

Men say it's not masculine to talk about body image concerns

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Many males think talking about body dissatisfaction is socially undesirable and associate it with a sense of shame, a University of Queensland study has found.

UQ School of Psychology Ph.D. candidate Beth O'Gorman said the findings highlight the importance of normalizing men's discussions about the issue.

"Men in our study perceived [body image](#) as a feminine issue, but male [body dissatisfaction](#) is equally as common and extreme levels of [body](#) dissatisfaction in men are associated with similarly negative outcomes," Ms. O'Gorman said.

"Study participants believed that male body dissatisfaction was less common than female body dissatisfaction, and associated with less risk to men's physical and mental health.

"Both body dissatisfaction and expressing [emotional distress](#) were perceived as socially undesirable for men, making the discussion of body dissatisfaction a type of double-jeopardy of behaviors contrary to what they believe it means to be masculine.

"Moreover, the stigma associated with male body dissatisfaction prevents men from talking to their friends or seeking professional support."

Ms. O'Gorman's research was conducted in collaboration with UQ Honorary Associate Professor Jeanie Sheffield, Dr. Scott Griffiths from the University of Melbourne, and psychologist Ruby Clarke.

Seven focus groups were conducted with a total of 40 Australian male university students, aged between 17 and 53 years.

"Study participants described a lack of media representation of men's body dissatisfaction, which contributed to a lack of awareness of body dissatisfaction among men," Ms. O'Gorman said.

"Furthermore, when this issue is discussed in the media or with friends, it is often treated with less sensitivity than female body dissatisfaction.

"Peer body comparisons were more common than media body comparisons, and friendship groups were found to be important in shaping participants' evaluations of their appearance and how they looked after their bodies, particularly when it came to exercise, diet, supplement use, and knowledge and attitudes towards steroids.

"At a broad level, it is important to foster an awareness of male body image concerns, challenge the notion that body image concerns are an exclusively female issue, and normalize both the experience and disclosure of body image concerns in men.

"Men need to be encouraged to talk to each other about their concerns and clinicians should also consider asking their clients about their relationship with their [physical appearance](#), even if body [dissatisfaction](#) isn't the presenting problem."

The study was published in *Clinical Psychologist*.

More information: Beth O'Gorman et al. "Guys don't talk about their bodies": A qualitative investigation of male body dissatisfaction and sociocultural influences in a sample of 40 Australian males, *Clinical Psychologist* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/cp.12198](https://doi.org/10.1111/cp.12198)

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