ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Examining the Role of Family, Media, Peers in Young Caucasian Men's Understandings of Body Dissatisfaction: A Thematic Analysis Using the Tripartite Influential Model and Social Comparison Theory

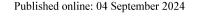Daria Apopei[1] · Jennifer Coe[1] · Sebastian Cordoba[2]

Abstract

This study explores the factors contributing to body dissatisfaction among young Caucasian men. It focuses on family, peers, and media influences, addressing a gap in the literature that rarely integrates men's experiences. The research draws on the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory, using thematic analysis to examine semi-structured interviews with eight participants aged 20–21. The research considers participants' sexual orientation and country of origin when analysing the data. The findings show that family, peers, and the media positively and negatively shape body dissatisfaction among participants. Positive familial support can enhance body image, while negative comments from family members and peers exacerbate dissatisfaction. Social media was found to often reinforce unattainable body standards. The research contributes to the limited literature on men's body dissatisfaction by expanding the application of the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory to this population. The study underscores the need for greater societal awareness and a more inclusive approach to body image research that considers diverse ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations. We argue that more attention needs to be paid to men's body dissatisfaction, as men are often excluded from these discussions. This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of male body image, offering a foundation for future research and societal discourse on this often-overlooked issue.

Keywords Body dissatisfaction · Body image · Men · External influence · Social comparison theory · Tripartite influential model

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Introduction

Body dissatisfaction impacts people of all genders (Jankowski et al., 2018). While most of the literature has primarily focused on the occurrences of body dissatisfaction among women, over the last few decades, more studies have begun to explore men's experiences (Schooler & Ward, 2006; Sondhaus et al., 2001). While some research found higher levels of body dissatisfaction in women compared to men (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2009), recent studies highlight the increasing levels of men's negative body self-evaluations (Flannery et al., 2020; Tamplin et al., 2018). However, there are significant gaps in understanding the factors contributing to body dissatisfaction among young men, particularly concerning the role of family, peers, and the media. The dominant cultural ideal for masculinity in Western society, particularly in the media, is the muscular body type (Wienke, 1998). The masculine body type is tall, with broad shoulders, low body fat, large, muscular arms, and a narrow waist (Pope et al., 1999). Though viewed as highly attractive and desirable, this appearance is unrealistic and unachievable (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014). However, many men feel pressured to achieve this standardised body type. It has been suggested that men unable to achieve such a physique may feel less masculine, thus exhibiting negative feelings about their appearance (Lu & Wong, 2013). It is highlighted that the increase in body dissatisfaction in men has reached levels, suggesting its occurrence may be a normative issue (Jankowski et al., 2018). The present study aims to understand the extent to which body dissatisfaction is based on individual (personal experiences and attitudes) and external (societal and environmental) influences by analysing interview responses from eight young Caucasian men. Moreover, this research focuses on the influence of family, peers, and media. We also explore men's understanding and awareness of body image, incorporating aspects such as men's sexualities and countries of birth, as these aspects were significant to our participants when discussing body image. This research draws on the Tripartite Influential Model and Social Comparison Theory to understand the experiences further. We will discuss the findings' broader societal implications and applications, offering suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Body Image and Body Dissatisfaction

Body image is a multidimensional concept which mainly, but not exclusively, refers to one's physical appearance. How an individual thinks, reflects, and behaves can also be related to their body image (Keery et al., 2004). As a construct, body dissatisfaction was first proposed by Muth and Cash (1997). They defined body dissatisfaction as an individual's negative feelings, thoughts, or behaviours about one's body. Body dissatisfaction is also associated with negative evaluations of body shape, size, muscularity, and weight and often entails an inconsistency between an individual's body evaluation and ideal body image (Aliyev & Türkmen, 2014). Researchers have linked body dissatisfaction with various adverse outcomes such as the development

of low self-esteem (Yean et al., 2013), eating disorders (Dakanalis et al., 2016a), internalisation of social media values (Dakanalis et al., 2015a), the need for increased levels of muscularity (Dakanalis et al., 2015a) and dysmorphia (Mitchison & Mond, 2015), among others. Most precedent body dissatisfaction research has focused on women's experiences, concentrating on weight, body fat, and body size (Dakanalis et al., 2016a; McFarlane et al., 2001). Such focus underlines the societal beliefs that body dissatisfaction is mainly related to women and is not a significant occurrence in men. However, in recent years, the focus has shifted to understanding the prevalence among men (Raevuori et al., 2014). It is important to note that women's and men's body concerns differ substantially (Dakanalis et al., 2016a; Holmes et al., 2015). Women's body concerns typically centre around ideals of thinness and losing overall mass and size (Bocage-Barthélémy et al., 2018; Drewnowski & Yee, 1987). At the same time, research conducted with teenage and young adult men suggested that their main appearance-based concern was gaining weight, strength, and overall size (Tylka, 2011). Research also indicated that men frequently evaluate themselves as too thin or underweight (Dwyer et al., 1969), thus demonstrating the pressures that men have to attain masculine body standards. Similar notions are common in literature focused on self-evaluation in gay communities (Kassel & Franko, 2000; Tiggemann et al., 2008). Tylka (2011) suggested that the Tripartite Influence Model is the primary influence factor concerning body image perception. This model affirms that family, peers, and media are the principal social-cultural factors influencing the development of body dissatisfaction. These three factors have also been associated with the subsequent appearance of eating disorders or other psychological consequences via appearance comparison and internalisation of societal ideals (Rodgers et al., 2015).

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) is also a helpful model for understanding body dissatisfaction. This theory proposes that the drive for self-evaluation leads individuals to compare themselves with others, which can result in body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann et al., 2020). This theory differentiates between two types of comparisons: upward and downward social comparisons. In upward social comparison, people compare themselves to others they view as superior, whereas in downward social comparison, people compare themselves to others they regard as inferior (Murnen & College, 2019). This theory will be employed alongside the Tripartite Influence Model to explore how appearance comparison and the subsequent internalisation of social standards embedded in family and peer relations and the media affect men on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level. The current study will begin by explaining the three factors concerning their influence on men's body dissatisfaction: family, peer, and media influences.

Family Influence

The family and home settings are essential influences on young individuals' perceptions of their bodies, which usually comprise weight-related comments and embedded parental modelling (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). Negative interactions originating from family members around the topic of body image, including promotion of dieting behaviour, teasing, and critical comments, are linked to the development of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbances (Hardit & Hannum, 2012). Even

rare and infrequent negative comments from family members have been found to have a high negative effect on individuals (Kichler & Crowther, 2009) – and positive comments have been associated with decreased rates of body dissatisfaction (Hardit & Hannum, 2012). Research supports the importance of parental relations and body image (Aliyev & Türkmen, 2014). For instance, Tylka (2011) reported the influence of family pressures on men to achieve a particular body type and the internalisation of that standard.

Moreover, Gillen and Lefkowitz (2009) highlight the significance of family in forming and developing values involving attractiveness. Hence, the reinforcement of specific unattainable body standards by family (through the impression that a lean and muscular appearance is the most attractive) further men's disposition to achieve an ideal body type and to gain more muscle, which, in turn, leads to an increase in body dissatisfaction and muscularity enhancement behaviours (Tylka, 2011). Conversely, multiple studies corroborated that family influence is proven chiefly to positively impact an individual's perception of their body (Byely et al., 2000). Similarly, literature underlines the importance of supportive familial relations for gay men; these have a positive influence on self-acceptance and self-esteem (Bozard & Young, 2016). Additionally, due to predominant heteronormative societal and cultural standards, gay men might be more susceptible to experiencing strained relations with their family members (Bybee et al., 2009). However, limited literature connects the importance of family influence and men's perception of their body image.

Peer Influence

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) research has found that individuals who perceive themselves as not achieving the desired standards and ideals relating to their bodies encounter physiological and psychological distress (Martin & Govender, 2011). These social comparisons are particularly influential through different means, including comparing oneself to peers (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Studies suggested that men are likelier to compare themselves to their friends and peers than men in their family or on social media (Karazsia & Crowther, 2009; Lin & DeCusati, 2016). Research also recognises that men might receive more vital messages from other men than women about the importance of muscularity as a fundamental role of their masculinity, highlighting the influence of same-gender peers (Lin & DeCusati, 2016). However, limited research has been conducted on same-gender peer groups and men regarding body image and dissatisfaction (Buss et al., 2001; Levesque & Vichesky, 2006). Lin and DeCusati (2016) argue that the influence of peers felt by men and the need to adhere to societal standards do not originate from close relationships but from distant peer groups. This claim is also found in studies based on women's relation with peer influence and comparison of thinness levels (Lin et al., 2015). This argument is also prevalent in research based on gay men's relations with peer and community pressures related to appearance standards (Martins et al., 2007). Lin and DeCusati (2016) also found that comparison to peer muscularity preferences significantly affects men's body perception and could lead to implications such as muscle dysmorphia.

Media Influence

Like peer group influence, media influence on men's body dissatisfaction is also based on social comparison, especially in internalising societal standards on bodies. The frequent use of mediatised spaces also increases the opportunities for appearance comparison – more than what is experienced on an off-line daily basis (Stronge et al., 2015), underlining the idea that media is a decisive influence factor on body dissatisfaction. Moreover, social media platforms also offer editing tools which promote distorted portrayals of physical appearances (Ahadzadeh et al.,2017), subsequently encouraging the alteration of pictures to correspond to an idealised body standard (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015) and promoting these standards through user validation (e.g., likes, comments, and reposts). While most of the literature regarding the relationship between social media and body dissatisfaction is solely focused on women, the research on men's body perception is slowly increasing (Aliyev & Türkmen, 2014; Flannery et al., 2020; Tamplin et al., 2018). Frederick et al. (2005) showed that the media targeting men presents hyperdeveloped muscularity as an attractive male physical characteristic, while the media portrays women as less muscular.

Furthermore, research has shown that the influence of media, in addition to appearance-based pressures from peers, is linked to appearance comparisons, which leads to the internalisation of body standards such as thinness and muscularity (Girard et al., 2018). This phenomenon could also be explained by the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). Men experience upward social comparison while interacting with social media, a significant place where the representation of the idealised male body type aimed toward men occurs (Flannery et al., 2020). Additionally, maladaptive influences of media promotion and the idealisation of an unachievable body type are also common causes for propagating negative self-evaluations in gay men (Levesque & Vichesky, 2006; Strubel & Petrie, 2018). Research has shown the relationship between high media usage and body image-related issues, such as reduced self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and even the development of eating disorders (Brown & Dittmar, 2005; Martins et al., 2007). Increased usage of social media platforms has resulted in discrepancies in the perception of one's actual body type and the idealised societal type (Flynn, 2016). Social media endorses discerning self-presentation with curated and strategically chosen pictures and a rising social reinforcement to further such practices by promoting social grooming attitudes like linking, surfing, and commenting on individual profiles (Kim & Chock, 2015).

Wider Social Implication

Research employing the Tripartite Influence Model suggested that sociocultural pressures are a prominent influence on women's body dissatisfaction (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Donovan et al., 2020; Hazzard et al., 2019; Shroff & Thompson, 2006). The present study aims to extend this literature by identifying how these domains influence Caucasian men's body image. Exploring the effects of men's body dissatisfaction at an individual and societal level is incredibly important due to the existing physiological and psychological consequences which occur due to negative self-evaluation. At an individual level, the consequences of body dissatisfaction present

in men's physical perception are related to psychological health implications, such as depression, muscle and size dysmorphia and sometimes even suicidal ideations (Griffiths et al., 2016). Recently, the Health Survey for England emphasised the fact that out of the approximately 1.25 UK population who exhibit an eating disorder, 10-25% are men (Sweeting et al., 2015). Most eating disorders affect the population in the age range of late teens to mid-twenties. With the increased pressure on men to have a societal idealised and unrealistic body, more types of destructive behaviours and implications appear. Destructive dieting behaviours, such as fasting, excessive exercise, binge eating and laxative and diuretic misuse, frequently occur among men who feel dissatisfied with their body image (Dakanalis et al., 2016a). It is also noted that with the increased pressure on straight and gay men to achieve greater levels of muscularity, their susceptibility to suffering from muscle dysmorphia and muscle dissatisfaction has also rapidly expanded (Dahlenburg et al., 2020; Davey & Bishop, 2006). Due to these negative implications and in the quest for preventive care, researchers have begun to explore the underlying reasons for body dissatisfaction among men (Lin & DeCusati, 2016). One of the root causes is men's reluctance to openly disclose and discuss their psychological and physical concerns with others (Diedrichs et al., 2011). While men report experiencing dissatisfaction, few are willing to admit it, thus minimising or dismissing the issue. Men still see the idea of having concerns regarding one's body image as a feminine and un-masculine issue, which drives men to disregard the topic and can, at the same time, increase the possible health and psychological consequences (Jankowski et al., 2018).

Additionally, prevalent societal ideas surrounding masculinity, gender identity and sexual orientation might formulate how gay men perceive body image and themselves (McArdle & Hill, 2007). Lastly, Mîndruț (2006) depicts the evolution and changes in the female perception, which is also extended to men, regarding body standards in Romanian society after and during the Communist regime. The researcher explains the newer perceived freedom of expression existing in contemporary Romania, which is portrayed in opposition to the more restrictive and uniform type of expression that was predominant during the communist regime. These aspects will be considered in the analysis, as most of the participants in the present study originated from Romania.

Present Study

This research draws upon the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory to further understand the experiences of body dissatisfaction among Caucasian and Gay men, with a particular focus on family, peers, and media. The present study uses a thematic analysis qualitative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to explore the unrepresented voices of men on the topic of body image and further expand on the existing research on the stereotypical notion that men are unaffected by body concerns. This research examines how young men experience their body image and how they understand body dissatisfaction. Additionally, we consider the broader social contexts, the implications of these themes, and their importance.

Research Methodology

A qualitative thematic analysis methodology was adopted for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted amongst a sample of 20 and 21-year-old men. All participants were based in the UK and were recruited via opportunity sampling. This research explores the role of young men's families, peers, and the media in their body dissatisfaction. The interview schedule created for this study, therefore, answers our research aims by asking participants to discuss the following domains: (1) their experience with body image and understanding of body dissatisfaction, (2) the influence of family, peers, and the media could have on their body dissatisfaction and (3) their understanding of societal implications on this topic and the importance of considering it.

Participants and Recruitment

This project received approval from the University of Suffolk's ethics committee on 11 November 2021. We followed The BPS (2021) Code of Conduct, ensuring the protection of the researcher and participants and addressing any potential ethical issues (BPS, 2021). All participants were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity, and data was stored privately on password-protected devices to maintain confidentiality.

The inclusion criteria were based on gender (men), age (18–25), and location (living in the UK). Additionally, ethnicity and sexual orientation were considered and subsequently reflected in the data analysis, but these factors were not part of the inclusion criteria. The age group was selected to ensure participants were in the same generation and, therefore, experiences would not be significantly influenced by societal changes over time (Eschleman et al., 2016). The researchers followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidelines for small projects using Thematic Analysis. They recommend 6–10 participants for qualitative studies. As such, eight participants were recruited using purposive sampling, with recruitment taking place through social media adverts. This method allowed the researchers to recruit participants from a specific demographic based on their knowledge and experience on the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). Ethnicity was asked as this was important for the experiences, particularly for family and the broader societal context. Table 1 (below) displays the

Table 1 Participant's pseudonyms and demographic information	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Age (years)
	Albert	Mauritian White	Gay	20
	Josh	Romanian White	Heterosexual	21
	Pearl	British/ Polish White	Bisexual	21
	Rupert	British White	Heterosexual	20
	Felix	Romanian White	Heterosexual, Leaning Bisexual	21
This table contains demographic information about the age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of the participants	Morgan	Romanian White	Gay	21
	Benjamin	Romanian White	Heterosexual	21
	Xander	Romanian White	Heterosexual	21

demographic characteristics of the participants, including pseudonyms, self-reported ethnicity, sexuality, and age. Four participants reported being Romanian white, one British white, one British Polish white and one Mauritian white. Four of the participants used language associated with being heterosexual to describe their sexuality; one was heterosexual leaning bisexual, two bisexual, and two gay.

Data Collection

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview schedule based on the literature surrounding the overarching theme of body image, the themes of Social Comparison Theory, and the Tripartite Influence Model, which extends to family, peers, and the media. Semi-structured interviews offer access to more in-depth explorations of individuals' perceptions on specific topics and an understanding of how these relate to social context (Schmidt, 2004). The primary investigator conducted the interviews. The questions were designed to encourage participants to discuss peer relations, school and familial environment and social media platforms, linking them to body image. Firstly, the questions were designed to discuss the general idea of body image and dissatisfaction, followed by instances in which appearance self-evaluation in these contexts. Furthermore, reflection was encouraged by discussing instances in which peers or family members might have influenced their appearance and self-evaluation through bullying and comparison and encouraged/discouraged gender norms or self-expression. The last part of the interview schedule touched upon more social topics, such as the influence of sexuality, birth country, societal standards, and society's consideration of the issues of male body dissatisfaction.

Data Analysis

The research team conducted the data analysis using Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022), a qualitative method focused on analysing and describing patterns in a data set. Besides a descriptive data approach, TA entails interpreting material to construct and select codes and themes. TA was used to understand the extent of influence of three sociocultural factors on the development of men's negative self-evaluations. A key element of TA is the flexibility in which the participants' sample size, the data collection method and the generation of data meanings are approached (Braun & Clarke, 2022). TA can be used to identify themes within and across data regarding the participants' experiences and opinions to understand the meanings and thoughts of the interviewees (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The reasoning in the study's analysis was predominantly deductive, an approach in which the identified themes are strongly linked to a theoretical framework. The present study's themes are linked to formulated research questions based on the Tripartite Influence Model. After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022), the primary thematic data analysis process commenced with the researchers familiarising themselves with the transcripts by immersing themselves in the data content. The primary investigator developed the initial codes, which were subsequently organised, combined, and grouped under broader themes by the rest of the research team. We held meetings to agree on the key themes we developed

for this research, acknowledging our positionalities and subjectivities, which include our gender identities, sexualities, and countries of origin, as well as our personal experiences of body dissatisfaction – all of which informed and added value to our analysis. These themes were developed in Word after considering the link between them and the research questions. The focus of the data analysis was to answer the research questions, address the gaps in the literature concerning men's body image, and explore the broader social context and related power relations.

Findings

Utilising TA, seven main themes were created, discussing the participants' views on body image, body dissatisfaction, and the influences of the three sociocultural factors: family, peers, media, and the broader social context. Concerning body dissatisfaction, the key sub-themes highlighted men's reluctance to openly discuss their issues and a lack of societal acknowledgement of their problems. The influence of all three factors (family, peers, and media) was found in all participants' accounts. These factors were also used as a guiding compass to create subthemes within the data. Other sub-themes were informed by the prominence of the participants' discussions around their sexualities and country of origin, as well as the lack of discussion of men's body issues (See Table 2).

Body Image Dissatisfaction

Participants were asked to evaluate their body image. The experiences were divided throughout the participants' interviews. Three participants firmly expressed a satisfactory evaluation of their appearance. In contrast, others, such as Morgan, remarked that due to the "fluctuating" nature of the expressed feelings concerning body image,

Table 2 Data structure

Theme	Subthemes
Body Image Dissatisfaction	Inconsistent appraisal
	Environmental influences
	Behavioural influence
	Justifiable dissatisfaction
Influence of Family	Negative familial judgement
	Imposed masculine standards
	Freedom of self-expression
Influence of Peers	Frequent inter-peer comparison
	Normalising negative feelings
Influence of Media	Altered depictions of standards
	Unrealistic representation of body ideals
Wider Social Implications	Societal disinterest
	Sexuality shaping views
	Country of birth and body image
	Emphasis on stereotypical masculine norms

Breakdown of themes and subthemes

there would always be a desire for bettering himself, which entailed that he was never satisfied. Similarly, Felix explains that:

> [W]e sit at home … in Romania. We are obligated to stay at home much more. And I've neglected my body in a sense. Eating is a refuge. It would have been better if I had to walk to university. (21, Romanian White, Heterosexual leaning bisexual)

This extract highlights that the cause of such negative appraisal, for some participants, originated from external factors, such as stress and lack of engagement in physical activities. This also underlines that self-appraisal depends on external circumstances and could vary on one's perceived environmental opportunities. Xander described his body image as "more than physicality" and "constantly changing." For Xander, body image was perceived as dependable on his mental state, affecting his perception of his body. However, as described by Albert, body image is a subjective matter, in which "people can be delusional with themselves in certain cases about how they see themselves compared to how they actually are". Xander also highlighted the repercussions of experiencing body dissatisfaction, which could lead to significant mental health and physical issues. Xander justified:

> This dissatisfaction often leads to dysmorphia, which is not good because it's an unobjective view of your own body image, and it leads to a lot of bad things like anorexia or bulimia or other things like that. (21, Romanian, Heterosexual)

On the other hand, and perhaps controversially, Rupert described body dissatisfaction as "justifiable", motivating people to become healthier or achieve a particular appearance. However, the benefits of this are still described as dependable on an individual's state (Jankowski et al., 2018). Additionally, Xander described body dissatisfaction as "not necessarily bad" in the instances in which the objective body appearance of an individual is seen as unhealthy. Josh echoed this opinion, arguing that "it's healthy to have a sort of dissatisfaction with your body". This could be why three participants in this study described being satisfied with their appearance. While body dissatisfaction is indeed harmful and a starting point for other mental health issues (Rodgers et al., 2015), many participants argued that this was a driver for bettering themselves and, in turn, ensuring satisfaction with their bodies.

Influence of Family

Most participants disclosed having received critical comments regarding body image from family, particularly from parents and a few remarks from siblings. Congruent with the Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2010) study, while most participants wrote the comments off as a joke, they would then further expand on the consequences on their self-esteem and body perception caused by said comments. Xander, for instance, highlighted the central influence family had on his emotional state, mainly when they discussed sensitive subjects such as appearance:

> It happens and it's kind of a joke, but not quite, you know? When they tell you you've put some weight, and even though it's light-hearted, it really hits you because family is always extremely sincere. (21, Romanian, Heterosexual)

In family contexts, stereotypical masculine behaviours are often imposed, i.e., the belief that men should not care about their appearance (Tylka, 2011). However, no participant recalls experiencing any situation in which their parents actively imposed any masculine standard on them. Some participants felt a sense of freedom when their parents did not enforce any restrictions on them growing up. Albert highlights this point:

> They just accepted whatever we wanted to do and still are. For example, growing up, my brother or I wanted, like, a girl's toy that we saw in the supermarket. They'd just get us a girl's toy, and that wouldn't be an issue. (20, Mauritian British, Gay)

Albert clarified that the freedom of expression provided by his parents also involved encouraging behaviours (such as playing with 'feminine' toys) which are not deemed stereotypically masculine. Albert is open about his sexual identity as a gay man, which may be a reflection of his family's openness to challenge gender roles. Furthermore, for many participants, body dissatisfaction was not a result of upward comparison – or the desire to achieve a particular body type – modelled by their parents' appearance. Nevertheless, family judgments relating to their bodies did aggravate participants' views on their appearance, contributing to their body dissatisfaction vis-à-vis their emotional responses to these comments.

Influence of Peers

A few participants discussed the onset of developing body dissatisfaction starting with puberty by relating to their own experiences growing up. Felix argues that it is "typical for children and teenagers to feel body dissatisfaction" because of the sudden changes in appearance, as well as other additional factors such as an increase in hormone levels. They also mentioned that younger children, in their experience, are more susceptible to developing negative feelings toward their bodies. Additionally, participants also mentioned that inter-peer teasing concerning body image was typical in school environments. Most of the participants disclosed having experienced a level of teasing. Pearl reasons that teasing behaviour during his younger years happened because "kids are so mean, and it's so easy in school to be bullied for something". Similar to the family context, jokes regarding their bodies were common. Josh adds evidence, explaining an instance in which he witnessed such an occurrence:

> Another guy who was a bit more plump, so to say, we would just make fun of each other like, look, you've got bigger breasts than my mom and stuff like that, but other than that, no, it was just fun banter, no actual teasing (21, Romanian White, Heterosexual).

Felix adds that when this type of bullying occurred, the only way out was to "shut up and go on with it". These highlight the conventionality in which men view harmful comments as a joke while ignoring the underlying detrimental messages that perpetuate the view that men's bodies should align with these masculine standards. Additionally, this also normalises bullying between peers and accentuates the way inter-peer interactions among men should transpire. Participants mentioned that social comparisons with peers were common. Comparison usually occurs within close circles and among peers. Pearl argued:

> I know their names and their stories; it's much more difficult to ignore that. (21, Polish, British, Bisexual)

Pearl discussed feeling envious of the achievements of someone close to him when he was younger, a form of upward comparison. Similarly, Xander and Morgan desired to change their appearance to look more like their peers. This was explained as stemming from the pre-existing insecurities about their bodies and the drive to feel more socially accepted, which aligns with the study by Lin and DeCusati ([2016]). Additionally, Xander explained the consequences of the comparison as a factor in the progression of body dissatisfaction, as well as the development of negative feelings and distress:

> You tend to only see the better ones, you know? Never look at the worst ones. And that just adds up to the dissatisfaction of everybody. Not everybody finds motivation the same way; looking at somebody else who is better than them could be actually demoralising for persons. (21 Romanian White, Heterosexual).

On the other hand, Rupert explained that comparing himself with other people is "only natural." He saw this positively, allowing him to adjust his expectations around his body. This was echoed by Josh, who explained he did not experience a sense of envy but an appreciation while comparing himself to his peers. He explained his desire, growing up, to be either "like or better than" his peers. As such, both Rupert and Josh expressed levels of admiration toward the achievements and physical development of their friends – an upward comparison which allowed them to negotiate the expectations of their body image.

Influence of Media

All participants discussed the influence the media has on their body image. The participants mostly viewed the term 'media' as predominantly encompassing social media platforms. Xander, for instance, discussed how people use social media to portray an embellished version of themselves:

> Really unrealistic body image goals and photos that have been photoshopped or cropped or edited or things that have been made one thousand times to look better than they look in real life. (21, Romanian White, Heterosexual).

Additionally, in terms of the representation of male bodies on social media, Pearl acknowledges that the majority are depicted as "predominantly full muscular men". This is echoed by Frederick et al. (2005), underlying the hypermasculine depiction of men's bodies. Xander also added on the consequences of unrealistic body portrayals:

> It's not just about being muscular or being fit. Many things are purely genetically codified, like height or facial structure that have a really important play in the perfect male body standard that you can't influence in any way and things that can't be influenced tend to cause frustration. (21, Romanian White, Heterosexual).

The overrepresentation of unachievable body stereotypes in social media platforms, therefore, can influence – and increase – body dissatisfaction among men. Lastly, due to the higher usage of social media by younger generations, the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by the content on the internet was also discussed by participants. For instance, Xander and Flynn (2016) discussed younger men's inability to "separate what's real from what's not real, or what's achievable from what not achievable". Importantly, all participants agreed that social media affected men's body image and considered this common knowledge.

Wider Social Implications

This section focuses on the implications identified by the participants concerning the broader social context, as well as other aspects such as sexuality and country of origin. When asked about how men's body issues are perceived by society, Josh said, "Who cares? Honestly!". This feeling was echoed by other participants and highlighted the lack of discussion on male body dissatisfaction in society. Furthermore, Pearl mentioned that men's body issues are "often perceived as not a real problem." The lack of interest and lack of awareness on this topic is a direct reflection of society's views on men's body issues – namely, it is something that is rarely talked about, a taboo subject. Other participants declared that society's perspectives on men's issues are slowly becoming more well-known, albeit secondary to women's body issues, as discussed by Dakanalis et al. (2016a). Pearl explained the double standard in the representation of men compared to women in society. He argued that the media's criticism and objectification of women's bodies are socially viewed as "terrible and not acceptable, [whereas], when it comes to men and male culture, no one cares as much".

When asked about the influence of sexual orientation and body image, the opinions were divided. Regarding stereotyping of appearances based on sexuality, some participants considered it impractical due to the diverse ways in which people express their genders and sexualities. This argument is soundly accentuated by Rupert, who explains that:

> I know gay people who dress in a very similar way to how I do. I know lesbian lesbians dressed like 'normal' women. It's not like you need to play into the stereotypes (20, British White, Heterosexual).

Additionally, Pearl explained that while "years ago" stereotypes concerning specific sexualities were mainly portrayed in a harmful and demeaning way, presently, these kinds of stereotypes are viewed, in his opinion, as "just funny stuff". However, Pearl also argued that, while stereotyping and body standards about his sexuality exist, these do not have an effect on his everyday life, given that his sexual identity is not a central part of his life. On the other hand, other participants expressed the prevalence of this factor in their self-evaluation. Albert and Morgan stated:

> I don't think it was particularly about sexuality, but I think it definitely had a factor in how I felt in my skin. (20, Mauritian British, Gay)
> I think that like keeping in mind my sexuality now I told you I start working out, but I'm kind of afraid of putting too much muscle mass (21, Romanian White, Gay).

Morgan expressed that his desire to achieve a particular body was associated with his desire to attract a specific type of partner. As such, the need to appeal to potential sexual and romantic partners is still a prevalent factor among men, regardless of their sexuality, thus contributing to their desires to change their bodies in significant ways. Additionally, societal standards about the appearance of gay men could also be factored into the participants' self-evaluations. While neither of them expressed any active impact of the gay sub-cultural influence, these standards could still be applied to how they want to be portrayed in society.

It should be acknowledged that most participants identify as Romanian white and that this context influenced their interpretation of societal implications regarding the studied topic. This is evident in the discussion concerning the influence of their birth country on their body image. Felix explained that because Romania experienced various economic and political issues in the last decades, there was a lack of societal focus on educating individuals about health and body positivity; this is also conferred in the study by Mîndruţ (2006). Felix explained that this, in turn, was transmitted through generations. Similarly, Morgan commented on his experience leaving Romania and moving to Germany, which has different body standards and expectations. In Romania, he was criticised about his body for being "too skinny". However, he received compliments for his body in Germany, which increased his confidence and body image. In addition, linking both society and sexuality as factors of influence, Pearl discloses that:

> I have to mute myself in a way: in how I dress, and how I talk, what I talk about, the way I talk to try and present a sort of ideal image of a straight man (21, Polish British, Bisexual).

Poland's unfavourable stance against the LGBTQ+ community made Pearl feel obligated to moderate his behaviours and appearance to feel secure within this context. Pearl also mentioned that "the majority of men aren't happy to talk about their body dissatisfaction" in his country but that he feels more confident talking about it in other contexts, mainly when he can express his sexuality freely. Overall, men rarely discussed body issues openly on media platforms or with peers and family, regard-

less of their sexuality or country of origin. However, men also experience negative feelings concerning their bodies. Xander commented, for instance, that "men actually just perceive them [negative comments on their bodies] as women do, so we get hurt just as easily, and it's just as difficult for us". Additionally, he argues that "society looks down on body dissatisfaction in males. Because they [society] say 'you're a dude, get your stuff together! You shouldn't be this emotional about your body, just lift some weights bro'". This is echoed by Jankowski et al. (2018), who highlight that men's issues are still considered a lesser topic than women's. Morgan also discussed gendered behaviour and stereotypical norms linked to appearances and how these influence how men are seen in society. He explains that the more muscular and stronger psychically they are, the more men will be "considered much more reliable in the society" compared to the men who appear "less masculine". This point was also voiced by Benjamin, who highlighted that the traditional norms of masculinity are still ingrained in the present society, where men "should always be dominant and powerful".

Discussion

Drawing upon the Tripartite Influential Model and Social Comparison Theory, this study sought to analyse men's opinions and experiences regarding the extent to which media, peers, and family impacted their body image, shedding light on the relationship between the physical aspect of the body and mental and emotional states. Additionally, this research focused on themes surrounding sexuality and country of origin associated with the factors above. The findings corroborate with pre-existing research while also highlighting the relationship between specific demographical characteristics, such as country of origin and sexuality, and body dissatisfaction.

Firstly, regarding the overarching topic of body image, participants acknowledged men's existing experiences and the varying nature of appearance appraisal. Some participants also described body dissatisfaction as a justifiable expression of self-evaluation, in which only objective interpretation of one's body exists. However, appearance dissatisfaction was also highlighted by participants as being the cause of multiple physical and psychological issues. The themes emerging on family, peers and the media highlighted both negative and positive effects on men's body image. While negative observations from the family were seen as detrimental to one's mental health, familial support in self-expression was seen as a positive influence. Likewise, peer influence was both seen as a negative (teasing) and favourable (progressive comparison) influence on men's relation with body image. Lastly, the broader social implication highlighted the minimal discussion and consideration men's body issues have in present society. Additionally, their country of birth was depicted as a significant influence in shaping one's body dissatisfaction. Lastly, sexuality was considered by some participants as affecting the way they see their bodies, particularly participants who identified as gay or bisexual.

Body Image Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction was seen as being justifiable by the participants in instances in which it remained an objective matter (performance and health levels), and subjective feelings were not added (inadequacies and dejection), possibly leading to sizable repercussions on physical and mental health, which might result in considerable decline on both planes. Most participants viewed family and media as the most influential factors in negotiating their body image. Family was perceived as both a positive and negative factor for all participants. While not all participants discussed peers as being influential, social comparisons with peers were prevalent, with many participants expressing envy and a desire to match their peers' appearance, which exacerbated pre-existing insecurities. However, some participants viewed these comparisons positively, using them to set realistic expectations and appreciate their peers' achievements. All participants identified social media as a common negative influence, as it perpetuated normative images related to masculinity. All participants discussed the lack of active societal importance that is placed on men's body issues, making them reluctant to talk about it with others. Additionally, all participants acknowledged how body dissatisfaction could impact their psychological and physical health. This is consistent with the studies conducted by Aliyev and Türkmen (2014), Mitchison and Mond (2015) and Tiggemann et al. (2008), which highlight that body dissatisfaction develops from a subjective evaluation inconsistent with one's appearance.

Contrary to the studies, the participants added another dimension of body dissatisfaction, describing its occurrence as justifiable and beneficial in multiple situations. This is also outlined in the fact that three participants are satisfied with their appearance. This highlights the importance of the objective aspects of self-evaluation, as well as the motivational aspect of perceived body dissatisfaction, as a means for bettering oneself and as a medium for improving one's body image. This is consistent with a study conducted by Swami et al. (2018), which demonstrated that positive appearance self-evaluation is associated with psychological and social well-being, such as an increased sense of personal growth and increased functionality in society.

Influence of Family

Participants frequently experienced critical comments about their body image from family members, particularly parents and siblings. While these remarks were often presented as jokes, they negatively affected self-esteem and body perception. Family plays a central role in emotional well-being, especially concerning appearance-related topics. However, no participants reported their parents enforcing stereotypical masculine standards, with some even experiencing a sense of freedom due to the lack of restrictions on their behaviour and interests. For some, this freedom could foster an open expression of identity and challenge traditional gender roles. Despite this, family judgments still contributed to body dissatisfaction and emotional distress. Contrary to Kichler and Crowther's (2009) findings, the participants regarded the rare negative comments received from family as laughable and insignificant, describing them as not having a considerable influence on their self-esteem. However, discussions about the possible adverse effects of these criticisms, such as low self-esteem

and the development of eating disturbances, were indeed mentioned by participants (Hardit & Hannum, 2012). The enforcement of masculine body ideals and subsequent internalisation of standards did not apply to any participants, contrary to the findings by Tylka (2011). The themes emerging from the interviews highlighted supportive familial environments in which self-expression was encouraged. Furthermore, no inclination towards inter-familial comparison was prevalent. This is also echoed by Karazsia and Crowther (2009), highlighting the comparison of father-son appearance as redundant. In general, the present findings suggest that family positively affected the development of a healthy body image for participants (Bozard & Young, 2016; Byely et al., 2000).

Influence of Peers

Participants discussed that body dissatisfaction among peers began during puberty and was influenced by physical changes and peer interactions. Teasing and joking about body image were common in school environments, contributing to negative self-perceptions and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Some participants highlighted the normalisation of such behaviours among peers, perpetuating bullying and the expectation to conform to masculine body standards, though all participants did not discuss this. As previously stated, a few participants saw these social comparisons positively. Consistent with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), participants displayed upward social comparison as a means of self-evaluation when comparing themselves with individuals they perceived as superior. However, we did not identify any instances of downward social comparison. This could be explained by the participants describing themselves as inadequate or equal to others. As such, no interviewee portrayed other individuals as inferior. The associated impacts of inter-peer comparison identified in the participants' accounts echoed the findings of Martin and Govender's (2011) study, linking psychological distress to the inability to achieve an admired body standard due to the subjective desires to achieve said standards.

The findings also highlighted the participants' desire to compare themselves with close peers rather than public figures on social media platforms (Tiggemann et al., 2018). The participants described associating the appearance of close peers to their self-evaluation more frequently than they did with individuals they encountered more infrequently or through impersonal settings such as the internet or social media platforms (Lin et al., 2015). The findings provided by Schaefer and Thompson (2014) highlighted the fact that inter-peer comparison stems from the internalisation of societal standards. However, in the current study, the participants rejected the extent of societal influence, attributing inter-peer comparison to only subjective opinions regarding appearance preferences.

Influence of Media

Social media was identified as the most influential factor in developing body dissatisfaction. Participants mentioned that social media showcases unrealistic and heavily edited body images, portraying hypermasculine and unattainable body standards, leading to increased body dissatisfaction. One theme all participants echoed was

the frequent use of appearance-alternating applications to portray unrealistically yet highly desired body standards (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015). The frequently promoted bodies were described as adhering to the Western male body standards, which comprised hyper-muscular and masculine models (Schaefer et al., 2021). Based on the promotion of such unachievable ideals, an increased upward social comparison was reported in the findings of this study. The interviewees also underlined the negative impacts of such internalisation of ideals and acknowledgement of perceived inadequacy of one's appearances, emphasising the susceptibility to the development of body dissatisfaction, especially in younger groups (Martins & Harrison, 2012). While increased social media usage was associated with increased internalisation of idealised body standards, the interviewees, while still acknowledging the influence of media platforms, could not fully explain its consequences. While acknowledging the effects body dissatisfaction could cause on an individual level, no participant disclosed experiencing any such consequences, such as psychological disturbances or active eating disorders, as evidenced in the study by Griffiths et al. (2016), which demonstrated the association between these factors and body dissatisfaction. Contrary to the association between body dissatisfaction and destructive dieting behaviours suggested by the study of Dakanalis et al. (2016a), no participant in the current research disclosed engaging in such behaviours due to social media usage, which is associated with negative self-evaluation, such as misuse of diuretics, laxatives, or use of steroids. The relatively positive body perception could explain why all participants were disinterested in conforming to hypermasculine societal standards linked to body image.

Wider Societal Implications

The participants' sexual identities and places of birth were also taken into consideration while analysing the data due to the association between the social and physical body. In line with Mîndruţ (2006) research on women's body politics in Romania, the participants of the current study, while discussing the idea of freedom of expression (which included sexualities), also experienced adverse effects that are perceived as being transmitted from the totalitarian political regime, which had at some point authority over the autonomy of one's body. For men, this implied aligning themselves to hegemonic forms of masculinity and heterosexuality. Participants who did not conform to heterosexual scripts and who had left the country had dissimilar relations to their body image, as they could observe and experience multiple ways of embodying masculinity, allowing them to deviate from the 'standard' form. However, no gay participant expressed any direct conformity to any appearance standards related to their sexual orientation, which might highlight the lack of sub-cultural influence on body image.

Most participants deemed any personal issues linked to body image concerns with relative disregard, portraying it as a women's issue. Participants discussed that these issues were not often talked about but were also reluctant to disclose these issues with others. Participants disregarded body issues in men and saw them as 'normal,' thus diminishing any adverse effect on their mental and physical health. This could be explained by the overall lack of education and awareness men receive on the topic

of body issues, as well as the stereotyping of such issues as 'feminine' and 'unmasculine' (Diedrichs et al., 2011; Sondhaus et al., 2001).

Limitations and Recommendations

While this study presents a small diversity of ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations, future studies could focus on a more extensive variety of these factors and how they might alter the perception of their influence. Sexual orientation and diverse ethnic backgrounds directly relate to appearance self-evaluation in studies among women due to the different societal standards and the subsequent international of these standards (Gültzow et al., 2020). Moreover, further investigation should be conducted with participants on which familial ties affected their views on their bodies. Measurement of the type of relationship between the participants and their family members should be considered, and future research could focus on exploring the extent of experienced body dissatisfaction while considering factors such as a positive or negative familial environment. Due to the study addressing the implications of influential factors on body image, issues might arise in the participants' definition of the notion of the body 'normality.' Some participants needed to be made aware of some aspects discussed during the interviews and the adverse effects of body dissatisfaction on an individual's mental state (Jankowski et al., 2018). Thus, future studies could be conducted with participants actively involved in appearance-related discussions or who suffer from body dissatisfaction to explore opinions that provide insight into the topic. As the literature highlights, while employing a qualitative approach assists in the in-depth understanding of the participants' views on a specific matter, due to the discussed reluctance of males to disclose such topics (Diedrichs et al., 2011), a quantitative approach is also suggested to be conducted. A recommendation for future studies could include participants with different age ranges and trans men. This inclusion will offer valuable insight into the experiences of trans men's perception as well as the social influence on their body image evaluation pre- and post-social transition (Romito et al., 2021).

Implications

This study outlines multiple implications resulting from the relevant findings. As previously stated, research has just recently started to focus on expanding the research on men; this research highlights the further need to develop exploration on this topic. This study highlights men's shared experiences concerning their self-appreciation of their bodies. While briefly outlining the extent of the research conducted on women, this study corroborates using the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory in qualitative research on men's samples. It expands on existing theory, highlighting the adaptability of the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory for male samples. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges the literature's Eurocentric perspective and outlines the need to analyse the familial, peer, and societal impact on body appreciation in men from different ethnic backgrounds. Thus, this study amplifies the need to develop the theory on various samples. Moreover, the present study adds the limited research conducted on Romanian groups. This

research highlights the unfavourable social climate affecting men's views of their bodies in the Eastern Block. This study suggests the need for further research on male body dissatisfaction, including samples from diverse ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and age groups, to conceptualise the influences and further prevent the development of body dissatisfaction in men. Finally, it emphasises how crucial it is to address this frequently disregarded problem in society debate and research. Discussion on the topic of male body image is still limited, and this study aims to highlight the shortage and expand on the research on the existing subject. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the interplay of family, peers, and media in shaping body image. It calls for a multi-faceted approach in research, theory development, and practical interventions to address body dissatisfaction and promote positive body image across different contexts.

Conclusion

This research aimed to delve into the complexities of body image and body dissatisfaction among young Caucasian men, focusing on the influences of family, peers, and media. Drawing upon the Tripartite Influence Model and Social Comparison Theory, the study uncovered multifaceted relationships between these factors and participants' perceptions of their bodies. The findings provided valuable insights into the nuanced ways in which these influences impact men's body image, shedding light on the often-overlooked subject of body dissatisfaction in men. While historical research predominantly focused on women, recent shifts have recognised the prevalence of body dissatisfaction in men, highlighting distinct concerns related to weight, strength, and overall size. The research findings revealed that family influence played a pivotal role, positively and negatively shaping men's body image. Contrary to some existing literature, participants downplayed the impact of occasional negative comments from family members, emphasising the importance of familial support in fostering positive body image. In line with Social Comparison Theory, peer influence demonstrated the significance of upward social comparison among men, particularly with close peers. Media, especially social media, emerged as a powerful force shaping body dissatisfaction, perpetuating unrealistic body standards and promoting appearance-altering tools. The study's broader societal implications emphasised the need for increased awareness and understanding of men's body image issues. It highlighted the reluctance of men to openly discuss these concerns due to societal stereotypes, potentially leading to negative psychological and physical consequences. The intersectionality of sexual orientation and country of origin added layers to the participants' experiences, emphasising the influence of cultural and societal norms on body image. The research methodology employed a TA approach through semi-structured interviews, providing a rich qualitative exploration of men's experiences with body image. However, the study acknowledged its limitations, including a relatively small and homogeneous sample, suggesting opportunities for future research to explore a more diverse range of participants and factors. furthermore, this research contributes valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of body dissatisfaction among Caucasian men. By unravelling the intricate interplay of family, peer, and media influences, the

study advances our understanding of the multifaceted nature of body image in men. It underscores the importance of addressing this often-overlooked issue in research and societal discourse.

Declarations

Ethical Approval Approval was obtained from the ethics committee at the University of Suffolk. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Conflict of Interest The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article's content.

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Authors and Affiliations

Daria Apopei[1] · Jennifer Coe[1] · Sebastian Cordoba[2]

✉ Jennifer Coe
jennifer.coe@uos.ac.uk

Daria Apopei
dariamariaapopei@gmail.com

Sebastian Cordoba
s.cordoba@londonmet.ac.uk

[1]   School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK

[2]   School of Social Sciences and Professions, London Metropolitan University, London, UK