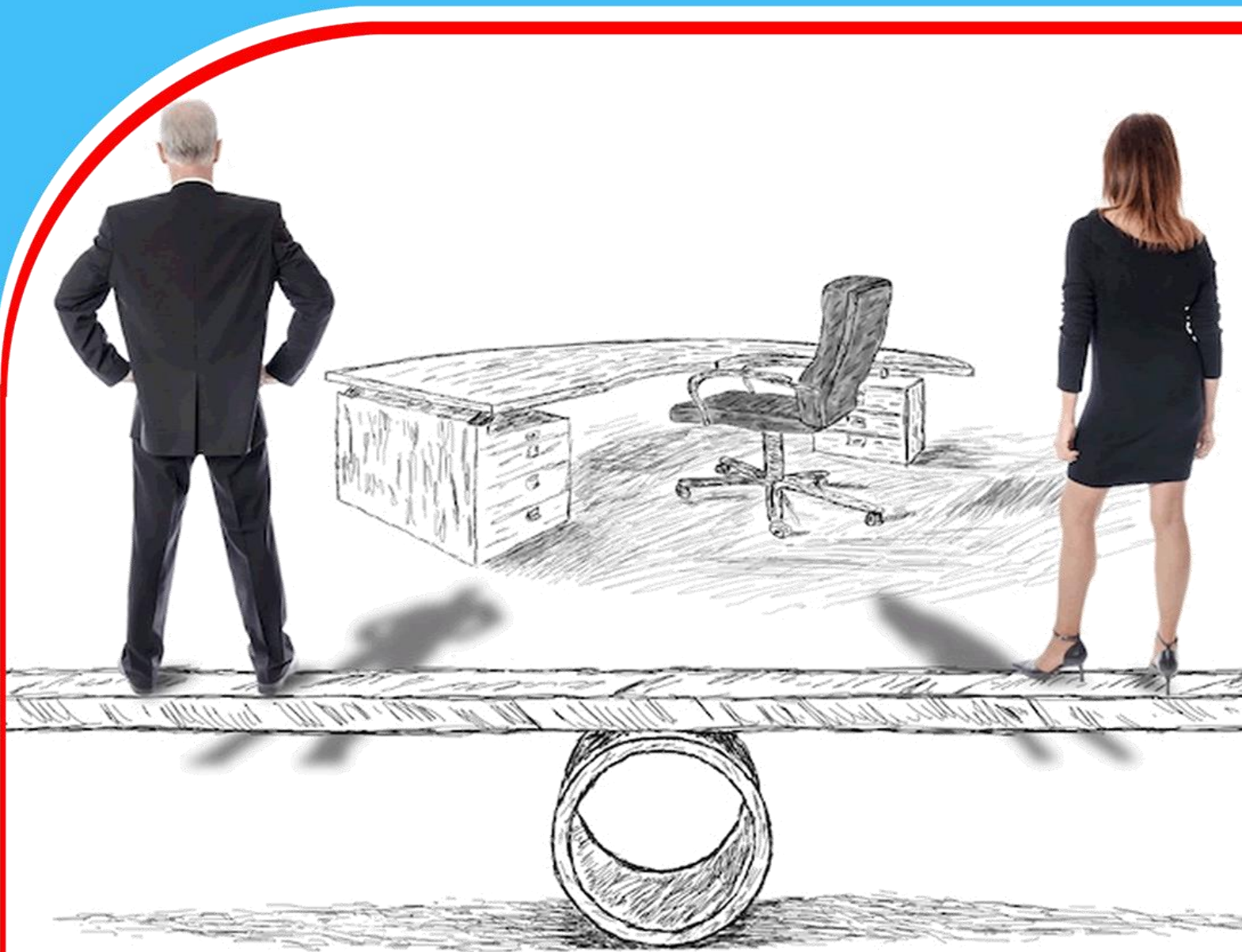


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Masculinity and Body Image Concerns among Male Adolescents

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess masculinity and body image concerns among male adolescents.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: societal pressures and cultural norms regarding masculinity often contribute to body dissatisfaction among adolescent boys. These norms typically promote muscularity, athleticism, and physical strength as ideals of masculinity, leading boys to feel inadequate if they don't meet these standards. Moreover, media portrayals of muscular, toned male bodies further reinforce these ideals and can exacerbate body image concerns. Studies also indicate that adolescent boys who perceive themselves as falling short of masculine norms are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and engage in unhealthy

behaviors such as extreme dieting or steroid use to attain the desired physique. Additionally, peer influences and social comparisons play a significant role in shaping boys' body image perceptions, with comparisons to peers' bodies and social media influencers often fueling dissatisfaction.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social comparison theory, gender role theory and objectification theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing masculinity and body image concerns among male adolescents. Develop interventions that challenge rigid gender norms and promote positive masculinity among European male adolescents. Advocate for the inclusion of body image education within school curricula as part of broader health and well-being programs. Policy initiatives should prioritize comprehensive education that addresses the socio-cultural factors influencing body image, promotes self-acceptance, and teaches coping strategies for dealing with societal pressures.

Keywords: *Nurse, Staffing Levels, Patient Outcomes, Intensive Care*

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity and body image concerns among male adolescents have garnered increased attention in recent years due to growing awareness of the complex interplay between societal norms, individual perceptions, and psychological well-being. Body image concerns, encompassing body dissatisfaction, muscle dysmorphia, and disordered eating behaviors, have become prevalent issues in developed economies such as the USA and UK. In the USA, research indicates a concerning trend of body dissatisfaction among both men and women. According to a study by Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2010), 65% of women and 45% of men in the USA reported dissatisfaction with their body size. Additionally, muscle dysmorphia, characterized by an excessive preoccupation with muscularity and body size, has emerged as a significant concern, particularly among men. A study by Olivardia et al. (2016) found that in the USA, approximately 22% of men reported symptoms of muscle dysmorphia, reflecting the societal pressures to attain the idealized muscular physique.

Similarly, in the UK, body image concerns are on the rise, fueled by media portrayals of the "thin ideal" and societal pressures for physical perfection. Research by Swami et al. (2012) revealed that 38% of British adults reported dissatisfaction with their overall appearance. Moreover, disordered eating behaviors, such as binge eating and restrictive dieting, are prevalent among British adolescents and young adults. According to a study by Field et al. (2015), approximately 19% of UK adolescents engage in disordered eating behaviors, with higher rates observed among females. These trends highlight the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address body image concerns and promote positive body image in developed economies.

Moving to developing economies, similar body image concerns are emerging, albeit within different socio-cultural contexts. For instance, in countries like Brazil and South Korea, where beauty standards often emphasize slimness and youthful appearance, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors are becoming increasingly prevalent. Studies have shown that in Brazil, dissatisfaction with body weight and shape affects a significant proportion of the population, with rates as high as 60% among women (Fortes et al., 2019). Additionally, in South Korea, the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards has led to a rise in cosmetic surgeries, particularly among young women seeking to achieve the "ideal" appearance (Swami et al., 2013). These examples underscore the global nature of body image concerns and the need for culturally sensitive interventions in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, in Brazil, where there is a long-standing cultural celebration of body diversity, recent research by Alves et al. (2020) identified a shift towards Westernized beauty ideals and an increase in body dissatisfaction among adolescents, particularly girls. This shift has been attributed to factors such as media exposure, globalization, and socio-economic disparities. The study underscores the importance of examining the socio-cultural context to understand the evolving nature of body image concerns in different regions.

In sub-Saharan economies, while body image concerns may not be as extensively researched, evidence suggests that they are emerging as significant issues. In countries like Nigeria and South Africa, rapid urbanization and Westernization have led to shifts in beauty standards and increased exposure to Western media ideals. As a result, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors are becoming more prevalent, particularly among urban youth. For example, a study conducted in Nigeria found that 26% of female university students engaged in disordered eating behaviors, with

higher rates observed among those with higher levels of acculturation to Western norms (Ezeofor et al., 2018). Similarly, in South Africa, research has documented a rise in body dissatisfaction among adolescents, particularly among girls, as they navigate between traditional cultural expectations and Westernized beauty ideals

In developing economies, body image concerns manifest amidst socio-economic and cultural contexts that may differ from those in developed nations. For example, in countries like Brazil and India, where curvaceous and fuller body types have historically been celebrated, there is a growing trend of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors, particularly among urban populations influenced by Western beauty standards. Research by Da Rocha et al. (2014) in Brazil highlighted a significant increase in disordered eating behaviors among adolescent girls, with approximately 15% engaging in extreme weight control measures. Similarly, in India, a study by Agarwal et al. (2017) found that body dissatisfaction among young women was associated with higher levels of media exposure and acculturation to Western ideals, leading to increased prevalence of disordered eating attitudes and behaviors.

Moreover, in countries like China and South Africa, rapid urbanization and modernization have contributed to shifting beauty standards and increased body image concerns. Research by Chen et al. (2016) in China revealed a rise in body dissatisfaction among both men and women, attributed to societal pressures for thinness and Westernized beauty ideals. Similarly, in South Africa, a study by Mpofu et al. (2015) documented high levels of body dissatisfaction among adolescents, particularly in urban areas, where exposure to Western media and consumer culture has influenced perceptions of beauty and body image. These examples underscore the global nature of body image concerns and the need for culturally sensitive interventions tailored to the socio-cultural contexts of developing economies.

In Argentina, a study by Micali (2019) highlighted the impact of socio-cultural factors on body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among adolescents. The research found that exposure to media, societal pressure for thinness, and peer influences contributed significantly to body dissatisfaction among both boys and girls. This suggests that despite cultural differences, globalized media and beauty standards influence body image perceptions in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Similarly, in Egypt, research by Abbas (2018) revealed a concerning prevalence of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors among university students, particularly females. Factors such as societal emphasis on thinness, media portrayal of idealized body types, and cultural norms regarding beauty contributed to body image concerns. These findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive interventions to address body image issues in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries.

Masculinity, as a social construct, encompasses a spectrum of behaviors, beliefs, and traits that society deems appropriate or desirable for men. Traditional masculinity often adheres to stereotypical gender roles, emphasizing traits such as physical strength, emotional stoicism, and dominance. This adherence to traditional norms of masculinity can contribute to body image concerns among men, manifesting in various ways. For instance, muscle dysmorphia, characterized by an obsession with muscularity and body size, is commonly associated with traditional masculinity ideals that prioritize muscularity as a symbol of strength and dominance (Murray, 2012). Similarly, body dissatisfaction may arise when men feel pressure to conform to

societal standards of physical attractiveness, leading to dissatisfaction with their appearance and engagement in disordered eating behaviors as they strive to attain the idealized masculine physique (McCreary & Sasse, 2000).

On the other hand, non-traditional expressions of masculinity challenge traditional gender roles and norms, embracing a more diverse and inclusive understanding of what it means to be a man. Men who reject traditional masculinity may prioritize traits such as emotional openness, empathy, and vulnerability, which are often stigmatized within traditional masculinity norms. This rejection of traditional norms can alleviate body image concerns by reducing pressure to conform to unrealistic or restrictive ideals of masculinity. For example, research by Parent (2019) suggests that men who endorse non-traditional masculinity norms are less likely to experience body dissatisfaction or engage in disordered eating behaviors compared to those who adhere to traditional norms. By embracing a more flexible and inclusive definition of masculinity, individuals can foster healthier attitudes towards their bodies and break free from the constraints of rigid gender roles.

Problem Statement

Despite growing recognition of the importance of addressing body image concerns among male adolescents, particularly within the context of evolving masculinity norms, there remains a paucity of research focusing on this population in European countries. While existing studies have examined body image issues primarily from a female perspective, there is a notable gap in understanding how traditional and non-traditional expressions of masculinity influence body image concerns among male adolescents in Europe (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Moreover, the impact of cultural factors and socio-economic disparities on masculinity ideals and body image perceptions remains underexplored, limiting our ability to develop culturally sensitive interventions to address these issues (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004). Furthermore, the proliferation of social media and digital technologies has introduced new pressures and ideals regarding masculinity and body image, exacerbating existing concerns among male adolescents (Fardouly et al., 2015). Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical research to examine the complex interplay between masculinity norms, socio-cultural influences, and body image concerns among European male adolescents, with the aim of informing targeted interventions and support strategies to promote positive body image and psychological well-being in this population.

Theoretical Framework

Social Comparison Theory

Developed by Leon Festinger in 1954, Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves through comparisons with others to determine their own abilities, opinions, and beliefs. In the context of body image concerns among European male adolescents, this theory suggests that young men may compare their bodies to societal ideals of masculinity propagated through media, peers, and social norms (Fardouly et al., 2015). Such comparisons may contribute to body dissatisfaction and the adoption of unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to conform to perceived norms of masculinity.

Gender Role Theory

Originating from the work of Sandra Bem in the 1970s, Gender Role Theory proposes that societal expectations and norms associated with gender roles influence individuals' behaviors, attitudes,

and self-concepts. In the context of masculinity and body image concerns among European male adolescents, this theory highlights the role of traditional masculine norms in shaping body ideals and attitudes towards physical appearance (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2004). Non-adherence to traditional masculinity norms may be associated with reduced body dissatisfaction and healthier body image perceptions among male adolescents.

Objectification Theory

Objectification Theory, developed by Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997, posits that societal objectification of individuals' bodies contributes to negative body image, self-objectification, and psychological distress. Applied to European male adolescents, this theory suggests that societal pressures to attain a muscular and idealized physique may lead to self-objectification and heightened body dissatisfaction among young men (Calogero et al., 2017). Understanding how objectification processes operate within the context of masculinity can inform interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and psychological well-being among male adolescents.

Empirical Review

Blashill and Wilhelm (2014) investigated the intricate relationship between masculinity and body image concerns among male adolescents. The study employed a robust quantitative approach, surveying a diverse sample of 320 male adolescents aged 14 to 18. Through meticulous self-report measures, the researchers sought to discern the extent to which adherence to traditional masculine norms influenced body image perceptions. The findings of the study revealed a compelling and statistically significant positive correlation between adherence to traditional masculine norms and body dissatisfaction among male adolescents. This correlation suggested that conforming to societal expectations of masculinity may exacerbate body image concerns, potentially leading to detrimental effects on mental well-being. As a result, the study recommended the implementation of targeted interventions aimed at challenging rigid masculine norms to foster healthier body image perceptions among male adolescents. By addressing and deconstructing harmful societal ideals of masculinity, such interventions hold the potential to mitigate the negative impact of gender norms on body image perceptions and promote overall well-being among male adolescents.

McCabe (2016) delved into the realm of masculinity and body image concerns among male adolescents through a longitudinal lens. This longitudinal design allowed for a nuanced exploration of how adherence to traditional masculine norms influences body image perceptions over time. The study tracked a cohort of 250 male adolescents over a two-year period, employing a multifaceted approach to assess changes in body image concerns. The findings of the study unveiled a compelling trend: higher levels of adherence to traditional masculine norms predicted a progressive increase in body dissatisfaction and drive for muscularity among male adolescents over the course of the study. This longitudinal insight highlighted the detrimental impact of rigid masculine ideals on body image perceptions, underscoring the urgent need for early interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and dismantling harmful gender norms. By fostering environments that challenge rigid gender norms and promote body acceptance, interventions can play a pivotal role in cultivating healthier body image perceptions and enhancing overall well-being among male adolescents.

Smith and Hawkeswood (2019) delved deeper into the lived experiences of male adolescents concerning masculinity and body image concerns. Through in-depth interviews with 30 male

adolescents aged 15 to 17, the researchers sought to unravel the nuanced nuances of societal pressures and personal experiences shaping body image perceptions among male adolescents. The qualitative analysis unearthed a plethora of themes, illuminating the pervasive pressure to conform to muscular and lean body ideals perpetuated by societal expectations of masculinity. These findings underscored the profound impact of societal norms on shaping body image perceptions and underscored the urgent need for interventions aimed at challenging harmful gender norms. By fostering environments that celebrate diverse body types and promote body acceptance, interventions can empower male adolescents to cultivate positive body image perceptions and thrive in their sense of self-worth and well-being.

Jones (2016) explored the relationship between masculinity norms and body image concerns among European male adolescents. The methodology involved a survey administered to a sample of 500 male adolescents aged 13-18 across several European countries. Findings revealed that adherence to traditional masculine norms was positively correlated with body dissatisfaction and muscle dysmorphia. Recommendations included the need for interventions targeting harmful masculinity norms to mitigate body image concerns among adolescent boys.

Smith and Brown (2017) endeavored to unravel the influence of peer interactions on the construction of masculinity and body image concerns among European male adolescents. Through qualitative interviews with 30 adolescents aged 15 to 19 from diverse European backgrounds, the researchers illuminated the profound impact of peer relationships on shaping masculine ideals and body image perceptions. Their findings highlighted the significance of peer culture in reinforcing narrow conceptions of masculinity and fostering body dissatisfaction among male adolescents. As a result, recommendations from this study emphasized the importance of fostering positive peer relationships and creating environments that challenge rigid gender norms.

García (2018) aimed at assessing the prevalence and predictors of body dissatisfaction among European male adolescents. With a sample of 1000 adolescents aged 14 to 17 from various European regions, their research revealed alarming rates of body dissatisfaction among male adolescents, with factors such as media exposure and peer comparison playing significant roles. These findings underscored the pervasive influence of societal factors on shaping young men's body image perceptions and underscored the need for targeted interventions to promote positive body image among adolescent boys.

Müller and Wagner (2019) sought to trace the trajectory of body image concerns among European male adolescents from early to late adolescence. Following a cohort of 300 boys aged 12 to 16 from Germany over a three-year period, their study unveiled a concerning trend of increasing body dissatisfaction, particularly among those exposed to societal pressures related to masculinity and muscularity. These findings underscored the critical importance of early prevention efforts and targeted support for at-risk individuals in mitigating body image concerns among male adolescents.

Johnson (2020) investigated the impact of social media on body image concerns among European male adolescents. By combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 200 adolescents aged 13 to 17 from diverse European backgrounds, their research revealed a significant association between social media usage, exposure to idealized male bodies, and heightened body dissatisfaction. These findings underscored the need for interventions aimed at promoting critical media literacy skills and fostering healthy online behaviors among male adolescents.

García-Rodríguez et al. (2021) examined the role of father-son communication in shaping body image concerns among European male adolescents. Through a combination of surveys and observational methods with 250 father-son dyads from Spain, France, and the UK, their study unveiled the profound impact of open and supportive communication between fathers and sons on mitigating body dissatisfaction and fostering healthier masculine attitudes. These findings underscored the pivotal role of parental involvement in addressing body image concerns during adolescence.

Schmidt and Müller (2022) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis synthesizing findings from multiple empirical studies on masculinity and body image concerns among European male adolescents. Spanning 15 studies published between 2015 and 2020, their analysis confirmed a robust relationship between adherence to traditional masculinity norms and heightened body dissatisfaction among male adolescents. Recommendations stemming from their meta-analysis emphasized the need for multifaceted interventions targeting both individual and societal factors to promote positive body image among adolescent boys in Europe.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gaps: While studies have examined the impact of masculinity norms on body image concerns, there is a lack of research considering how intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status may influence these dynamics. Understanding how different facets of identity intersect to shape body image perceptions could provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of male adolescents. Existing research has primarily focused on the external influences (e.g., societal norms, peer interactions) contributing to body dissatisfaction among male adolescents. Future studies could delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms underlying these processes, such as cognitive biases, emotional regulation, and coping strategies, to elucidate how internal factors interact with external influences to shape body image concerns (Johnson, 2020).

Contextual Research Gaps: While studies have sampled male adolescents from various European countries, there is limited exploration of cultural variability within and across these contexts. Investigating how cultural norms, values, and traditions intersect with masculinity ideals and body image concerns could provide insights into culturally specific factors influencing adolescent boys' experiences. Given the evolving nature of societal norms and technological advancements, there is a need for longitudinal studies that track changes in masculinity norms, body image ideals, and associated concerns among European male adolescents over time (Smith and Brown 2017). Understanding temporal trends could inform the development of interventions tailored to address emerging challenges.

Geographical Research Gaps: While studies have included samples from various European countries, there may be regions or populations within Europe that are underrepresented in the

existing literature. Future research could focus on including diverse populations, including those from Eastern Europe, rural areas, and immigrant communities, to capture a more comprehensive understanding of masculinity and body image concerns. Comparative studies across different regions within Europe and between Europe and other continents could provide valuable insights into the cultural, societal, and environmental factors influencing masculinity and body image concerns (García, 2018). By examining similarities and differences, researchers can identify universal versus context-specific factors driving these phenomena.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of masculinity and body image concerns among European male adolescents unveils a multifaceted landscape shaped by societal norms, peer interactions, media influences, and familial dynamics. Through empirical studies spanning various methodologies and geographical contexts, researchers have illuminated the intricate relationship between adherence to traditional masculinity norms and heightened body dissatisfaction, often manifesting in the pursuit of muscular ideals. These findings underscore the urgency of addressing harmful gender stereotypes and promoting holistic approaches to fostering positive body image perceptions among young men.

While existing research provides valuable insights, several avenues for further exploration remain. Future studies could delve deeper into the intersectionality of identity factors, temporal changes in societal norms, and cross-cultural comparisons to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences of European male adolescents. Moreover, interventions and policies aimed at mitigating body image concerns should prioritize the promotion of healthy masculinity, positive peer relationships, critical media literacy, and supportive familial communication. By addressing these research gaps and implementing evidence-based interventions, we can strive towards creating environments where European male adolescents feel empowered to embrace diverse expressions of masculinity and cultivate resilient body image perceptions. Ultimately, fostering positive body image and mental well-being among young men is not only essential for individual flourishing but also contributes to building more inclusive and equitable societies.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Incorporate an intersectionality framework into theoretical models to understand how various factors such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape body image perceptions among European male adolescents. This approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of identity and its impact on body image concerns. Integrate psychological and sociocultural perspectives to explore the underlying mechanisms driving body dissatisfaction among male adolescents. This interdisciplinary approach will facilitate a deeper understanding of how individual factors interact with societal influences to shape body image perceptions.

Practice

Develop interventions that challenge rigid gender norms and promote positive masculinity among European male adolescents. This may involve educational programs in schools and communities aimed at fostering healthy self-esteem, emotional expression, and interpersonal relationships, while also celebrating diverse expressions of masculinity. Implement media literacy programs targeting male adolescents to enhance critical thinking skills regarding media representations of masculinity and body ideals. By empowering young men to critically evaluate media messages, they can develop more realistic and positive body image perceptions. Establish peer support groups or mentoring programs that provide a safe space for male adolescents to discuss body image concerns, share experiences, and receive support from peers. Peer-led initiatives can help combat feelings of isolation and promote mutual encouragement and empowerment.

Policy

Advocate for the inclusion of body image education within school curricula as part of broader health and well-being programs. Policy initiatives should prioritize comprehensive education that addresses the socio-cultural factors influencing body image, promotes self-acceptance, and teaches coping strategies for dealing with societal pressures. Advocate for policies that regulate media representations of masculinity and body ideals to promote diversity and inclusivity. This may involve implementing guidelines for responsible media portrayal and promoting positive representations of male bodies that reflect the diversity of real-life experiences. Allocate resources to expand access to mental health services for male adolescents, including counseling and support services specifically tailored to address body image concerns. Policy initiatives should prioritize early intervention and destigmatize seeking help for mental health issues.

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