"TRAIN REAL HARD, BROTHER!" MEDIA SELF-ASSIMILATION OF
MASCULINE IDEALS ON MALE BODY IMAGE AND PHYSICAL STRENGTH

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"TRAIN REAL HARD, BROTHER!" MEDIA SELF-ASSIMILATION OF MASCULINE IDEALS ON MALE BODY IMAGE AND PHYSICAL STRENGTH

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ABSTRACT

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Male body image research focuses on deleterious effects of a muscular ideal on positive self-regard following self-ideal comparisons. Imbuing oneself with the masculine ideal may buffer against effects. Media self-assimilation (MSA) may attenuate differences in responses. MSA with the ideal could instill higher self-regard and provide impetus for achieving one's ideal self with respect to the collective ideal. Study 1 analyzed men's relationships with media role models. Results were not significant for the theoretical model but provided evidence of MSA's primacy to PSR. Study 2 was a manipulation of MSA as participants wrote narratives about themselves as their favorite (or a disliked) superhero. Participants' grip strength increased following MSA, but only with a favorite superhero. Confidence in performing a physical task was augmented by MSA. Results demonstrate how embodying personal and collective ideals bolsters physical strength and confidence in ability. Narratives served as a teleological proxy by creating a coherent view of the self as part of both a personal and cultural ideal.
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"Eat your vitamins, say your prayers, and train real hard!" Hulk Hogan expected adherence from his "Hulkamaniacs" to these demandments. His third maxim left a lasting impression on young men as a litany of characters pursued and formulated cultural exemplars of masculinity (e.g., Soulliere & Blair, 2004). Anecdotal accounts illuminate a dark side of the pursuit of male physical perfection. Wrestling great Chris Jericho (2007) recounted several instances of how striving for physical perfection may have contributed to Chris Benoit's untimely demise in his self-critical fervor to emulate Dynamite Kid. Empirical studies demonstrate further other consequences of the pursuit: low self-satisfaction (Baird & Grieve, 2006; Bartlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007), body dysmorphia (Grieve & Helmick, 2008), and risk taking behavior (Karazsia & Crowther, 2009).

While not discounting valid and alarming findings, they represent only one outcome. The question remains of how to parse negative outcomes from positive. Studies concerning exposure and motivations to achieve the ideal operate on social comparison processes in which a person recognizes disparity between the self and what is ostensibly an ideal (Daniel & Bridges, 2010; Karazsia & Crowther, 2009). However, these studies
did not readily address changes in self-perception or processes independent to social comparisons. Research also indicates processes of body image and self-perception improvement when exposed to the masculine ideal (Nikkelin, Anschutz, Ha, & Engels, 2013; Young, Gabriel, & Hollar, 2013). Results driven by wide self-ideal disparities may not address when one identifies with or even becomes his specific ideal. That is, a unification of personal and cultural ideals to shape one's identity.

Muscular ideals correlate with self-dissatisfaction through social comparison frameworks (Karazsia & Crowther, 2009; Martins et al., 2007). Eliminating ideal-self disparity should buffer an individual from feelings of inadequacy. When media figures representing a masculine ideal become accessible to a person, it reduces disparity. This critical influence in positive effects involves the representation of cultural ideals and shaping audience behavior via vicarious interactions between audience members and media personae called parasocial relationships (PSR, Horton & Wohl, 1956). The media figure forms a role model relationship with the audience member as a behavioral template (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Audience members then incorporate ideal characteristics of the media figure into their self-concept from perceived heightened congruity between media figure and self, fostering ideal attainment (Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008; Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, & Arkin, 2014).

Parasocial Relationships and Media Self-Assimilation

Parasocial relationships simulate real-life interactions in the minds of an audience member (Gardner & Knowles, 2008). Such a relationship creates ties to otherwise inaccessible media figures. These ties ostensibly serve as basis for perceiving a media
figure as a role model (De Backer, 2012), and brings the media figure into the audience members' plane of awareness (Giles, 2002). The audience member and media figure's realms of existence overlap. Audience members can enter a media-based collective (Gabriel & Young, 2011) as means to satisfy belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Despite compelling evidence of the ideal collective's influence, it may not necessarily address another fundamental human motivation with respect to the collective. That is, a person's striving to become a paragon within the ideal (Leary, 2004). Simple collective membership may not result in ideal attainment. Research from Young et al. (2012, 2013) indicated that PSR allows individuals to compare themselves with similar others (e.g., Mussweiler, 2003). During a disparity reduction, Young et al. did not address the degree to which they embody the ideal. That is, eliminate comparison altogether. Derrick et al. (2008, 2009) found PSR buffers self-esteem and fosters ideal self attainment. However, this suggests that the relationship is the primary component. Little concern is given to the self's role in assimilating into the media.

I have termed this self-reconfiguration media self-assimilation (MSA). MSA derives from (a) identification, (b) narrative collective assimilation, and (c) self-expansion. Identification (Cohen, 2001), addresses "entering" media environments and congruity with fictional characters. Narrative collective assimilation (Gabriel & Young, 2011) sees behavioral and cognitive modification and enhancement via ideal collectives, i.e., media, as perceivers grow closer to an ideal. Self-expansion (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) concerns incorporating aspects of others into the self. In MSA, the media figure is the other, but the self-expansion is vicarious, as the other, the collective ideal, merges with the self but not vice versa.
Collective membership bolsters self-esteem and buffers from negative regard (cf. Anthony, Wood, & Holmes, 2007; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). The individual recognizes when he reaches optimum level for positive self-regard following MSA in the PSR, indicated to him via a sociometer, a gauge indicating one's group standing (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). Without MSA, the sociometer would alert the audience member of his inadequacy with respect to the ideal collective. During MSA, the individual can respond with appropriate behavior to keep oneself in good standing, thus bolstering self-regard (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Membership in the collective ideal buffers one against perceived inadequacies. One must adjust self-perception; a young man may perceive himself closer to or capable of the ideal. When adjusted, this should foster positive body image and catalyze one's objective growth to the masculine ideal. This coincides with Anthony, Holmes, and Wood (2007), who found the sociometer to be attuned to appearance concerns.

Following MSA, the individual should identify himself as able to behave in the context of a muscular, athletic collective. Once perceiving the self in the collective, the individual can become motivated to attain the ideal in a physical sense. Self-perception facilitates subsequent social behaviors (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). For example, the archetypal 98-pound weakling feels wimpy compared to elite athletes. To buffer against feelings of inadequacy, he assimilates aspects of the ideals into his own self. Not only is the ideal self more attainable, the individual feels confident and competent in their abilities to thrive in that domain. Research reports certain stereotypic primes to change self-perception and social behavior (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Huang, Ackerman, & Bargh, 2013; Nelson & Norton, 2005). Unlike those studies' less personally relevant
primes, these studies should allow meaningful self-reflection and change.

MSA offers potential primes. In contrast to social comparisons, individuals may be primed with personal ideals that become congruent with the self. An idea of personal ideals instills a sense of meaning and investment to the person that translates to everyday life (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). This provides basis for the individual to "stand out" and appear valuable to the collective and himself (Leary, 2004). The individual may move beyond similarity and adopt attitude congruency with the idyllic individual (e.g., Kawakami et al., 2012), thus providing impetus for personal and cultural ideal attainment. Congruence should occur via recognizing similarities with another. Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) found a link between vicarious experiences and self-other incorporation. Incorporating ideals may augment effects from self-perception as the ideal.

Such ideal incorporation may certainly translate to body image research, which may account for findings' bidirectionality (e.g., Young, Gabriel, & Sechrist, 2012; Young et al., 2013). Given this sociometer framework to explain the motivational factors for ideal attainment, along with certain mental faculties that buffer against the social comparisons that may trigger a sociometer alert, this thesis should conceptualize the origin of the masculine ideal and its manifestations through prevailing male body image research trends. It examines how men become their heroes through MSA without social comparisons and bolstering the self from recognizing inadequacies. Masculine role models provide motivational impetus of a proverbial Hogan pushing vicarious protégés because of a perceived physical ideal.
There may not be an immediate connection between the self and media in similar regard to the collective context and a sociometer. This collective emerges through PSR. PSR simulate real world interactions (Gardner & Knowles, 2008) and can foster feelings of similarity between self and other (Derrick et al., 2008). MSA furthers the relationship between both PSR parties as a single entity in the mind of the audience member. The person becomes the media figure in the PSR. A media figure held in high esteem by an audience will influence more than those who are not; exalted characters become idyllic templates for audiences. In this influence, perceiving oneself as ideal should lead to feeling as such, reducing dissatisfaction.

From role model relationships, audience members identify themselves with the media figure (Cohen, 2001). MSA should extend beyond recognizing similarities between media persona and self. PSR allows audience members entrance into the story while the personae "enter" the real world as if they are real to the audience (Gardner & Knowles, 2008). This could explain what Gabriel and Young (2011) reported as narrative collective assimilation with participants feeling like characters with whom they identify if the person incorporates behaviors of the other in the self. However, these studies only accounted for similarity and not congruency. Eyal and Te'eni-Harari (2013) mentioned that with PSR alone, a relationship with an ideal media figure could reduce one's body satisfaction among adolescents. Rather than joining the collective via similarity, one buffers himself from negative effects with self-other congruency.

Studies may not have considered when Hulk Hogan is salient to the "Hulkamaniac." Their studies relied on ad hoc self-other pairings that could have resulted in reduced self-regard rather than a natural pairing that is personally meaningful for the
individual. Satisfaction may rely on perceived similarity between the media figure and the media persona. Thoughts of social comparison catalyzed body dissatisfaction and negative mood in women viewing an ideal, but fantasizing (i.e., being the model) yielded higher body satisfaction and positive mood (Tiggemann, Polivy, & Hargreaves, 2009). These processes operate on a classic understanding of social comparison in terms of dissimilarity with another, even if that person does not represent a personal ideal for the individual. Young et al. (2012, 2013) demonstrated the effects of "Hulkamaniacs" thinking about a Hulk Hogan as buffered social comparison. Research has yet to find effects similar to Tiggemann et al. for men's self-ideal assimilation.

MSA, akin to identification, demonstrates perceptions of oneself as characters in stories. Results include participants' newfound abilities and perceptions as the protagonist and incorporating new ideas into one's own self-concept after reading a story about the character (Gabriel & Young, 2011; Sestir & Green, 2010), creating attitude congruency. Libby, Shaeffer, Eibach, and Slemmer (2007) found that placing a person in a protagonist position, i.e., first-person, would alter self-perception and subsequent behaviors congruent with that of a protagonist. Even radical differences between reader and protagonist yielded similar findings (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Huang, et al. (2013) found superpower-imbue ment to facilitate stronger self-control. A possible explanation may be the participant transports himself/herself into another world (Green & Brock, 2000), which Sestir and Green (2010) reported as occurring in parasocial relationships. Audience members enter the domain of the media personae, imbuing the self with features of the ideal vis-à-vis the group. Such feelings buffer negative esteems and may reaffirm one's own abilities (e.g., Steele, 1988). The audience feels part of the narrative
with ideal traits, allowing them to feel accepted in their perceived relationships.

Men experienced positive effects as well as women. Young et al. (2013) found viewing a very muscular image of a superhero, which he identified as a possible role model, resulted in men reporting higher self-satisfaction with their physique than an encounter with one to whom he had no connection. Regardless of personae's dimensional realism, engaging in PSR buffers one from low self-esteem (Derrick et al., 2008), alleviates loneliness (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009), and restores self-control (Derrick, 2013). This may stem from a connection with the persona as a self-extension. These studies have not investigated degree of self-extension.

**Origins and Processes of Masculine Ideals**

The mantra of male body image research incants detriments of muscularity in the media. This mentality dominates the topic with reports of lowered self-satisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009) and high objectification (Martins et al., 2007). Recent meta-analyses contend compelling evidence of negative effects (Bartlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008). An emerging body of research indicates, by establishing PSR with heroes and role models (Young et al., 2012; 2013), people buffer themselves from negative feelings about physical shortcomings. PSR with role models may be the basis of MSA with the character. Self-extension embodies masculine ideals and creates self-ideal consistency, thus alerting the individual that he is not only acceptable to the collective, but he is the ideal.

Men's body image centers on an ideal exemplar, a tapered build with a large, muscular chest and arms and narrow waist (Frederick & Haselton, 2007; Olivardia, Pope,
Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004). Young men deem musculature paramount to indicate physical prowess intersexually (Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001) and intrasexually (Sell, Cosmides, Tooby, Sznycer, von Rueden, & Gurven, 2009; Sell, Hone, & Pound, 2009). That is, one's ability to demonstrate virility (Gallup, White, & Gallup, 2007), dominance (Archer & Thanzami, 2007), and health (Montoya, 2007). Delton and Sell (2014) posit these dimensions and concepts co-evolved to recognize others' and one's virility in these domains, potentially providing motivation for ideal attainment.

The sociometer may alert the individual who is not feeling physically able to succeed compared to "fit" men of disconcerting shortcomings, invoking insecurity (e.g., Dijkstra & Buunk, 2001). One may strive for these ideals or readjust self-perception to make it possible for goal achievement. Media present these physical dimensions (e.g., Frederick & Haselton, 2007) paramount for success; the individual compares himself with this collective (Galioto & Crowther, 2013). Keeping himself in good group standing, he imbues himself with the characteristics needed for success. MSA should align the self with the collective, as assimilation in other contexts has previously proven successful.

Musculature may serve as the evolutionary basis for what culture recognizes as a masculine ideal. This is evident by such dimensions and ideals existing in Western culture and elsewhere (Archer & Thanzami, 2007; Frederick et al., 2007), associated with success. Culture subsequently propagates these ideals through media and associates them with success. Franzoi and Shields (1984) indicate upper body strength's influence to men's body-esteem, a concept formed by esteem toward arms and muscles. One's attitude toward his physique rests on his own physical ability and appearance, particularly through muscle mass. This suggests a drive for musculature (McCreary & Sasse, 2000)
may have evolutionary bases. Muscle may indicate success, aiding development of a
cultural ideal, thus making it desirable for one to achieve muscularity.

Drive for muscularity may not necessitate feelings of low self-regard in while
gaining muscle. Bergeron and Tylka (2007) report drive for muscularity has little relation
to body dissatisfaction. Confusion surrounding body image processes and the belief that
drives for the ideal body may have originated from findings of self-objectification, body
dissatisfaction, and a drive for thinness all found in male populations (e.g., Martins et al.,
2007). Drives for specific body types appear not to have similar underlying mechanisms.
This lends credence to a drive for muscularity encompassing not only a physical entity
but also a mental entity of masculinity, recognizing how a strong male character carries
himself. In attainment of the physical ideal, one may also adopt the mental ideal.
Nikkelin et al. (2013) postulate exposure to a muscular ideal provides impetus for one's
success. This may be an empowering process in its own right. Furthermore, research has
yet to address how drive for muscularity correlates with body-esteem.

Frustration may abound from an inability to attain the ideal physique, especially
with widening disparity between ideal and realistic. Cultural ideals may not necessarily
represent the average man, but certainly gauge popular opinion of physically desirable
attributes. Social comparisons emerge with deleterious effects if ideals presented by an
exalted other remain unattainable (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Mussweiler, 2003). Galioto and
Crowther (2013) report higher social comparison amongst young men viewing muscular
images of men, translating to higher body dissatisfaction. Feelings of inadequacy result in
feeling unable to achieve the ideal.
However, body image research generally only considers when the social comparison occurs when the individual sees the self as dissimilar from the ideal other. Instances in which the self becomes similar to an ideal, comparing oneself with the exalted other may not yield certain caustic effects (Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992; Mussweiler, 2003). Young et al. (2012, 2013) demonstrated how PSR might buffer against negative self-regard toward the body in social comparison by showing similarities between self and other. These results may manifest deeper in the individual's mind in that it is not only similarity, but also assimilation of ideal into self.

**Identity Development in Media Self-Assimilation**

Rather than engaging in comparisons without PSR, audience members assimilate the characteristics of their idol and incorporate it into their own self (Derrick et al., 2008; Gabriel & Young, 2011). Researchers mostly agree on these processes being a normal part of human identity development. Children and adolescents develop bonds with a favorite character that creates a schema for their behavior, often shaped from perceived similarities (Hoffner, 1996; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). This could guide a person in formation of the self, often through peers, which shapes one's overall social behavior (Giles & Maltby, 2004). Such a concrete representation of the self in a young person's mind as a physical ideal following MSA should indicate to the individual that the self is operating at optimum level (e.g., Anthony et al., 2007).

Narratively, one may demonstrate finding or attaining an ideal. McAdams (2006) indicates that one's construction of a narrative develops life thematic coherence. It has teleological implications for achieving goals and representing oneself as a hero or warrior
(McAdams, 1993). Recovering addicts and therapy patients consistently self-report heroically conquering adversity and developing agency, resulting in more recovery (Adler, 2012; Adler, Skalina, & McAdams, 2010). McAdams and McLean (2013) define this as protagonists/narrators gaining control of their own fate via achievement and self-mastery. Similar processes may apply to body image. Personal pursuits of a warrior may elicit warrior-type imagery, including visible portrayals of masculinity. This creation of a life narrative, and subsequent thematic coherence developed, forms mental basis for one's narrative image as a competent and powerful warrior. This powerful being is not only a personal ideal, but also an ideal in the context of the collective.

**The Present Research**

This research addresses mental and physical correlates of PSR and MSA in two studies. Study 1 is a theoretical model of MSA's role in male body image processes. Rather than other studies demonstrating the role of social comparison processes, this study's conceptualization of MSA has eliminated comparisons altogether. I used measures of drive for muscularity, internalization, and body-esteem self-report measures as the basis of participants' body image. Participants also completed narratives for which I coded for MSA. Study 2 is an experiment that facilitated self-assimilation with characters by becoming a personal ideal. When identifying with a favorite media figure, versus a disliked, I predicted participants to report higher body-esteem, higher confidence in performing feats of strength, and increase physical strength following MSA.
MSA and PSR should correlate with a drive for muscularity and body-esteem. These processes involve one's assimilation into, and subsequent identification with, the collective media ideal. With the MSA, one should feel as if he is the ideal media figure. This should align the self with the media world, creating a sense of similarity with others. To maintain one's status as part of the ideal, this should trigger a drive for muscularity (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). This may serve as initial impetus to attain masculine ideals.

This motivation should not correlate with body-esteem (Franzoi & Shields, 1984), positive regard for one's own body, by itself as much of this drive concerns reducing dissatisfaction. Whereas drive for muscularity is not expected to correlate with well-being, both MSA and PSR are expected to correlate with well-being in the form of body-esteem due to a congruence between self and ideal. The assimilation and relationship with the character should buffer the person from deleterious effects. This allows the person to feel more able to attain a physical goal, because, despite the drive remaining present, the goals seem attainable. Previous studies' reliance on PSR without considering the self may hinder their ability to achieve a full scope of the effects. This potentially limits the understanding of genuine, personally meaningful PSR's. Due to non-reliance on comparison in favor of congruence with MSA, this should also demonstrate how perceiving similarity is less influential than self-ideal congruity.
Internalizing the Western ideal (e.g., Daniel & Bridges, 2010; Karazsia & Crowther, 2009), by itself, should correlate negatively with body-esteem. Despite one holding the Western ideals of muscularity as important, these ideals may become unattainable. I expect that one would report lower body-esteem since the audience member might not assimilate the media figures without MSA, which would allow the individual to recognize lofty goals as more easily attainable. Presence of both MSA and internalization should positively predict body-esteem since the individual has endorsed values and assimilated with a character, a personally meaningful endeavor (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005).

Rather than achieving the goal of a physical ideal, as purported by culture, an individual would have their external goal align with their internal (Sheldon & Elliott, 1997; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). In other words, they strive for the size and muscularity for intrinsic purposes (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2004). The evolutionary need for collective membership and standing out (Leary, 2004) in this context further exemplifies this intrinsic motivation. This should signal collective and personal ideals congruence; the self can thrive personally and through the collective. See Figure 1 for model.

**Method**

**Participants.** Male participants completed the measures in exchange for credit for an introductory psychology class (n = 59, mean age = 19.65) or for $5.00 (US) via Amazon's Mechanical Turk service (n = 96, 29.72). Two participants were removed from analysis due to a limited understanding of English (introductory class) and two were eliminated from analyses as age outliers (mTurk sample). Independent sample t-tests reveal no significant difference between samples' internalization, MSA, and drive for
muscularity. Body-esteem and parasocial relationship scores yielded significant differences between groups. Analyses indicated less magnitude in correlations. I collapsed both groups into one sample for analysis. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

Following consent, participants completed MSA narrative prompts. Participants first completed the narrative to create PSR context since they responded to "Media Figure" questions. Participants then completed other measures and were debriefed.

**Non-narrative measures.**

**Positive parasocial relationships.** I used an English translation of the positive parasocial relationship scale (+PSR; Hartmann, Stuke, & Daschmann, 2008), a measure of PSR with favorite media figures. This 13-item measure uses a 5-point scale between 1, *Totally Disagree*, and 5, *Totally Agree*, about one's regard toward media personae. Statements include "When Media Figure does well, I am very happy." See Appendix A.

**Drive for muscularity.** I used the Drive for Muscularity Scale (DMS; McCreary & Sasse, 2000, Appendix B), a 15-item measure of one’s motivation for muscle mass. The measure utilizes a 6-point scale anchored between 1, *Always*, and 6, *Never*, for statements assessing attitudes and behaviors toward muscle building. I reverse scored items so that "1" indicated the highest level of drive for muscularity for an item and "6" the lowest. Items include, "I think I would be stronger if I had more muscle mass."

**Internalization of Western cultural ideal.** The 14-item male internalization subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire- 3 (SATAQ-3, Karazsia & Crowther, 2008, Appendix C) measures individuals' endorsement of media's ideal physical appearance. Participants respond on 5-point Likert-type scales.
from between 1 (Definitely Disagree) to 5 (Definitely Agree) with statements, "I try to look like athletes." Higher scores indicate higher internalization.

**Body-esteem.** The Body-Esteem Scale (BES; Franzoi & Shields, 1984, Appendix D) measures one's regard toward their body. This 31-item measure (for men) pertains to personal satisfaction with body parts and physical attributes, e.g., biceps, chest, physical condition. Participants rate satisfaction on 5-point scales from 1, Have strong negative feelings, to 5, Have strong positive feelings.

**Narrative measures of MSA.** Participants wrote about a male media figure that serves as a role model or personal ideal (see Appendix E). I have loosely defined "male media figure" for participants to think about athletes, actors, or historical figures. The figure could be fictional, animated, or deceased, only needing a minimal level of perceived fame. I prompted participants to think about being the media figure, and to embody the life or experiences of the person. This measure concerned behavior manifestation similar to a media role model through MSA rather than feeling what the character felt (e.g., "I think just like X"). I coded each media figure narrative dichotomously for the presence or absence of self-assimilation. I defined the absence of MSA, perhaps as PSR or homophily, through comments not indicating participants' not assimilating character behavior. This includes, "X is a good athlete," or "Ladies love X."

Of interest to this process is whether the participant behaves similarly to the role model since that may indicates a level of MSA. Instances that the media figure would be a behavioral role model for the participant, thus self-assimilation, was represented by phrasing similar to "I model my life after X," or "I train just like this person," and/or
perceived level of influence the media figure imposes on participants' attitudes and behavior. An undergraduate research assistant and I coded narratives dichotomously in that indication of these behaviors received a code of "1" and the absence, which would be the aforementioned admiration or affective response to the character, a "0." Inter-rater reliability was acceptable, kappa = 0.77.

Results

**Bivariate correlations.** Following a correlation matrix (Table 2) analysis of bivariate relations, I ran a series of multiple regression for significant correlations.

I found little support for the theoretical model, particularly with drive for muscularity and body-esteem in relation to either +PSR or MSA (See Table 2). Internalization of the Western cultural ideal had a significant, positive correlation with +PSR and but not with MSA. Those who internalized the Western cultural ideal engaged in parasocial relationships with a favorite media figure but did not have a higher drive for muscularity. As expected, MSA correlated positively with +PSR, meaning that those who internalized ideals also formed PSR with media figures. There were no significant correlations regarding body-esteem. Internalization of the Western ideal had a near-significant correlation with body-esteem, suggesting that higher levels of internalization marginally correlated with higher levels of body-esteem.

**Multiple regression.** Two significant correlations emerged. MSA and internalization of the Western ideal both correlated with +PSR. As a result, I regressed +PSR on MSA (see Table 3). These variables accounted for 8.2% of variance, $F(2, 149) = 6.58, p = 0.002, \eta^2 = 0.02$. MSA significantly predicted +PSR ($\beta = 0.24$), $t(148) = 3.09,$
This shows that MSA and PSR are related constructs, spanning both self-related and interpersonal processes in media consumption. That is, assimilating oneself with traits of a favorite media figure coincides with assimilating oneself into media collectives. Internalization of the Western ideal was not a significant predictor for +PSR ($\beta = 0.13$), $t (148) = 1.62$, $p = 0.108$. Results from the regressions indicated a potential role of MSA as a mediator linking internalization and +PSR. Regression indicated that internalization does not predict MSA ($\beta = 0.04$), $t (148) = 1.22$, $p = 0.223$.

**Discussion**

Results provided little evidence for the model. However, results did indicate the presence of MSA in relation to PSR. Rather than conceptualizing interactions between self and a media figure purely as an interdependent relationship, I demonstrated that interaction on a more self-directed level. That is, how the relationship affects the audience member's self-construal and how one behaves when embodying media figures. Despite the lack of significant results surrounding MSA in this study, I demonstrated its presence, thus providing framework for future research.

Western ideal internalization was interesting in the analysis. Rather than a negative correlation with body-esteem, it marginally positively correlated with and body-esteem. This stands in contrast with the negative correlates reported by Karazsia and Crowther (2010) and notions of internalizing the external world (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). That is, external motivation may become internally important, thus personally meaningful. This may provide preliminary evidence for how men buffer themselves against negative feelings about their own bodies. When ideals are congruent, a person
may feel better about himself because these ideals are also important to him. In turn, his strivings for achieving the ideal are met with higher feelings of body-esteem. While these results were only marginally significant, it may be worth investigating future populations in which individuals do view the physical masculine ideal as personally important, rather than the general sample of individuals seen the current sample.

Internalization also served as a predictor for PSR. This may suggest that when one internalizes the ideal as important to the self, their bond with a favorite media figure may become stronger. Viewing some ideal as personally meaningful should direct a person to engage in relations with those who similarly represent the ideal. Regarding the media figure with whom the individual has a PSR, when representing the masculine ideal, as evident by a participant's high internalization, the individual recognizes the group as part of his own ideal. In his need to belong to such a group (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995), he starts to relate to group members.

Non-significance regarding body-esteem may be due to the inquiry reaching beyond what one could tap with the domain-specific measures. Issues such as muscularity and body image may not be personally important to everyone. Many participants chose authors, philosophers, and politicians as MSA figures. A general sense of well-being could branch into several different facets, which may include body-esteem, that this study could not cover. Narrowing the scope of respondents to those who find the physical masculine ideal personally important, e.g., athletes may yield significant results.

Another possible issue that may have prevented the results from being significant may concern participant age. Skewed by the mTurk sample and a relatively small sample
from the introductory class, the mean age of participants was 27 with participants included in the analysis in their 40s. Adults tend to have different goals and concerns than those in a potential stage of early or "emerging" adulthood, a time in life highlighted by the development of an individual identity (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2010). In this time, a person seeks to create an agentic identity for him- or herself (Erikson, 1968). Such manifestations may be apparent from esteem concerns in young populations (Anthony et al., 2007). Bauer et al. (under review) contend that the assertions to create this identity often address status and concern for physical appearance. Body image research generally concerns those experiencing emerging adulthood, a time of physical appearance concerns. Later stages prevalent in the sample could have hindered results.

Drive for muscularity's non-significance relate to the measure capturing both negative and positive feelings regarding body image at the same time. Despite one's physical dimensions may not be muscular enough, that may not exclude high body-esteem. When internalizing the collective ideal as also important to the self, he may experience higher well-being from his endeavor (Bauer & McAdams, 2004, 2010), and the act of knowing that he is moving himself closer to the ideal is reason enough to exhibit higher body-esteem. When achieving the ideal, one strives for the goal and may feel confident in his own ability. This offers a notion of how internal and external motivators for achieving an ideal may actually function in tandem, complementary ways. This buffers one from inadequacy both personally and collectively. This study provided a foundation for a second study to demonstrate how a manifestation of a personal and collective ideal influence one's subsequent behavior and self-regard when embodying the masculine ideal. I designed a laboratory study to investigate MSA with personal ideal
STUDY 2

Research indicates that self-perception (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001), perceived gender identity (Hundhammer & Mussweiler, 2012), and social contexts (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) influence subsequent behavior. Perceiving oneself in the perceived ideal should bolster positive effects and persuade one to feel like the protagonist of the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). These studies only primed novel concepts in participants and nothing personally meaningful. I manipulated MSA with narratives for personally meaningful responses in some contexts—narrative prompts about a favorite (e.g., personally meaningful) superhero in which they take the perspective of the character, effectively becoming characters.

Becoming a superhero resonates with visual imagery and perspective taking. Taking a first-person perspective with the other person, should foster self-other congruence. Libby, Shaeffer, and Eibach (2009) demonstrated that engaging in a first-person perspective with behavior and attitudes would identify with the perspectives. Kaufman and Libby (2012) further report how that shapes attitudes and behaviors as being congruent with one's own, even if previous ideas differed radically. To maintain consistency and coherence (McAdams, 2006) with the self, implications may extend to body image research by changing self-perception before and after assimilating oneself with the ideal. The individual changes attitudes based on their current behaviors.
This study accounts for temporal progression between before and after MSA. One's physical strength should increase when embodying a PSR character since those figures represent something personally desirable for the individual, thus combining a PSR with MSA. One's body-esteem should be higher when embodying a favorite hero due to feeling as if one is actually the character. One can interpret "favorite superhero" as something personally meaningful, thus leading a person to an ideal self; a personally meaningful activity in life serves as a predictor of well-being (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). Nelson and Norton (2005) indicate that similar priming of oneself as a superhero increased superhero-related behavior over several months.

Personal meaningfulness is a double-edged sword. Perceiving oneself as something negative or disliked should yield negative self-synchronization in that the negative affronts one's personal sensibilities (Gabriel, Kawakami, Bartak, Kang, & Mann, 2010; Sheldon & Kasser, 1997). Moving away from an ideal self, creating further disparity, should reduce one's regard toward the self and certain positive traits they may exhibit otherwise. This study widened participants' ideal disparity perceiving themselves as a disliked superhero. To reduce disparity, participants may reaffirm to themselves how their ability is not reflected by physical performance (Steele, 1988).

PSR narratives have shown to empower participants for cognitive tasks, as participants perceived themselves closer to ideal (Derrick, 2013; Derrick et al., 2008, 2009). This study differs by forcing participants to engage in assimilation. Participants' strength should increase following favorite superhero MSA by incorporating a character's ideal aspects into the self. This should yield higher body-esteem and confidence in feats of strength with MSA. Effects should reverse following MSA with a disliked superhero.
Method

Participants. Sixty-five men participated for course credit (see Table 4). Ninety percent were Caucasian. Four non-English-speaking participants were removed from analysis and one for illness. Power analyses indicated this sample with a medium effect size ($f = 0.252, \eta^2 = 0.06$).

Procedure. Following informed consent, the participants gripped a handheld dynamometer to gauge grip strength and pre-manipulation base. This was ostensibly part of a task to compare real people with a superhero. Participants then gave a personal assessment for their confidence in performing a hypothetical, loosely defined physical strength task with a Russian kettlebell (Appendix F). The options for the task were anchored between 8 and 40 kg.

The researcher then administered one of two narrative prompts. One was a prompt for writing about a disliked superhero (Appendix G). The other was about their favorite (Appendix H). Both prompts requested participants to write from the perspective of the superhero (i.e., first-person, see Green & Brock, 2000) and discuss the character and his heroic duties. After writing the essay, participants then gripped the dynamometer a second time and completed measures (see below). Participants indicated their confidence again. The researcher debriefed the participant.

Materials.

Body-esteem. The Body-Esteem Scale (Appendix J) focused on strength and physical condition. Questions reported strong reliability, $\alpha = 0.87$. 
**Feats of Strength.** A person takes on characteristics of the role model to shape behaviors and thoughts during MSA. Since the study concerns superheroes, I devised 6 questions assessing confidence in physical prowess. Questions are on 5-point Likert-type scales, anchored between complete agreement and no agreement at all, e.g., "Compared to the average person, how strong do you feel right now?" I framed these questions from Gabriel and Young's (2011) questions about one's confidence in performing abilities like the character in the story they read and attitude questions. Questions had acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.72$. See Appendix I.

**Drive for muscularity.** I included the attitude subscale of the drive for muscularity scale (McCreary & Sasse, 2000, Appendix I) to assess one's desire for muscularity and attitude toward one's own body, ostensibly taping state responses toward one's body. Unlike the original measure, this was on a 5-point scale anchored between 1, *Strongly Disagree*, and 5, *Strongly Agree*. Questions had acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 0.74$.

**Grip strength.** Participants gripped a 90 kg Camry (Model EH101) digital hand dynamometer to assess physical strength. Participants held the dynamometer in their dominant hand, making a slight angle at the elbow before grasping the instrument distally from the chest.

**Results**

I used a 2 (Time 1 grip vs. Time 2) $\times$ 2 (Favorite Superhero vs. Least Favorite) repeated analysis of variance (ANOVA). An independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between conditions in Time 1 grips, $t (58) = -1.69, p = 0.096$. A Superhero $\times$ Time interaction indicated grip significantly improved following favorite
superhero MSA compared to a least favorite, $F(1, 58) = 6.01, p = 0.017, \eta^2_p = 0.09$. See Figure 2. During favorite superhero MSA, participants' grip strength significantly increased from before ($M = 86.00$) to following MSA ($M = 89.81$), $F(1, 29) = 6.79, p = 0.014, \eta^2_p = 0.19$. MSA with a least favorite superhero did not significantly decrease from before ($M = 94.53$) to after MSA ($M = 92.42$), $F(1, 29) = 1.20, p = 0.281, \eta^2_p = 0.04$.

I used another repeated-measure ANOVA for the weight requests. There was no significant difference between conditions' Time 1 weight request, $t(57) = -1.12, p = 0.267$. Results indicated no significant Time × Superhero interaction, $F(1, 57) = 0.003, p = 0.955, \eta^2_p = 0.00$. However, there was a significant main effect for time. In conditions of favorite superhero MSA, participants' request for weight increased from before ($M = 44.31$) to following MSA ($M = 48.51$), $F(1, 28) = 5.06, p = 0.033, \eta^2_p = 0.15$. Contrary to hypotheses, the least favorite superhero condition also yielded an increase from before ($M = 49.20$) to following MSA ($M = 52.66$), $F(1, 28) = 6.41, p = 0.017, \eta^2_p = 0.18$.

I used a one-way ANOVA for the body-esteem scale. There was no significant difference between conditions of favorite ($M = 3.44$) and least favorite ($M = 3.31$) superheroes for participants' body-esteem, $F(1, 58) = 0.62, p = 0.432, \eta^2_p = 0.011$. The one-way ANOVA for confidence in performing feats of strength yielded no significant difference between favorite ($M = 3.60$) and least favorite ($M = 3.50$) superhero MSA, $F = 0.57, p = 0.454, \eta^2_p = 0.01$. The attitudinal drive for musculature found no significant difference between favorite ($M = 2.77$) and least favorite superhero ($M = 2.63$), $F(1, 58) = 1.27, p = 0.264, \eta^2_p = 0.2$. 
Discussion

Results provided support for the idea that embodying characteristics of another person as part of the self via MSA will facilitate an increase in physical strength. One may approach these results readily from several complementary theoretical perspectives. A sociometer interpretation of the self (i.e., Leary & Baumeister, 2000) provides a superordinate framework. The sociometer alerts a person of their overall standing within the group and indicates whether he or she is an effective, or even indispensible, member of the group. Moments of perceived inadequacy with the standard should alert the individual to adjust to maintain their standing (Leary et al., 1998). Being able to adjust the self to the ideal should bolster a feeling that one is comparable to the ideal, resulting in an augmented sense of self-competence and ability.

Participants in this study adjusted themselves to attain the ideal in a salient context and bolstered a relevant behavior with respect to the self. That is, thinking about oneself as a favorite superhero was able to increase physical strength from a time prior to a media self-assimilation. Superheroes represent a cultural ideal shaped from an understanding of what it means to succeed in one's culture and group. Perceiving oneself as part of the idyllic collective may facilitate increased performance in a task.

With increases in physical strength, one must also consider the ideal image's context. What was interesting about these results is that they operate not only from an evolution-derived framework regarding ideal achievement, but also on a basis of what is personally meaningful to the narrator (e.g., Bauer et al., 2005; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). Not every "ideal" resonates with one's sensibilities. Only superheroes that the participants
perceived as ideal triggered a positive effect on strength. This suggests motivation to achieve the ideal is contingent on interpretations of ideal as much as a general schematic of what the ideal is.

Another physical change that may occur along with the physical strength may also be based in a physiological change. That is, a challenge response (Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993). In a challenging situation in which one perceives to possess the resources to perform a task, he may be able to perform better. Physiologically, his body would operate at optimum efficiency with accompanying improved performance on a given task (e.g., Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001; Tomaka et al., 1993). Grip strength may indicate performance improvement and serves as basis for future research of physiological mediators between the primes and physical performance.

**Potential influence of self-enhancement.** The weight request form captured a confidence increase for performing physical tasks. Least favorite superhero MSA yielded a higher increase. This may suggest that MSA, while empowering, yields a different mental manifestation. Participants gripped the dynamometer between the MSA manipulation and responding to the second weight request form. In non-empowered states, it may be important to self-enhance in any available outlet. With self-enhancement, a positive construal can bolster well-being (O'Mara, McNulty, & Karney, 2011; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). The non-empowered participant following MSA may have attempted to assert his ability despite less-than-ideal performance on the previous task. Increased weight request may emerge to affirm his own self-construal (Sedikides & Strube, 1997) or interpersonally vis-á-vis the experimenter (e.g., Leary, 2007).
Results did not indicate differences in one's body-esteem. Young et al. (2012, 2013) reported the utility of body image measures in determining state satisfaction and esteem. I used the body-esteem scale under the assumption it may better capture body image post-MSA; participants could have experienced practice effect. Since body-esteem does have utility as a state measure, it may be worth investigating changes in one's esteem from before and after MSA. Participants may have engaged in self-enhancement to maintain positive self-construal, following a perceived mediocre performance. Like with the weight request, body-esteem could have been a viable outlet to reassert oneself as a competent individual. A repeated design with the scale could tap body-esteem shifts.

**Narrative self-identity.** Like other research using narratives as a manipulation, the context of the story one writes has implications for how he or she may subsequently behave. However, experimental manipulations have only covered one aspect of a holistic narrative experience. Derrick (2013) reported participants who wrote about a PSR media figure exhibited more self-control. This demonstrated the energizing through priming, but not necessarily explaining the mechanism.

Another story component concerns interpretations of events. The nature of storytelling depends on one's attempt to achieve and maintain thematic coherence (McAdams, 2006). This fosters consistency between the self-concept and other facets of life that may not necessarily be consistent with that concept. An easy way for a person to reconcile the inconsistencies is through a theme, an overarching schematic for how the discourse of life occurs. This creates a reciprocal feedback cycle between the self-concept and life interpretation (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). This self-conception creates coherence between the individual and a protagonist to influence future behavior.
**MSA vs. social comparison.** These results operate solely on the notion of MSA without concern given to social comparison processes. Research from Derrick (2013; et al., 2008, 2009) ultimately indicate how simply thinking about a person in a PSR context does result in a number of mental benefits, including a movement to the ideal self. Young et al. (2012, 2013) assert these claims to be dependent on one's perceived similarity with the exalted other. In the current research, it is assumed that the manipulation would eliminate social comparison and focus on *being* the media figure rather than *being like* him. The possibility exists that participants may have still engaged in social comparison, which may confound taking a first-person perspective.

The next step in this research is a direct comparison of MSA and social comparison processes to parse out similarity from total congruency to find its level of influence over a person's self-perception and performance. With respect to Tomaka et al. (1993), it may be possible to discern the physiological mediators from a social comparison from MSA with respect to PSR. That is, would the MSA with a favorite superhero operate via the challenge response whereas social comparison would be a threat? Perhaps seeing oneself in the ideal would produce the challenge response necessary for both improved physical performance and self-perception. Conversely, comparing oneself with the ideal and not feeling like this ideal is attainable could result in distress, resulting in reduced performance and self-satisfaction.

**Nature of grip strength.** An advantage of this study concerns its ability to demonstrate how individual differences influence physical strength. Using oneself as his own control not only makes the dynamometer a more sensitive measure of MSA's role in changing one's self-perception and physical ability, it also considers the individual and
how he has progressed temporally without referencing himself with an aggregate sample. This demonstrates the utility of "competing against oneself" as a metric of growth and self-improvement. This may signal personally meaningful progress in a physical manifestation (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998).

One should assume that both groups would have equal baseline strength, yet Time 1 grip was not roughly equal between groups. Nicolay and Walker (2005) have demonstrated that maximum grip strength typically decreases over subsequent trials in experiments. Results from this study demonstrate how an individual is able to increase strength from baseline based on a change in self-perception. The conditions' disparity may also be from a small sample size. The sample size was determined by power analysis. The emerging disparity may simply be an illumination of individual differences in participants that deserve future investigation. An interaction of personality characteristics with grip strength may subsequently predict performance in strength task.
GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research demonstrated how male body image works as a tandem operation of both personal and collective exemplars of a physical ideal. Study 1 demonstrated how MSA is associated with PSR. That is, identification with a specific media character, rather than a general cultural ideal, can serve as the basis for a parasocial relationship. Study 2 demonstrated how such identification bolsters one's physical strength, at least in the short term.

Research contends that muscular ideals may be detrimental to young men due to their inability to attain the ideal (e.g., Bartlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008). This thesis does support the notion that such perceived inability to attain the ideal would certainly result in feelings of inadequacies. However, simply regarding these ideals as something with which one should not concern himself may not sufficiently address how one buffers against feelings of inadequacy. These images permeate Western culture quite a bit (e.g., Soulliere & Blair, 2004) and seem to conceptualize several facets of success (Delton & Sell, 2014). They are certainly an important influence on the lives of many young men (e.g., Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Young et al., 2013). If a person regards these ideals as personally meaningful, it may benefit the individual to identify with and move toward the ideal, particularly through a specific media figure.
This research attempted to detect how one moves himself closer to an ideal, both cultural and personal. Perceiving oneself as the ideal is how one may bolster self-perception, resulting in improved physical ability. The self develops as reciprocal influence between internal and external influences and ideals. Rather than conceptualizing one set of ideals as more pervasive to one's attitudes and behavior, I sought to reconcile competing views of sociocultural and self-determined ideals as coexisting to develop a self that attains an ideal that is both socially desirable and a personal paragon. This may offer a viable explanation for why one may strive to attain a physical ideal, even if he recognizes that the masculine ideal purported by the media may be socially constructed or impossible to attain. He may internalize cultural ideals as personally meaningful and a self-directed impetus for future ideal attainment.

These studies served as the reconciliation between cultural and personal ideals' effects on male body image. That is, it demonstrated how embodying an ideal that is both culturally propagated and personally meaningful has positive effects for one's physical abilities and mental strength. More importantly, this research demonstrates how this improvement occurs without how having to compare oneself to an ideal. Rather, bolstering of physical strength occurs when the ideal becomes personally attainable. One recognizes his own ability to achieve his goals with respect to the ideal. Such improved physical ability could be the basis of one's continuance to the supposed goal of the ideal. It may not reach the epic levels of some of the larger-than-life characters, but it can certainly allow for self-improvement and empowerment based on one's already existing potential to attain one's ideal.
REFERENCES


Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>mTurk (n = 94)</th>
<th>Intro. Course (n = 57)</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body-Esteem</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSR</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>29.72</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>19.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. PSR = Parasocial Relationships; MSA = Media Self-Assimilation.
* p < 0.01.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients for Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. DMS</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BES</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SATAQ-3</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. +PSR</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. MSA</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Age</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. DMS = Drive for Muscularity Scale; BES = Body-Esteem Scale; SATAQ-3 = Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3; +PSR = Positive Parasocial Relationships Scale; MSA = Media Self-Assimilation Narrative. Reliabilities reported in parentheses are for inter-item reliability (i.e., \( \alpha \)), except for MSA, which is inter-rater (i.e., \( \kappa \)).
\( \dagger \) p < 0.10. * p ≤ 0.05. ** p ≤ 0.01.
Table 3.
*Simultaneous Regression of +PSR for Study 1.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>η²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. MSA</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Internalization</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MSA = Media Self-Assimilation. PSR = +Parasocial Relationship. *p ≤ 0.05.

Table 4.
*Descriptive Statistics for Study 2.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 1 Grip (Favorite)</td>
<td>86.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 1 Grip (Least Favorite)</td>
<td>94.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2 Grip (Favorite)</td>
<td>89.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2 Grip (Least Favorite)</td>
<td>92.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 1 WR (Favorite)</td>
<td>44.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 1 WR (Least Favorite)</td>
<td>49.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2 WR (Favorite)</td>
<td>48.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2 WR (Least Favorite)</td>
<td>53.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feats of Strength</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMS</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* WR = Weight Request Form; BES = Body-Esteem Scale; DMS = Drive for Muscularity Scale (Attitudes). "Favorite" refers to favorite superhero condition; "Least Favorite" refers to least favorite superhero condition. Weights described above are in lb.
Figure 1. Interaction plot for change in grip strength from Time 1 to Time 2 for favorite and least favorite superheroes.
APPENDIX A
Positive Parasocial Relationship Scale

The following is a list of statements addressing your experiences with the media figure about whom you just wrote. While still thinking about this media figure, please respond to each of the prompts using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reading the statements, replace the phrase "media figure" with the person about whom you just wrote. For example, if you wrote about Zubin Discotheque, you should consider a statement like, "Regardless of whether it is possible, I would like to meet Zubin Discotheque in person."

1. I think the media figure is like an old friend.
2. The media figure makes me feel comfortable as I am with friends.
3. I think about the media figure even when he is not immediately present (i.e., not on TV, not reading about him).
4. I have a feeling of missing the media figure if I don't see him on TV or read about him for a long time.
5. I feel that I know the media figure very well.
6. I try to imagine what the media figure think about when he does something at which he is good.
7. I find the media figure to be likeable.
8. I mostly agree with what the media figure does/the media figure's actions.
9. If there were a story about the media figure in a newspaper or on TV, I would read or watch it.
10. Regardless of whether it is possible, I would like to meet this media figure in person.
11. I admire the media figure for aspects of his life such as achievements and abilities.
12. TV, print media, and/or online coverage of the media figure tell me what he is like.
13. I look forward to watching the media figure in the next thing in which he is featured (i.e., movie, game, book).
APPENDIX B

Drive for Muscularity Scale

Please read each item then, for each one, click the number that best applies to you.

Always  | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never
---|---|---|---|---|---
1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6

___ I wish that I was more muscular.
___ I lift weights to build up muscle.
___ I use protein or energy supplements.
___ I drink weight gain or protein shakes.
___ I try to consume as many calories as I can in a day.
___ I feel guilty if I miss a weight training session.
___ I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle mass.
___ Other people think I work with weights too often.
___ I think I would look better if I gained 10 pounds in bulk.
___ I think that I would feel stronger if I gained a little more muscle mass.
___ I think that my weight-training schedule interferes with other aspects of my life.
___ I think that my arms are not muscular enough.
___ I think that my chest is not muscular enough.
___ I think that my legs are not muscular enough.
APPENDIX C

Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire

Please read each of the following items carefully and indicate the number that best reflects your agreement with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

___ I would like my body to look like the people who are on TV.

___ I compare my body to the bodies of people on TV and in movies.

___ I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines.

___ I compare my appearance to the appearance of people on TV and in movies.

___ I would like my body to look like the people who appear on TV and in movies.

___ I compare my body to the bodies of people who appear in magazines.

___ I compare my appearance to the appearance of people in magazines.

___ I try to look like the people on TV.

___ I wish I looked as athletic as sports stars.

___ I compare my body to that of people who are athletic.

___ I try to look like sports athletes.
On this page are a number of body parts and functions. Please read each item and indicate how you feel about this part or function of YOUR OWN BODY with this scale. I have...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Negative Feelings</th>
<th>Moderate Negative Feelings</th>
<th>No Feeling One Way or Another</th>
<th>Moderate Positive Feelings</th>
<th>Strong Positive Feelings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<th>Appetite</th>
<th>Physical Stamina</th>
<th>Reflexes</th>
<th>Waist</th>
<th>Energy Level</th>
<th>Thighs</th>
<th>Physical Coordination</th>
<th>Figure or Physique</th>
<th>Appearance of Stomach</th>
<th>Agility</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Physical Condition</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Muscular Strength</th>
<th>Body Build</th>
<th>Width of Shoulders</th>
<th>Arms</th>
<th>Chest</th>
<th>Nose</th>
<th>Lips</th>
<th>Chin</th>
<th>Appearance of Eyes</th>
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51
Throughout this survey, we will ask you to think about a media figure who serves as a role model or represents personal ideals for you. The phrase "media figure" may include a variety of people such as professional athletes, actors, musicians, historical figures (political, religious, anything). This media figure may be either alive or deceased. This figure may even be a fictional character (i.e., cartoon, characters, superheroes). The only requirements are a MINIMAL level of perceived fame and that the persona is MALE. What matters is that this person serves as a role model or otherwise serves as an ideal or an important person or character in your life.

Sometimes people imagine what it is like to be the media figure, to embody the life or experiences of the person or character. Sometimes people feel that they have an actual relationship with a media figure, if only because people internally imagine interpersonal conversations with a media figure in a similar way that they do with a person whom they know in person. We wish to note that doing so is not problematic, just as imagining dialogues with friends or family members- alive or deceased- is not problematic and may, in fact, be helpful.

We also wish to note that we are not asking this question for the purpose of making any kind of health/unhealthy "diagnosis." The purpose of this study has nothing to do with "healthy or not healthy." We are simply interested in how people conceptualize media figures as role models or ideals.

Still, we realize that sometimes people's role models from the media are a highly personal topic. Please keep in mind that your response is confidential. With that in mind, please write the name of your favorite or ideal media figure as a header before your start writing. Please describe how you think and feel about this media figure and what role this figure plays in your life.
APPENDIX F

Weight Request Form

We would like you to think about weightlifting tasks with Russian kettlebells. From the weights presented below, choose the one that you have the most confidence in using if you were to do a weightlifting session with it. Be aware that your size does not necessarily correlate with the weight you choose to use or your strength. We are interested in your confidence. The metric measurements correspond with the imperial measurements.

Weight options for the task:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 kg</th>
<th>16 kg</th>
<th>24 kg</th>
<th>32 kg</th>
<th>40 kg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 lb.</td>
<td>35 lb.</td>
<td>53 lb.</td>
<td>70 lb.</td>
<td>88 lb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We would like you to take a few minutes and think about your favorite male superhero. Even if your favorite hero is female, this study would like to know about male heroes, so we request that you choose your favorite male superhero (i.e., Wolverine, Spider-Man, Thor).

Once you identified this character, please try to think like the superhero. Specifically, imagine you are this character and can feel and behave just like this character. You have his powers, or if you're like Batman or Iron Man, you have all of his gadgets and weapons.

Now, we would like you to write about yourself as this superhero. Below, describe who the character is and what he is like.

Next, we want you to make a story of a specific event or "episode," which you may have created. Next, keeping in mind that you are this superhero, describe what you are doing, who is involved, and where and when it takes place. Are you fighting your arch nemesis (e.g., Spider-Man fighting Doctor Octopus)? Did you save a child from a burning building? Is it your origin story or some other story from your past that lets the reader know how you became who you are today? In any case, be sure to describe not only what you’re doing but also why you are doing it. Again, remember that you ARE this superhero, and you’re telling the story from your own perspective, so use the first person (I/me, not he/him) in this story.
APPENDIX H

Superhero Narrative Prompt B

We would like you to take a few minutes and think about a superhero who you do not like. Even if your favorite hero is female, this study would like to know about male heroes, so we request that you choose your favorite male superhero (i.e., Wolverine, Spider-Man, Thor).

Once you identified this character, please try to think like the superhero. Specifically, imagine you are this character and can feel and behave just like this character. You have his powers, or if you're like Batman or Iron Man, you have all of his gadgets and weapons.

Now, we would like you to write about yourself as this superhero. Below, describe who the character is and what he is like.

Next, we want you to make a story of a specific event or "episode," which you may have created. Next, keeping in mind that you are this superhero, describe what you are doing, who is involved, and where and when it takes place. Are you fighting your arch nemesis (e.g., Spider-Man fighting Doctor Octopus)? Did you save a child from a burning building? Is it your origin story or some other story from your past that lets the reader know how you became who you are today? In any case, be sure to describe not only what you’re doing but also why are you doing it. Again, remember that you ARE this superhero, and you’re telling the story from your own perspective, so use the first person (I/me, not he/him) in this story.
### APPENDIX I

**Feats of Strength**

1. Compared to the average person, how strong do you think you are right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Stronger</th>
<th>Very Much Stronger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Compared to the average person, how brave do you feel right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Braver</th>
<th>Very Much Braver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Compared to the average person, how impervious to pain do you feel right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Impervious</th>
<th>Very Much Impervious</th>
</tr>
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</table>

4. If you were to jump right now, would it be worse than the average person?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>Very Much Worse</th>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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</table>

5. If you were presented with a challenge right now, how confident would you be that you would perform well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Very Much Confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

6. Right now, do you think that you would fail at a physical task?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Would Not Fail</th>
<th>Would Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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</table>


7. Right now, in most ways, I am close to my ideal self.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

8. My legs are not muscular enough.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. My chest is not muscular enough.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. My arms not muscular enough.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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11. I wish I was more muscular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. I think I would feel more confident with more muscle mass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

13. I think I would feel stronger with more muscle mass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
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APPENDIX J

Body-Esteem Scale (Study 2)

On this page are a number of body parts and functions. Please read each item and indicate how you feel about this part or function of YOUR OWN BODY using the following scale:

I have...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Negative Feelings</th>
<th>Moderate Negative Feelings</th>
<th>No Feeling</th>
<th>Moderate Positive Feelings</th>
<th>Strong Positive Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appetite
Physical Stamina
Reflexes
Waist
Energy Level
Thighs
Physical Coordination
Figure or Physique
Appearance of Stomach
Agility
Health
Physical Condition
Weight
Muscular Strength
Body Build
Width of Shoulders
Arms
Chest
Overview

This coding protocol is for the narrative portion of Study 1 for my master's thesis. It concerns multiple aspects of what Cohen (2001) originally defined as identification to discern it from parasocial relationships (e.g., Horton & Wohl, 1956). Regarding the former, this is engagement with the media persona beyond affinity toward the character. The perceiver "feels" what they perceive the character to feel; media figure becomes an extension of the self. Because identification may be a loaded word for what I am trying to find, I have adopted the term "Media Self-Assimilation." Derived from Gabriel and Young (2011), this describes a deeper parasocial relationship that incorporates aspects of identification. We define this assimilation as the perceiver incorporating aspects of the other into the self, e.g., someone training to be just like a specific athlete.

We designed this coding system to capture the aforementioned feeling of self-assimilation along with other facets purported to correlate with a number of constructs associated with the processes of male body image. These narratives will vary in length, from a brief paragraph to what may be a full page of text. However, other narrative types and lengths can be used with this protocol. Naturally, these coding instructions can be modified for the specific narratives in question.

Generally, we are coding for the subjective meanings and interpretations, rather than objective events, of the narrative. We might begin coding each narrative by asking ourselves: What is the event or observable behavior? Then, what does the event mean to the person? The answer to this latter question is what we code for—the personal meaning of the event, i.e., how the narrator interprets the event (Bauer et al., 2005).
Coding for Media Self-Assimilation (MSA)

For this coding, we determine whether the narrative fits the pattern of MSA.

In absence of MSA, the narrator is simply discussing the character and the relationship. The media figure may be a role model or the audience member perceives this character as a friend; however, that would not necessarily constitute MSA. There is no evidence of the MSA process (see below). The narrator indicates his affinity or admiration for the figure but does not seek to live his life with the media figure as an influence on his life in shaping behavior. In other words, the perceiver does not regard media figures as part of their "real life." The narrator may think like the character but that does not necessarily indicate whether the character is the basis for how the narrator lives his life.

The assimilation process sees the narrator thinking or behaving like the actual media persona. This is determined by the narrator indicating how he uses the character as a paragon for his own life, indicating that he tries to live his life, or does live his life, in a manner similar to the persona. The coder should take into account such aspects of the narrator and his role model:

a. Does the narrator discuss being like the persona?
b. Does the narrator perceive the persona to be an extension of the self?c. Does this persona act as a model for the person's life?

We code MSA dichotomously. In the instance of no MSA, code the narrative with a "0." For MSA, code a "1." The narrator mentioning only simple liking of the character indicates the absence of MSA. This may also include mentioning how the narrator thinks like the character. Thinking like the character does not necessitate that the individual will behave as the character. The behavior component, as described above, will indicate MSA in the narrator.

It is strongly encouraged for the coders to look up the characters if they do not know who they are and see if the narratives convey identification based on the knowledge of the character.

An example of coding a "0" may include:
"My favorite media figure is Triple H. He is one of the best performers I have ever seen in professional wrestling and I admire his work in the ring. When he cuts a promo, I feel like I understand what he's saying." The narrator simply states that he can think like Triple H, but that does not necessarily mean he is assimilating his behavior.

For a "1," it would be more like this:
"Triple H is my media figure of choice. I have a strong connection to what he does in the ring and backstage that I try to incorporate his training regimen into my daily life. I also tend to carry myself like a champion, primarily because that's the way HHH carries himself." Did you notice how the narrator uses Triple H as a behavioral model? That is MSA. Again, everything on this system will vary but this is the basic schematic of what to expect for each narrative style.