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### **Abstract**

With little actual appraisal, a more 'appearance potent' (i.e., a reverence for appearance ideals) subculture has been used to explain gay men's greater body dissatisfaction in comparison to straight men's. This study sought to assess the respective appearance potency of each subculture by a content analysis of 32 issues of the most read gay (*Attitude*, *Gay Times*) and straight men's magazines (*Men's Health*, *FHM*) in the UK. Images of men and women were coded for their physical characteristics, objectification and nudity, as were the number of appearance adverts and articles. The gay men's magazines featured more images of men that were appearance ideal, nude and sexualized than the straight men's magazines. The converse was true for the images of women and appearance adverts. Although more research is needed to understand the effect of this content on the viewer, the findings are consistent with a more appearance potent gay male subculture.

*Keywords:* Body image, Media, Gay men, Magazines, Body dissatisfaction.

**“Appearance Potent”? A Content Analysis of UK Gay and Straight Men's Magazines**

Gay men consistently present greater body dissatisfaction and related health consequences in comparison to straight men. For example, a meta-analysis of 20 studies comparing these two groups found that gay men reliably report greater levels of body dissatisfaction (Morrison, Morrison, & Sager, 2004; Smith, Hawkeswood, Bodell, & Joiner, 2011). More recent research has replicated these findings (Jankowski, Diedrichs, & Halliwell, 2013; Marino-Carper, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010; Tiggemann, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007). Gay men also report higher levels of disordered eating, sociocultural appearance pressures and other related health outcomes (Jankowski et al., 2013; Marino-Carper et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2011). The central question then becomes why?

One explanation proposed for these differences is that the gay male subculture is more 'appearance potent' than the straight male subculture. That is, even though both gay and straight male cultures endorse the prevailing cultural appearance ideal (i.e., the young, White, mesomorphic male with facial symmetry, a full head of hair and minimal body hair; Saucier & Caron, 2008; Tiggemann et al., 2007), gay male culture places a greater importance on appearance and objectifies and reveres the male appearance ideal to a greater extent than does straight male culture (Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1989). Differences between gay and straight men's body dissatisfaction are therefore at least partly attributed to the different subcultural environments in which gay (e.g., gay bars, gay men's magazines and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) organizations) and straight men are thought to live.

To the best of our knowledge, there exist only five studies that have explicitly compared differences in appearance potency between gay and straight male subcultures via analysis of dating adverts and magazines (Bartoş, Phua, & Avery, 2009; Epel, Spanakos, Kasl-Godley, & Brownell, 1996; Kaufman & Chin Phua, 2003; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr,

& Brown, 1995; Lanzieri & Cook, 2013). These media formats represent one element of or proxy for gay male and straight male subcultures. Specifically, although some have questioned whether discrete subcultures actually exist (Duncan, 2010; Kane, 2009), gay men's and straight men's media attempt to capitalize on distinct subcultures by creating content for, and marketing to, gay and straight men separately. This occurs even if, in reality, either group of men resist participation, or do not participate exclusively, in such subcultures (e.g., when gay men read straight men's magazines).

Four of the above five studies that examined differences between gay and straight men's subcultures analysed dating adverts. Two of these examined the stated age preferences of US dating adverts posted by gay and straight men (Kaufman & Chin Phua, 2003; Kenrick et al., 1995). Whereas Kaufman and Chin Phua (2003) found that gay men were more likely than straight men to request an older partner, Kenrick et al. (1995) found that the two groups specified similar age preferences. The third study, conducted by Epel et al. (1996), found that US dating adverts posted by gay men mentioned aspects of appearance of both the user and the desired partner significantly more often than adverts posted by straight men. Finally, in contrast, Bartoş, Phua, and Avery (2009) found that Romanian men-seeking-women dating adverts stipulated the desired weights, heights and youth of their potential partner more often than men-seeking-men dating adverts (although both groups were equally likely to give their own weights and heights).

The fifth study, conducted by Lanzieri and Cook (2013), is the first to compare gay and straight male targeted media. This study assessed the degree of body fat and muscularity of male images in widely read US gay and straight men's magazines. The researchers found that images of men in the gay men's magazines had lower levels of body fat compared to straight men's magazines, but did not differ in levels of muscularity. Given body fat and muscularity are both important components of the cultural male appearance ideal (Tiggemann

et al., 2007), these results offer partial support to the proposition that gay men's subculture (at least as displayed in these magazines) is more appearance potent than its straight counterpart.

The assessment of appearance potency in the Lanzieri and Cook (2013) study was limited to the body fat and muscularity of the images of men in these magazines. However, there exist other components of the male appearance ideal, such as having a full or shaved (though not balding-<sup>1</sup>) head of hair, youthfulness, and little body-hair. This is supported in qualitative research where men consistently list these appearance aspects as what the ideal man should have (Fawkner & McMurray, 2002; Tiggemann et al., 2007). In addition, there are other types of appearance potency beyond ideal images of men (discussed further on). Accordingly, a fuller and more detailed appraisal of the appearance potency of gay and straight men's media is warranted.

It can be seen that the existing empirical evidence for greater appearance potency in the gay male subculture (presented above) is conflicting and limited. Thus it seems premature to explain gay men's higher body dissatisfaction as a result of a more appearance potent subculture when this has not been definitively established. More generally, there has been recent criticism of researchers "stereotyping [gay men]...[by making] generalizations that gay men are socialized by the gay subculture to be fixated on their appearance; evaluations that reduce [them] to being universally fixated on their appearance" (Kane, 2010, p. 315).

Therefore the present study aimed to appraise the appearance potency via a detailed content analysis of samples of gay and straight men's media. As in the studies above, content analytic methodology provides a more objective and reliable appraisal than the self-report data used to compare gay and straight men in many previous studies (e.g., Jankowski et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> UK company Skalp highlights how a full head of hair – even if shaved – is considered more culturally appearance ideal than a balding head. The company tattoos ink follicles onto men's scalps in order to "create a full, convincing, youthful and attractive hairline" (Skalp<sup>TM</sup>, 2014).

2013) where it is not clear whether any differences between gay and straight men are more “announced than pronounced” (Kane, 2010, p. 315).

### **What Elements of the Media are Appearance Potent?**

To assess the relative appearance potency of gay and straight male media in any detail, it is necessary to understand which elements can be deemed appearance potent. A number of different theories (Aubrey & Taylor, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Tiggemann, 2012) have identified appearance ideals and sexualized media content as sources of multiple detrimental effects on their consumers and therefore as appearance potent content. In particular, Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) argues that pervasive sociocultural pressures in the form of sexual objectification gradually socialize individuals to view and monitor their own bodies from an outsider's perspective (i.e., to self-objectify), resulting in a range of potential psychological problems including body dissatisfaction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tiggemann, 2013). Although Objectification Theory was formulated as a formal account of women's experience, its application has been extended to gay men. Two studies have found that when gay male participants (but not their straight counterparts) are randomized into objectifying conditions (e.g., trying on a swimsuit, viewing idealized images of men), their self-objectification and body dissatisfaction significantly increase (Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007; Michaels, Parent, & Moradi, 2013). This evidence suggests that gay men may experience body dissatisfaction and related consequences at least partially due to a self-objectifying perspective arising from the greater appearance potency and sociocultural objectification of their subculture. For straight men, on the other hand, encountering sociocultural objectification may be a new or rare experience and thus have little effect.

More general support for the above sociocultural theories and the appearance potency of this media content comes from the finding that men's self-reported pressure from the

media correlates with higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008). In addition, several meta-analyses of experimental studies have concluded that acute exposure to lean and muscular images of men leads to increases in body dissatisfaction (Barlett et al., 2008; Blond, 2008; Ferguson, 2013), as well as depressed mood, disordered eating and other related health problems (Hausenblas et al., 2013) for some men. This evidence and research highlights the appearance potency (e.g., via its resultant effects on men's body dissatisfaction) of appearance ideal and sexualized media content.

However, as mentioned above, there are other components of the male appearance ideal beyond a man's body shape, e.g., his level of head hair or age (Tiggemann et al., 2007), that are potentially important aspects of media images that have not been assessed. In addition, other characteristics of the photographic image, such as the degree of nudity and objectification present, have also not been examined. There is also reason to suggest that appearance potency effects may result from media content other than images of men. In particular, research has documented that straight men's magazines contain a plethora of images of appearance ideal, sexualised and nude women (Aubrey & Taylor, 2009; Conley & Ramsey, 2011; Taylor, 2005) and that (straight) male participants' exposure to these images is related to higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Aubrey & Taylor, 2009). In line with Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), women are the object of straight men's gaze. Therefore images of women should be more likely to conform to the cultural appearance ideal, be nude and sexualized in the straight men's magazines than the gay men's magazines (as men will be the object of gay men's gaze in the gay men's magazines).

Finally, media content other than images of people (men or women) can be judged as appearance potent. With regards to magazines, such content includes both advertisements and articles that focus on appearance. Specific examples include advertisements for skin care or fragrance products, and feature articles on fashion or muscle building. So although the effects

of this content have not been explored in experimental or quantitative studies this content is still theorized to be appearance potent and therefore is important to assess when appraising the media's appearance potency.

To sum, a more appearance potent gay subculture has been used to explain gay men's greater body dissatisfaction, with relatively little appraisal of the assumptions underlying this explanation. Various media elements, including appearance ideal and sexualized images of men and women, as well as appearance-focused adverts and articles, may be considered appearance potent elements of gay and straight men's subcultures. The present study then aimed to assess whether UK media targeted at gay men differs in appearance potency from media targeted at straight men. Specifically, we hypothesized that in comparison to straight male media, gay male media will feature:

1. More images of men who are appearance ideal, are nude and are sexualised
2. Fewer images of women who are appearance ideal, are nude and are sexualised
3. More appearance advertisements
4. More appearance-focused articles.

## Method

### Materials

UK magazines targeted at gay and straight men were selected for analysis. In 2012, the two highest circulated men's magazines in the UK (targeted primarily at straight men) were the UK editions of *Men's Health* and *For Him Magazine (FHM)* (Ponsford, 2012). The two highest circulated gay men's magazines were *Attitude* and *Gay Times* (Gardiner, 2012; Tassie, 2011). All four of these magazines publish between 11 and 13 issues a year and have content that focuses on lifestyle, entertainment and health issues of straight men and gay men, respectively. Most of the readers of these magazines are aged between 18 and 45 years, and



are male professionals (Bauer Media, 2011; Gardiner, 2012; Tassie, 2011; Todd, 2011). As of February 2012, Press Gazette, the UK's journalism reviewer, estimated the total annual circulation of *Men's Health* as 221,176 and *FHM* as 140,176 issues (Ponsford, 2012). Press Gazette does not record the circulations of *Attitude* and *Gay Times*, though according to each magazine's respective media packs for 2011, *Attitude's* annual circulation was 75,000 and *Gay Times'* was 68,143 issues (Tassie, 2011; Todd, 2011).

One issue from each of the four magazines from each of the four seasons (spring, summer, autumn and winter) of 2012 and 2011 were obtained for coding. Attempts were made to obtain the same monthly issues of each of the four magazines (from 2012 and 2011) but this was not possible for every issue. A full list of issues is available upon request from the first author. In total, 32 magazine issues were analysed<sup>2</sup>.

## **Procedure**

As recommended by Bauer (2000) and Luyt (2011), coding categories were devised both through previous empirical findings as well as through pilot testing of the codes on a sample of the material. This inductive-deductive process allows for comparisons of findings of previous studies as well as codes that fit the material well (Luyt, 2011). Codes used in previous content analyses of images of men were adapted for use in the current study by making them more specific and/or comprehensive. These included age, facial attractiveness, and body type codes from Buote et al. (2011), the nudity, chest hair and ethnicity codes from Saucier and Caron (2008), and the dismemberment and sexualisation codes from Rohlinger (2002). Additionally, codes for the type of articles and adverts featured were adapted from Saucier and Caron (2008), Taylor (2005) and Labre (2005). Finally, as amount of head hair

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<sup>2</sup> There is no set convention for the number of issues needed in a content analysis. Previous content analyses' sample sizes have ranged from 8 issues (Buote, Wilson, Strahan, Gazzola, & Papps, 2011) to 53 issues (Taylor, 2005). Eight issues per magazine type (gay and straight) is, however, comparable to Lanzieri and Cook (2013) who analysed, on average, 3.5 and 4.9 issues per gay and straight male magazine, respectively.

has not been assessed before, a code was created for purpose. All codes were piloted by the first (a White British male in his twenties) and second authors (a White Australian female in her forties) on previous issues of each of the four magazines (these issues were not used in the analysis). Coding took part in four consecutive stages: (1) Images featuring men, (2) Images featuring women, (3) Appearance advertisements and (4) Appearance articles.

### **Coding scheme.**

*Images featuring men.* Any adult man (18+ years) in an image over 4.25cm<sup>2</sup> was coded. Children were not coded and women were coded separately. If an image featured the same model more than once, this was treated as one instance unless the image differed significantly.

There were six codes for the physical appearance attributes of the male model including: Age: (1a) Very young (under 25 years), (1b) Young (26-40 years), (1c) Middle-aged (40-60) and (1d) Older (60+); Facial attractiveness: (2a) Symmetrical facial features and unblemished skin (no obvious wrinkles, spots, or discolouration), (2b) Non-symmetrical facial features, and/ or unblemished skin and (2c) Other/unknown; Body type: (3a) Thin, (3b) Average, (3c) Ambiguously average or mesomorphic – model's level of muscularity and/or leanness obscured but evident model is not thin, hypomesomorphic, overweight or obese, (3d) Mesomorphic - sufficiently low level of body fat and high degree of muscularity that the outline of his muscles are visible (e.g., biceps, abdominals), (3e) Hypomesomorphic – extreme level of muscularity where veins are present akin to a bodybuilder, (3f) Overweight – endomorphic body shape, excess weight is visible particularly around stomach, (3g) Obese – heavily overweight; Head hair amount: (4a) Full head of hair, (4b) Some recession of hair, (4c) Bald, (4d) Shaved and (4e) Unable to tell/ other; Ethnicity (as visible to reader): (5a) White, (5b) Black, (5c) Asian, (5d) Mixed Race and (5e) Unknown; and Chest hair amount:

(6a) Model is clothed/unknown, (6b) No chest hair, (6c) Some chest hair visible and (6d) A lot of chest hair visible.

Further, these images were coded for degree of nudity and objectification (i.e., sexualisation and dismemberment). The specific codes follow: Nudity: (7a) Fully clothed, (7b) Shirtless, (7c) In underwear only, (7d) Naked – genitals covered and (7e) Naked – genitals shown; Sexualisation: (8a) None, (8b) Subtle - model part undressed, two models in suggestive pose and (8c) Explicit - model in sexual pose (i.e. focus on crotch, model with phallic prop etc.); and Dismemberment, where part or all of a model's body is featured without their face visible (Rohlinger, 2002): (9a) None and (9b) Dismembered.

***Images featuring women.*** Any adult woman in an image over 4.25cm<sup>2</sup> was coded. One code was constructed specifically for images of women: Conformity to the female appearance ideal: (1a) Yes - from what is visible model appears to be: young (under 40 years of age), White, thin and has medium or larger sized breasts, (1b) Yes except for one attribute– model is not young, (1c) Yes and model is not White, (1d) Yes except model is not thin or has small breasts, (1e) No - model conforms to two or fewer of the attributes above and (1g) Unable to tell. The following codes used for images of men were also used to code images of women: (2) Nudity, (3) Sexualisation and (4) Dismemberment.

***Appearance adverts.*** All full-page adverts were counted whether or not they contained images of men or women. Those that were for appearance products (e.g., clothes, cosmetics, protein shakes, underwear) were coded as appearance focussed.

***Appearance-focused articles.*** Any articles listed in the magazine's content page were counted. Those that encouraged behaviour change or product purchase to change appearance (including weight loss and muscle building) were coded as appearance-focused. Additionally,

articles featuring celebrities with accompanying sexy/attractive photos were also coded into this category.

### Results

The second author randomly selected one of each of the magazines (two issues from 2012 and two from 2011) for independent double coding with the first author. Across the 68 codes (17 for each magazine) inter-rater reliability was acceptable for 62 in the first instance ( $k = .72 - 1.00$ ). For the six codes (e.g., Body Type of images of men in *Attitude* magazine) that did not have acceptable reliability ( $k < .70$ ) the authors met and revised their coding appropriately. Once the reliability of the coding was acceptable, the first author proceeded to code the rest of the 32 magazines.

A series of chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the gay men's magazines (*Attitude* and *Gay Times*) and the straight men's magazines (*Men's Health* and *FHM*) in terms of the physical, nudity and objectification codes of the images of men and women, and the number of appearance –focused adverts and articles featured. Cramer's  $V$  statistic, a chi-square effect size which can be interpreted using the following size guidelines specified by Pallant (2010):  $r = .01$  indicating small,  $r = .30$  indicating medium and  $r = .50$  indicating large, is also presented.

#### **Do the Gay Men's Magazines Feature More Images of Men that are Appearance Ideal, and Objectified in Comparison to the Straight Men's Magazines?**

Across all magazines, the majority of images of men were coded as very young or young (82.3%), having symmetrical and unblemished faces (81.3%), mesomorphic (44.0%), having full heads of hair (76.2%), White (88.8%) and when their chests were visible having no chest hair (80.0%). Many of the images had physical characteristics obscured i.e., were

ambiguously average or mesomorphic (36.2%) or had unknown -facial characteristics, -age, -body type and -head hair amount (8.8-15.5%). Few were non-appearance ideal: i.e., were in mid- /later- life (9.9%), had non-symmetrical and/or blemished faces (4.1%), were thin/average/hypomesomorphic/overweight/obese (11.2%) had some hair recession/were bald (5.3%) or were not White (10.2%). Finally, many of the images were fully clothed (55.9%), not sexualised (65.9%) and most were not dismembered (94.1%).

The chi-square analyses showed a significant difference between the magazine types on Age  $\chi^2(4) = 94.22; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .14$ , Facial Attractiveness  $\chi^2(2) = 53.54; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .10$ , Body Type  $\chi^2(6) = 509.93; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .32$ , Head hair amount  $\chi^2(4) = 64.55; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .11$ , Ethnicity  $\chi^2(2) = 76.74; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ , Chest hair amount  $\chi^2(3) = 574.34; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .34$ , Nudity  $\chi^2(4) = 825.56; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .41$ , Dismemberment  $\chi^2(1) = 2.75; p = .097$ , Cramer's  $V = .02$  and Sexualisation  $\chi^2(2) = 1319.80; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .52$ .

More specifically, analyses of the standardized residuals revealed that there were more images of men in the gay genre magazines coded as very young, as having symmetrical and unblemished faces, as being mesomorphic, as having full heads of hair, as having none- or some- chest hair visible, as being shirtless, in underwear only and naked, and as subtly- or explicitly sexualised compared to the images of men in the straight genre magazines. These results support the first hypothesis. Percentages and cross tabulation statistics are presented in Table 1.

### **Do the Straight Men's Magazines Feature More Images of Women that are Appearance Ideal and Objectification in Comparison to the Gay Men's Magazines?**

Across the magazines three quarters of the images of women were appearance ideal (80.6%), more than a third displayed some degree of nudity (40.7%) and more than half were

sexualized (52.9%). Few were dismembered (3.5%). The chi-square analyses showed a significant difference between the magazines types on Conformity to appearance ideal  $\chi^2 (5) = 191.30; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .41$ , Nudity  $\chi^2 (2) = 315.44; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .52$ , Sexualisation  $\chi^2 (2) = 371.14; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .57$  and Dismemberment  $\chi^2 (1) = 19.48; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ .

More specifically, the standardized residuals revealed there were fewer images of women in the gay genre magazines that were coded as appearance ideal, as nude, as dismembered and as explicitly sexualised. These results support the second hypothesis. Percentages and cross tabulation statistics are presented in Table 2.

### **Do the Gay Men's Magazines Differ in the Proportion of Appearance Adverts in Comparison to the Straight Men's Magazines?**

Across the magazines of 1,193 adverts coded, 573 (48.0%) focussed on appearance. The chi-square analysis showed a significant difference, with the gay genre magazines featuring significantly fewer appearance adverts than the straight genre magazines  $\chi^2 (1) = 233.47; p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .44$  These results do not support the third hypothesis. Percentages and cross tabulation statistics are presented in Table 3.

### **Do the Gay Men's Magazines Differ in the Proportion of Appearance-Focused Articles in Comparison to the Straight Men's Magazines?**

Across the magazines of 866 articles coded, 273 (31.5%) focussed on appearance. The chi-square analysis showed a significant difference in the number of appearance articles between the magazines  $\chi^2 (1) = 4.06; p = .044$ , Cramer's  $V = .07$ , though analyses of the residuals revealed these differences were not in fact significant. These results do not support the final hypothesis. Percentages and cross tabulations are presented in Table 3.

### Discussion

The present study aimed to compare the appearance potency of the gay male and straight male subcultures by a detailed content analysis of images of men and women, advertisements and articles in magazines aimed at gay and straight men. The major result is clear. Images of men in the gay men's magazines were more likely to be appearance ideal compared to images of men presented in the straight men's magazines. That is, the former images were more often very young, mesomorphic, had symmetrical and unblemished faces, full heads of hair and little or no chest hair. Further, the images in the gay men's magazines were more likely to be nude and sexualised. Conversely, the straight men's magazines featured fewer images of men that were appearance ideal and a greater diversity of male appearances. As the images of men were less likely to be nude, they were also more likely to have their chest hair covered and less likely to be sexualised. Images of men who were in later life, were Asian or had a lot of chest hair and images of men that were dismembered (where the body but not face of the model is visible) may not have differed between the two magazines types as they featured equally rarely. These findings are in line with other media content analyses showing images of dismembered men (7%; Conley & Ramsey, 2011) non-White men (5%; Saucier & Caron, 2008), older men (5-7%; Buote et al., 2011; Saucier & Caron, 2008) and men with visible chest hair (1%; Saucier & Caron, 2008) are rarely featured.

Finally, the majority of both magazine types' images of men were young, though the gay men's magazines featured more images that were very young and fewer in mid-life. This difference may reflect the gay male subculture's particular idolization of the Twink (the young, slim, smooth-chested White gay man; Filiault & Drummond, 2007).

These findings are consistent with that of Lanzieri and Cook (2013) who found that male images in gay men's magazines had lower body fat than in straight men's magazines. Our findings extend these initial findings by showing that images of men in gay men's magazines are more likely than those in straight men's magazines to conform to cultural appearance ideals beyond their leanness and muscularity, in particular, in their youth, amount of head hair, and facial symmetry.

The present study also adds to previous research by examining the portrayal of women across the two magazines types. The majority (80.6%) of women across magazines conformed to the appearance ideal (i.e., they were White, young, slim and had medium-large breasts). Around a third of the women were also nude (29.9%) and sexualized (40.2%). Here, unsurprisingly, it was found that the straight men's magazines featured more images of appearance ideal, nude, sexualized and dismembered women than the gay men's magazines. These findings support other studies that suggest that Western objectification of the female body is ubiquitous; particularly so in media targeted at straight men (Buote et al., 2011; Conley & Ramsey, 2011).

Both types of magazines featured a significant proportion of adverts for appearance products and articles focussing on appearance. Other research on men's magazines has also found a high proportion of such content (Labre, 2005; Saucier & Caron, 2008; Taylor, 2005). The gay men's magazines did not differ in the number of appearance articles, but did have fewer appearance advertisements, than the straight men's magazines. This is perhaps surprising and likely attributable to the high frequency of protein supplement adverts in the straight men's magazines, particularly *Men's Health*. In addition, the proportion and selection of adverts featured will be dictated upon the magazines by market forces and advertiser's preferences. For example, the gay men's market may already be saturated with appearance advertisements and therefore advertisers may seek to capitalize on the relatively untapped



straight male market. Alternatively the fewer appearance adverts in the gay men's magazines may reflect companies prejudices about advertising in an LGBT publication, as the Editor of *Attitude* magazine, Matthew Todd, recently criticised (Goldfingle, 2014).

The findings regarding images of women, appearance adverts and appearance focussed articles do not support a greater appearance potency in the gay male subculture. Nevertheless, the sheer number of appearance ideal and sexualized images of men in these magazines far outnumbered the other content investigated (images of women, appearance adverts and articles). Thus, taking all content together, the gay men's magazines were more appearance potent than the straight men's magazines. As media are such a pervasive influence, this supports the greater appearance potency of the gay male subculture assumed in explanations of gay men's body image concerns (Martins et al., 2007; Silberstein et al., 1989). Researchers have been asked to base assertions regarding gay men on evidence (Kane, 2010). By systematically appraising gay and straight men's magazines for their appearance potency, the present study goes some way towards doing this.

It is important to emphasize that this study does not of itself speak to the effects of magazine content on gay or straight men. Nonetheless, the results suggest these magazines are appearance potent for both gay and straight men, based on our current understanding of what media content plausibly has detrimental effect on men's body image (Aubrey & Taylor, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Recent support of Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) suggests that gay men's experience of body dissatisfaction is partially related to sociocultural sexual objectification (Martins et al., 2007; Michaels et al., 2013). Our findings show that although the gay men's magazines had a high proportion of nude and sexualised male images, and appearance related content, so too did the straight men's magazines (albeit to a smaller degree). Perhaps these former magazines are more emblematic

of their subculture for gay men for whom the effects of sociocultural objectification are experienced regularly. In contrast, for straight men there exist many other magazines and spheres of culture that do not focus on appearance and do not objectify men (e.g., of the top 14 straight men's magazines four i.e., *Wired*, *BBC Focus*, *RWD* and *How It Works* focus on the topics on science, sport, business and technology; Ponsford, 2014). Therefore straight men are less likely to experience sociocultural objectification and subsequently are less likely to experience body dissatisfaction, on average, compared to gay men as studies consistently show (Morrison et al., 2004).

It should also be noted that the specific magazines examined were not necessarily homogeneous within type. The images of men and women featured, as well as the number of appearance adverts and articles, differed according to magazine title reflecting the somewhat different purposes and independence of each magazine title. For example, *Men's Health* focuses (or at least claims to focus; see Labre, 2005) on *Men's Health* whereas *FHM* positions itself more as a 'lads' magazine.

In addition, not all magazine content within a single magazine issue is uniformly appearance potent. In innovative research by Buote et al. (2011), the effect of heterogeneous media on viewer's body dissatisfaction is highlighted. Like other experimental exposure studies (Barlett et al., 2008; Blond, 2008), the authors found that male participants exposed to mesomorphic images of men experienced significant increases in their body dissatisfaction. Other participants who were exposed to these same images of men in addition to images of men who were not appearance ideal (who were older or were not mesomorphic) experienced no change in their body dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that the presence of images of 'non appearance ideal' men may have a cancellation effect on the effects that would normally results from mesomorphic images; a finding echoed by participants in qualitative research (Diedrichs, Lee, & Kelly, 2011; Fawkner & McMurray, 2002).

The current findings with UK magazines support previous less detailed content analyses that have documented that the majority of images of men are appearance ideal in US media (Buote et al., 2011; Dallesasse & Kluck, 2013; Law & Labre, 2002; Saucier & Caron, 2008). Thus the same male appearance ideals are promoted in magazines from at least two Western cultures. The majority of the images of women also were appearance ideal, nude and sexualised. In addition, the magazines devoted, on average, at least 23% of their adverts and at least 28% of their articles to focussing on appearance. This speaks to the ubiquity of the sexualisation and promotion of cultural appearance ideals in contemporary media (e.g., Buote et al., 2011). These findings are consistent with theory suggesting that media are pertinent in men's and women's body dissatisfaction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

A limitation of the current study is that only two titles of each magazine type were analysed. However, these were the most read men's magazines in the UK (during 2012). Nonetheless, there was some heterogeneity of type. Future studies could analyse more magazine titles. Secondly, magazines were selected for analysis as they attempt to capitalize on distinct gay male and straight male subcultures. However, it is important to acknowledge that as media migrates online, these magazines (following print media circulation trends in general) have declining circulations (Ponsford, 2014). It is therefore important that researchers interested in media consumption explore online media such as social media, pornography sites, as well as the recent creation and popular use of mobile phone dating and sex applications (e.g., *Tinder* and *Grindr*). This media is likely to have greater salience and, indeed, more relevance in men's lives today.

The results of the current study as well as others (Conley & Ramsey, 2011; Rohlinger, 2002) show there are myriad ways in which images of men and women can be sexualised and

this differs between magazine type and gender of the person in the image featured. This will partially relate to gay men's magazines featuring men as both objects of reader's desires as well as aspirational ideals. In contrast, straight men's magazines are more likely to feature women as objects of reader's desires and men as the subjects of aspirational ideals. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the conceptualization of appearance potency in this study did not explore the meaning of content whether it is aspirational or the object of desire (or both) to consumers. Future research could usefully employ then Elliott and Elliott's (2005) 'readership-response' method (in which a participant guides the researcher through their responses to media). In addition to employing other qualitative techniques to better understand men's experiences of the media, given that consumption is a reciprocal, complex and highly individualized process (Elliott & Elliott, 2005; Ferguson, 2013; Wykes & Gunter, 2005).

### **Implications**

The current study found that men's magazines frequently feature appearance ideal and sexualized images of both men and women as well as adverts and articles that promote the pursuit of these ideals. Although the effects on men of these ideals are not definitively established, they are, at the very least, unrepresentative of the general population. Interventions that aim to reduce body dissatisfaction should continue to highlight the frequency and unattainability of the cultural appearance ideal. These interventions should also focus on engaging in health behaviours for the sake of health and discourage the engagement of behaviours for the purpose of appearance change (not least because such motivations tend to lead to unhealthy behaviours (Putterman & Linden, 2004). Such interventions should be particularly beneficial when targeted towards gay men, a population who report greater body dissatisfaction and associated health outcomes and who appear to face greater appearance potency.

**Conclusion**

The UK men's magazines examined in the present study are clearly appearance potent. Further, gay men's magazines appear to be more appearance potent in comparison to straight men's magazines, with a greater number of images of men that conform to the appearance ideal and are sexualized. Support aimed at alleviating men's body dissatisfaction may usefully highlight and critique the appearance potency of the subcultures in which gay (and straight) men live.

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