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Review: The Muscular Ideal: Psychosocial, Social, and Medical Perspectives

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Introduction

The Muscular Ideal: Psychosocial, Social, and Medical Perspectives edited by J. Kevin Thompson and Guy Cafri (2007) is published by the American Psychological Association and retails for \$59.95. This title follows in the footsteps of *The Adonis Complex* (2000) by Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia which helped to increase public and professional awareness of issues associated with body image and muscularity. Indeed, in their introduction, Thompson and Cafri cite a 731% rise in the articles focusing on the muscular ideal from 2000 to 2007 compared with the previous seven years. The overall purpose of *The Muscular Ideal* is to provide readers with updated research findings particularly for the male population, but also to focus on the growing trend of a muscular, toned physique among females.

Following the introduction, the text is broken down into five sections. In the first, cultural, social, and psychological perspectives of the muscular ideal are discussed. The second section is dedicated to definitions and measurement. The third section assesses the medical issues, treatment, and prevention of body image issues associated with muscularity and the fourth covers special topics. Finally, the fifth section provides a conclusion with specific areas for future research highlighted. Each of these sections will be discussed in further detail.

Section I: Cultural, Social, and Psychological Perspectives

Split into three chapters, this section is dedicated to providing the reader with insight in to how and why the muscular ideal is promoted within today's society. In Chapter One, Gray and Ginsberg assess the different theories of muscularity, the relationship between the media and the promotion of muscularity within the United States, and the relationship between muscularity and specific groups within differing cultures. Also provided are some pertinent areas of future research which those with a research interest in this area may find of particular use.

Chapter Two provides a historical overview of muscularity and masculinity within the United States. Beginning in the 19th Century, Luciano explains how muscularity was initially shunned by society and muscular men were viewed as anomalies. Gradually, a separation between strongmen and muscularity occurred whereby muscularity became associated with fitness and health. In particular, Luciano attributes much of this transformation to Joe and Ben Weider. Those with a particular interest in this chapter may also wish to consider Alan Radley's *The Illustrated History of Physical Culture: The Muscular Ideal* (2001).

Chapter Three analyzes the relationship between culture and the subculture of bodybuilding. Klein (see also *Little Big Men*, 1993) examines the rituals associated with bodybuilding, the social psychology of male bodybuilders, and how bodybuilding has and should be marketed to promote it into a larger mainstream. Readers will particularly enjoy the examples provided by Klein from his many years of work with bodybuilders to support his suggestions.

Section II: Definitions and Measurement

Section two provides two chapters which define various terms associated with muscularity and means for their measurement. Chapter Four is dedicated to assessing the various methods used to measure the drive for muscularity among males and females. While McCreary does cover a variety of empirically published methods for its measurement, the majority of the text is given to the Drive for Muscularity Scale (DMS), not surprising given McCreary and Sasse were its creators. The DMS is presented within the text in conjunction with research findings that support its reliability, validity, and use within different populations. It was particularly pleasing to note that McCreary had indicated that question 10 (I think about taking steroids) can be excluded at the discretion of the researcher. The issue was raised between this reviewer and McCreary (D. McCreary, personal communication, October 26th, 2006), as it may be that some respondents may already be taking steroids. McCreary completes the chapter by providing limitations of the DMS and areas for future research.

Chapter Five encompasses a great number of measurement methods for assessing body image and muscle dysmorphia. Specifically, Cafri and Thompson differentiate between Likert-based measures and silhouette measures in addition to providing

alternative assessment methods such as semi structured interviews and self-report questionnaires. Although mentioned later in the book, the

Muscle Dysmorphia Inventory (Rhea et al., 2004) was unfortunately missing from this chapter and researchers should also consider its efficacy in their research before choosing the best method or methods for data collection.

Section III: Medical Issues, Treatment, and Prevention

In Chapter Six, Olivardia provides an overview of the characteristics, assessment, and treatment of muscle dysmorphia. Symptoms and classification are provided and Olivardia provides several examples of those suffering from muscle dysmorphia. A section dedicated to its assessment and treatment is included, and the author is clear to delineate between those with muscle dysmorphia and those who have healthy weight lifting behavior.

Muscle enhancement substances and strategies is the title for Chapter Seven. Bahrke presents a summary of the various methods by which an individual aims to increase muscle mass and reduce body fat. The chapter is broken down into anabolic-androgenic steroids and its associates, stimulants, blood-doping methods, analgesics, legal dietary supplements, and social and recreational drugs. In addition, Bahrke suggests technologies which may impact this area in future. This chapter will serve as an excellent resource although readers should consider investigating additional research investigating the relationship between anabolic-androgenic steroid and ancillary drug use.

Goldberg and Elliot examine the prevention of anabolic steroid use among adolescents in Chapter Eight. Data describing the prevalence of steroid use among male and female adolescents are provided in addition to their adverse effects in this younger population. Also provided are strategies that have been used to try and curb their use including student athlete drug testing, prevention techniques, and gender-based education.

Section IV: Special Topics

In Chapter Nine, Sarwer, Crerand, and Gibbons provide an overview of how cosmetic procedures have increased both in number and by improving body shape and muscularity. Statistics concerning the number of cosmetic surgeries are provided in conjunction with the psychiatric disorders among body contouring patients and the influences on the growth of cosmetic surgery.

Ricciardelli and McCabe analyze the pursuit of muscularity among adolescents in Chapter Ten. Much of the text is given to the risk factors associated with this pursuit. Readers may also find the section dedicated to the pursuit of muscularity among adolescent girls to be particularly interesting.

The final section of Chapter Ten leads well into Chapter Eleven, for its focus is on the muscular female body ideal. Gruber notes how females desire a toned physique over a hypermuscular appearance and how more females are becoming comfortable with this ideal. Gruber also examines the hypermuscular physique among females and provides further avenues for research.

Section V: Conclusion

The book is concluded by Chrisler and Cochran who provide a brief summary of the book and suggests various areas for future research. Included in this summary are issues associated with body image and muscularity measurement, assessment, treatment, prevention, culture, gender, and diversity.

Analysis

As greater attention is being given to body image and muscularity within empirical research and the media as a whole, this book provides a clear and insightful overview over much of the findings associated with this area. While much of the content is not new and can be found within empirical journals, this compilation of work will provide an excellent resource for those with an interest in the field. In addition, by presenting the information in a less scientific manner, the text remains understandable to someone with only limited familiarity with body image and muscularity. Readers should not consider this a comprehensive text, but it will provide an excellent overview of the area and would be a very worthy first text for someone with an initial interest.

References

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