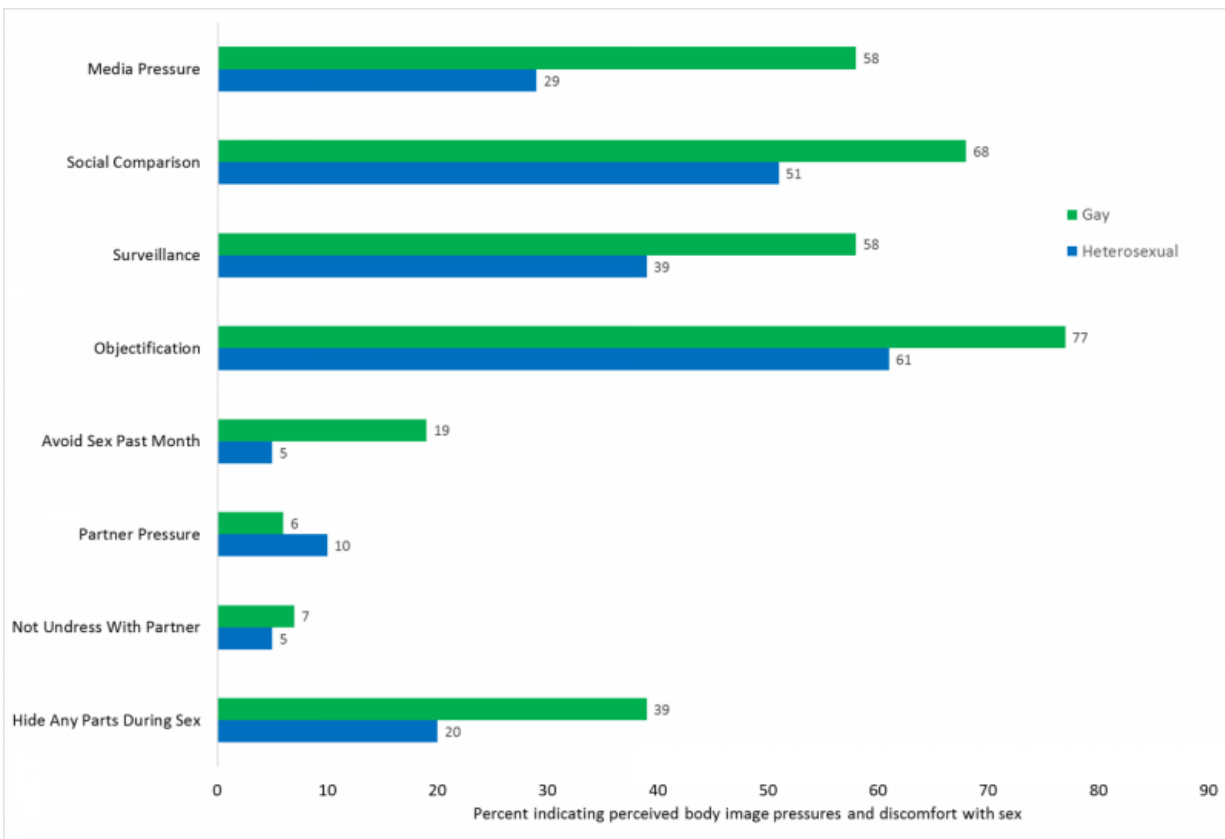


# Researcher examines body satisfaction in national study of men

March 8 2016, by Sheri Ledbetter



Graphic depiction of gay versus heterosexual behaviors based on body image. Credit: Chapman University

A Chapman University psychologist has just published the results of a national study examining how men feel about their bodies and their

attractiveness. Long thought to be an issue primarily faced by women, body dissatisfaction was identified as a common issue among men in the largest examination of body image to date.

"We analyzed reports from 116,356 [men](#) across five national studies. Between 20 and 40 percent of men reported feeling dissatisfied with their overall physical [appearance](#), weight, and/or [muscle tone](#) and size," said David Frederick, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at Chapman University and lead author of the study. "The majority of men also felt that they were judged based on their appearance and reported that they compared their appearance to that of others at social events."

Men classified as "normal" weight tended to feel positively about their appearance, whereas men who were "obese" tended to feel negatively. However, in an interesting twist, most men who were classified as "overweight" felt satisfied with their appearance.

"Men can feel pressure to appear strong and powerful, so having some additional mass does not necessarily lead to [body dissatisfaction](#)" said Dr. Frederick. "The fact that most 'overweight' men felt satisfied might seem surprising, but the medical category for overweight does not correlate well to what people consider to be overweight socially—for example, George W. Bush was medically 'overweight' during his presidency."

## **Heterosexual and Gay Men**

The research also looked at differences between heterosexual and gay men. Much of the existing research looking at these differences has been based on small samples, where gay men are recruited from political or social support organizations. This study's large sample size allowed the researchers to look at gay men and heterosexual men who were recruited in the same manner.

The study showed that gay men were much more likely than heterosexual men to report feeling pressure from the media to look attractive, to avoid having sex because of how they felt about their bodies, and to desire [cosmetic surgery](#).

People's weight and sexual orientation were both related to their feelings of comfort during sex. Among heterosexual men, 20 percent of [normal weight](#) men reported hiding an aspect of their body during sex, most often their stomach, and this was also true for 29 percent of the obese men. Only 5 percent of normal weight heterosexual men had avoided having sex at least once in the past month because of how they feel about their bodies compared to 10 percent of [obese men](#). Among gay men, the rates were much higher, with 20 percent normal weight gay men avoiding sex and 32 percent of obese gay men avoiding sex.

Some of the other key findings included:

- Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to feel uncomfortable wearing a swimsuit in public (26 percent vs. 16 percent), to be dissatisfied with physical appearance (29 percent vs. 21 percent), and to be dissatisfied with muscle tone and size (45 percent vs. 30 percent).
- Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to report interest in cosmetic surgery (51 percent vs. 23 percent), to have considered cosmetic surgery (36 percent vs. 12 percent), and to have had cosmetic surgery (7 percent vs. 1 percent).
- Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to have been on a weight loss diet in the past year (37 percent vs. 29 percent) and to have use diet pills (12 percent vs. 5 percent), but did not differ in whether they had exercised in an attempt to lose weight in the past year (57 percent vs. 55 percent).
- Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to report feeling judged based on their appearance (77 percent vs. 61

percent), to routinely think about how they look (58 percent vs. 39 percent), to compare their appearance to others at social events (68 percent vs. 51 percent), and to feel pressure from the media to be attractive (58 percent vs. 29 percent). However, they were less likely to feel pressure from a partner to lose weight (6 percent vs. 10 percent).

The study, called, *Male Body Image: The Roles of Sexual Orientation and Body Mass Index across Five National Studies*, examined five national datasets with sample sizes ranging from 3,237 to 42,332 participants. The total sample size across the five studies was 111,958 [heterosexual men](#) and 4,398 [gay men](#). Participants were asked questions about how dissatisfied to satisfied they were with aspects of their body, whether they engage in attempts to modify their appearance, and whether they felt social pressures related to their appearance. The study is published in the journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* which is affiliated with the American Psychological Association. The average ages across the samples ranged from 35 to 50.

**More information:** The link to the paper at the journal website can be found here: [psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2016-07277-001/](https://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2016-07277-001/)

Provided by Chapman University

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