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**Summaries of Presentations  
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**Male Body Image: Exposing the Growing Dilemma among College Men**

Lewis Bozard, Ph.D., M.Div., NCC, ACS, LAPC

Higher education professionals may be familiar with body image as a female concern without realizing that male students experience body image distress as well. Male body dissatisfaction increased by 187% at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from 15% in 1972 to 43% in 1997 (Garner, 1997). One study found that male college students, on average, believed they should possess 25 pounds more muscle and 8 pounds less fat to meet their perceived ideal of male physique (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004). Whereas female body image concerns typically focus on the desire to be lean, male body image may be bi-directional, focused on leanness and/or muscularity.

Male body image disturbance has been linked to a range of problems from disordered eating to depression to suicidal ideation (Eaton, Lowry, Brener, Galuska, & Crosby, 2005; Whetstone, Morrissey, & Cummings, 2007). College-age men are particularly vulnerable to body image disturbances. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that men tend to be more reluctant to admit to another person that they feel dissatisfied with their bodies because of traditional gender notions which hold that men are not supposed to care about their appearance. Finding support for body image disturbances and related problems can be especially difficult for men. Furthermore, student affairs and mental health professionals may not realize they should screen for male body image disturbances.

Gay and bisexual men are believed to be at greater risk for body image disturbance and related conditions such as disordered eating and steroid use than straight men (Chaney, 2008; Morgan & Arcelus, 2009). Social factors including media, peers, and social location (i.e. heteronormative culture and gay culture) influence male body image, with gay and bisexual males likely to be more severely impacted. Within gay culture, the body plays a critical role in gaining social acceptance and finding and keeping romantic/sexual partners.

To enhance our understanding of the nature of body image development, especially among college-age sexual minority males, I chose for my dissertation research to study the role of experiences with family members, friends, and romantic/sexual partners in body image formation. In-depth qualitative interviews with eight bisexual and gay participants revealed that romantic/sexual partners, family members, and friends all played significant roles in body image development. Partners appeared to be the most significant of the relationship types, as explained by one participant: "I don't care nearly as much what friends or family think. But coming from a romantic or sexual partner definitely gets me emotionally." Modalities of influence varied across a broad spectrum, including verbal comments, social observation/comparison, social evaluation/rejection, nonverbal actions, sexual interest, sexual performance, sexual rejection, seeking sex for affirmation, public performances involving display of the body, and physical touch. Overall, the findings suggest that the process of body image development is relatively unique to individuals, with few generalizations possible. Further research is needed to better understand, treat, and prevent male body image disturbances.

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