

Bachelor Thesis  
Marketing Department  
Risky (consumer) behavior and what is driving it?

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*“The contemporary body image of men”*  
*Do looks outweigh the importance of being healthy?*

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## **Abstract**

A reason for this particular study is that much research has been conducted about how media influences body image of females, but what about the opposite gender? This report has tried to narrow down the construct of body image for men. Furthermore, this report has researched if there is evidence if images of men in media are currently portrayed differently compared to the past. Besides looking how these images have evolved an attempt has been made to look if media influences the behavior of men when trying to improve their body image. Finally this report discusses the risks men take when trying to reach the ideal body image. However, the focus will not be that much on which risks, but on the consequences of these risks.

## *Findings*

It seems that some men are influenced by images in the media. However, to which extent depends on factors such as, with whom or what image men compare themselves with and the extremity of the comparison. This report discovered that images of men in different media became more muscular. This may lead to lower body satisfaction amongst men because normal men are not that muscular. In fact, men in Western societies become heavier therefore it becomes harder for them to make the correct conclusion about their body image. Due to this discrepancy this reports expects that more men will start to use steroids or diets, which actually pose serious risks to the health of these men. This in the hope that they get a body that looks similar to that of the images portrayed in the media and therefore become more popular.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Problem background

Every day consumers are confronted with images of ideal people and it seems we can hardly escape from them. Indoctrinated by television, Internet, magazines and billboards our self esteem is build around these “perfect” looking people, (Schooler & Ward, 2006).

From a historic perspective females are at the centre of attention in these discussions. Groez, et al (2002) mention: “boys learn to view their bodies as tool to master the environment whereas girls learn that their bodies should attract others”. This clearly stereotypes each of the genders into different categories. Typical stereotyped behavior of men is: competitive, dominant and self confident (Polce-Lynch, et al. 1998). Especially self confidence is of a particular importance here because this indicates that men by nature are confident about their own bodies. In the past it was assumed that men being self confident had no problem with their body image due to images in the media (Groez, Levine & Murnen. 2002).

Currently the view that body image is predominantly an issue of the female gender is changing. Farquhar & Wasylkiw (2007) bring to the attention that men also show dissatisfaction with their body image, due to images in the media. However with men there is a different trend when it comes down to body image. Besides a group of men wanting to lose weight other men prefer to increase their muscularity. Images of men in the media show a resemblance towards this last attitude. Leit, Pope & Grey (2001) measured the size of males depicted on the centerfold of Playgirl magazine. Their findings were that men in these pictures have become more muscular. Even more striking is that boys are already confronted with increasing muscularity. Modern action figures, compared to past action figures, have increased in size (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber & Borowiecki (1999).

The focus of this report will be what effects images in the media have on the body image of men. However the consequences of the risks men may take to improve their body image will be discussed as well. Most of the time a risk that is associated with becoming more muscular is the use of steroids (Let et al. 2001). However Cafri et al. (2005) also indicates that there are men who perform “extreme” diets.

## 1.2. Problem statement

Most debates revolve around females and how images in the media negatively influence their body image (Groez, Levine & Murnen. 2002, Smeeters & Mandel 2006). With the objectification of the female body, the possibility may exist that men will not receive enough attention for their issues about body image (Polce-Lynch, et al. 1998). Besides examining which issues men may experience when being exposed to the ideal image in media, it is also important to examine which risks men take when trying to improve their body image. Therefore the problem statement will be:

Do images of the “ideal men” in the media affect the body image of men and does this lead to an increase in risky behavior?

## 1.3. Research questions

- What is body image and how can we measure this construct in men?
- What kind of effect does the image of the “ideal man” in the media have on the body image of males?
- What kind of change in behavior can be detected in the males, who are influenced by these images of the “ideal man”?
- Does change in behavior lead to actions which pose an extra risk for men and what are the medical consequences of these risks?

## 1.4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework, shown below, is developed based on the problem statement and research questions.

*Figure 1: Theoretical framework*

## **1.5. Relevance**

### **1.5.1. Academic relevance**

Most research for men has been either focusing on: media and the effect on body image or the consequences of risky behavior to alter body image. This research tries to close the gap between these two different fields of research. Closing the gap between these studies will hopefully prove that men have their own issues with body image and that media plays a significant part in that. At the same time it will also show that “ideal images” in media lead to an increase in risky behavior, due to the fact that men are dissatisfied with their body. Hopefully this report can enrich the literature with, the issues men might have with their body image and explain the consequences of the risks men take when trying to improve their body image.

### **1.5.2. Managerial relevance**

In the past men did not receive enough attention when the issue of body image was discussed. However, recently there has been an increase in literature supporting this issue. Academics and psychologists have recognized the problems for males. On the other hand managers, advertisers as well as the general public still underestimate the influence media has on the body image of men. One of the reasons is that genders are being stereotyped; people assume that men do not have body image disorders. Primarily the focus of the discussion has always been about women and their disorders.

Until now little action has been taken to abolish images of females in media that are too thin. With literature starting to recognize that men have disorders with their body image as well it is expected that a change in images in which the perfect men is depicted will not go fast either. The aim from a managerial perspective is to make the issues of body image dissatisfaction amongst men negotiable with managers, advertisers and the general public. So when the time arrives and a solution is presented, in which media takes on responsibility for the images they publish, it will be applicable for women as well as men.

## Chapter 2: Constructs of body image and self esteem

Before this report can examine how media influences body image of men, it is important to understand what body image actually is. Besides narrowing this construct down, an important feature of body image is self esteem, which will be discussed as well. The reason for discussing this construct is that multiple studies have indicated that there is a positive relation between body image and self esteem (Palladino- Green & Pritchard 2003, Ricciardelli & McCabe 2001 and Cohane & Pope 2000). After these two constructs have been evaluated a summary will follow at the end of this chapter.

### 2.1. Body image

Body image refers to how people think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes (Muth & Cash, 1997). When the construct of body image is measured, research tries to measure how satisfied or dissatisfied a person is with their own personal attributes (Muth & Cash, 1997). The discussion of body image is important, because it influences our daily lives. Especially in Western societies negative attitudes exist amongst larger individuals (Philips & de Man, 2010). In addition Palladino- Green & Pritchard (2003) relate body image dissatisfaction with eating disorders amongst college females but also males.

#### 2.1.1. Differences between body image of men and women

The study of Philips & de Man (2010), in which 110 persons participated, two remarkable findings were found. First, it seems that women's body image dissatisfaction is linearly related with body weight. This means women who are heavier show higher body dissatisfaction. Men, on the other hand showed, there was one group too heavy, wanting to lose weight and another group perceived themselves as too small and wanted to increase weight. The same results were found for men in the study of McCabe, Ricciardelli & Ridge (2006). The latter group, who has the desire to increase in weight, possesses the drive for muscularity. The drive for muscularity is an important scale to measure body satisfaction for men (Cafri & Thompson, 2004). In addition McCreary and Sasse (2000) discovered in their study, in which they used 197 adolescents (male and female) that the drive for muscularity is predominantly an issue for the male gender. Men trying to increase their muscle size, showed lower levels of body esteem. Whereas self esteem for women was not affected when striving for the same result. Therefore it seems that certain



body image disorders can be exclusively related to males, because females do not show lower self esteem when trying to increase muscle size. The second finding was that men were less concerned, compared to women, about their attractiveness. Instead, men value the body as what they can physically do with it (Philips & de Man, 2010, Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003). Men can become dissatisfied because they cannot lift as much weight or be as active in participating in sports activities as they would like to.

Finally Halliwell & Dittmar (2003) also discovered a reason why men in general might be less bothered with their body image. In comparison to women, men see their body as one thing. This does not mean that men either judge themselves as perfect or not. However, with a slight imperfection men draw a general conclusion about how content they are with their body. Females on the other hand seem to discuss every body part individually, which could lead to higher body dissatisfaction.

## **2.2. Self esteem**

Besides showing the importance that men have specific issues of their own, it is equally important that the drive for muscularity shows that self esteem is an important construct related to body image. Palladino- Green & Pritchard (2003), state that body image and self esteem are positively related. This means when self esteem decreases, body esteem decreases as well. Even though self esteem is an important construct of body image, not much supporting evidence is available about self esteem for men (Palladino- Green & Pritchard, 2003). To the contrary much research has been carried out for females and their self esteem. One research that discusses the self esteem for women is that of Smeesters & Mandel (2006). This review, tries to link the theory discussed by Smeesters & Mandel to males.

### *2.2.1 Self comparison*

It is human nature to compare oneself with another person or image; based on standards a person has (Musseweiler, 2003). A man might be satisfied with his body but, whilst comparing him with others he makes a separation according to his standards between men less, equally or more attractive than him. Musseweiler (2003) adds that these standards are so deeply rooted in humans psyche, that people even subconsciously measure themselves with other people or images in media.

Self comparison consists out two constructs, upward and downward comparison (Smeesters & Mandel, 2006). Historically, upward comparison is associated with comparing oneself with a thin model. The reason why this is called upward comparison hides in the fact that being thin is the ideal image in Western society (Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz & Muir, 1997). Downward comparison deals with the opposite, comparing oneself with a heavier image. One view is that upward comparison leads to a decrease in satisfaction while downward comparison leads to increased satisfaction (Richins, 1991). A second view which is presented by Smeesters & Mandel (2006) is that upward comparison can also be an inspiration for women. Females can start acting healthy, to reach a certain standard which they want to uphold. Downward comparison can work as a scare tactic; showing a heavy woman, may lead women to start working on their self image, in order not to be associated with fat women.

With respect to men, the theory of Smeesters and Mandel (2006) can probably be upheld to a large extend. Philips & de Man. (2010) indentified, compared to women, that there are two groups of men either, men who want to lose weight or those who want to gain weight. Men wanting to lose weight are expected to be similar to women meaning they compare themselves with thin or heavy male models and based on these comparisons have higher or lower self esteem. The second group of men possesses the drive of muscularity; these men compare themselves with others based on either being slender or muscular. However there is a ceiling when men try to compare themselves with muscular men. It seems that hyper muscular men are not taken into consideration when comparing oneself to an image (Arbour & Martin-Ginis 2006). A reason why hyper muscular men in media are not taken into consideration is that “normal” men see hyper muscular men as unrealistic. A second limitation of this scale is that media uses more muscular men, as this report will show in chapter three. This may lead to the fact that, in absence of normal/ slender looking men in media, muscular men feel no aspirations to slim down. In addition, with the absence of normal looking men in media there will probably be an increase of men who want to bulk up, this to look similar with the more muscular images in media (Leit, et al. 2001 & Pope, et al. 1999).

### *2.2.2 Extremity of the comparison*

Besides examining self esteem on the dimension thin and heavy, Smeesters & Mandel (2006) added an implication for self comparison namely, the extremity of the comparison. Comparing

our own body with an image that is closely related to our own body leads to an increase in accessibility of standard consistent self-knowledge (Smeesters & Mandel, 2006). This means that a female is actually more capable in making judgments about her body image, when the body of the model shows more resemblance with that of her own. When dissimilarities between the female body and models body increases it will be harder for the female to draw the right conclusion about her own body image. This literature review assumes that this theory holds for men as well. It seems logical that a person can make a better comparison about his or her self image if an image in the media looks more similar to that of his or her own body. The quality of this evaluation is expected not to be gender related, meaning it does not seem logical that men have better comparison skills than women.

Currently, on average 50% of the American and European population is overweighed (Smeesters, Mussweiler & Mandel, 2010). In chapter three this report will show, that images of men in magazine advertisement (Leit, et al. 2001) and male toy action figures (Pope, et al. 1999) have evolved and increased in size. Based on this knowledge and that of Smeesters & Mandel (2006) and Smeesters, Mussweiler & Mandel, (2010) it can be concluded that dissimilarities between the bodies of men in real life and the images portrayed in the media increases. It seems that men in real life become heavier and bodies of male models in media become more muscular. This will probably make it harder for men to draw the right conclusions about their body image. Making it harder for men to come to the right conclusion, an increase in body image dissatisfaction is expected.

### **2.3 Summary**

Body image refers to the fact how we judge our own physical attributes. Compared to women, men differ when discussing how body image is affected. A reason why men may have higher body satisfaction is that they see their body as a whole, whereas women evaluate each body part individually. However, body dissatisfaction may originate from the fact that men are not physically capable to perform certain actions which they could perform in the past, therefore have the feeling to be less of a man. Another important feature for men when discussing body image is the drive for muscularity. Men not only compare themselves in terms of being thin or heavy but, also compare themselves with one another based on the level of muscularity they possess.

In addition a positive relation exists between body image and self esteem. This means that if body satisfaction increases self esteem does so as well. Besides using upward and downward comparison measuring self esteem on weight and muscularity, another important implication for self esteem has to be taken in consideration as well, namely the extremity of the comparison. This implication explains that people can make better judgments about their body image when the image looks more similar to their own body. The extremity of the comparison however does not necessarily mean that it automatically leads to lower self esteem. With the right comparison a person can actually feel an increase in self esteem.

However, currently half the American and European population is overweighted. At the same time, what chapter three will show, is that the size of men in different media such as magazines and action figures have increased in size. Therefore the level of discrepancy rises between real persons and images published in the media, this could lead to a decrease in body satisfaction. This report expects that more men will be dissatisfied with their body image, due to images in the media and therefore take risks which are dangerous for their health, in order to improve their body shape.

## **Chapter 3: The influence of media on men**

This chapter will examine what the current image of men in today's media is. However, this chapter starts to evaluate other socio-cultural influences, because body image is not exclusively influenced by media. After having established what the importance of media is, this chapter will examine how men are being depicted in different media. The aim of the second part is to see whether different media, depicts men in the same way. After having established how men are currently portrayed, this chapter will further investigate what effect these images have on men. At the end of this chapter a summary shall follow.

### **3.1. Importance of media on body image**

As mentioned in the introduction, media is not the only variable that influences body image; there are also other socio-cultural influences such as family, friends and peers. The studies of McCabe & Ricciardelli (2003) and Ricciardelli & McCabe (2001) include these other socio-cultural influences. According to these studies it seems that media does not significantly influence body image of men.

McCabe & Ricciardelli (2003) draw the conclusion that media only influences men when they are specifically focusing on either losing or gaining weight. Thus, if men have the desire to lose weight, weight loss advertisement will influence them. On the other hand, body image as a whole is not influenced by media. Ricciardelli & McCabe (2001) on the other hand state that the influence of media is moderated by the level of self esteem men possesses. Men who possess low self esteem seem to be more sensitive for media compared to men with high self esteem.

Leit, Gray Harrison & Pope (2002) established that there is a positive relation between body image and images in the media. Their study excluded all other socio-cultural influences. It is not surprising that the first two studies show an interaction effect between the different variables. It seems plausible that people closely related to us have more influence on our body image compared to images in the media.

Even though, from the first two studies it can be assumed that people with whom we grew up and bonded are more important than unfamiliar persons in advertisements. Our family, friends and peers also see advertisements, which means they could be influenced by messages in

different media as well and project this information onto us. Based on this it seems media is still an important factor to consider when examining body image for men.

### **3.2. Images of men in today's media**

The general public cannot distinguish fiction from real in the media (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). The purpose of this report is not to distinguish between reality and fiction but how images of men in media have evolved. To do so, this report has chosen to examine different media more closely, these are: television, magazines and toys. These were specifically chosen to show that images seen by the male audience derive from different media.

#### *3.2.1. Television*

Lin (1998) indicates that commercials which appeared on prime time television in the U.S.A [1993] 30,4% of the presented males possessed muscular bodies. Other body shapes appeared less frequently. Skinny male body shapes only appeared in 4.4% of the commercials. Chunky shapes for males only appeared 8.7% of the time. This study indicates that muscular male shapes are predominantly displayed during television commercials.

Unfortunately from this study it is impossible to draw a conclusion how images in television commercials have evolved. The reason to include television is that it is one of the most aggressive forms of media (together with magazines) which conveys the ideal image (Groesz et al., 2002). To give this argument more support, an average American adult in the 80's watched 1857 hours of television per annum, during this period an adult sees 37,000 commercials (Bretl & Cantor, 1988). Combined with the figures of Lin, an American male would be confronted 11,248 times per annum with muscular men in commercials. Whereas skinny male body shapes only appeared 1,628 times and chunky male body shapes only appeared 3,219 times.

#### *3.2.2. Magazines*

To show how images of the male body have evolved in magazines this report will first discuss the study of Leit et al (2001). This is an interesting article however, it has certain limitations. Therefore it will be combined with the Anderson & DiDomenico (1990) article which also has limitations but, can support the discussion of Leit et al. (2001).

Leit et al., (2001) examines how images of men have changed, in particular their body size, between 1973 and 1997 on the Playgirl centerfold. The study proves that over this period, men in these images became more muscular and less fat. There were even eight extremely muscular models. Two models were from pictures taken in the 80's and six taken in 90's confirming that men in these images became more muscular over time. A limitation of the study of Leit et al (2001) is that Playgirl magazine is not read by males (homosexuals as exception). Therefore this report will use the study of Anderson & DiDomenico, (1990) to support the argument that images for men in magazines have changed.

Anderson & DiDomenico (1990) discovered that, fitness magazines predominantly read by males 77.3% of the advertisement featured messages how to alter body shape, whereas the remaining part focused on dieting. For females these figures were the other way around. A disadvantage of this study is that it does not mention anything about the images in the media. But it can be assumed if advertisement is focusing on developing muscles it will not depict a thin male. The positive side is that this research uses the right target group. Therefore, by combining these studies we have the right target group and it also shows that images of men in magazines are changing and that these images become more muscular.

### *3.2.3. Action figures*

Already touched upon this matter in chapter one, there is evidence that the market of toys for boys is changing, in which the size of action figures have become extremely muscular (Pope et al., 2001). The study compared waist, chest and bicep size of action figures from 1974 with action figures up to 1998. Comparing the same type of action figure, one made in 1974 and the other in 1998 considerable changes were found. Pope et al (2001) discovered that chest size nearly grew with 50% and biceps with almost 200%. Having measured these latest proportions against a team of professional lacrosse players these proportions of the action figures were highly unrealistic (Pope et al. 2001)

Pope et al (2001) mentioned in their discussion they had some doubts if the results of their study would accurately mirror the trend in other media. The previous discussions support the fact that other forms of media also saw an increase in male body muscularity. Therefore this report eliminates the doubt Pope et al (2001) might have.

### **3.3. The impact of media on body image of males**

Established that the image of men in media is changing it is important to know how this influences them. The influence of each medium will be discussed separately as well, this to uphold a clear separation between the previously discussed forms of media.

#### *3.3.1. Television*

Agliata et al. (2004) suggest that watching commercials will have an effect on mood and body image. When a muscular man appears in a commercial it can lead to muscle dissatisfaction. An increase in depression can be detected as well. Whereas commercials where the “ideal men” is not depicted the opposite holds true. This means men do not show any signs of muscle dissatisfaction or have signs of depression.

Two additional notes have to be made next to the above finding. First, men who have lower self esteem are likely to be more influenced by muscular bodies in commercials but, men with higher self esteem also seem to be affected by muscular bodies (Hargreaves & Tiggeman, 2009). Second, according to Barlett, Vowels & Saucier (2008) young men are more sensitive and influenced by mass media (television) than older men.

Therefore, it seems all men are somehow influenced by commercials seen on television. However, based on the level of self esteem men react differently to commercials they have seen and experience different levels of body (dis)satisfaction. However this is not the only moderating factor, it also seems age plays a role. The older men get the less sensitive they are for influences from commercials.

#### *3.3.2. Magazines*

This medium shows resemblances with television but, the studies of magazines are less explicit in drawing conclusions about the influence men experience after having seen images of the ideal men in magazines. Morry & Staska (2001) mention, that men or women, who read fitness or beauty magazines advertisements, have greater concern for their physical appearance. The study which they performed was a blind study in which participants did not know what the test was for. There were 3 groups of 20 males and 4 groups of 20 females tested. Each gender had to fill out a questionnaire that measured body image. Even though only beauty and fitness magazines were of



interest, participants were misguided because other magazines were included as well. The results showed that, reading fitness magazines relates to higher body dissatisfaction.

This argument is reinforced by Morrison, Morrison & Hopkins (2003). However, Morrison et al (2003) also argue that self-reported comparison influences the drive for muscularity in men. This means that men who compare themselves with images in fitness magazines might have a negative feeling about their own body image because images of men in fitness magazines are more muscular. This conclusion is in line with the theory of Philips et al (2010) chapter two, they state that a male's body image can be influenced when a men compares him with others on weight and muscularity. In addition Morrison et al. (2003) also state that the level of body dissatisfaction depends on how sensitive men are for images of muscular men in magazines. It seems that men, who are more sensitive, have a higher chance on body dissatisfaction. A similar argument in the section television was given by Hargreaves et al. (2009)

### *3.3.3. Action figures*

Barlett, Harris, Smith & Bonds-Raacke, (2005) discovered in their study, in which students play with action figures, such as GI Joe and X-men, that playing with muscular action figures can result in lower self esteem. They also mention that students who played with extremely muscular action figures, compared to students who played with moderate action figures, had an even lower self esteem. In chapter two Abour et al. (2006) discussed that hyper muscular images had no influences on the body image of men, because they look unrealistic and can hardly be achieved without any substance usage. A reason for this contradiction might be that the study of Abour et al. (2006) only discusses magazine advertisement, in which men only see the images for a few moments before turning the page. Barlett et al. (2005) let the students play with the action figures, so the students were continuously confronted with them.

Even with the contradiction in the studies of Abour et al (2006) and Barlett et al (2005) action figures show the same results as television and magazines. Namely, body image dissatisfaction might be caused by images showed in the media. In which images of muscular men in media particularly causes lower self esteem.

This report continues only to examine muscular images as a source for body image dissatisfaction and leaves out hyper muscular images. Not to neglect the study of Barlett et al

(2005) but Barlett et al (2005) and Abour et al. (2006) both argue that muscular images influences body image, therefore both can be included in this literature review.

### **3.4. Summary**

It seems that other socio-cultural factors, such as family, friends and peers have a greater influence on body image compared to media when all are included in the same study. A reason for this might be that persons close to us have a greater influence than unfamiliar persons in different media. However, a positive relation exists when we measure the influence of media on body image solely, without the other socio-cultural factors, meaning media does influences body image of men. In addition, it must not be forgotten that family and friends also receive messages from the media and may project this information onto us. Therefore media may not be ignored as influencing factor of body image.

Second, this chapter indentified that the image of men in today's media has changed and that it has become more muscular. There are cases in which muscularity has taken on very extreme forms. Some of which we have seen in the longitude studies of magazine and action figures. The longitude studies also show that muscularity is not something that appeared suddenly, it grew gradually over the years. This chapter also showed that the frequency of muscular men appearing in commercials is considerably more than other body figures of men.

Finally, it seems that all men are affected by images of men in the media. With men depicted in images becoming more muscular and men in society becoming heavier, probably the number of men dissatisfied with their body increases. However, each man reacts differently on the images in the media, one factor explaining this is the level of self esteem the person's possess. Next chapter deals with the risk men take in which the focus will be on the consequences of these risks.

## **Chapter 4: Risks men take and the consequences**

This chapter will examine the risks men take to improve their body image. In the previous chapter this report showed that the image of men in the media has become more muscular while ordinary men become heavier. This report expects that there will be an increase of men that experience issues with their body image. Therefore, a possibility might exist that more men seek solutions to improve their body image, which could be dangerous for their health. This chapter will first discuss the two risks men may take to improve their body image. After these risks have been examined, the second part of this chapter will look at the consequences of these risks.

### **4.1. Possible risks men take**

There are two risks predominantly discussed when men try to improve their body image, these are Androgenic Anabolic Steroids (AAS) and dieting (McCreary & Sasse 2000, McCabe & Ricciardelli 2003 and Pope & Cohane 2000). Of course other risk exists as well but because these two appeared in several studies the focus of this chapter will only be on steroids and diets.

#### *4.1.1. Androgenic Anabolic Steroids (AAS)*

The main reason men use steroids is that it improves muscular size, strength and reduces body fat (Cafri et al. 2005). The usage of AAS is not something new, since Greek – Roman times athletes used steroids to increase their performance (Nelson, 1989). Currently there is a growing concern that besides athletes, adolescents use steroids as well (Peters, Copeland & Dillon, 1999 and Nelson 1989). Adolescents seem to have other reasons for using steroids. Instead of using it for enhancing their performances, non-athletes use them to improve their appearance (Irving, Wall, Neumark- Sztainer & Story, 2002).

Continuing with appearance, in the adolescent stage of life men are searching for their identity. During this stage many strive to reach the physical stature of individuals appearing in popular media (Peters et al. 1999). By trying to reach these similar “ideal” forms men hope to be socially accepted and more popular (Nelson, 1989). In chapter three we saw that media influences body image of men and to improve body image men may use steroids but not all men use steroids. Irving et al. (2002) examined the differences between AAS and non-AAS users. This study included 4764 participants from 31 different locations. A man who poses lower self esteem or

feels more depressed has a higher chance of steroid usage to improve his body image than a man with higher self esteem.

#### *4.1.2 Diets*

Diets for men can perform two separate functions, either to lose weight or to gain weight (McCreary & Sasse 2002). Less is known about dieting behaviors amongst men compared to AAS usage. A reason explaining this might be that issues related to dieting practices in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was mostly seen and recognized as a female disorder (Woodside et al. 2001 & Tanofsky et al. 1997). Meaning men have learned stereotypical behavior in which dieting is associated with issues for the opposite gender. Being embarrassed of having a female disorder, men delay seeking treatment for their problems (Labre, 2002).

Despite the fact men seek delayed treatment for their issues. This does not mean that men do not have eating disorders similar to women. Labre (2002) found that 1.7% of men in his study were anorexic and 2.8% bulimic. Tanofsky et al. (1997) have found nearly the same result, mentioning that 90% of all anorexic and bulimic cases involved females. Because the group of anorexic and bulimic men is small, compared to men dieting to gain weight (21.2%) and men wanting to lose weight (12.4%) (Labre, 2002) anorexia and bulimia will not be discussed any further.

Reasons for men to start dieting, to gain weight is that men try to increase weight/body mass. After a period of excessive eating, men perform exercises to lose body fat. However at the same time they try to gain muscles (McCreary & Sasse, 2002). Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2007) related dieting to lose weight also to men. Losing weight can be as simple as men who perceive themselves as overweighted and want to lose the extra kilos.

## **4.2. Medical implications**

### *4.2.1. Consequences of Androgenic Anabolic Steroid use*

Before describing the negative effects, this report will present the positive sides of AAS usage first. Irvin et al. (2002) and Nelson (1989) mention that there are legitimate medical reason to use AAS. When used in the right doses it can initiate delayed puberty and growth promotion. Besides medical advantages the study of Peters et al. (1999) and Hildebrandt et al. (2006) discovered that steroids users experience other positive effects as well. Both make a difference

between psychological positive effects and physical positive effects. Positive psychological effects were that AAS users reported increased self esteem, better goal achievement and ability to attract romantic partners. Both Peters et al. (1999) and Hildebrandt et al. (2006) mention these effects were not directly noticeable, meaning it was merely a feeling instead of actually experiencing these effects. The physical effects were noticeable because AAS users reported increase muscle mass, thus improving the users image. It is unclear however, if these psychological and physical effects are only experienced when steroids are being taken or if it has an ongoing effect.

Despite the positive side effects of AAS usage, it has negative side effects as well. The reason why negative side effects may occur is that the amount of steroids a person takes, without medical issues, is more than the required doses (Nelson, 1989). The table below gives an overview of all the issues related to steroid usage.

<b>Liver disease</b>	<b>Miscellaneous</b>
Cholestasis	Acne
Tumor (benign & malignant)	<u>Alopecia (Baldness)</u>
Peliosis hepatitis	<u>Gynecomastia (breasts dev.)</u>
<b>Male reproductive system</b>	<b>Psychological</b>
Oligospermia/ Azoospermia	Aggressiveness
Testicular atrophy	Mood swings
Prostatic atrophy	Libido changes
Testicular/ prostatic tumors	
<b>Cardiovascular</b>	<b>Youth</b>
Hypertension	Premature closure of epiphysis

Table 1: Possible health risks when taking steroids<sup>1</sup>

Alopecia and Gynecomastia are underlined in the table because if this occurs during the period of steroid usage, the effects are irreversible. All other issues that might occur could be reversed but the person has to stop taking steroids (Nelson, 1989).

From this point onwards, this report leaves the usage of steroids for medical purposes out the discussion. The reason for this is that most studies agree about the usefulness of steroids as medicine. We may assume that medical doctors prescribe the right amount of medicine to their

<sup>1</sup> Modified table from the report of Nelson (1989) *Androgenic- Anabolic Steroid Use in Adolescents*.

patients. Still evaluating steroids we arrive at the question, which is actually the subtitle of this report, “do looks outweigh the importance of being healthy?” By taking and abusing AAS people may reach their ideal image but at what costs? Is the ideal image more valuable than a liver that does not function?

#### *4.2.2. Consequences of diets*

Whereas rates of anorexia and bulimia amongst men are lower compared to women, the binge eating disorder is not. For every three women, two men have a binge eating disorder (Tanofsky, 1997). It is not strange that relatively many men have a binge eating disorder (BED) because this disorder is related to men trying to gain weight (Labre, 2002). BED is similar to Bulimia Nervosa (BN) however there is one difference when the two are compared. BN is characterized by, eating large amounts of food in a short period of time but, to prevent weight gain compensatory measures are being used e.g. vomiting. BED is exactly the same but does not make use of compensatory measures (Stice, 2002). By not using the compensatory measures a person may increase in size. However, a serious risk is associated with BED namely obesity (Neumark-Sztainer, et al. 2007, Cafri et al, 2005 & Labre, 2002).

Before listing some risks which are associated with obesity, the behavior of losing weight will be discussed first. The reason is that the study of Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2007) and Cafri et al (2005) both suggest that dieting to lose weight is also associated with obesity. Diets that focus on losing weight, might only have a temporarily effect. This can be explained by the fact that these diets are only implemented on a short term basis. After a short period of eating healthy they fall back in their old and unhealthy habits. Instead, a long term vision should be adopted when people want to lose weight (Neumark-Sztainer et al, 2007). Thus, even having a period in which the person experience weight loss, due to falling back in old habits, people become overweighted.

Several diseases could be linked to obesity, e.g. cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure (Cafri et al. 2005). Other diseases are: coronary heart disease and diabetes (Labre, 2002). There are probably more risks associated with obesity, for which these four are just the tip of the iceberg. In addition, Stice (2002) links pathological eating behavior not only to obesity, but also assumes there is an increased chance of substance abuse. Meaning, if this substance would be

steroids, men will not only experience health risks which are related to obesity but also the risks related to steroids.

### 4.3 Summary

This chapter evaluated two risks which men might take when trying to improve their body image. Of course these two risks are not the only two that possess a health risk for men. Besides discussing the risks, the second part of this chapter provided a discussion about the consequences of these risks.

The number of men using steroids to improve their body image is increasing. A reason for this increase might be that media have influenced them to attain a more muscular body. It seems that the new standard in different media is to depict men with a muscular build. Even though positive effects can be traced to steroids, such as an increase in muscle mass, these can be considered negligible, when compared to the negative side effects. Two irreversible effects using steroids are, becoming bald and the growth of breasts. This indicates that steroids in the long run can have the opposite effect, namely becoming less attractive.

Even though dieting is a risk often discussed in several studies less is known about these practices amongst men. A reason could be that in the past these issues were predominantly related to females. Diets seem completely harmless; a change in a healthier lifestyle can be better for the body and might even increase body satisfaction. However a person who bulks up and does not perform enough exercise to lose the extra weight can become obese. On the other hand dieting to lose weight can be healthy, as long as it does not take on extreme forms like anorexia or bulimia. However, it seems that people performing diets to lose weight, actually fall back in their old pattern. This may result in the fact that they become overweighted as well. Certain risks related to obesity are: coronary heart disease and cardiovascular disease.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter deals with providing an answer to this reports problem statement. The answer to the problem statement will be kept short, but immediately followed by the conclusion. Finally some limitations of the report will be discussed, this to give further insights for future research.

### *5.1. Problem Statement*

The problem statement of this report was:

Do images of the “ideal men” in the media affect the body image of men and does this lead to an increase in risky behavior?

Based on this report and the information it has provided, it seems that media has an effect on body image of men. Becoming dissatisfied with their own body the possibility might exist that some men take risks to improve their body image. A reason explaining this is, if men were not depicted as muscular in current media, men should have fewer reasons to become dissatisfied with their own body composition and therefore might take fewer risks.

### *5.2. Conclusion*

It seems that men can be influenced by media, due to the fact that every human being compares himself with other people or images in the media. However there is a significant difference between, being influenced by and actually having a decreased level of body image. The cause of the difference can be found when we examine the construct of body image. When men perform up- or downward comparison it can either have a negative, neutral or a positive effect. If men perceive an image more handsome compared to him, this leads to body dissatisfaction. The comparison can also lead to a neutral response, due to the fact that the person sees it as a challenge, making a negative positive. So a person uses the source as inspiration and a negative effect does not necessarily have to occur. It could also be that the person finds himself better looking than the model, which can lead to body satisfaction.

In addition, body image satisfaction for men has to be measured on two different constructs namely, thin and fat (men & women) and slender or muscular (only men). The last construct can be viewed as the drive for muscularity, a theory developed by McCreary and Sasse. They



discovered that the drive for muscularity was predominantly an issue for men, because women wanting to become more muscular did not show any signs of having lower self esteem or depression.

The research of Smeesters and Mandel (2006) has been used to show how self esteem can influence body (dis)satisfaction. In their report they introduced the extremity of the comparison theory. This means that the level of body satisfaction can be influenced by knowledge that is gained by comparing oneself to somebody else. It seems when a female chooses to compare herself with a model that looks more or less similar to her, she can make better judgment about her body image. If dissimilarities between the female and the model increase, the extremity of the comparison increases as well. Therefore it becomes more difficult for her to draw the right conclusion about her body image. This report expects that this theory is also applicable to situation of men.

On average 50% of the European and American population is over weighted (Smeesters, Musseweiler & Mandel, 2010). This report believes that images of men depicted in different media have become more muscular. Some men in the images became so muscular that it is humanly impossible to reach such level of muscularity, without using any stimulants. With the “normal” population increasing in size and the male body in the media becoming more muscular there is a growing discrepancy between real bodies and idealized bodies in media. Combining the theory of Smeesters & Mandel 2006, Smeesters, Musseweiler & Mandel (2010) and chapter three, were proof is given that images of men in the media have become more muscular, it is expected that it becomes more difficult for the ordinary men to make a right evaluation about his own body image. Because it becomes more difficult there is a chance that the number of men with decreased body satisfaction and lower self esteem increases.

Finally, to reach the same body size that models have depicted in different media, men have shown to take risks. Two risks that were discussed in this report are: Androgenic Anabolic Steroids and diets and both have serious consequences on men’s health. Steroids usage can lead to irreversible baldness or the growth of breast, but even worse are, the not functioning liver or heavy moods swings which leads to aggression. In the case of diets, which seems to be perfectly healthy a relation to obesity can be found, which in turn causes coronary heart disease.

To conclude there will be men affected by media, but not all men affected will experience a decrease in body satisfaction. However with the increase of images of muscular men in different media and an increase of men becoming heavier, it is expected that more men will be affected by media. A reason might be that it becomes harder for men to make a correct comparison between images in the media and their own body. Therefore it is expected that the number of men feeling dissatisfied about their body image increases. With an increasing number of men dissatisfied, there will probably be a growing number of men using steroids or diets to improve their body which actually pose a risk to the health of these men.

### *5.3. Limitations*

Obviously there are some limitations that apply to this literature review. This research based its conclusion on a universal man, meaning that cultural differences, sexuality and different age groups were not taken into account. Through research of Hofstede, it is known that there are cultural differences in which there are muscular and feminine cultures. Men in muscular cultures will probably react differently on images of the ideal men, than men in feminine cultures. Also the sexuality of men was not taken in consideration, this research focused on the heterosexual men. French et al (1996) mention that homosexual men score higher on body dissatisfaction and that they are more likely to be diagnosed with anorexia and bulimia. Thus by generalizing and focusing on the heterosexual men, this report ignored an important group of men for which the conclusion may not apply. A final remark on universality is the age of men. This report discussed that when men become older; men are less likely to be influenced by the ideal image in advertisements. However most conclusions in this report are based on different research papers in which the age of men was not the same. Therefore it is hard to establish if we can really speak of the fact that older men are less bothered by muscular images in the media.

Due to the fact this is a literature review assumptions in this report are not backed by statistical data. Two assumptions are important for this report; first this report assumes that the theory developed by Smeesters & Mandel (2006) is applicable for men as well. Due to the lack of research about self esteem of men, this paper was used as replacement. Even though the assumption in this report seems plausible, it is suggested that further research must be done about self esteem for men. Second this report also assumed that media has an important influence on body image, besides the other socio-cultural influences such as family, friends and peers.

However it would be interesting to investigate how family, friends and peers are influenced by the media and how much of the information they receive project onto others.

A final limitation of this report is that when discussing the subject magazines in chapter three this report made use of research papers that specifically focused on fitness magazines. Therefore the arguments made in the part magazines have to be read with care and cannot be generalized for the entire magazine market. Besides the fact the whole magazine market cannot be generalized, an interesting research would be how images of men in other magazines besides fitness magazines have developed.

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