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Abstract

This study examined men's body image in the context of their romantic relationships. One hundred and four heterosexual romantic couples ($N = 208$ participants) completed measures assessing men's body image, perceptions of men's weight change, relationship length, and sexual intimacy. Men's height and weight were also measured. Results indicate that men were more likely to be satisfied with their bodies when they perceived their partners to be, when their partners actually were satisfied with their bodies, and when they perceived themselves to have gained relatively little weight throughout the duration of their relationships. Analyses also revealed that men expressed greater body satisfaction when there was a relatively high degree of sexual intimacy in the relationship. Findings are discussed in terms of their contributions to researchers' and practitioners' understanding of men's body satisfaction.

Keywords

body image, men, romantic relationships, sexual intimacy

There is a widespread belief that women have a greater tendency to suffer from body image (and often related) eating disorders at much higher rates than do their male counterparts (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2004). However, research has provided increasing evidence to suggest that body dissatisfaction and its physical and psychological consequences may be comparably prevalent and damaging among men as it is among women (Corson & Andersen, 2002; Tager, Good, & Morrison, 2006). Men's bodies are presented as both leaner and more muscular in popular culture than in previous decades (Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004), as evident in an examination of Playgirl centerfold models from 1973 to 1997 (Leit, Pope, & Gray, 2001). This trend, in addition to other sexualized and unrealistically muscular depictions of men's bodies in popular media, increases the likelihood that men will engage in negative health behaviors (e.g., steroid use and exercise dependence) to alter their body size to conform to societal standards (Filiault, 2007; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Olivardia et al., 2004; Varnado-Sullivan, Horton, & Savoy, 2006). Although societal messages about men's physical appearance have been linked to men's body image, we know little about proximal messages from romantic partners. Given that romantic partners' comments about individuals' bodies

may be more influential than other sociocultural contributors (Sheets & Ajmere, 2005), it is important to examine their influence. Thus, this study aims to extend our understanding of men's body image by examining the potential influences of their romantic partners.

The empirical basis of this study is guided by two important social psychological theories. Symbolic interaction theory (e.g., LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) suggests that individuals develop their self-concept through their social interactions. More specific to our interests in this study, this theory indicates that individuals' self-concept is particularly shaped by interactions with significant others. Furthermore, it is the reactions of significant others and individuals' perception of those reactions that ultimately defines one's self-concept. In terms of body image, it follows then that a significant other's reaction to one's body will help define the individual's own body image. The Michelangelo phenomenon (see Drigotas, Rusbult,

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Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999) extends the ideas presented in symbolic interaction theory by describing the role of romantic partners as shaping individuals through affirmation. For example, the degree to which a wife's perception of her husband matches his own perception of himself is regarded as critical to the husband's evolving sense of self; positive affirmations will contribute to a positive sense of self. Therefore, wives' (and girlfriends') perceptions of men's bodies may be an important contributor toward men's own body satisfaction. These theories and previous research focusing primarily on husbands' influences on their wives' body image guide the aims of the present study. Further, relationship commitment (e.g., length of relationship) and sexual intimacy will be examined to better understand men's body image in the context of romantic relationships.

Decades of research has established links between romantic relationship experiences and both physical and psychological health outcomes (Horowitz, McLaughlin, & White, 1998; Markey, Markey, & Gray, 2007; Minuchin, 1985, 1988), but only recently have associations between body image and romantic relationship experiences been investigated (e.g., Markey & Markey, 2006). This research suggests that women's perceptions of their own bodies are associated with their male partners' perceptions of their bodies. Interestingly, studies show that men's *actual* views of their partner's bodies seem to have a lesser impact on women's body image than women's *perception* of their partners' views. In two studies by Markey and colleagues (Markey, Markey, & Birch, 2004; Markey & Markey, 2006), women were found to be less satisfied with their bodies than they perceived their romantic partners to be and than their partners actually were. In another study of young adult couples, women's body satisfaction was related to how satisfied they *perceived* their partners to be with their bodies (Miller, 2001). Further underscoring the importance of perceptions, Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson (1995) found that the size of the gap between women's perception of their own body size and the size they *think* their romantic partners see as ideal for women was a critical predictor of women's body image.

An important component of research examining women's body image in the context of their romantic relationships is consideration of both women's and their significant others' satisfaction with women's bodies (e.g., Markey & Markey, 2006; Morrison, Doss, & Perez, 2009). In other words, both members of a romantic couple have been included in some of these studies that focus on women. However, the focus of these and other examinations of body satisfaction has tended to be on women and has more or less excluded men's body image experiences. The little evidence regarding men's experiences is mixed as to whether women's *actual* views of their male partners' bodies or men's *perceptions* of women's views are

more important in shaping men's body image. In one study, men's body satisfaction was associated with their *perception* of their partner's satisfaction with their bodies (Miller, 2001). In contrast, Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson (1995) report that the size of the difference between men's perception of their own body size and their female partners' *actual* rating of their ideal male body was an important predictor of men's body image. In the current study, this work is expanded by focusing on both men's and their female partners' perspectives of men's bodies, considering women's actual views as well as men's perceptions of women's views.

To ascertain a more complete understanding of men's body image in relation to their romantic relationships, elements of men's relationships relevant to their body image were also considered: perceptions of men's weight change during the relationship, relationship commitment (i.e., length), and sexual intimacy. Although there are no prior studies to suggest which romantic relationship variables may be associated with men's body image, conclusions about the variables that are most likely to be associated with men's body satisfaction can be drawn by again turning to previous studies examining women (e.g., Markey et al., 2004; Markey & Markey, 2006).

Research suggests that weight gain is associated with marriage; married individuals weigh more than their single peers (Markey & Markey, 2011; Sobal, Rauschenbach, & Frongillo, 2003). However, research has yet to explore the potential body image consequences of weight gain across time in a relationship from both partners' perspectives. In past research focusing on women's body image, relationship length has been found to be negatively related to body image. In other words, women in longer relationships report believing their male partners to be less satisfied with their bodies across time in a relationship; however, men do not report this reduced satisfaction with their partners' bodies (Markey & Markey, 2006). It has been speculated that women may receive less positive feedback from their partners about their bodies across time leading to heightened insecurity about their partners' perceptions of their bodies (Markey & Markey, 2006). This study will attempt to replicate this finding by focusing on men's body image.

Research indicates that certain features of romantic relationships may be associated with body image, such as attachment styles (Cash, Theriault, & Annis, 2004), relationship quality (Markey et al., 2004; Morrison et al., 2009), and negative events in romantic relationships (Morrison et al., 2009). Prior research has also examined men's and women's body image as it applies to sexual experiences more generally. This study builds on past research by considering how sexual intimacy in romantic relationships contributes to men's body image. Body image is associated with virginity status, sexual frequency, and

sexual experience (Ackard, Kearney-Cooke, & Peterson, 2000; Gillen, Lefkowitz, & Shearer, 2006; Wiederman, 2000), and for men in particular, body satisfaction increases after first sexual intercourse (Vasilenko, Ram, & Lefkowitz, 2011). The relation among body image and sexuality appears to be reciprocal in nature, such that a poor body image may negatively affect a sexual relationship and a poor sexual relationship may negatively affect one's body image (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). That is, individuals may interpret sexual dysfunctions as indicative of being physically unattractive or undesirable, likely leading to body image anxiety (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Such interpretations may inhibit romantic partners sexually and perhaps lead to avoidance of sexual interaction (Yamamiya, Cash, & Thompson, 2006). Based on previous research, we expect that men who have higher levels of sexual intimacy in their romantic relationships will have less body dissatisfaction than their peers with lower levels of sexual intimacy in their relationships.

Aims of the Present Study

The current study extends prior research by using data from both romantic partners to consider a variety of relationship-relevant predictors of men's body image. Men's body satisfaction ratings were first compared with men's perceptions of their female partners' satisfaction ratings and their female partners' actual satisfaction ratings. Consistent with past research examining women (Markey & Markey, 2006; Markey et al., 2004), men's own body satisfaction was expected to significantly differ from men's perceptions of their female partners' satisfaction with men's bodies, such that men would be less satisfied than they perceived their partner to be (Hypothesis 1a). Furthermore, men's own body satisfaction was expected to significantly differ from their female partners' actual satisfaction with men's bodies, such that men would be more critical of their own bodies (i.e., less satisfied) than their female partners actually were (Hypothesis 1b).

The next set of analyses explored associations among men's body satisfaction and men's and female partners' perception of men's weight change across time in the relationship, men's perceptions of their female partners' satisfaction with men's bodies, female partners' actual satisfaction with men's bodies, relationship length, and sexual intimacy. Men's perceptions of their female partners' satisfaction with their bodies and their female partners' actual satisfaction were expected to be associated with men's own body satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a). Next, it was predicted that men's weight gain across time in a relationship would be associated with body image such that when partners perceived little weight gain among men, men would report greater body satisfaction

(Hypothesis 2b). Based on previous research addressing young women (Markey & Markey, 2006), relationship length was hypothesized to be negatively associated with men's body satisfaction (Hypothesis 2c) and sexual intimacy was expected to be positively correlated with men's body image (Hypothesis 2d).

After addressing potential correlations among men's body satisfaction and the other variables investigated, we considered the ability of the aforementioned constructs to predict men's body satisfaction while controlling for men's weight status (body mass index [BMI]). Controlling for weight status allows us to determine whether or not the variables examined in this study explain unique variance in men's body image in addition to the variance explained by weight status. This is important given past research indicating a strong association between BMI and body satisfaction among men (e.g., Yates, Edman, & Aruguete, 2004). Using simultaneous regression analyses, we replicated the above hypotheses, controlling for BMI. The aforementioned predictors are expected to remain significant, even after BMI is taken into account (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants and Procedures

One hundred and four heterosexual-identified men and their female partners participated in the present study as part of a research program examining the influence of romantic partners on health. The men in this study were predominantly European American (76%; African American = 10%, Asian = 7%, Hispanic = 7%), in their mid-20s ($M = 25.20$, $SD = 5.88$), and had low to moderate socioeconomic status while having relatively high educational attainment. Female participants (men's romantic partners) identified themselves predominantly as European American (70%; African American = 9%, Asian American = 7%, Hispanic = 8%, and other = 6%) and had a mean age of 23.06 years ($SD = 4.64$). Participation in the study required involvement in a heterosexual, monogamous romantic relationship for a minimum of 1 year. The study's participating heterosexual couples reported an average relationship length of 3.2 years ($SD = 2.1$), and reports of relationship status qualified 40% as dating, 34% as cohabitating (i.e., living together), and 26% as married. APA's ethical standards for the treatment of human participants in research were observed in collecting these data.

Participation in this study was advertised to students of a major northeastern public university through class announcements and campus advertisements. Community participants were made aware of the study through newspaper advertisements as well as "snowball sampling," a

technique in which participants recommended other eligible couples. Student participants (14%) were compensated with research credit for an Introduction to Psychology course. Community members received \$50.00 as compensation for their contribution to the study. Participants were asked to report to the lab setting, where they were provided with general information about the study and then given instructions for completing the surveys addressing relationship and health constructs. Participants were then separated into different rooms to privately complete the questionnaires. Trained research assistants remained with participants throughout the duration of the study (approximately 1.5 hours). Last, measurements of participants' height and weight were collected by trained researchers. This methodology was approved by an internal review board where the research took place, and participants indicated their voluntary involvement in this research via a consent form.

Measures

Contour Drawing Rating Scale. Participants' body satisfaction was measured using the Contour Drawing Rating Scale (CDRS; Thompson & Gray, 1995). The scale consists of nine pictorial figures illustrating varying male body sizes. Each figure is labeled with a number, 1 to 9, with 1 illustrating a very underweight figure and 9 illustrating a very overweight figure. Male participants were given the CDRS depicting male body sizes varying in weight status (but not muscularity) and questions pertaining to their satisfaction with their own body. Men's female partners were given the CDRS depicting the same male body sizes with questions pertaining to their satisfaction with their male partners' bodies. Men were asked to select the figures that represent the following: (a) what they think they currently look like (perceived body size), (b) what they would like to look like (own ideal), (c) what they think their romantic partners would like them to look like (perceived partner ideal), and (d) what they think their romantic partners think they currently look like (perceived partner actual). Women were asked to select the figures that represent the following: (a) what they think their romantic partner looks like (partner actual) and (b) what they would like their romantic partner to look like (partner ideal). Each of these questions were used to create discrepancy scores indicating men's (a) own body satisfaction (own ideal – perceived body size), (b) perception of their female partners' satisfaction with their bodies (perceived partner ideal – perceived partner actual), and (c) women's actual satisfaction with men's bodies (partner ideal – partner actual).

A score of 0 indicates no difference between actual and ideal ratings and that men and/or their partners actually are satisfied with men's bodies; negative scores mean

participants' actual rating was higher (thus, heavier) than their ideal rating and indicated a desire to be/have their male partner be thinner, and positive scores mean that participants' actual rating was lower (thus, thinner) than their ideal rating and indicated a desire to be/have their male partner be heavier. Past use of this measure has yielded a test–retest reliability of .79 (Thompson & Gray, 1995), and validity for this measure is indicated by associations between men's and women's evaluations of men's bodies and men's actual weight status (BMI; $r = .70$ and $r = .69$, respectively).

Figure rating scales have recently been criticized, particularly for their use of difference scores and their psychometric properties (Cafri, van den Berg, & Brannick, 2010; Gardner & Brown, 2010). To address our hypotheses, however, using difference scores in a figure rating scale is necessary. We know of no other measure that can simultaneously assess the body size perceptions of more than one individual. Although computer software may be used to measure individuals' own body dissatisfaction, to our knowledge, these programs have not been used to capture others' (e.g., romantic partners') perceptions of individuals' bodies (see Gardner & Brown, 2010). Also, the CDRS (Thompson & Gray, 1995) has good validity and test–retest reliability, which fulfills Gardner and Brown's (2010) recommendation for using figure rating scales with established psychometric properties.

Body mass index. Participants' BMI was used as a measure of weight status. In this study, three consecutive measurements of participants' height and weight were collected by trained research assistants following the survey portion of the study. These measurements were then averaged to calculate a composite BMI score for participants, with men's average BMI being 27.35 ($SD = 5.96$), which is in the overweight range according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2011). In accordance with the statistics presented by the CDC (2009), the percentage of men in this sample who fit the criteria of overweight (39%) or obese (25%) is similar to national statistics on the prevalence of overweight and obesity for this age group (32% and 34%, respectively).

Perceptions of weight change. Men's perceptions of their own weight change and their female partners' perceptions of men's weight change were measured using a version of the Child Feeding Questionnaire adapted for use among romantic partners (Birch et al., 2001; see also Markey, Gomel, & Markey, 2008). Men were asked to indicate what they believe their weight status to have been when they began their romantic relationship (“When I first met my partner, I was . . .”) and what they currently believe their weight status to be (“Right now I think I am . . .”). Men's female partners were also asked to indicate their perceptions of men's weight status at the start of their relationship (“When I first met my partner, he was . . .”)

Table 1. Correlations Among All Constructs Investigated

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Men's body satisfaction	—						
2. BMI	-.63**	—					
3. Men's perception of weight change	-.49**	.25*	—				
4. Women's perception of weight change	-.24*	.18 ⁺	.23*	—			
5. Men's perception of women's satisfaction	.71**	-.48**	-.39**	-.19 ⁺	—		
6. Women's actual satisfaction	.66**	-.53**	-.35**	-.29**	.66**	—	
7. Relationship length	-.14	.17 ⁺	.22*	.12	-.21*	-.11	—
8. Sexual intimacy	.25*	-.18 ⁺	-.31**	.14	.26*	.12	-.30**

Note. BMI = body mass index. Higher scores on the body satisfaction variables indicate more body satisfaction. Higher scores on BMI indicate higher weight status. Higher scores on the weight change variables indicate more weight change (negative scores indicating weight gain). Higher relationship scores indicate a longer relationship and higher sexual intimacy scores indicate more intimacy.

** $p < .001$. * $p < .01$. ⁺ $p < .10$.

and their current perception of his weight status ("Right now I think my partner is . . ."). Both partners responded to all items using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 is *markedly underweight* and 5 is *markedly overweight*. These items were used to create discrepancy scores (weight at beginning of relationship – current perceived weight) indicating the extent to which men and their female partners perceive men's weight to have changed during the course of their romantic relationship. Men's and women's perceptions of men's weight change across the duration of the relationship were significantly related ($r = .23, p < .05$).

Sexual intimacy. A measure of couple's sexual intimacy was created for the purposes of this study using items from three different surveys. A question from the Marital Interactions Scale (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) asking men and women to rate sexual intimacy in their relationship (i.e., "How sexually intimate are you with your partner?") was included. Both partners were asked to select a rating, ranging from 1 to 9, where 1 indicates *very little sexual intimacy* and 9 indicates *a lot of sexual intimacy*. In addition, one item from the Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (Waring, Holden, & Wesley, 1998) was used in this measure. Men and women were asked to circle true or false regarding the statement "I tell my significant other how I feel about our sexual relationship." The final item included in this measure is a statement from the Locke-Wallace Scale (Locke & Wallace, 1959), which asked both partners to rate the amount of agreement between themselves and their significant other in regard to "sex relations" in their romantic relationships, ranging from *always agree* (1) to *always disagree* (6). These items were standardized and then used to create a single measure of couple's sexual intimacy. To take advantage of both partners' responses, composite scores were created to establish "couple" ratings (3 items from the man and 3 items from the woman in the relationship) rather than

individual ratings. Reliability for this measure was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Results

To address our initial hypotheses, analyses were conducted to examine men's body satisfaction, their perceptions of their partners' satisfaction with their body, and their partners' actual satisfaction with their body. Paired samples *t*-tests were used to compare the means of these variables, revealing that men's own body satisfaction ($M = -0.62, SD = 1.19$) was significantly different from men's perceptions of their partners' satisfaction, $M = -0.30, t(102) = 3.49, p < .01$, and their partners' actual satisfaction, $M = -0.21, t(101) = -4.24, p < .001$. That is, on average, men were more dissatisfied with their body than they perceived their partners to be (Hypothesis 1a) and than their partners actually were (Hypothesis 1b). A comparison of men's perceptions of women's satisfaction ($M = -0.30, SD = 1.247$) and women's actual satisfaction with men's bodies ($M = -0.21, SD = 1.07$) revealed that these variables were not significantly different from one another, $M = -0.07, t(101) = .79, p = .43, ns$.

Correlational analyses were used to examine associations between men's body satisfaction and all variables considered in this study. In support of Hypothesis 2a, men's body satisfaction was positively associated with men's perceptions of their partners' satisfaction with their body and their partners' actual satisfaction with men's body. Men's and women's perception of men's weight change were both significantly correlated with men's satisfaction with their body (Hypothesis 2b). Finally, couples' reports of sexual intimacy were found to be significantly associated with men's body satisfaction (Hypothesis 2d), while relationship length was not (Hypothesis 2c; see Table 1).

To address the third hypothesis of this study, simultaneous regression analyses were used to control for men's

Table 2. Simultaneous Regression Analyses Predicting Men's Body Satisfaction While Controlling for BMI

	B	SE B	β	R	R ²
Men's BMI	-.109	.014	-.552**		
Men's perception of their weight change	-.766	.159	-.347**	.724	.525
Men's BMI	-.122	.015	-.611**		
Women's perception of men's weight change	-.293	.172	-.133 ⁺	.647	.419
Men's BMI	-.071	.013	-.359**		
Men's perception of women's satisfaction with their body	.556	.065	.575**	.811	.657
Men's BMI	-.079	.016	-.398**		
Women's actual satisfaction with men's body	.492	.088	.448**	.741	.550
Men's BMI	-.125	.016	-.629**		
Relationship length	-.015	.044	-.027	.634	.402
Men's BMI	-.121	.016	-.616**		
Sexual intimacy	.038	.021	.139 ⁺	.656	.431

Note. BMI = body mass index.

** $p < .001$. ⁺ $p < .10$.

BMI in predicting their body satisfaction from men's weight change, sexual intimacy, and relationship length. As shown in Table 2, results indicate that men's perceptions of their partners' satisfaction and women's actual satisfaction with men's bodies were both found to significantly predict men's satisfaction with their bodies after statistically controlling for BMI. Men's perceptions of their weight change during their romantic relationships significantly predicted their body satisfaction, whereas women's perceptions of men's weight change marginally predicted men's body satisfaction. Finally, results indicate that couples' sexual intimacy marginally predicted men's body satisfaction whereas couples' relationship length did not predict men's body satisfaction.

Discussion

Given previous research (e.g., Markey & Markey, 2006; Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1995) suggesting the potentially important role romantic partners have in one another's health and body image, the objectives of the present study were to identify specific factors contributing to body satisfaction among men in committed romantic relationships. Although romantic relationship factors, weight status, relationship length, and sexuality have previously been examined in relation to women's body image, to our knowledge no other study has examined all these factors among romantic partners with an interest in predicting men's body satisfaction.

Findings from the present study are consistent with those of past reports among women (e.g., Markey & Markey, 2006; Markey et al., 2004), suggesting the potential role of romantic partners in predicting body satisfaction. Analyses revealed significant differences between men's own body satisfaction and both men's perceptions

of their female partners' satisfaction and their female partners' actual satisfaction with men's body. Similar to results found among a sample of women (Markey & Markey, 2006), the men in this study were more critical of their own bodies than their partners were, such that men were less satisfied with their own bodies than they perceived their female partners to be and than women actually were. Unlike past findings (Markey et al., 2004), the current results indicate that there was no significant difference between men's perceptions of women's satisfaction and women's actual satisfaction with men's body. This result suggests that perhaps men are more aware of how their partners feel about their bodies. It may be that women provide their partners with reassurance about their bodies and that they tend to be more content with their partners' body than men are with their own bodies.

In addition to analyzing differences in partners' reports of body satisfaction, the relations among these variables were also assessed. Results revealed that men were more likely to be satisfied with their bodies when they perceived their female partners to be satisfied with their bodies and when female partners actually were satisfied. It is intuitive, and consistent with past research, and symbolic interaction theory (e.g., LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) that individuals would feel more positively about their bodies when those around them do as well. This finding extends prior research by suggesting that romantic partners are not only important in predicting women's body satisfaction (Markey & Markey, 2006; Markey et al., 2004) but in men's body satisfaction as well.

Correlational analyses were conducted to examine associations among men's body satisfaction, men's and women's perceptions of men's weight gain, and relationship constructs. The results of these analyses indicated that both men's and women's perceptions of men's weight

change were significantly related to how satisfied men were with their own bodies, such that men were more satisfied with their bodies when both partners perceived men to have not gained weight during the relationship. This finding should be considered among other findings, indicating that individuals tend to gain weight across time in relationships and that married individuals tend to be heavier than their single peers (see Markey & Markey, 2011).

Romantic relationship variables expected to be associated with men's body image were explored next. Results indicate that relationship length was not significantly associated with men's body satisfaction. It is difficult to explain this unexpected finding, but it may be a result of the relatively low variability in relationship length among the couples in this sample. However, consistent with literature suggesting the importance of sexuality to body image (e.g., Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002; Wiederman & Hurst, 1997; Yamamiya et al., 2006), the current results indicated that men were more satisfied with their bodies when they and their partners perceived relatively high levels of sexual intimacy in the relationship. This result is not surprising, given that feeling positive about one's body is often associated with more sexual confidence and gratification (Yamamiya et al., 2006). These findings extend prior work on body image and sexuality by indicating that there is an important link between these constructs for men in the context of committed romantic relationships.

To be sure that these findings were not driven by men's weight status, men's BMI was controlled for in our next set of analyses. Results indicate that for men, their own perceptions of weight change during the relationship significantly predicted how satisfied they were with their body. However, women's perceptions of men's weight change only marginally predicted men's own body satisfaction. Although correlational analyses suggested that men were more satisfied with their bodies when women perceived them to have had little weight change, this result indicates that perhaps women's perceptions of men's weight change do not matter as much to men's satisfaction as does men's own perceptions of their weight change.

We next examined whether or not men's *perceptions* of their female partners' satisfaction with their bodies and female partners' *actual* satisfaction with men's bodies predicted men's satisfaction with their own body, while controlling for men's BMI. Results indicate that both variables were predictive of men's body satisfaction. Consistent with the correlational findings discussed earlier, these results seem to suggest that men's own body satisfaction is based in part on their *perceptions* of their female partners' satisfaction with their bodies (with these perceptions being related to their female partners' *actual* satisfaction). This finding extends past research (i.e., Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1995), suggesting that women's body satisfaction is determined, in part, by their perceptions of their

partners' satisfaction with their bodies. This result is also consistent with social psychological theories such as symbolic interaction theory (e.g., LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) and the Michaelangelo phenomenon (Drigotas et al, 1999) predicting the important role of interactions with romantic partners in determining an individual's sense of self.

In examining the relationship variables in this study, these findings suggest that couples' perceptions of sexual intimacy were only marginally predictive of how satisfied men were with their bodies, thus interpreting this finding with caution is warranted. It appears that men's actual weight status may be a more important contributor to their sexual intimacy than is their body satisfaction. In other words, men's actual weight status may be more relevant to their experiences of sexual intimacy than is their feelings about their weight (i.e., body image). Further research should help explain the longitudinal and potentially causal relations among men's body satisfaction, weight status, and sexual intimacy.

Limitations

Results from the present study offer new insights into our growing understanding of men's body image. However, there are some limitations that are worth noting. Our primary limitation concerns the correlational and cross-sectional nature of this study's design. Although associations among relationship variables and men's body satisfaction have been identified in this study, we cannot conclusively determine the causal nature of these relations. Another limitation of this study is the absence of a measure assessing men's muscularity, which may be important to examine in addition to weight and body size (e.g., Cafri & Thompson, 2004; Lynch & Zellner, 1999) in future studies. The homogeneous nature of our sample (i.e., predominantly early 20s, Euro-American) and a need for additional relationship measures, in particular a more comprehensive measure of sexual intimacy, are other limitations. The sexual intimacy measure presented was created using existing items from established, often used relationship quality surveys, but it is possible that participants had differing interpretations of "sexual intimacy" (e.g., frequency, satisfaction) and that the comprehensiveness (and internal consistency) of this measure would be improved by adding more items.

Conclusions and Implications

With research suggesting an increasing concern among men regarding the appearance of their bodies (Olivardia et al., 2004) and a willingness to compromise their health to alleviate these concerns (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004), it has become necessary to better understand predictors of these concerns. One previously unexplored predictor

is romantic partners. Existing studies have indicated the potential importance of romantic partners in young adults' self-perceptions (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999), including the establishment of one's body image (e.g., Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 1995). This study extends past research that has focused on women (e.g., Markey & Markey, 2006) or that has included only one member of the romantic dyad in analyses (e.g., Sheets & Ajmere, 2005) by including both partners in investigating the relation among romantic relationship experiences and men's body satisfaction. Results from this study suggest that romantic partners and specific aspects (i.e., sexual intimacy) of their relationships are associated with men's body dissatisfaction. Therapeutic interventions may benefit from these findings by considering the romantic relationship context in which men experience body image.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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