

Male Body Image Issues

Whether it's shown through a daytime talk show, a magazine article, a testimonial on a commercial, or even an ad at a bus stop, the issue of female body image dominates the media as a hot topic. Women are constantly noted for their struggle to lose weight, look better, and dress to impress. One large group of society that is often left out, though, is 49% of humanity:

Men.

I have never seen a man shown on *Oprah*, crying because someone told him that he's not attractive. The male stereotype is that of strength, machismo, and a bold ability to handle any situation without hesitation. I have found that this mentality, in itself, can be a body image. Not every guy has the ability to move a coffee table by himself, and psychological discrimination based on weight or appearance is not solely limited to women. I see the viewpoints as simple differences between the gender stereotypes – while society accepts a woman who will openly talk about her insecurities, the man in the same situation will be frowned upon. As a result, he must work harder, and repress any problems that he may have with his appearance.

I am not attempting to describe men who are athletic, or men who have a certain purpose for training. Such a group has a very specific purpose, and a good reason to work out more than the average person. Instead, I am referring to many young people who I am familiar with, who choose to go to the gym 5 days a week just for the sake of appearance. Many gym companies relentlessly advertise to young men, as well as women, on college campuses, and the pressure increases on males to have the right body in order to maintain status among friends.

The consequence of this is much different from the anorexic and bulimic tendencies that women have. I have noticed that men who have body-image issues will go to the gym four or five times a week, and also take multiple supplements in order to increase strength, lose fat, and gain muscle. What is the motivation for all of this work? Is it to simply be physically stronger? Is it to be healthier? Or, in the end, is it really just to impress people?

Two popular supplements I often see taken by these "body builders" are protein and creatine. Both of these come in the forms of pills and dissolving powders, and the latter was originally intended to be used by patients with muscular

degeneration diseases. There are no proven harmful side effects of either supplement, but after knowing several men who take them, I have also not seen them achieve tangible results. Some of my male peers increase their food intake by 1000 calories a day, and then cite these supplements as the reason for muscle gain.

I have also observed men who take these supplements along with their workouts, but not actually change their diet. This usually ends in no actual results, and simply begs the question of motives. Why do people take these supplements? I frequently see these college males being frustrated and self-deprecating.

Football players, basketball players, swimmers, and other athletes have a very specific purpose to work out, and they get results through their exercise. Most of the gym gurus I know have no sports-motivated reason to work out fanatically, and have exhibited signs of serious self-criticism, and even self-loathing.

We all recognize the pressure on women with the media-portrayed crash dieting, plastic surgery, and even health-oriented tactics. Men have similar media and social pressures, but it seems that little attention is paid to its impact. A man who goes to the gym every day of the week and takes supplements is seen as strong and commanding of his life, and while this can absolutely be a good habit, it can also be the result of deep-rooted insecurities.

The question men have to ask themselves is simply, "Why am I doing this?" Not much fault can be found if they do it for increased strength, health, and confidence, but it is equally important for men as it is for women to acknowledge if it is a body image issue that needs attention. The philosophy that the end justifies the means may be worth questioning, as it seems that many men are building more muscle than self-awareness.