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Debriefing Form
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Research on body image has shown that people's feelings about their bodies can directly impact their psychological and behavioral health (e.g., self-esteem, eating disorders, depression). Although most of the research has focused on the body image concerns of women, there is evidence which suggests that body image is a growing concern for men as well. For example, research on the body image concerns of men has found that men experience pressure to achieve greater muscularity and that increasing numbers of men are dissatisfied with their bodies. This is of particular concern since studies have linked male body dissatisfaction with low self-esteem, anxiety, eating disorders, compulsive exercise, and steroid use.

In order to address the growing concerns related to male body image, researchers have begun examining factors which influence men's drive for muscularity. One variable which may affect men's muscularity ideals is the social norm for muscularity. Research strongly suggests that people use social norms to understand the range of acceptable behaviors within any group, and that falling outside of the group norm leads to personal distress and motivates conforming behavior. Social norms have been shown to influence how people feel about their bodies and can motivate unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to fit the social standards of a "desirable" body type.

The few studies that have examined the social norms related to men's muscularity ideals have found that men may be misperceiving the muscularity norm. For example, one study found that males exaggerate the degree to which women find muscularity attractive. Similarly, in a separate study, college-age men from Austria, France, and the United States believed that women were more attracted to males with an extra 27-32 pounds of muscle. The implications from these studies suggest that men have social misperceptions about what others find most attractive, which may contribute to men's drive for muscularity.

Although some initial research has been conducted on how social norms influence men's body image, there are a number of unanswered questions. For example, little is known about which group norms are most influential in the formation of men's own internal standards for muscularity. Also, it is unclear if perceiving oneself as falling outside of the muscularity norm is related to negative outcomes, such as muscle dysmorphia (a clinical disorder characterized by an unhealthy preoccupation with muscle size accompanied by significant impairment or distress) or steroid use. Our study plans to examine these questions. To our knowledge, this will be the first study to examine these questions within a male population.

If you would like more information on this topic, you can read the following articles:

Grossbard, J.R., Neighbors, C., & Larimer, M.E. (2011). Perceived norms for thinness and muscularity among college students: What do men and women really want?. *Eating Behaviors, 12*, 192-199.

- McCabe, M., & Ricciardelli, L. (2004). Body image dissatisfaction among males across the lifespan: A review of past literature. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 56*, 675-685.
- McCreary, D.R., & Sasse, D.K. (2000). An exploration of the drive for muscularity in adolescent boys and girls. *Journal of American College Health, 48*, 297-304.
- McCreary, D.R., Saucier, D.M., & Courtenay, W.H. (2005). The drive for muscularity and masculinity: Testing the associations among gender-role traits, behaviors, attitudes, and conflict. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 6*(2), 83-94.
- Miller, D. T. & Prentice, D. A. (1996). The construction of social norms and standards. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.) *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles*. (p. 799-829). New York: Guildford.
- Pope, H.G., Jr., Gruber, A.J., Mangweth, B., Bureau, B., deCol, C., Jouvent, R., & Hudson, J.I. (2000). Body image perception among men in three countries. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 157*, 1297-1301.
- Schooler, D., & Ward, L.M., (2006). Average Joes: Men's relationships with media, real bodies, and sexuality. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 7*, 27-41.

