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The Effects of Harmful Male Body Representation:
Uncovered Through The Lens of Podcasting

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Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
College of Arts and Sciences: BA in Communication

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Abstract

A body of recent studies suggest men are objectified in the media, as men report increasing levels of body dissatisfaction and potentially, an array of negative consequences in response. Western media images of men, exemplified through media such as advertisements, television, and social media promote a “drive for muscularity” with attention to the upper body and abdominal region. Societal standards and norms have a documented influence on self-concept, and the current study investigates explicitly which influences hold the greatest magnitude during the development of one’s self-perception. In the present thesis project, men aged 18-25 were interviewed to gauge their perspectives on male objectification, masculinity, self-esteem, and body ideals. Interview questions were generated after reviewing relevant secondary research and were designed to be open-ended to spark conversation and produce qualitative data. The interviews were audio-recorded and edited thematically into a series of podcasts. The resulting podcast series, “One of The Boys” aims to lay a foundation accessible for public discourse, examining how college-aged men are socialized to view their bodies, the way men perceive male objectification, and the future of body representation in the media. The project finds coherence with much previous male objectification research, elaborating upon these with individual episodes including the body and masculinity, media influences that impact the formation of male self-perception, and the complexity of male objectification itself.

I. Introduction

The way in which an individual forms an opinion of self, specifically on his or her body, may be influenced by an array of factors. These factors include, but are not limited to: societal standards, culture, and media influences. Societal standards and norms have a documented influence on self-concept. The current study investigates explicitly which influences hold the greatest magnitude during the development of one's self-perception, in conjunction with male objectification and male body representation.

Objectification theory is defined by Fredrickson as the framework for understanding how individuals "are socialized to internalize an observer's perspective as their primary view of their physical selves" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 173). Subsequently, this altered view carries the psychological cost of one's preoccupation with one's body, separating the outward appearance from the body's health or functioning (Roberts, 2004). Further, one's objectification coaxes self-objectification, sexual objectification, and other consequences such as eating disorders, body image dissatisfaction (BID), and low self-esteem (Sylvia, King & Morse, 2014). The perpetuation of unrealistic body characteristics for both males and females are often promoted and even glorified within popular media. Other factors that contribute to these ideals may derive from advertisements, magazines, television, film, and video games. The increasing muscularity of male figures in popular media suggests the perceived commonality and shift of such a male body ideal to reflect a more muscular standard (Leit, Gray & Pope, 2001).

While traditionally objectification research has focused exclusively on women, recent research shows the increased focus regarding the effects of objectification upon men. Though women report higher body image dissatisfaction than men (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez & Stice, 2006), the aforementioned studies acknowledge that body image disturbances in males are not

only present, but that they are particularly manifested in male's concerns regarding both weight and muscularity. In essence, these studies demonstrate that body image dissatisfaction is an affliction pertaining to both genders (Sylvia et al., 2014). This study seeks to fill the gap by incorporating all aspects of objectification to inform how society conditions and normalizes male objectification. This research aims to illuminate the complexity of male body representation and corresponding male body satisfaction within a culture that may prioritize the belief that female objectification and female body representation hold precedence (Fowler & Thomas, 2015).

With this in mind, this current research-informed project investigates explicitly which influences hold the greatest magnitude during the development of one's self-perception, in conjunction with male objectification and male body representation. This project marries prior research with real world applications to cast light on this issue through a series of interview-based podcasts titled "One of the Boys," allowing for a more humanistic approach in the face of traditionally explicit empirical studies.

II. Literature Review

Objectification theory posits that both men and women's primary view of self is ultimately dependent on an outside observer's perspective (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). This theory, pioneered by Fredrickson and Roberts in a 1997 study, emphasizes the phenomenon of objectification within popular media that perpetuates a specific standard for one's body, appearance, and speech. However, this theory has become increasingly focused upon men. Objectification theory has been well documented and reinforced with data that suggests men and women both experience pervasive objectification, which often results in body dissatisfaction, shame, eating disorders, and self-objectification (Murnen, Smolak, Mills & Good, 2003). Much subsequent research has expanded this theory to varying forms of media, all expressing the

notion of interconnectedness between media portrayals in Western culture and the concept of the human body. This infatuation derives not from a biological standpoint, rather the socialization of men and women through the lens of “social and cultural contexts” (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, 174). Drawing from prior research, Murnen’s idea that one’s view on his/her body is not truly their own is demonstrated through society’s ever-changing, unattainable body ideal (Murnen et al., 2003).

Stemming from objectification comes the internal experience of self-objectification, defined by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) as a heightened awareness and monitoring of one’s external body in response to consistent outward objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). More specifically, while objectification focuses on societal expectations, self-objectification focuses on awareness and monitoring of self, driven by these societal expectations. The concept of body surveillance draws parallels to habitual body monitoring, yet emphasizes the incessant preoccupation with how one’s body appears in the eyes of others (Daye, Webb & Jafari, 2014). Consequently, McKinley and Hyde state that appearance control beliefs reflect the degree to which one believes they have the ability to successfully alter their weight and appearance if enough effort is exerted (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The internalization of an outsider’s perspective has documented negative effects on one’s self esteem, potentially resulting in shame and anxiety surrounding the body’s outward appearance and performance (Tiggemann, Martins & Kirkbride, 2001) and a considerable increase in body surveillance. This theory is further suggested in a 2006 study (Quinn, Kallen, Twenge & Fredrickson, 2006) in which women were dressed in either a one-piece bathing suit or a sweater and asked to complete a set of questionnaires, including measures for body shame and a modified Twenty Statement Test (TST), followed by the Stroop color naming task. Researchers found that the women in a self-

objectified state, wearing the bathing suit, found it harder to focus on the Stroop task and reported feeling more shame and self-awareness than those wearing the sweater (Quinn et al., 2006). This led researchers to hypothesize that self-objectification has a notable negative impact on individual performance. The largely uncompromising nature of body-image expectations often denies those affected by them the chance to critically analyze or refute the shame so commonly caused by failing to live up to said images.

Another branch of objectification inciting oppression introduces sexual objectification, which researchers have coined as the experience of being treated as a collection of body parts for sexual consumption or observation by others, stripping away regard for one's dignity or personality (Fredrickson, 1997). The entanglement of the body and sex is explicitly promoted in popular media, often conceptualized as isolated, focused images of a person's body or body part(s), such as one's breasts, legs, bare stomach, or buttocks (Aubrey, 2006), in lieu of the entire person. One can conclude that sexual desirability derives from the overarching obsession with such key body parts, endorsed by advertisements, television, and magazines. It should be noted that, similar to other avenues of objectification, there are basic differences in how the media exercises sexual objectification for males and females, revealed through the face-to-body proportions (Aubrey, 2006). For women, a "body-ism" bias exists, in which media images draw attention to a female's body parts, frequently removing the female's head from the image. (Crawford & Unger, 1996). Contrarily, males encounter a "face-ism" bias that places a greater spotlight on male faces, while also isolating certain body parts, such as hands, the groin, and muscular regions (Aubrey, 2006). However, men are less likely than women to identify such images as being sexually objectifying (Reichart, Latour, Lambiase & Adkins, 2007), perhaps due to the normalization and integration of advertising tactics in everyday life. In a study analyzing

sexually objectifying television and magazines, Aubrey (2006) illustrates that continual exposure to sexually objectifying media shifts a viewer's focus to how the body may appear through physical traits, rather than its functioning and internal traits. Aubrey designed her quantitative, two-wave panel study through questionnaires measuring factors such as exposure to sexually objectifying media, body surveillance, self-esteem, and self-objectification. The researcher resulted that exposure to sexually objectifying media increased the trait for self-objectification in both men and women, while exposure to sexually objectifying media increased body surveillance for men only. Though sexual objectification traditionally has been theorized to have more adverse effects on women than men (Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi & Klein, 2012), such research reveals it imposes an undeniable degradation of human nature for both sexes.

Male and female body types are narrowly represented in nearly all forms of media, strengthening and defining a standard for how one's body should appear in order to be considered attractive or desirable within the eyes of the observer. The dual-sex body ideal projected by the media begins in childhood, where appearance-enhancement-based commercials take center-stage between Saturday morning cartoons, 9 out of 10 of which are directed at young girls (Ogletree, Mason, Raffeld, Williams & Fricke, 1990). Furthermore, dolls and action figures begin conditioning children to expect a certain body after puberty and, when not lived up to, there is room for decreased self-esteem, as well as an array of other mental health issues (Stephens, Hill, & Hanson, 1994). Researchers have discovered that boys are taught their bodies should be used to master their external environment, while girls are taught that their worth lies in their ability to use their body to attract others (Stephens et al., 1994).

Carrying into adulthood, the divide across sexes becomes more apparent. While the objectification phenomenon is shared across genders, the way the media's influence manifests in male and female observers differ. Scholarship has suggested that not only do both sexes desire different overall body types, but there is heightened attention to individual body parts and regions (Andersen, Cohn, & Holbrook, 2000). Adult men are more likely to be dissatisfied with their lack of muscularity and aim to achieve a larger, v-shaped body (Cordes, 2016), which centers the regard upon the upper body. In a quantitative study using a 3D interactive software system to virtually create ideal bodies, results note men's fixation on the abdominal muscles, chest, and arms (Crossley, Cornelissen, Tovée, & Howe, 2012). Contrarily, studies that touch on objectification in female adults have correlated the drive for thinness and the preoccupation to the lower body (Andersen et al., 2000), such as thighs, hips, and waist to female's self-deprecating body attention.

Within our technologically-dependent Western culture, media are woven into all aspects of everyday life by means of television programs, movies, social media, advertisements, and video games. These varying forms serve as platforms to promote cultural standards, and the perpetuation of body ideals in popular media has been linked to lowered self-esteem and body dissatisfaction (Sylvia et al., 2014). Women in media are often shown as thin, with long legs, curvaceous hips, big eyes, a small nose and a flat stomach, whereas men are represented through the use of "young, bare-chested, lean, and muscled male bodies in fashion magazines and advertising" (Tiggemann et al., 2007, p. 15). Women are socialized to strive for thinness, while men's attention is centered on muscularity (Murnen et al., 2003). There is a significant divide between male and female bodies that are glorified within the media versus the wide spectrum of body types seen in everyday life, leaving feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction among

both sexes. Men and women are increasingly exposed to the prescribed ideal that instills the pressure to succumb to this standard, even if it is by unhealthy means (Leit et al., 2001).

Mannequins serve as another physical symbol of the body ideal (Argo, Dahl, Peracchio & Adaval, 2018) used to attract buyers, but contrary to this, Argo's study revealed that mannequins often turn buyers away. Across six studies, Argo concluded that male and female buyers with reported low appearance self-esteem appraised an appearance-based product more negatively when displayed by a mannequin (Argo et al., 2018). This response resulted from feelings of inadequacy when exposed to the normative standard of beauty the mannequin exhibits, rather than the symbol itself. Through synthesizing preceding research, the role of media in shaping self-perception is undoubtedly one of the main catalysts driving body dissatisfaction among adult men and women.

While traditionally objectification research has been primarily directed towards women, recently light has been shed on the effects of male objectification as research interest in this area has grown. In a study considering the media's portrayal of the male body ideal and dissatisfaction, Devlin and colleagues (2008) found significant positive correlations between exposure to the male body ideal in the media and high levels of body dissatisfaction, increasing with media consumption rates. Examining the impact of highly realistic video games on male self-image, Sylvia (2014) conducted a study designed to gauge how gamers' attitudes toward muscularity and one's body were affected through the use of different avatars. One sample size played with an exaggerated, muscular avatar representing the current male body ideal, while the control group played with an average-build avatar. After playing a highly-realistic game for 45 minutes, participants completed a survey detailing their current body image, and a clear divide between the two groups' attitudes were uncovered. Supporting Sylvia's hypothesis, participants

who used the body ideal avatar reported far lower scores of body satisfaction than participants in the control group (Sylvia et al., 2014), indicating that even brief presentations of media images may hold a drastic effect on one's self-perception (Leit et al., 2002).

A rapid increase in the diagnosis and treatment of men struggling with eating disorders, obesity, excessive exercise, and body image concerns (Grossbard, Lee, Neighbors & Larimer, 2009) has prompted researchers to investigate these "hidden problems for millions of men" (Benoit, Blank & Burns, 2001, p. 327). Between 10% and 25% of eating disorder cases are male (Sweeting et al., 2015), yet the fear of being "feminized" restricts a large majority of men from seeking the needed help. This suggests the complexity of internalized shame, stigma, and threat to one's identity, being the essence of one's masculinity (Delderfield, 2018). Cash and Hicks researched the outstanding psychological differences of one's perception of his or her body in relation to the actuality of his or her weight, and it was reported that nearly as many males as females were dissatisfied with some facet of their physique (Cash & Hicks, 1990), yet prior research has principally accepted the assumption that body dissatisfaction is greatly bound to women (Tiggemann et al., 2007). There is an apparent research gap in the understanding of the levels of thinness/muscularity males strive for in the face of body dissatisfaction and the promotion of the male ideal body (Cordes, 2016). The gap only widens as boys and men are generally overlooked in light of research funding (Delderfield, 2018) surrounding the discussed topics.

With this in mind, there is a call for in-depth, qualitative research that strives to illuminate male struggles with body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and objectification (Delderfield, 2018). Qualitative research seeks to understand the intricacy of individual's experiences, without "reducing these to statistical values about etiology, epidemiology, psychopathology or treatment"

(Delderfield, 2018, p. 2), which seemingly diminishes the needs of the male population.

Therefore, this current study sought to understand the complexity of male objectification through the lens of podcasting. The aim of this study was to better define how media influence men's self-image. It specifically sought to better understand the correlation between one's body and one's perceived masculinity, how men were taught to view their bodies from childhood to adulthood, and which factors hold the greatest weight in forming male self-perception. With this in mind, the following research questions were put forth:

RQ1: How, if at all, do college-aged men report their experiences of being objectified?

RQ2: At what age did college-aged men begin to notice their bodies in relation to others and what feelings were evoked?

RQ3: How, if at all, do college-aged men talk describe insecurities they face in relation to their bodies?

III. Methods

Participants

Participants were 10 men aged 18-25 attending the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Five participants were recruited via word of mouth, and five participants were recruited via email. The researcher sent an email¹ to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Honors College detailing the main objectives of the study, calling for potential male participants ages 18-25 to reply with their name, age, and contact information. After potential participants responded, the researcher informed them on the nature of the study, while also presenting possible risks or discomforts in lieu of the audio-recorded interviews and the questions asked.

¹ See *Appendix A* for the full recruitment email sent to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Honors College.

Then, the potential participants were asked if they wanted to participate; all chose to participate, and they were scheduled for an interview time slot.

Materials

The researcher compiled a list of interview questions² based upon secondary research regarding male objectification and media influences. The main data-driven concepts addressed in the interview questions revolved around research in objectification theory, sexual objectification, self-objectification, and the socialization of boy's relationship with their bodies. The questions were designed to be open-ended in order to spark conversation between the researcher and the participant. The goal of the interview questions was to add a humanistic layer to traditionally empirical data, and allow the participants to feel comfortable speaking on topics they may not discuss often. If at any point a participant felt uncomfortable answering a question, they were given the option to skip the question or end the interview.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in this study in which a participant could be identified remained confidential and was disclosed only with one's permission. The researcher offered each participant the option to use a pseudonym in their responses. Interviews were audio-recorded, the researcher took notes, and the participant's comments or answers were only be published with permission. The participant's information, even if identifiers were removed, will not be used or distributed for future research. The researcher had full editorial control over the editing and use of audio recordings for the podcast. Upon request, participants were able to review the podcast before publishing.

² See *Appendix C* for the entire list of interview questions.

Procedure

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, each participant was scheduled for an in-person interview at the WUTC radio station at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Interviews were scheduled for approximately 30 minutes; however, some interviews varied in length depending on the participants' responses. Once the participant arrived, they were given an informed consent form³, which outlined each step in the procedure, including confidentiality, refusal/withdrawal, discomforts, and all Institutional Review Board contact information. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions if anything stated was unclear or in need of more clarification. Once the participants signed the informed consent form, the researcher sat down with the participant and began audio-recording in WUTC studio. The researcher asked each interview question in the same order for each participant, to ensure consistency in each interview. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. After each interview had been conducted, the researcher thematically analyzed the interview responses (N = 10) and organized them into a series of topics that corresponded with data and theories noted in the literature review. The researcher then audio-edited each topic's responses into a podcast to create a series of four podcasts that all illuminate the complexity of male objectification theory⁴

IV. Results

Episode I

The commencement of this podcast series discusses the age in which men first became aware of their physical shape and the feelings that were evoked, whether those be feelings of

³ *Appendix B* outlines the entire Informed Consent Form.

⁴ See *Appendix E* for all podcast episode links.

pride, shame, social comparison, etc. The goal of this episode is to gain a general background on college-aged men's introduction to body image, and how one's family, friends, or media influences impacted said body image, so that the further episodes have a point of reference or foundation. All participants stated that they began to compare their bodies to others around puberty, during middle school or even earlier. Ninety percent of participants stated that they began to compare their bodies to individuals they knew personally, and 10% stated that comparison was prompted by media influences. Some feelings evoked in response include inadequacy, confusion, embarrassment, and neutrality. Participant, Thomas stated, "I definitely felt feelings of inadequacy when it comes to my body, and I definitely experienced bullying from other people for really no reason at all, but the fact that I was the skinny, thin kid that was interested in science and not basketball." Another perspective came from Holland, who noted that he was "super skinny" growing up and around third grade, "gained a ton" of weight, which prompted him to notice his body and compare himself to the "boys around [him]." Holland continued, "I am extremely short and always have been for my age...even in third grade, they were taller than me and here I am not being able to run or play any games with them. I was like, that's not fun." Another participant, Jasper stated that at age 14, his mother was diagnosed with cancer, so his family tried to "beat it the healthy way" and all began eating clean and exercising together, which led him to notice that he was "fat." Over time, his family got "fit" together and Jasper commented, "through that, I started noticing how my body could fluctuate back and forth between being skinny and being fat really quickly." Participant, Logan G. mentioned that he became aware of his body image in sixth grade when he began shopping at the stores, Abercrombie & Fitch and American Eagle. He said that the advertisements of male models displayed in-store made him believe "that's how normal 14- to 15-year-old guys should look."

Episode II

Building off of the genesis of this series, episode two inquires whether men recognize or believe men are objectified in the media, or if objectification in the media is exclusive to women. Further, this episode attempts to outline specific media examples, while also noting the effect it has on male self-esteem and self-image. The main objective of this episode is to explore how college-aged men recognize harmful objectification in the media and to investigate if my secondary research aligns with the responses. The episode begins by asking participants what they believe to be the male body ideal primarily represented in the media. Some responses included, “the man with the swimmers bod and washboard abs,” “toned but not too muscular,” “no body fat and muscle in placement of that,” “at least 6 feet tall,” and “as tall and as strong and you can possibly be.” These responses indicated that participants recognized a media standard, which led to conversation about male objectification. Holland stated that he believes “there’s a similarity to a lot of the ways women are objectified, which are via appearances and a lot of things you can’t control.” Holland used height as an example for ways in which men are objectified in the media. In conjunction with this, Logan G. mentioned that he believes men have become “more objectified as of late due to the rise of social media” and with the accessibility to standards being pushed on social media, “you see you don’t really fit that mold.” Following the trend of social media, Nicholas stated that he has noticed the trend of “body-positivity” posts, but he’s “not seeing any of that stuff right now for men.” Other forms of media, TV, film, and action figures, were discussed by Jose and Jasper. Jose stated that “[As a man], you get pushed a lot of this idea, especially in movies and television, that looks and money matter.” Jasper followed that up with mentioning, “As a kid, I would look at [wrestling] action figures and see how strong they were, and I was never like that, even when my family started working out...”

Episode III

Episode three closely examines the intricate relationship between one's physical body and one's perceived masculinity. Moreover, it poses the question asking if one's body makes one feel more or less masculine and why it may have such a hold on masculinity itself. Additionally, this episode focuses upon men with backgrounds in sports and how such cultures or environments jumpstart and heighten one's awareness of their physical body. The goal of this episode is to gauge the interconnectedness of masculinity and the body in the participant's responses, while keeping in mind individual's backgrounds and upbringing. The episode begins with commentary from Logan G., Nicholas, and Tommy, all men who grew up playing either basketball, football, or wrestling which emphasized rapid muscle/weight gain. Logan G. stated that when reflecting back on his experience playing basketball in high school, "It was not a healthy environment because we weren't getting healthy for the right reasons, it was more so that we wanted to 'get big' to look intimidating...but I am glad it gave me the experience to see other guys struggling with that as well because prior to that, no one really talked about why we were exercising; it was just an unspoken thing." Similarly reflecting upon playing football, Nicholas recalled that the constant pressure to "bulk up" and spend multiple hours in the weight room, something he "never wanted to do," led him to feel insecure. Tommy stated that when wrestling, he often had to gain or cut weight to fit into a specific weight class, which he said was always "pretty easy" for him as long as he "skipped a meal." As the episode progresses, the conversation shifts to the topic of masculinity and how one's body impacts that. John begins by stating that "there's this boyhood-ness of trying to figure out masculinity," questioning if he should fight against the standard and "take pride in [his] shortness" or if he should "want to outgrow it." When speaking on his masculinity, Nicholas stated, "I could honestly care less about the

masculine image. I care more about feeling comfortable with my own body, which is hard to do.” Further, Holland commented that despite being “5’4,” he’s “always had the mentality that...because [he has] a beard and arm hair and chest hair,” that he’s “the manliest man.” Giving another perspective, Jasper expressed gratitude for his body by mentioning, “When I walk to class, I’m not out of breath, I can walk all the way there...I don’t feel masculine, but I feel happy.” Straying away from connecting the body to masculinity, Jose noticed that “masculinity is changing,” and used Harry Styles as an example. Jose stated “[Harry Styles] is sort of bending these masculine roles that we’ve been accustomed to.”

Episode IV

The final episode explores how men are conditioned to discuss certain insecurities they face in relation to their body or masculinity. Certainly, this factor varies based upon friend or family relationships, yet the primary objective lies in gauging male’s comfortability with this subject and whether or not men believe these topics are socially acceptable to speak out against. Lastly, this episode delves into how to open the conversation for men in order to feel more comfortable talking about insecurities or issues one faces, despite what one might have been socialized to believe being a “man” entails. When asked how men speak about their insecurities, Holland mentioned that “we don’t talk to each other about anything like that...you just don’t do it...it’s got to be ingrained [in our culture].” Likewise, Will said that his father raised him well and believes that everything he taught him was to help, but one of the things he taught Will was to not talk about his insecurities. In his father’s voice, Will stated, “Don’t show your emotions...it’s okay to cry, just don’t do it in front of people.” He continued “And same thing for insecurities, ‘Just don’t even bring them up.’” Contrarily, John felt that it wasn’t necessarily difficult talking about his height insecurities with his brothers and sisters, but other insecurities

were harder to voice. John stated, “I wasn’t so much insecure about that, [rather] a sense of fulfilling this thing of being strong, and I think that has a lot more to do with personality than it does with physicality...just from a young age refuting this construct of aggression and strength.” Logan R., Jasper, and Nicholas mentioned that they have and feel comfortable voicing their insecurities to family, friends, or significant others.

The second half of this episode poses the question of what the solution might be to allow men to feel accepted and heard when speaking on these issues. Nicholas brought up “body-positivity” social media posts that are often flooded with discouraging or hateful comments. Nicholas stated, “That’s not the kind of environment we need, that’s going to stifle people talking about it...We need open spaces.” Alternatively, John proposes that society itself needs to desexualize the body in the media stating that “We’re both in love with sex and we’re afraid of it, and we’ve created this situation where the body is inherently sexual...and that’s really problematic.” Jasper suggests that the best way to resolve the stigma around men discussing their insecurities is to simply start talking about them to trusted individuals. He encourages one to “Just do it. Start talking to people about it...most people are nicer than you think.” Overall, this episode sparks interesting dialogue building from the previous episodes because it takes the participants environmental factors into account, and provides society real solutions for men by men in attempt to alleviate some of the pressures men may feel on a daily basis.

V. Discussion

The present research project extends prior studies by producing qualitative, interview-based data, while aligning with the theoretical framework of Fredrickson & Roberts’ (1997) objectification theory, as well as the influence of body ideals on body dissatisfaction (Sylvia et al., 2014). Responses to the data-driven interview questions were reflective of previous research,

indicating that social media, television, advertisement, film, and video games all promote aspects of male objectification.

Research question one inquires how, if at all, college-aged men report their experiences of being objectified, which is detailed in *Episode II*. The majority of participants stated that they believe men are objectified, but to a lesser degree than women. Participants named advertisements, films, action figures, and video games as prime sources of objectification, and some noted that the means of objectification for men are identical to the means of objectification for women. Research question two questions the age in which men began to compare their bodies to other individuals, either individuals in the media or ones they knew personally. The consensus was that this most occurred during middle school or earlier, primarily emphasized by the event of puberty. Research question two is investigated further in *Episode I*. Research question three aims to understand how, if at all, college-aged men describe insecurities they face in relation to their bodies. Additionally, it opens the floor for suggestions on how to bring this topic to light and allow men to feel comfortable being vulnerable talking about struggles or insecurities. While one's comfortability with talking about insecurities varies depending on several factors, there was a common theme among responses that indicates men are often raised to not speak on their struggles or show signs of emotional weakness. Contrarily, several other participants mentioned feeling comfortable in the past and going forward with talking to loved ones or friends about certain insecurities. *Episode IV* delves deeper into research question three.

This study revealed that most participants began comparing their bodies to others during puberty, yet they reported the catalyst for comparison is more often one's peers, rather than media influences. Only one participant stated that advertisements prompted comparison at a young age. As expected, participants recognized the male body ideal represented in the media as

being a tall, muscular male with low body fat, which corresponds with Tiggermann's study (2007) on the male body ideal. The body ideal led participants to comment on the dichotomy of striving to succumb to the standard while also wanting to feel comfortable with their own body, which leads to inherent body dissatisfaction (Devlin, Ross & Kotchick, 2008). Two major branches that stemmed from conversation on objectification were sports and masculinity. An unexpected outcome of this study was the prevalence of participants with backgrounds playing sports, and how they conditioned men to view their bodies primarily as a tool "to master their external environment" (Stephens et al., 1994), and promoted an unhealthy culture surrounding diet and exercise for middle and high school-aged boys. Such responses were not foreseen when conducting secondary research or generating interview questions, so this phenomenon is not investigated to its maximum potential. Another common theme among responses was the pressure felt at a young age to be "strong" and to fill a masculine role, which would be interesting to solely focus upon in a future study.

The results of this study suggest the importance of diversity in the media, in terms of alternative forms of masculinity and a spectrum of body types represented in mainstream media. Some participants noted that rising social media platforms such as Tik Tok or YouTube are shifting the ideal body culture because these platforms allow anyone to create an account and reach success in the public eye. Additionally, public figures such as Harry Styles and Tyler the Creator were mentioned for bending masculine stereotypes in mainstream media and creating their own trends. Alternatively, one participant mentioned that while he's seeing "body-positivity" campaigns for women in advertisements, there have been no strives to replicate that for men. This study aims to illuminate the lack of male body representation and encourage future studies to inspect why this affliction is often normalized in Western society.

Although this study allows for unique, open-ended responses, one limitation would be the small sample size of participants interviewed. Future research of this nature could increase the sample size and perhaps include a questionnaire section to return quantitative data, as well. Such data may allow for further generalizations to the population. Future samples could go beyond interviews with college-aged men, expanding to men of all ages to underline generational differences and diverse perspectives. Another methodical suggestion could be interviewing the same participant multiple times, but distinguishing each interview by topic. This would allow for more depth in responses and a more succinct series of interviews.

In conclusion, this thesis project brings to light male objectification and male body representation, subjects that are often neglected in this field of research and in the public discourse. While a limitation of scholarship itself may sometimes be inaccessibility to general audiences, this thesis project is designed to be rather comprehensive and accessible to the everyday person. Considering the audio-exclusive format of podcasting, listeners are unable to view participants' appearances and are inherently denied of comparison, which enhances the notion that body satisfaction is more dependent on one's self-esteem than one's physical body. It could further be speculated that perhaps participants were more willing to volunteer and share intimate experiences given the medium. This research aimed to spark conversation by correcting the notion that objectification and body dissatisfaction are limited to females by suggesting that males face similar struggles, yet are socialized to internalize and diminish them. By combining both scholarly research and the format of podcasting, the uniqueness of this project adds to the public conversation by delving deeper into college-aged males' perspectives via a medium that still provides a sense of anonymity while also capitalizing upon accessibility to general audiences.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hi Honors Friends,

Are you a man aged 18-25? Are you willing to help a fellow peer in completing their DHON? If so, my name is Maddi Thompson and I need your help. I am currently in the process of completing my DHON, which aims to illuminate male struggles with body image and objectification through the lens of podcasting. Over the next month, I will be interviewing men about their perspectives on this topic to create a series of podcasts that allow for a more personal approach than traditionally empirical research. Interviews will be on-campus and will last no longer than 30 minutes. Please reply to this email if you're interested in being interviewed or would like more information. It would be greatly appreciated!

Thank you so much,

Maddi Thompson

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

In-Person Informed Consent Form

Purpose: This is an honors thesis project entitled “The Effects of Harmful Male Body Representation: Uncovered Through The Lens of Podcasting” that is being conducted by Madelynn Thompson, a senior Brock Scholar at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, alongside Dr. Jessica Freeman, an assistant professor of Communication at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The purpose of this study is to examine how men shape their opinions of their bodies from childhood through adulthood via media-influences such as action figures, video games, mannequins, magazines, and male models via one-on-one recorded interviews. The study will then inform a series of podcasts, which will utilize the audio recordings.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a male between the ages of 18-25. Approximately 15 males may participate in this study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, you will take part in an in-depth, in-person interview with Madelynn Thompson. All interviews will be recorded using an audio-recorder. It will take approximately thirty minutes. The interview will include questions about your body image, self-objectification, and your personal demographics.

Upon the completion of all interviews, the researcher will listen to, compile and edit audio recordings to create a series of 1-3 podcasts on male objectification. The podcasts will be made publicly available via social media and Internet websites such as the Honors College website.

Discomforts/Risks: Participation in this research project presents minimal risk. It is possible that some of the topics discussed may be emotionally sensitive because the researcher will discuss your relationship with your body, as well as external factors that may have influenced your disposition. The level of discomfort will depend on how each individual reacts to questions. If at any point a participant is uncomfortable with the questions or discussion, they may stop the interview.

Benefits: Male body image and male body representation are understudied in relation to female body image and female body representation. This research project has the potential to provide a better understanding of issues adolescent and adult males face, directly resulting from media-influences.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. The researcher will offer each participant the option to use a pseudonym in their responses. Interviews will be audio-recorded, the researcher will take notes, and the participant's comments or answers will only be published with permission. The participant's information, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research. The researcher will have full editorial control over the editing and use of audio recordings for the podcast. Upon request, participants may review the podcast before publishing.

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the University of Tennessee at

Chattanooga. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, as well as decline to answer any question asked. If a participant withdraws from the study, their audio recordings and collected information will not be used and will be deleted from all files.

Contact: If you have any questions, now or later, you may contact me at 615-519-9317. Thank you very much for your time and assistance. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact Dr. Amy Doolittle, Chair of the UTC Institutional Review Board at (423) 425-5563. This research protocol has been approved by the UTC Institutional Review Board. Additional contact information is available at www.utc.edu/irb. If you request, I am happy to provide the print version of this consent form via email.

Madelynn Thompson
1032 Carriage Parc Drive
Chattanooga, TN 37064
frz554@mocs.utc.edu
615-519-9317

Audio Recording of Study Activities: Interviews will be recorded on an audio recorder to assist with the accuracy of your responses. These files will be kept by the researcher on a password protected laptop, as well as a shared drive with Dr. Jessica Freeman. Only the researcher and research advisor will have access to these tapes. You have the right to refuse the recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate.

Signature of Subject Date

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

(Note: These questions will be asked to participants, however they will be asked in the flow of conversation. The researcher may ask for more clarification or detail regarding certain given answers.)

1. Would you like to use a pseudonym during this study?
 - a. If not, what is your first name?
2. Age, background, demographics etc.?
3. At around what age did you begin to notice your body in relation to others?
 - a. Comparison
 - b. Anxiety
 - c. Insecurity
4. Do you recall what triggered those thoughts?
 - a. Media
 - b. Family members
 - c. Friends
5. Do you feel that men are objectified in a similar way to how women are?
 - a. In what ways?
 - b. Are you familiar with the concept of objectification?
 - c. If so, give me a quick definition of what you believe it is?
 - d. If no, tell them
6. Would you say that your body makes you feel more or less masculine?
 - a. Does it change depending on what shape you're in?
7. Do you feel that it is difficult to talk about certain insecurities you face in relation to your body?
 - a. Have you ever talked to your friends or family about these issues? If so, how?
 - b. If not, why not?
 - c. If yes, what do you think is a good way to change that for men?
8. What do you feel is the standard for male bodies in our society today?
 - a. Do you believe the standard changes over time, similar to how it does for female bodies?
9. Do you feel that masculinity is something you perform?
 - a. Does the degree to which you perform differ among different individuals?
 - b. Why so?

Appendix D: Podcast Scripts

EPISODE I SCRIPT

- General Intro:
 - Hi! You're listening to "One of the Boys" and this is episode 1. I'm Maddi Thompson, a student researcher at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with the aim of investigating male struggles with body image, masculinity, and objectification through a series of interview-based podcasts.
- Specific Intro:
 - In this episode, we're discussing how men have been taught to view their bodies from childhood through adulthood, as well as the point in which men began to notice their bodies in relation to one another.
 - So what exactly do men have to say about their experiences with body image throughout their lives?
- Specific Back Announce:
 - In this episode, we heard from....
 - Building off of these stories, in the next episode, the conversation will be centered on the media's grasp on body image and how that manifests over time.
- General Back Announce:
 - The music in this podcast is "Propane" by Tintamare
 - I'm Maddi Thompson and you've been listening to "One of the Boys."

EPISODE II SCRIPT

- General Intro:
 - Hi! You're listening to "One of the Boys" and this is episode 2. I'm Maddi Thompson, a student researcher at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with the aim of investigating male struggles with body image, masculinity, and objectification through a series of interview-based podcasts.
- Specific Intro:
 - In this episode, we're focused on current trends of both male and female objectification shown in the media, while investigating the potential negative effects it may hold for men.
 - So how do college-aged men report the male body standard primarily represented in the media?
 - :25 (after Will) Objectification theory posits that both men and women's primary view of self is ultimately dependent on an outside observer's perspective (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997).
 - So, if applicable, what do men have to say about male objectification and do media influences have an impact on male body image?
- Specific Back Announce:
 - In this episode, we heard from....
 - Diving further into the potential consequences of body ideals and ingrained norms, in the next episode, we will be hearing more about the drive for muscularity and the correlation between one's physical shape and one's definition of masculinity.

- General Back Announce:
 - The music in this podcast is “Propane” by Tintamare
 - I’m Maddi Thompson and you’ve been listening to "One of the Boys."

EPISODE III SCRIPT

- General Intro:
 - Hi! You’re listening to "One of the Boys" and this is episode 3. I’m Maddi Thompson, a student researcher at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with the aim of investigating male struggles with body image, masculinity, and objectification through a series of interview-based podcasts.
- Specific Intro:
 - In this episode, we're shedding light on the relationship between one’s physical body and one’s perceived masculinity. Additionally, this episode dives into how growing up playing sports may or may not affect one’s body image and how body norms are instilled among young men of similar backgrounds.
 - Let’s hear about some of these experiences
 - So, does your body make you feel more or less masculine, and does that change depending on what shape you’re in?
- Specific Back Announce:
 - In this episode, we heard from....
 - In response to these testimonies, I, the researcher, am curious how, if at all, men are allowed to talk about said insecurities. In the next episode we’ll focus on the ways in which men feel comfortable talking openly about their bodies and how to open the conversation going forward.
- General Back Announce:
 - The music in this podcast is “Propane” by Tintamare
 - I’m Maddi Thompson and you’ve been listening to "One of the Boys."

EPISODE IV SCRIPT

- General Intro:
 - Hi! You’re listening to "One of the Boys" and this is episode 4. I’m Maddi Thompson, a student researcher at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with the aim of investigating male struggles with body image, masculinity, and objectification through a series of interview-based podcasts.
- Specific Intro:
 - In this episode, we're discussing the ways in which our culture allows men to speak out about insecurities or struggles faced and how, moving forward, such conversations can be brought to light.
 - Further, I pose the question asking how men have been socialized to talk about insecurities they face in relation to their bodies?
 - And how to better open the conversation for men?
- Specific Back Announce:
 - In this episode, we heard from....
 - Hopefully in moving forward, these experiences have given you a more humanistic approach to traditionally empirical research. This research was

completed in hopes that we might shed a light on the struggles of men grappling with body image, masculinity, and objectification as we all do.

- General Back Announce:
 - The music in this podcast is “Propane” by Tintamare
 - I’m Maddi Thompson and you’ve been listening to “One of the Boys”

Appendix E: Podcast Episode Links

- Episode I: <https://soundcloud.com/user-326346397/episode-i>
- Episode II: <https://soundcloud.com/user-326346397/episode-ii>
- Episode III: <https://soundcloud.com/user-326346397/episode-iii>
- Episode IV: <https://soundcloud.com/user-326346397/episode-iv>