GQ Magazine & Body Image Disturbance:
An audience study of homosexual males

Corey Carlyle Bailey
Department of English: Communication & Media Studies
Advised by Dr. Andrea McDonnell
Distinction in the Field of English Communication & Media Studies Research

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Abstract

Photographs are a dominant medium in GQ magazine. Photographic content in this serial publication contains both men (generally shot from the female gaze) and women (generally shot from the male gaze). In this study I examine the representation of masculinity in images from GQ, drawing on photographs from different issues and historical moments, featuring a variety of different men. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the impact of these images on homosexual male readers. What emerges from this visual typography is a hyper-idealized portrayal of the male body. Through a media effects audience studies approach, this project demonstrates a correlation between reader interaction with such images and occurrences of Body Image Disturbance (BID) in homosexual males. Communications and gender studies theories are used to compare and contrast how the thin ideal and Body Image Disturbance affect men through the lens of sexuality. To test my assumptions, I utilize original data gathered in individual interviews with homosexual males readers of GQ. All participants report that the sampled images were consistent with societal ideals for male body aesthetics and that viewing sampled images may lead readers to adopt maladaptive behaviors in order to attain an image that they perceived as ideal.
Corey Carlyle Bailey

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There are a series of associated themes in my life that have motivated my interest in Body Image Disturbance (BID) among homosexual males. These themes have inspired me to conduct extensive original research for my distinction in the field of Communication and Media Studies research project. I have personally dealt with the harmful, painful affects of BID, motivating me to look deeper into the “why”.

Additionally, for a long time I have taken interest in how mediated messages broadcasted in our society may affect a male’s internalized views of his body image, eating habits, and levels of anxiety and/or depression related to body image.

My goal in this study was to identify a series of photographic texts within GQ that I classify as masculine in gender and subsequently utilize theoretical evaluation as well as original research gathered through individual interviews with viewers of the content to draw conclusions about sociocultural implications and the relevance of sexuality in this discourse. I chose to utilize a men’s magazine in my research; such texts are unique because they are generally targeted towards heterosexual males in their content and narrative style, yet are frequently consumed by homosexual males for various uses.

According to a 2006 Simmons Market Bureau consumer study, 219,000 or 10.39% of readers identify as gay or bisexual. This statistic ranks GQ as the “gayest” non-gay-
oriented men’s magazine with a circulation of at least 500,000 (Draper 104). Regardless of sexuality or specific use, their photographic content most often depicts the male body in an idealized fashion from a female gaze. The dichotomy of heterosexual targeting and homosexual consumption motivates some interesting use cases and consumption effects.

The format of this paper is as follows: to discuss research findings of BID, apply media theory to BID, introduce GQ as a serial text, describe the ways in which the specific image samples I chose embody problematic gendered imaging, explain my research practices, outline the findings of my interviews, discuss conclusions and individual/cultural implications of the gendered nature of the content, and finally, compare this narrative to some within the popular feminine discourse. By portraying the male body in a hyper-idealized way, I argue that GQ is causing homosexual male readers to feel a dissonance between their physical and ideal selves, as supported by interviews with users of the text of my chosen demographic, which may in some cases lead to occurrences of Body Image Disturbance.

BID & The Thin Ideal

“BID is defined as a distortion of perception, behavior, or cognition related to weight or shape, and it is becoming a common clinical disorder” (Pimenta et al). In many cases, BID roots from repetitive exposure to the way mainstream media portrays the human body. While most significant works of research on BID are conducted on females, a psychological understanding of the condition at hand is very important to an understanding of my motivation for this study and the condition of BID referred to throughout my discussion.
Todd Morrison and Emer Sheahan, in their research titled “Gender-related discourses as mediators in the association between internalization of the thin-body ideal and indicants of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating” discuss the correlation between media representation of the female body and occurrences of BID in women.

Sociocultural norms and values in Western societies, particularly those portrayed in the mainstream media, are often proposed as major contributors to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among women. A substantial amount of research suggests that internalization of the thin-body ideal, which refers to the extent to which an individual cognitively buys into socially defined and unrealistic ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviors designed to produce an approximation of these ideals, is associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance (Morrison and Sheahan 374).

As their research suggests, internalization of the thin body ideal is proven to be associated with body dissatisfaction and eating disturbances (in women). When referring to the thin body ideal, it is important to realize that people knowingly subscribe to this belief. Most people are able to realize that the physical bodies depicted in the mainstream media are idealized and difficult, if not impossible to attain, however they continue to subscribe to the ideal despite that awareness.

BID and Media Theory

There are countless studies dedicated to correlating media imaging to BID in women, which are so important considering what women have endured for decades with societal beauty norms and gender performance expectations. However, this does not diminish the increasing reality that men, and more specifically to my interests, gay men, share many of these same experiences with BID as women. The thin ideal is focused on the impact of media imaging on females, however more research is emerging to connect the thin ideal to gay males. In one of the most extensive, groundbreaking works of research on the topic, *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*,
researchers Pope et al. acknowledge the intensity to study the occurrence of BID in males.

While there has been a strong emphasis on researching body image dissatisfaction and disturbance in women, the present research was interested in looking at body image in men. The body image concerns found in males have been placed under the umbrella term the *Adonis complex*, which is neither an official medical name, nor one particular sign of body image disturbance. Rather, it is used to describe secretive and potentially obsessive concerns that some men have towards their bodies, which range from being mild to extremely severe. These may manifest in several ways, including excessive exercise and weightlifting, steroid abuse, and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Pope et al., 35).

Occurrences of BID in males are steadily increasing, and evidence from research suggests that this trend will continue in such a direction. Two primary traits differentiate men and women when it comes to managing BID. First, men are conditioned from an early age, due to hegemonic gender performance expectations, not to show emotion or express their internal struggles for fear of being perceived as weak in comparison to their male counterparts. In relation to BID, this means that men are much less likely to discuss the problems they are experiencing and seek help than women, making it more difficult to address their struggles and work towards a recovery. “Since men are conditioned not to care or at least not to ‘whine’ about how they look, they often suffer in silence or address the ‘problem’ by buying a product designed to enhance their physical appearance” (Dugan & McCreary 47). Second, is the fact that the acknowledgement of BID in males is a relatively new idea, while the same issues in females have been recognized and studied for many years. Pope, contributing author of *The Adonis Complex*, suggests that:

Self-ideal discrepancy is worse for men than for women. They believe that women have learned, from decades of appearance-related advertisements, to ignore or confront the impossible ideals of beauty promoted by mass media. Men, on the other hand, are socially prohibited from discussing such issues, and may not be comfortable acknowledging concerns over physical appearance (Dugan & McCreary 47).
Due to the longevity of the feminine struggle with body image and gender performance, there are resources and body-positive messages in existence today to reduce harmful media effects. Unfortunately these resources do not exist for men, and due to their emotional conditioning, it is not likely that body-positive messages targeted towards men will be released any time soon. Further, if such messages were to be released, their effectiveness would certainly be called into question.

Although BID does not discriminate based on sexuality (in that both homosexual and heterosexual men can experience it), sexuality certainly does influence the specific ways in which individuals are affected. I will argue that generally heterosexual men experience BID triggered by *masculine performance expectations* and muscularity, resulting in obsessive exercise and reliance on commercial products, while homosexual men’s experiences with BID are more likely to occur based on *body image* with the potential of developing maladaptive eating or fitness attitudes or behaviors.

*Masculine performance expectations* in heterosexual men refer to the idealized, unrealistic expectations of gender performance including: an overtly muscular build, power, career/financial success, and sexual accomplishment. *Body image* in homosexual men refers to the aesthetically focused physical expectations that have legitimized in gay culture through texts such as pornography and men’s magazines (as I am reviewing in this work). These aesthetic expectations for homosexual males include, but are not limited to: the desire for a slender figure, muscular toning in critical areas (abdomen, chest, and biceps), and sexual desirability/performance in relation to body image/appearance alone (versus emotional capacity, for example).
I believe that the specific ways in which BID affect men vary depending on sexuality, based on a combined application of the Cultivation Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Model of Communication. The Cultivation Theory states that repeated exposure to similar images, beliefs, or ideas, will ultimately encourage audiences to adopt those same ideas or beliefs (Gerbner). The Uses and Gratifications Model of Communication looks at how audiences deliberately and intentionally use media messages in ways that apply to their own life experience (Ruggiero).

According to the Cultivation Theory alone, repeated exposure to media messages would influence men to adopt certain beliefs regardless of sexuality. However since heterosexual and homosexual men have different beliefs, life experiences, and gender performance expectations, simultaneously applying the Uses and Gratifications Model provides a more realistic explanation for how men interpret media messages, taking sexuality-centric differences into consideration. According to this theory, users apply media messages to their lives in a way that makes the most sense for their life experience, beliefs, and values. This idea served as the foundation for Duggan & McCreary’s study: “Body Image, Eating Disorders, and the Drive for Muscularity in Gay and Heterosexual Men: The Influence of Media Images,”

According to the Cultivation Hypothesis…viewers may internalize the messages contained in mass media, even when those messages are implicit. Thus, gay men may look at [a media text] and embrace the belief that they need to possess a similar physique in order to obtain sexual gratification (Duggan & McCreary 48).

In the instance of an issue of GQ, a heterosexual male may utilize the text for enjoyment of feature articles on female figures or dating and sex tips, while homosexual males may use the same exact text in a completely different way, perhaps to view the upcoming fashion trends for next season or for pleasure in viewing images of the male
figures depicted in the text. It is important to note that all of these types of content are frequently published within the same issue of *GQ*, so no matter what issue is consumed, users can find content in each issue that they find relevant to their life experience regardless of gender or sexuality. Regardless of the intended use or sexuality, the Cultivation and Uses and Gratifications Theories provide an explanation for how content resonates with users differently, and thus sexuality is a significant factor in how men are affected by media messages.

For my research, I chose a series of images and advertisements featured in *GQ* that exemplify body image norms frequently depicted in the serial. I introduced participants to the texts and gathered information about their interpretation of societal body image ideals and personal reflections on their own body image, among other data.

**GQ** as a Serial Text: Mass-Cultural Relevance

*GQ* has a long history as a men’s fashion publication, however despite the magazine’s history, theoretical media readings of the text are rather new in terms of gender studies. *GQ* originated in 1937 in New York City as *Apparel Arts* and served as a trade magazine for men’s clothing wholesalers and retailers to communicate current trends in the men’s fashion industry. The publisher of *Apparel Arts* was the same as *Esquire*, another popular men’s magazine at the time. In 1957, *Apparel Arts* became a supplement to *Esquire* magazine, but only for a year, until the magazine resumed singular publication in 1958 under the name *Gentleman’s Quarterly*. In 1983, *Gentleman’s Quarterly* was sold to Condé Nast Publications and rebranded as simply: *GQ*, the common name that is still used and well known today (“*GQ*”).
Today, *GQ* is the premier male-marketed periodical source and opinion leader for fashion, popular culture, news, and celebrity profiles. The magazine targets a market of men aged 18-30 years old ("GQ"). The publication appeals to a variety of demographics from younger men who are interested in seeing the latest fashion trends, to older readers who are more interested in keeping up to date with what is popular. The most realistic actual consumers of the products advertised in *GQ* are upper class males with a disposable income capable of purchasing designer products.

**Constructed Masculinity and the Capitalist Agenda**

*GQ*’s depiction of males is similar to that of women in the popular media because they also exploit the concept of ideal body image, however it is accomplished differently. Similarly to females, the magazine uses its authority as a major media outlet to broadcast messages in a reflective way. Content encoding suggests that the publication’s construction of gender is the societally accepted one, which can in turn lead to body image disturbance in males who feel a dissonance between encoded gender concepts and their own self concepts. Muscularity, handsomeness, financial privilege, competitiveness, well roundedness, and sexuality are all values that *GQ* establishes as expected via the men they publish.

*GQ* magazine is unique in that it holistically incorporates encoded gender constructions via: body image in photographic content, exploitation of “needs,” wants, and insecurities through advertising, and expectations of masculine gender performance through their commonly written narrative lifestyle component. Denis McQuail excellently discusses this relationship in his work *Audience Analysis*:

Not only are masculinities and male bodies socially constructed and imagined (the media-and the men’s lifestyle magazines per se-being one of the primary factors
McQuail suggests that the entirety of masculinity is socially constructed through media, particularly lifestyle magazines such as GQ. In other words, the concepts and images of masculinity broadcasted by the publication carry significant weight in the societally accepted ideals of masculinity.

Another researcher, Federico Boni, relates body image depictions in lifestyle magazines to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu). Habitus transforms the male body into physical capital, “the accumulation and conversion [of this capital] depend on the dominant definitions of a ‘legitimate’ body and legitimate use of it” (Boni 466). He continues:

The body is seen as something ‘docile’, and the optimization of this process of normalization is the fully individualized self-regulation of the body... masculinity and male bodies are sustained by a continuously negotiated performance and display, and hence they are something that has to be achieved, produced, and reproduced (Boni 467).

These studies suggest that men are becoming more and more vulnerable to media depictions of idealized images of masculinity. While self-regulation was previously a concept primarily attributed to females in the decoding of media messages, masculinity is now recognized as a sustained performance requiring constant work and regulation. GQ targets men through visual representation, encouraging men to mirror the behavior and appearance of opinion leaders, as well as through cultural depictions in the form of written narrative.

Beyond just visual and textual representations of masculine performance in GQ, the publication notoriously exploits metrosexuality. A metrosexual person can be defined
as a “straight man with some stereotypically feminine traits, such as taste in grooming and culture” (Ervin 58). This identity is exploited by redefining the socioeconomic position of previously privileged straight white men (Ervin 59). By constructing male opinion leaders as metrosexual in their aesthetic, men are further enlisted in the neoliberal project. Pressure to purchase high-end grooming, clothing, and lifestyle products in order to fit into a methodically constructed concept of gender and beauty is no longer only a female issue. The consumer product industry has in recent years uncovered a massive opportunity to exploit the same insecurities as women in their male readers, through carefully encoded advertising messages. This exploitation simultaneously benefits producers, advertisers, and publishers through their respective revenue channels.

These trends suggest a multifaceted media effects issue for males. We see issues of beauty myths leading to body image disturbance, performativity, constant self-regulation, and exploitation of the metrosexual identity all to sell products and produce a profit. These are all issues that have previously been solely associated with females, meaning that these new issues could be highly indicative of major changes in gender and media theory.

Sample Texts

I chose GQ for a media effects study on this audience because of the publication’s extensive presence in today’s popular masculine media landscape. Although the samples I selected for my study are all from GQ, it is important to note that similar texts to these are present in publications throughout the popular masculine media. The theme of the texts I selected for my study is somewhat broad: essentially images within GQ that depict the male body in a hyper-sexualized/idealized way. Samples were curated from feature
articles as well as advertising spreads in the series. Each represents the way in which *GQ* generally styles content. *Selected samples can be found in Appendix A.*

The commonalities of the men in these images are: shirtless, sometimes pant-less, muscular particularly in the abdominal, bicep, and chest regions (referred to as “critical areas,” in my study), portraying some form of hegemonic masculinity (such as: athleticism, appropriated metrosexual or “rugged” style identifiable by the use of thick, dark, canvas, and/or denim fabrics, dark colors, boots), and a feminine gaze in terms of composition. These body-centric typographies are encoded in ways suggesting that the publication’s construction of masculinity is the societally accepted one, which can lead to BID in males who feel a dissonance between encoded gender concepts and their own self concepts. These stylistic themes are common not only in *GQ*, but in cross-media advertising campaigns and publications targeting men. The subjects range from underground models, to famous models, to celebrities and athletes; but they all have these themes in common regardless of the subject’s position in the media landscape.

Research Methodology

**Objective:** My objective in conducting these individual interviews was to find out how participants interact with the text (primarily frequency and depth), how the participants feel about the way in which men are depicted in the samples, the participant’s knowledge of BID, and if they do or ever have experienced any sort of BID and to what severity, and finally, how the participant’s consumption of this and similar texts influences their feelings about body image both individually and on a broader societal scale.
My predictions were that participants would find these samples consistent with societal aesthetic expectations for males and would rate the subjects highly on both quantitative scales. I hypothesized that due to sustained exposure to images like these samples, as associates of gay culture, participants would have a distorted or irrationally negative view of their own body image, resulting in some form of BID (such as maladaptive eating or exercise patterns). Further, I predicted that participants would conclude that due to consistent messaging like this, the media perpetuates an unrealistic image of the male body. In terms of comparing and contrasting heterosexual and homosexual men, I predicted that participants would find that heterosexual men are more concerned about masculinity, muscularity, and exercise while homosexual men are more concerned about weight, maintenance (or attainment of) slimness, strict dieting, and peer perception within the gay community.

**Participant Selection:** I selected eleven males who self-identify as gay. I personally know each participant in some capacity and felt that their relationship with *GQ* as a text would help me determine whether or not my hypotheses were correct. I selected participants who do/have engage(d) with the serial to a notable extent, making them familiar with the sustained nature of the magazine’s construction of masculinity.

**Survey Components:** My interview evaluation was based on a survey (see Appendix B) to ensure consistency. The survey consisted of the following components:

1. **Introduction:** This section thanked the participant for their data and explained what I was conducting research on and why.
2. **Demographic and Background Data:** This section acquired details about the participant including name, age, occupation, and basic relationship with the text.
Questions included frequency and depth of interaction with the text, feelings of pleasure and guilt associated with using the text, and finally, the participant’s favorite/least favorite components of the text.

b. **Reaction to Samples:** Next, participants had the opportunity to respond directly to the samples provided. Questions in this section included: a general reaction, how the participant compares these images to others in the popular media, and finally, two quantitative questions requesting the participant to rate on a ten-point scale, a) how attractive they felt the depicted men were *based on body image alone*, and b) in terms of beauty norms, how ideal the subjects’ bodies were.

c. **BID Index:** This component collected an understanding of the participant’s familiarity with Body Image Disturbance, and ask some qualifying questions to determine if they currently or have ever shown signs of BIDs. Questions included: the meaning of BID to the best of the participant’s ability, if the participant has ever felt the need to excessively exercise in order to attain a certain image (and what image the participant was trying to attain if so), if they have ever felt the need to severely modify their diet in order to obtain a certain image (and whether their change in diet was healthy and strategic, or haphazard and indicative of crash dieting if so), whether the participant feels their sexuality has affected views on ideal body image, and differences between heterosexual and homosexual men in terms of body image views and means of attaining them.

d. **Male Body Image in the Media:** The purpose of this section was to determine the participant’s overall views on male body image in the media. Questions
targeted: if the participant felt the sample images provided were representative of men in the media, if they feel the image is realistically attainable, and how images of men in the media influence their internalized views of their bodies.

Results

My goal was to find proof through my research that users of this text experience negative media effects that in some instances lead to occurrences of BID. For my results discussion, I have systematically divided findings into the four sections of the interview in which they were collected. I will discuss the commonalities and if there were any outliers or unexpected results.

a. Demographic and Background Data

Participants were all homosexual males, ranging in age from 20-36. Geographically, most reside in Boston, MA, with two residing in NJ, and one residing in Vermont. Most participants were students (10/11) studying the liberal arts and sciences.

In terms of consumption, all users were self-disclosed fans or followers of the text to some extent. The frequency of interaction with the text ranged from subscribing to the publication and viewing monthly, to reading the publication at work (one participant worked at grocery store where he would read them during down time). The depth of the interaction was generally the same; all participants reported primarily viewing the photographs in the text, stopping if an article stood out to them (aside from two participants who had a subscription and read the text in more depth regularly).

In terms of pleasure, all participants took some form of pleasure in interacting with the text. Some enjoyed the risqué images that are styled artistically instead of pornographically (“The risqué yet non-pornographic photos are appealing to the eye”).
Other users enjoyed seeing and reading about current and upcoming fashion trends. Two other participants found interest in content relating to exercise tips. Only one participant felt a “guilty-pleasure” reaction to associating with this text, and one participant who discussed that his brother used to subscribe when he was younger, “When I was younger, my brother had a subscription to the magazine and I would browse through it from time to time. I sometime would feel guilty looking at the content at a young age, but now I don't have that feeling since I am order and the content is more applicable.”

The common trend in participants’ least favorite component of the text is that written content is often targeted towards heterosexual males. Participants responded that they felt the content was sometimes misogynistic, close-minded, and overtly focused on heterosexual norms and hegemonic gender attributes. This was disheartening to them due to the high number of homosexual readers.

“The articles on sex are sometimes awkward and can come across as misogynistic or narrow-minded in its ideals of masculinity or what defines a 'man.'”

“Sometimes the way that the text treats itself as the final argument on certain topics can be annoying. It acts as if it has all the answers for the issues or things it discusses.”

Another participant stated that he only found interest in the photographs because the content is almost always targeted towards heterosexual men to the point that he was discouraged from even attempting to read it.
b. Reaction to Samples

For their initial reactions, all participants said something about the men in the images being extremely attractive, and some mentioned feelings of inferiority due to automatic comparisons of themselves and the models.

“I view the images as the American ideal body image: tan - defined - bulky - well groomed - and almost too perfect. I often compare the images to myself and think of how their flawlessness fails to capture the different types of male body. I am slim and have lean muscle, but you never see my body type in GQ because to some, my body type is too scrawny or feminine and not up to standards of GQ or the ideal man.”

One participant also noted that white men are depicted much more frequently than men of color. Another participant took a comical, yet honest approach in his response: “Wow they’re hot. And I don’t want to stand next to them because then I’d look ugly as f**k!”

In terms of relation to other mass media texts, participants were in agreement that these images succeeded in capturing the general idealistic images of men used in various different media forms. Not one participant felt that the samples were an inaccurate representation of men in the media.

When asked to rate the attractiveness of the men depicted in the sample on a ten-point scale, the average rating was 9.09 (4 responded 10; 5 responded 9; 1 responded 8, and 1 responded 7). When asked to rate the idealness of the body types (based on societal standards) in the samples on a ten-point scale, the average rating was 9.45 (7 responded 10; 2 responded 9; 2 responded 8).
c. Body Image Disturbance Index

When asked about previous knowledge of BID, four respondents confidently knew the definition of the term based on previous exposure to it. The remaining respondents were able to use context and deductive reasoning to determine a relatively correct educated guess about the meaning.

When asked if the participant has ever felt the need to excessively work out in order to obtain the body image that they interpret as ideal, eleven out of eleven respondents said “yes.” When asked to select what the end goal of the exercise was, nine chose “to lose weight and tone critical areas”, and two chose “to build muscle.”

When asked if participants have ever felt the need to implement a strict diet or severely modify their eating habits in order to obtain the ideal body image they desired, ten out of eleven responded that they have, and those ten participants reportedly acted on this feeling. The one participant who did not stated that he has never felt the need to severely modify his eating habits, yet has utilized a liquid supplement as a metabolic aid.

When asked if said diet modifications were done in a healthy, deliberate, well thought out, and/or strategic way, two responded yes. Nine respondents stated that their diet changes were sudden, unhealthy, haphazard, or otherwise aligned with the traits of a “crash diet.”

When asked if their sexuality has influenced their view on ideal body type, all eleven participants said yes. Several responses are highlighted below:

“Yes. Straight skinny is gay fat. In gay culture there is an expectation for a certain image. If I were straight I would be considered skinny, but as a gay, I feel that my
body is not good enough in terms of norms and expectations for homosexuals due to my “hugely average body type.””

“For me I feel like I need to be what I picture my ideal body image is (Olympic swimmer/diver) so I look desirable by other men as well as attractive to the rest of society.”

“Yes. I am gay and our population tends to be attracted more to a slender and fit male.”

“If I was a straight guy I don’t think I’d care as much. Gays are brutal.”

“Early on it did, nobody wants to stop being a ‘twink,’ so I wouldn’t eat much, I’d exercise a lot in order to stay thin… but those unrealistic goals and expectations faded over time, leaving me a good understanding of who I am and where I should be body-wise.”

“Yes, because in the gay community (despite that I am bisexual), gay and bi men are very shallow and expected to look a certain way. ‘No fats’ is written on many profiles of gay men on dating apps. They only want to date a person who looks like they’re ‘perfect.’ And of course that changes my perspective because I am one who is deemed ‘imperfect’ because I don’t look like the desirable type.”

When asked to describe perceived differences between heterosexual versus homosexual men’s internalized views on body image, nine out of the eleven participants felt that heterosexual men are concerned about body image as well, however their primary area of interest is muscle building, bulking, and achieving a “rugged” look, while in homosexual men the primary target is weight loss, achieving a slender figure, and toning muscle in critical areas (not all respondents specified “critical areas” in relation to
toning, some answered generally). One respondent had an answer that was somewhat surprising, he felt that heterosexual men do not care about body image nearly as much as homosexual men, if it all.

When asked to compare and contrast the means that heterosexual men would take to achieve their ideal body image versus homosexual men, participants felt that heterosexual men would take on a primary focus of working out to build and maintain musculature, while homosexual men would most likely focus more on a strict diet with only some exercise, mainly to tone critical areas. It is to be noted that one respondent felt it important to mention that while this is a concern for both sexualities, gay men are more likely to take action to obtain their desired body image.

d. Male Body Image in the Media

When asked if participants felt that the sample images were consistent with representations of men in the mass media, all eleven participants believed that they were. When asked if they felt that this image was attainable, most said the exact image that we see in the media is impossible to attain due to the level of processing they undergo. Which includes but it’s not limited to: set, lighting, professional photographers, photography equipment, makeup, airbrushing of models, and professional editing. Most participants did, however, feel that the raw, unprocessed bodies that these men have are attainable, one would just have to desire it enough and have the motivation that they do to achieve it, which very few people have.

When asked if the media influence their internal views of their body image, all participants answered yes. Consumption of media representations consistent with the
samples provided does inflict harmful effects on their view of body image as a societal entity, as well as an internal desire for themselves.

Discussion of Results

Essentially, as evidenced in my results, participants’ readings of the sample texts were consistent with my hypotheses. All participants felt that the provided gendered texts were consistent with societal expectations for male body aesthetics, and on both quantitative scales, participants rated the subjects highly. In addition, each participant expressed that in some way they have felt the need to excessively work out in order to attain an image that they perceived as ideal (although not all participants acted on this feeling). This desired image is reportedly a slender frame, with muscle definition in critical areas, with the primary objective of sex appeal. Seven out of eight participants have severely modified their eating habits in an attempt to attain this same body aesthetic, even when completely aware that their efforts were “haphazard, non-strategic, sudden, unhealthy,” or indicative of “crash-dieting.” It is important to note here that the severity of these maladaptive practices varied from participant to participant. In some cases, the diets that were employed lasted for very short times, while others were more long-term habits that have been formed.

Compared with heterosexual men, my hypothesis was partially correct. I believed that homosexual men would focus their maladaptive habits entirely on excessive dieting in order to work towards their desired image, while heterosexual men only would focus on exercise in order to achieve their goals. I discovered however that homosexual men do have a tendency to utilize both maladaptive eating habits and exercise to achieve their goals.
Lastly, it was shown in the results that sustained exposure to such texts does have a negative media effect on users. Each participant explained that due to media portrayals of men including and similar to the samples provided, they have a consistent, irrationally negative view of their physical aesthetic and display some form of fear or anxiety about how others in the gay community will view them.

Relation to Feminine Gender Performance Discourse

There are many ways in which gendered media texts influence individuals’ concept of the world around them. For better or for worse, media texts can have a significant impact on how consumers view society and themselves. Just as BID in males does not discriminate based on sexuality, the same applies to gender as a whole. As research has concluded, BID in females has been present for decades, prompting countless research studies, resulting in body-positive advertising campaigns and messages to combat the negative. A primary way in which my topic is related to the popular feminine is the simple fact that both men and women are forced to deal with it, but it runs deeper than that.

Occurrences of Body Image Distortion in males as a result of hegemonic masculinity and idealization of the male body image in the mass media is the equivalent to “the problem that had no name,” or “The Feminine Mystique,” as coined by Betty Friedan in 1963. This was:

The problem [that] lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” (Friedan 15)
The suffering, wondering, and helplessness endured, often alone, are the same pains that men are experiencing today. Their “this is how it should be,” and “man up and don’t talk about your feelings,” mentalities are the same driving forces that keep men suffering silently in the same way of housewives in the 1950s.

Flash back to the media landscape of the 1950s, when popular feminine media texts included: radio shows, radio soap operas, televised soap operas, and sitcoms. In every one of these texts, women were depicted in the same way: the happy housewife. Everyone is that way, aren’t they? Everyone is enjoying it blissfully, so shouldn’t I be too? She asked. But deep down she doubted the legitimacy of this cycle, wondering if every woman was experiencing the same questions and doubts: “is this all?” Constant reinforcement of these damaging images through media texts and advertising are what kept women in the same unhappy position for decades.

This same cycle is occurring now in men (as well as women) with body image. Regardless of the fact that men are questioning the legitimacy of these idealized images of masculinity and beauty, and despite the fact that men are questioning their maladaptive eating and exercise habits for the sake of matching a strange man’s figure who is on the cover of a magazine do not matter. These media effects do not matter because of the very fact that the media will continue to perpetuate and broadcast them… why? Because people will consume them, and the media outlets will make a profit.

Conclusion

The results confirm, the studies show, and the masses agree: body image norms portrayed in the media are psychologically harmful. Today this has become a fact regardless of age, income, gender, race, or sexual orientation. Body Image Disturbance
resulting from media imaging is no longer a women’s issue, nor is it a men’s issue… it is a human issue. I believe that the questions are no longer whether or not these problems exist, or are legitimate, because those answers have already been provided. The question now remains: where do we go from here? How do we inform, educate, and bring awareness to the masses? What types of body-positive images could be utilized to try to counteract the harmful effects of the media that have populated in today’s landscape? Until these questions are answered, perhaps we are all left with only one lingering question: “is this it?”
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO SCORE STYLE POINTS THIS FALL

IT'S A WHOLE NEW GAME!

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Appendix B: Survey/ Interview Questionnaire

A. Demographic

1. What is your name?

2. What is your age?

3. What is your occupation? If you are a student, please specify at which institution and your course of study.

4. Please briefly describe your relationship with GQ magazine in terms of **frequency**, meaning how often do you typically interact with the text? (An interaction with the text can mean anything from viewing a cover image in a retail store, to flipping through the magazine in a waiting room, to browsing the website or social media sites, to an in-depth reading of the text.)

5. Please briefly describe your relationship with GQ magazine in terms of **depth**; please provide more details about how deeply you interact with the text. Meaning, do you/ have you read the whole text from cover to cover, do you generally just look at the photos, etc.

6. Do you take pleasure in viewing or interacting with GQ magazine?

7. Do you feel any sort of guilt (guilt as in guilty pleasure) in using, viewing, or interacting with GQ?

8. What is your favorite part of the text? What draws you to it, inspires you, or interests you?

9. What is your least favorite part of the text? Does anything turn you off; discourage you from future interaction, etc.?

B. Reaction to Samples

10. What is your initial reaction to these images?

11. How do you find these images similar or different from other images of males in the popular media?

12. In terms of body image, on a scale of 1-10, how attractive do you think the men depicted in those photos are **based on body image alone**.

13. In terms of societal beauty norms and expectations, on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the least desirable, and 10 being the most ideal body type), how ideal do you think the body images depicted are?
C. BID Index

14. Are you familiar with the term or the meaning of Body Image Disturbance? (Do not search for it). If you are familiar with the term, please briefly explain your understanding to the best of your ability. If you are unfamiliar with the term, explain what you think it might mean to the best of your ability.

15. Have you personally ever felt the need to excessively work out in order to obtain the ideal body image you desired? Keep in mind this is asking if you have felt the need to, not if you have actually followed through with it.

16. If you have felt the need to work out in order to improve your body image, please describe the ultimate goal you wanted to achieve. (A high level of muscle definition, muscle toning, weight loss/a slender figure, or other)

17. Have you ever personally felt the need to implement a strict diet or severely modify your eating habits in order to obtain the ideal body image you desired?

18. If you have modified your eating habits in order to obtain the ideal image you desired, would you say the changes you made were healthy, deliberate, well thought out, and strategic; or sudden, unhealthy, haphazard, or otherwise known as a “crash diet?”

19. Do you feel that your sexuality has influenced your idea of the ideal male body image? How so?

20. Thinking about body image in heterosexual men and homosexual men, what do you think the biggest differences are? Do you think goals of body image are different depending on sexuality?

21. What means do you think a heterosexual male might take to achieve his ideal body versus the means of a homosexual male?

D. Male Body Image in the Media

22. Do you feel that in general, images depicting the male body in the media are similar to the ones I showed you?

23. Do you think they are attainable?

24. How does the depiction of males in the popular media affect the way you look at or feel about yourself? Please briefly explain.
Works Cited


Morrison, Todd G., and Emer E. Sheahan. "Gender-Related Discourses As Mediators In The Association Between Internalization Of The Thin-Body Ideal And Indicants

