

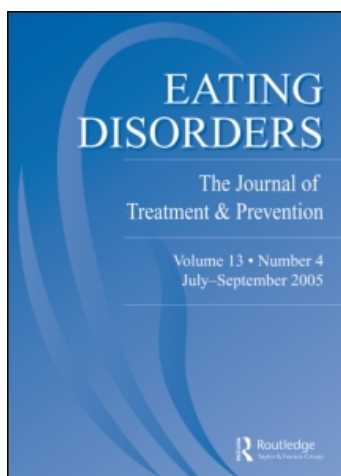
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The Muscular Ideal: Psychological, Social and Medical Perspectives

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The Muscular Ideal: Psychological, Social and Medical Perspectives, J. Kevin Thompson and Guy Cafri (Editors), Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007, 265 pages, \$59.95

The Muscular Ideal is a critical overview of the history and increasing popularity of the muscular body type. This edited book covers a wide range of topics, including psychological and socio-cultural perspectives, measurement, treatment and even muscularity among women. Kevin Thompson, a frequent contributor to this journal (*Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*) is a preeminent expert in the field of eating disorders, body image and measurement. Guy Cafri, a doctoral student at the time of publication, has also done considerable work in the field of body image and the pursuit of muscularity.

The book is divided into five parts: Cultural, Social and Psychological Perspectives; Definitions and Measurements; Medical Issues, Treatment and Prevention; Special Topics; and Guidelines for Future Research. The introduction nicely lays out a roadmap of the book, emphasizing the “potential negative aspects of the relentless pursuit of the muscular ideal . . . and the deleterious effects of an extreme focus on physical perfection . . .” (p. 10). It also presents a bio-psycho-social model involved in the pursuit of the muscular ideal, providing compelling factors that support and influence the health risk behaviors associated with pursuing the muscular ideal.

Section one includes three chapters which are dedicated to the psychological and societal influences on the etiology of the muscular ideal. Gray and Ginsberg review the psychological and cultural research and theory of muscularity. They blame the current “crisis in masculinity” squarely on top of the broad shoulders of a culture driven by the media and consumerism. Luciano presents a historical overview of muscularity and masculinity in chapter two, beginning shortly after the Civil War, when “strongmen” were viewed as spectacles, through to the narcissism of the “Me Generation” where muscularity became associated with physical attractiveness and its pursuit came at an ever-increasing cost. Chapter three provides a welcome personal perspective from Alan Klein, a social anthropologist, who studied competitive bodybuilders for nearly 10 years. His descriptions of the ritualized behaviors of the bodybuilder combined with the social psychology behind these “neurotic” and “overly insecure” individuals offer insights into this growing subculture.

Section two defines various terms associated with muscularity and provides an overview of measurement tools. McCreary describes the drive for muscularity in chapter four, detailing research related to the construct and the reliability and validity of the DMS (Drive for Muscularity Scale). Cafri and Thompson examine a number of methods of assessing body

image and muscle dysmorphia in chapter five, differentiating and providing support for the use of multiple methods of assessment.

Section three assesses the medical issues, treatment and prevention of body image issues associated with muscularity. Olivardia describes the history of the muscle dysmorphia concept in chapter six, providing a thorough overview of its characteristics, assessment and treatment; differentiating between muscle dysmorphia and healthy weight lifting behavior. A call for further research, treatment and prevention programs highlight the newness of the clinical classification. Bahrke outlines the dizzying array of muscle enhancement substances and strategies in chapter seven, emphasizing the adverse health risks and predicting future technologies that may further threaten health. In chapter eight, Goldberg and Elliot provide a thoughtful and much needed overview of steroid use among adolescent boys, influencing factors and prevention efforts designed to reduce the self-reported use of anabolic steroids as well as the risk factors for disordered eating.

Section four explores various "special topics." Sarwer, Crerand and Gibbons detail the preponderance of cosmetic procedures used to enhance body shape and muscularity. The authors suggest that the combination of the increasing cultural emphasis on physical attractiveness, technological developments in the field of cosmetic surgery, and the widening influence of the mass media and entertainment industries all contribute to the popularity of cosmetic surgery. Chapter ten describes the pursuit of muscularity among adolescents. Ricciardelli and McCabe examine the increasing sociocultural pressures and risk factors among adolescent boys and girls, suggesting future research, especially among different cultural groups. In chapter ten, Gruber associates the increases in women's fitness activities, athletic participation, and muscular women in the media with the increased muscularity seen in the female body ideal.

The conclusion, written by Chrisler and Cochran, begins by acknowledging the "mirror" of the muscular ideal for men with the thin ideal for women. It lays out several ideas for future research, emphasizing the need to further explore issues of culture, gender and diversity as well as factors of measurement, treatment and prevention.

The Muscular Ideal is an excellent resource for physicians, therapists, coaches, trainers and anyone interested in eating disorders, body image, and health/sports psychology. It compiles recent research to demonstrate the importance of studying the muscularity dimension of body image. It is thorough, concise and is an important addition to a field that has focused primarily on weight loss and the thin ideal.

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