

## Young men who feel body shame less hopeful about relationships, study finds

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(Medical Xpress)—It's no longer just Barbie dolls that evoke a sense of unattainable beauty. Now, it seems G.I. Joe's biceps and six-pack abs are doing the same. Increasingly, objectification and heightened masculinity in images of men is saturating popular culture and the media.

A new University of Nebraska-Lincoln study examines how this objectification affects men's body image and how that in turn affects men's hopes of developing social and [romantic relationships](#).

Specifically, the study found that young men who are more self-aware of their appearance are more likely to have body shame—and are less likely to be hopeful of developing social and romantic relationships.

Brian Cole, a psychology graduate student, worked with Meghan Davidson, assistant professor of [educational psychology](#), and Sarah Gervais, assistant professor of psychology, to look at how [body image](#) and body shame can lead to lowered hope in college-aged men.

Cole said the study is among the first to look more closely at these specific effects related to objectification of men.

"We're becoming more aware of men being objectified," Cole said. "There is also a larger awareness of the [socialization](#) of men. Boys are socialized in their gender. There is a study that looked at action figures and how they've changed since the '70s. They've become much bulkier, more muscular. That was the impetus for this study."

The scientists recruited 227 college men, most of them white and heterosexual, to complete a survey that asked them about their appearance self-awareness, as well as their feelings about their abilities to maintain and pursue relationships. The results provided evidence that men who often focused on their appearance were more likely to be unhappy with their bodies, which the researchers call body shame. The same men who thought about their appearance a lot and were dissatisfied with their bodies were also much less hopeful about their relationships.

"What was most surprising to me about the research was that the relationships between self-objectification and hope emerged among men," Davidson said. "Objectification (research) has been primarily conducted among women, and so finding similar detrimental associations among men was a surprising result."

Researchers examined hope, a multifaceted psychological state that involves both perceived confidence and opportunities the men had to maintain good relationships and pursue relationships. They found that men with body shame did not have either the motivation or the pathways to pursue relationships, indicating that they lacked hope.

"What we find when we look at the data is that men who think about how they look a lot experience body shame and they're not motivated in their romantic relationships and they can't think of ways to get a romantic partner," Gervais said. "They're thinking a lot that their appearance is really important and that they don't stack up. As a result, they're not feeling too good about their chances."

Gervais, who focused her previous research on the objectification of women, said she believes men are becoming more self-conscious as media hypes more muscular builds.

"You see objectified images of women everywhere," she said. "But, the

truth is, if you walk through the grocery store lines, you're going to see that there are body builders on magazines and a lot of really attractive men there as well. That has to be having some sort of impact on men, too.

"This is not a static thing. Even recent media analyses show that the images that are prevalent in the media for men are becoming increasingly muscular, so I wonder if we had done the study 10 years ago, if we would have the same outcomes."

The next step, researchers said, is to look at a broader spectrum of men. They said they believe that their new findings will likely hold true in gay men, but not as [men](#) age.

The scientists are also hoping to bring the line of research into a laboratory setting to study how direct body-shaming feedback affects general hope.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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