2010 for doing a 'lap dance' with a 44-year-old man and a 'pole dance' at the Teen Choice Awards.

Body Image Ideals for Boys and Men

Men are not immune to body image ideal portrayals either. Just as the female ideal body and its underlying messages regarding femininity permeate North American popular culture, it only takes a brief look at a magazine or TV commercials to identify the ideal male body. While the ideal body for women is thin and sexualized, images of male athletes and models with enormous muscles project the ideal that the most attractive man is a muscular one. Images of peak celebrities and athletes such as Matthew McConaughey, Reggie Bush, and LeBron James show muscular, lean men and often convey messages associated with masculinity, such as power, control, and strength. It is no mistake that images of beautiful women alongside these men are not hard to find.

With respect to the research on boys and men, researchers originally assumed men were relatively satisfied with their bodies because they were generally less concerned than women with being thin. However, this view clearly did not take into account the divergent body ideals for men and women, and the fact that fear of fatness is for the most part much less salient for men. While most men report being somewhat weary of being overweight (and some men do indeed report a desire to lose weight), the desire to increase muscles has been shown to be a stronger predictor of body dissatisfaction and body change strategies compared to desire to lose weight. Even boys as young as 8–11 years old seem able to make a distinction between being overweight and being muscular, and the majority of them prefer the latter. In one study, men reported that their ideal body size would involve an average of a 28 lb increase in muscle mass. The same men also believed that women were most attracted to men who were 30 lb heavier in muscle weight.

The male body is believed to be a location for projection of many aspects of the masculine ideal, such as dominance, aggression, and the aforementioned power and control. While the drive for muscularity (DM) certainly contains cosmetic considerations for many, men are generally assumed to be concerned with functionality rather than appearance. Feminist theory predicts that women's bodies are treated like objects, while men are actors concerned with the use of their body. It is

the use of the strong, muscular physique that is supposed to assert masculinity.

Out of the realization that men desire and even take action toward achieving a more muscular body came the development of the Drive for Muscularity Scale, which has been the crux of many studies on male body image, change, and dissatisfaction. One item from this scale is "I think I would look better if I gained 10 pounds in bulk." Drive for muscularity has been associated with a number of psychological and behavioral outcomes, many of which are deleterious to mental and physical health. For example, DM has been related to depression, disordered eating, use of steroids, and low self-esteem (though not always strongly) in numerous studies. Men with higher DM also demonstrate elevated levels of masculine attitudes and behaviors, as measured by a number of different gender role instruments. One of the strongest indicators of body image concerns and body change strategies in boys is sociocultural influence. Pressure from parents, peers, or the media to increase muscularity has consistently been associated with higher DM.

Cultural products and practices are available to support men's DM, although they are not as omnipresent as those that support women's pursuit of sexualized thinness. There are a variety of protein and vitamin supplements to help build muscle such as 'NitroCut' to 'get ripped fast', CytoSport's 'Muscle Milk', and Universal's 'Animal Pak'. The language associated with these products likens men to machines and animals, showing the link between muscularity and power. There are also a variety of types of exercise devices to try to develop a 'six pack' of abdominal muscles. There are specialized magazines about bodybuilding and muscularity such as *Iron Man Magazine*. Perhaps of most serious concern is the availability of anabolic steroids for muscle building that have both emotional and physical side effects that can be dangerous.

Portrayals of the importance of muscularity might vary by the culture of men represented. There is an emphasis on hyper-masculinity among African American men consistent with an emphasis on sports participation and cultural phenomena such as rap music. This emphasis can be accomplished by showing muscular images of men that are prominent in rap music videos. In addition, there has been an increased eroticization of men in the media, which some argue is correlated with the gay rights movement. There is a greater emphasis on the importance of appearance, and consequently muscularity, in gay male culture.

Contemporary Gender Role Norms and the Body

What do these exaggerated gender-stereotyped body ideals symbolize and why are they being promoted in the culture at this particular time? We argue that these body ideals support (and in the case of women directly represent) the current gender role norms. We live in a still surprisingly gendered society where there are polarized expectations for the behavior of females and males. Gender-stereotyped body image ideals support gender-stereotyped roles.

According to Alice Eagly and colleagues' social role theory, gendered social roles probably originated with some biological differences between women and men such as women's ability to bear and feed children and men's greater physical strength.

Women became associated with caretaking and domestic roles, while men became associated with roles that required physical strength. In industrialized societies, a gendered division of labor was exaggerated such that women were more likely to be associated with nurturing roles in the home and men with industrious roles outside the home. When people perform various roles, they develop skills to help them succeed in these roles so that women might be more likely to develop empathy and emotionality compared to men if they are in roles where they are taking care of others. The social processes related to gender role stereotyping lead to societal expectations that women are better suited to 'feminine' roles and men to 'masculine' roles. Diekmann and colleagues' gender role congruity theory adds the idea that women and men will be motivated to try to 'live up' to the ideal roles associated with their gender. People who do not conform to gender roles risk being socially rejected for nonnormative behavior.

Although gendered roles might seem complementary and suited to women's and men's biological differences, there is a power dimension associated with these roles. Men's roles are associated with the agency required for political and economic leadership positions linked with status. Although women's access to high-status roles has increased, it is still true that women are less likely to be public leaders in American society and they earn less money. Thus, women are more economically dependent and might need to attract men to ensure financial stability. Greater male access to resources such as political and economic power in patriarchal, industrial societies means women have less control over their lives.

Further, the heterosexual interdependence of women and men in society means that gendered roles get romanticized and heterosexual 'success' is stereotyped to be dependent on gendered societal prescriptions. Kim and her colleagues have operationalized the concept of the 'heterosexual script' that dictates that women and men should interact with one another in ways that perpetuate traditional roles and promote the importance of heterosexual relationships. In this script, men are sexual actors and women are sexual objects. Men want sex and women want relationships. Kim and colleagues found this script to be prevalent on prime-time television. This heterosexual script's messages are bolstered by gendered body ideals. Men as the dominant sexual actors are consumed with sexual thoughts and cannot help but to objectify women. A man's physical strength and other dominance markers such as wealth can be used to attract women in the scripted scenario. The woman's role in this script is more passive except in her ability to use her sexualized body to attract men. Thus, the ideal body is magnified in importance by the heterosexual script that frames the interactions between women and men in the mass media culture. Cash and colleagues found that college women who hold more traditional views about gender roles in sexual relationships are more likely to have dysfunctional body image attitudes and experiences (i.e., greater dissatisfaction, dysphoria, and investment, as well as greater thin-ideal internalization).

Thus, because of a patriarchal society and heterosexual interdependence, women's bodies can be very important to their sociocultural well-being. Messages about the importance of attractiveness are more prevalent for women than men in the culture. In fact, objectification theory was developed to discuss how the ubiquitous objectification of women (both societal

and interpersonal) might explain women's greater experiences with body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. According to this theory, which has received much empirical support, societal objectification can lead women to treat their own bodies as objects, to self-objectify. This self-objectification and body monitoring can lead to body shame when women do not meet societal standards. Body shame mediates a positive relationship between self-objectification and eating disorder attitudes.

It might seem surprising that modern gender roles seem so traditional given that there have been changes in women's roles in society such as greater numbers of women in jobs that are stereotyped as masculine and much greater participation of girls and women in masculine-stereotyped athletic domains due to Title IX. While women do have increased access to agentic roles, there does not seem to be less focus on appearance for women. In fact, the focus might have increased as a type of 'backlash' to women's accomplishments, according to feminist theorists. If women need to focus on appearance to a great degree, it captures strength and energy that could be used for other pursuits. Further, women who are sexualized are perceived as less competent in masculine-stereotyped domains, so promoting such an image could thwart women's status as a group. Finally, given the increasingly media-saturated culture, it is important to recognize that the commercial culture has much to gain by women (and men) feeling sufficiently dissatisfied with their bodies that they will purchase products to help them try to meet societal ideals.

Some research suggests that expectations for the behavior of women have become more flexible as women's social roles have changed. There are some women in leadership positions who are expected to show assertive behavior. However, in terms of men's behavior, and women's behaviors that support heterosexual relationships, expectations still seem quite gender stereotyped. Mahalik and colleagues examined contemporary gender role norms conducted by focus groups with college students. For women, two of these norms are directly associated with body image concerns: invest in appearance and thinness. The other six norms of modesty, domestic, care for children, romantic relationships, and sexual fidelity clearly situate women in traditional societal roles. For men the roles of winning, emotional control, risk taking, violence, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, power over women, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status certainly help reinforce a patriarchal society. Mahalik and colleagues have developed a scale to measure conformity to feminine norms and one to measure conformity to masculine norms. As will be discussed later, conformity to feminine norms can relate directly to concerns about thinness, whereas masculinity norms might more indirectly promote concerns about muscularity.

The system of interlocking gendered roles is complex and deeply embedded in society. Theorist Sandra Bem wrote about three 'lenses of gender' that help frame our understanding of gender in a patriarchal culture. She argued that we tend to polarize the genders and emphasize gender differences as much as possible, exemplified by the use of the terms 'opposite sex'. This polarization is certainly evident in the current gendered body ideals. We also have an androcentric society, where we are more likely to value what is male. In the realm of body image, both the female and male body ideals support a

patriarchal structure. Men are stereotyped as muscular and dominant, and women are sexually subordinated to them symbolized by thinness and sexualization.

The third 'lens' we look through to understand gender is to use biological explanations to essentialize gender differences. There is some biological essentialism in the research on body image ideals. Evolutionary psychologists have argued that men will prefer physical attractiveness in women as a sign of their reproductive health, while women will seek men with access to resources to support offspring. The biological mechanisms are presumed in this research and they cannot be experimentally tested. Further, such studies obscure the known historical and cultural variations associated with gendered ideals and attitudes. When data on gender and 'mate preferences' were examined by social psychologist Eagly, much of the variation was predicted by the status of women in society such that gendered expectations were more divergent in cultures where women have less status. The muscular male ideal and the sexualized female ideal are heavily promoted in the commercial culture.

Women's Bodies and Femininity

Gender-stereotyped body image ideals are associated with gender-stereotyped social roles that seem to persist in American society. Is everybody vulnerable to these rigid societal prescriptions? Who cares if an individual body meets societal ideals? Research suggests that many people do care and will go to substantial effort to try to attain these ideals.

There has been much research on the influence of body image ideals among women and girls. Historian Joan Brumberg wrote about the historical factors that led girls to start to define their self-worth more by their appearance than by the content of their character. When the commercial mass media became prominent and ties between older and younger women were loosening, young women became vulnerable to focusing on their appearance as a means toward self-improvement – what Brumberg called the 'body project'.

There is cultural pressure concerning this 'body project'. Much research has shown that girls can become part of an appearance-oriented culture that focuses on thinness. They might gather in groups to read fashion magazines that will give specific prescriptions for the ideal body. They might go to 'makeover' birthday parties and shop in their own special 'tween' stores that sell sexualized clothing to emulate the thin, sexualized ideal woman. Research has found that there is social pressure for girls to disparage their bodies in the form of 'fat talk'. Thus, it is socially acceptable, even expected, for girls to be obsessed with their bodies. Body obsession is related to thinness concerns. One study found that between 30% and 50% of adolescent girls are concerned with their weight and many report dieting. Recently, Grabe and colleagues found that girls as young as age 11 engage in self-objectification.

For quite some time, researchers have implicated women's gender role demands as instrumental in explaining their greater body dissatisfaction and experience with eating disorders. Murnen and Smolak conducted a meta-analysis of all of the research related to adherence to the feminine gender role and eating disordered attitudes. In this body of research that dates back to the 1970s, gender role adherence is measured by scales

such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire that measure the extent to which gender-stereotyped traits are part of one's self-definition. Across this body of research, there was a small but statistically significant relationship between agreement with feminine-stereotyped traits (e.g., emotionality) and possessing eating disordered attitudes. There was a somewhat larger (but still small) inverse relationship between possessing masculine traits (e.g., assertiveness) and eating disordered attitudes. Thus women who are more feminine and less masculine were most at risk for eating disorders. The authors argued that this measurement of gender roles does not comprehensively capture women's 'lived experiences' that make them more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders.

In subsequent research that has expanded the definition of 'femininity' to include women's gendered experiences, we have explained additional variability in women's eating disordered attitudes. Aspects of the feminine experience such as 'silencing the self' and experience with sexual harassment and sexual abuse are associated with increased body dissatisfaction and/or eating disordered attitudes. Women who are more invested in romantic relationships and who agree that women are sexually subordinate to men are more likely to invest in beauty ideals. Women who occupy a subordinate feminine role in society might manipulate their bodies to either comply with feminine dictates and/or try to gain some 'control'.

Much of the research on pressures related to the thin ideal has been conducted on middle-class White women and girls. There is some research that points toward a varying degree of vulnerability to body dissatisfaction among some ethnic minority women. A meta-analysis of ethnic differences in body dissatisfaction found that African American women were somewhat more protected than were women in other ethnic groups studied. There seems to be greater acceptability of a range of body types in African American cultures and less emphasis on body appearance as a determinant of attractiveness. This relative invulnerability might be due to greater emphasis on work roles, athletic accomplishment, and intergenerational relationships that might serve to counter narrow beauty ideals. Further, some theorists propose that African American women might develop a 'critical consciousness' to deal with racism that might help them question other societal values.

Other ethnic minority groups in America seem equally vulnerable to the thin ideal as Caucasian women. To the extent that there is a distinction in expectations between the genders in a minority culture and a valuing of a submissive feminine role, there is likely to be an emphasis on female appearance ideals that promote submissiveness. Strong gender role differentiation in Hispanic/Latino American and Asian American cultures suggests that the body image ideals of the dominant culture might be emulated. In cultures termed Hispanic in the United States, there seems to be more acceptance of larger body sizes, which conflicts with dominant American ideals, so acculturation is an important factor to consider. Immigrant women are particularly likely to use media as a 'cultural guide', so they might be more vulnerable to ideal images. Socioeconomic status is also relevant to consider. Women of low socioeconomic status are less likely to be able to afford the commercial products that help facilitate the ideal image. A necessary emphasis on work roles and perhaps a greater

valuing of physical strength among lower socioeconomic status women might make them less vulnerable to body ideals.

Other research has examined the influence of athletic status. Some women athletes might be protected from problematic ideals in that they might value what their bodies can do more than how they look. In a meta-analysis, Smolak and colleagues found that women athletes participating in sports that do not emphasize leanness reported less concern with their bodies compared to nonathletes. Similarly, in another meta-analysis, we found that women with feminist attitudes were somewhat more satisfied with their bodies. Possessing feminist attitudes might allow women to critique body ideals associated with femininity. Other researchers have found that lesbian women are somewhat more satisfied with their bodies, perhaps because they are less subjected to the male gaze. Although there is strong pressure associated with the feminine gender role to focus on the body, some women either do not receive the same level of pressure or are less vulnerable due to other attributes.

Men's Bodies and Masculinity

Less research has focused on men's concerns with their bodies, so we do not know as much about how gender roles might relate to such concerns. However, we should not expect men's gender role prescriptions to focus too much attention on the body because of other outlets for adherence to the ideal gender role. Men can enact their gender role concerns through means other than the body, and in fact, if they focus too much on the body, they might be seen as feminine (and/or 'gay'). Generally, men's body concerns need to be expressed within the confines of focusing on the body as an instrument of action rather than as central to achieving a particular appearance. Being dominant is a central part of men's gender role expectations to be dominant and to the extent that muscularity helps project dominance it is useful. However, there are other ways for men to express dominance such as through high-status work roles and through competing and winning.

Men who spend a lot of time in the domain of athletics seem to have greater concerns with muscularity. While women report body change strategies with the goal of appearing more attractive clearly evident, men and boys report body change strategies related to improving their athletic performance, with any appearance-based considerations generally being an afterthought. Development of a drive for the muscular ideal may be related to the importance of succeeding at sports from an early age. Successful participation in sports is theorized to be a way for boys to fulfill many of the masculine gender role ideals, such as being dominant, tough, powerful, and authoritative. If a large, muscular body becomes associated with dominant athletic performance in the minds of young men, it may also be associated with fulfillment of the ideal masculine image as well. Because sports are so important in the socialization of developing boys, future research should look more closely at how the involvement in sports affects attitudes regarding masculinity, body image, and a plethora of other subjects.

There has generally been increased pressure in the culture for men to focus on appearance. In the 1990s, the 'metrosexual' man was born. This is a man who cares about appearance and

is willing to buy hair-care and skin-care products as well as clothing to present a particular image. Being metrosexual is associated with living in cities and having the financial means to support a focus on a well-groomed appearance. Celebrities such as David Beckham and Ryan Seacrest exemplify this role. The metrosexual man is not necessarily muscular, but he probably works out to maintain a moderate level of muscularity as well as slimness. The rise of this image is associated with the increased objectification of men found in the media. The metrosexual man might read *GQ* or *Esquire* to get messages that link masculinity with appearance. More research on possible pressures associated with this ideal would be useful.

Some men seem to experience vulnerability to body image concerns in similar prevalence and patterns as do women. For example, gay men are somewhat more dissatisfied with their bodies than are heterosexual men and they report higher rates of self-objectification. Gay men might feel the need to monitor their bodies, because perhaps like heterosexual women, they are subject to the 'male gaze'. Men who participate in sports that emphasize leanness and weight control are more vulnerable to dissatisfaction based on thinness according to an update of the meta-analysis of Smolak and colleagues that was conducted by Metzger. These data show that when men are objectified like women, they will behave much more like women.

Given African American and Latino American men's lower access to high-status work roles, they might be more reliant on a muscular body to project dominance. There is little research on group differences in body dissatisfaction among men, but one meta-analysis of the available data found that Black American men desire a larger body size than do White American men, yet Black men report more satisfaction with their bodies.

Comparing Women and Men

Thus, both women and men are subjected to unrealistic body image ideals that support traditional gender roles. However, the fact that women's bodies are more important to their well-being means that fulfilling appearance demands becomes more important. Not surprisingly, research suggests that there are gender differences in attitudes and behaviors related to the body.

Feingold and Mazzella conducted a meta-analysis of the size of the gender difference in body satisfaction rates across times. They found that prior to the 1970s there was no significant difference in body satisfaction, but it became statistically significant in the 1980s. By the 1990s, the gender difference increased even further, although the rates of body satisfaction of both groups were larger than in the previous decade.

Women and girls generally experience such high rates of body dissatisfaction that it is considered to be a normative part of being female in American culture. However, increasingly, we find high levels of concern among boys and men as well. One estimate of the levels of body concern is that among adolescents, half of girls want to be thinner and between one-fifth and one-third of adolescent boys wants to be more muscular. Research on self-objectification and body monitoring shows that women are more likely to report focusing on their bodies.

Women are also clearly more invested in their appearance for self-worth than men are. Further, the relationship between social comparison and body dissatisfaction is stronger for women than men according to a meta-analysis conducted by Myers and Crowther. Women's self-esteem is more closely tied to their body esteem than is true for men.

In terms of body-related behaviors, women are at least twice as likely to report dieting compared to men, although both women and men report using exercise to manipulate their bodies. When one looks at extreme appearance measures such as cosmetic surgery, the gender differences are quite large. At least 90% of cosmetic surgical procedures in the United States are performed on women. Women have six to eight times the rate of eating disorders compared to men.

Variables predict body dissatisfaction in men and women in the same way, however. When both women and men are subjected to images of the ideal body, it can lead to body dissatisfaction and interest in body change behaviors. Adolescent girls and boys who internalize the media image ideals are more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction. When both women and men are induced to engage in self-objectification, it can create body image concerns.

Summary and Conclusions

Both women and men are subjected to unrealistic body image ideals that exaggerate characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity: women are supposed to be 'thin and sexy' and men are supposed to be 'strong and muscular'. These gendered expectations are framed by a culture that is patriarchal and heterosexist. Conformity to the ideal body for women is central to their 'success' as women, whereas conformity to the ideal body for men is associated with success, but not central to it. Women generally experience higher rates of body dissatisfaction and self-objectification, their feelings about the body are more closely tied to self-esteem, and they engage in more extreme body change behaviors than do men, which can be explained by their subordinate gender role in relation to men and the greater self-objectification that accompanies this societal position.

Given the interlocking gender roles that support the ideals, what is the hope of change? Women's roles have changed, yet there is still an emphasis on the body. Change in women's roles is limited by the interdependence of gendered roles, so change in men's roles is important. An implication of social role theory is that more men need to take on caretaking roles to deemphasize traditional masculinity. In addition, further change could occur as sexual and ethnic minority groups gain power in society to the extent that these groups promote different gendered sexuality and body ideals. On the other hand, to the extent that the commercial culture can continue to make more people feel vulnerable to body image ideals, it can sell more products, so commercialization pressures need to be addressed. Encouraging people to critique media ideals is important, and increased access to the media by marginalized groups. Working toward more flexible gendered roles for both men and women should promote gender equality and decrease the focus on the body as a source of self-definition.

See also: Beauty over the Centuries – Female; Beauty over the Centuries – Male; Body Image among African Americans; Body Image and “Fat Talk”; Body Image and Self-Esteem; Body Image and Sports/Athletics; Body Image Development – Adolescent Boys; Body Image Development – Adolescent Girls; Body Image Development – Adult Men; Body Image Development – Adult Women; Body Image Development – Boy Children; Body Image Development – Girl Children; Body Image in Dance and Aesthetic Sports; Body Image: Peer Influences; Children’s Media Influences; Clothing and Adornment: Social Psychology Perspectives; Cognitive-Behavioral Perspectives on Body Image; Dolls and Action Figures; Feminist Perspectives on Body Image and Physical Appearance; Internalization of Thin-Ideal and Muscular-Ideal; Media Influences on Male Body Image; Media Influences on Female Body Image; Muscularity and Body Image; Objectification Theory, Self-Objectification, and Body Image.

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Relevant Websites

- <http://www.adiosbarbie.com/> – Adios Barbie site to promote body acceptance.
- <http://www.about-face.org/> – About-Face site to promote girls’ and women’s awareness and resistance of harmful media messages.
- <http://www.bodypositive.com/> – Body Positive site to promote body acceptance.
- <http://www.mindonthemedia.org/> – Mind on the Media site to promote girls’ awareness and resistance of harmful media messages.
- <http://psychcentral.com/> – Psych Central, a mental health and psychology network.