

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Winchester</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> A4 <u>Psychology</u>, Psychiatry and Neuroscience</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b>  <b>Contributions of media psychology research to discussions of body image in society.</b></p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b>          David Giles’s research on the influence of media on human behaviour has generated impact across a number of domains in the world beyond academia. One area where impact is particularly evident is in his research on body image and eating disorders. The findings reported in Giles and Close (2008) were reported in high-profile media sources including the Health section of the BBC website, the <i>Sunday Times</i>, and the <i>Daily Mail</i>; and material from these sources was reproduced in other locations, most notably in the <i>Wikipedia</i> entry for the UK version of <i>Men’s Health</i> magazine.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b>          For more than a decade, Giles has explored the ways in which media influence human behaviour (see Giles, 2010 for an overview), and a particular strand of this research has focused on the cumulative effects of repeated media exposure to idealised or unrealistic body shapes on young people in particular. While there is much literature on how limited exposure to such imagery can have a short-term influence under laboratory conditions, there is a dearth of evidence linking eating and exercise behaviours to longer-term media use. There is also much more research on the internalisation of media ideals by females than by males.</p> <p>Giles and Close (2008) tested the hypothesis that high levels of exposure to idealised masculine bodies, typically displaying an excessively developed musculature, would lead to increased ‘drive for muscularity’—a cognitive and behavioural measure that captures both thinking about, and actually performing, ways of building a more muscular physique. The Drive for Muscularity Scale (McCreary &amp; Sasse, 2000), in which respondents agree on a 6-point scale with various statements about body-building and muscularity, is an established measure of the phenomenon. Typical statements assessing cognitions include ‘<i>Other people think I work out with weights too often</i>’; a typical statement assessing behaviour is ‘<i>I use protein or energy supplements</i>’.</p> <p>The authors asked 161 young men to complete a measure of magazine reading habits in which they were asked to indicate how frequently they read a selection of titles, including a list of men’s ‘lifestyle magazines’ such as <i>Men’s Health</i>, but also titles such as <i>FHM</i> and <i>Esquire</i>, which often feature muscular male imagery. They also asked their respondents to complete the Drive for Muscularity scale as well as the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance scale (Heinberg et al., 1995). The latter is a measure of the extent to which people internalise (and accept) the prevailing orthodoxy in the media for prizing physical attractiveness above other personal qualities (typical item: ‘<i>Attractiveness is very important if you want to get ahead in our culture</i>’).</p> <p>The results indicated that the Sociocultural Attitudes measure acted as a ‘mediator’ between the other two measures. In other words, there was a significant relationship between the frequency of reading men’s lifestyle magazines and drive for muscularity – but this was mediated (explained) by the degree to which they internalised the values of the media regarding appearance and the importance of being attractive. So, those who read a substantial number of these magazines <i>and</i> strongly believe in the importance of attractiveness are more likely to take measures to increase their musculature (and to think about doing so).</p> <p>A further finding of the study was that this effect was significantly greater for non-dating respondents than those in permanent relationships. In other words, while the effect was true of all respondents, it was more pronounced for those without a current partner: people who might be more susceptible to ‘quick fix’ methods for enhancing their physical attractiveness.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)          Giles, D.C. (2010). <i>Psychology of the Media</i>. Basingstoke: Palgrave.          Giles, D.C., &amp; Close, J. (2008). Exposure to ‘lad magazines’ and drive for muscularity in dating and non-dating young men. <i>Personality and Individual Differences</i>, 44, 1610-1616.</p>

#### 4. Details of the impact

During the period following the publication of Giles and Close (2008), several UK national newspapers and other media sources carried stories citing the paper's findings—quoting quite extensively from either the paper itself, various press releases or direct from the interview material. BBC Radio Solent broadcast a live interview in which Giles discussed the research.

The first source to carry the story was the *Sunday Times* (16/3/08), which published a short feature entitled 'Lads' mags inflict preening curse' following an interview with the author. On 26/3/08, the *Daily Mail* carried a similar length article, which also contained several quotes from Giles. Two days later, the Health section of the BBC news website ran a feature which also quoted Giles repeatedly, for example: "While magazines aimed at men often include pictures of scantily-clad women, Dr David Giles said images of male bodies may be more dangerous... Dr Giles, from the University of Winchester, said that some of the content may drive men to try to become more muscular, even if that could harm their health." These are sources with broad reach: The BBC website has 40 million unique users a week, and the *Mail* and *Sunday Times* currently have reported circulation figures of 1,594,421 and 885,612 respectively.

Following the initial coverage of UK news media, a number of other media sources also carried features reporting the findings of the paper. These included health blogs and websites, such as *World Health Net* (a non-profit general health site run by the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine), *Go Health Live* (the website of the UK-based men's health charity), *One India* (an English-language based Indian news site) and *My Body Beautiful* (a health site promoting positive body image). The story was also carried on two prominent psychology blogs – *Shrink Rap*, run by Tri City (a Canadian psychology service), and the British Psychological Society's Research Digest, a popular service which is currently linked to 458 Google+ circles. In addition to press coverage, the research findings have since been cited in a report (p. 86) by COMAB, the Coalition on Men and Boys (UK), a body of charities, services and researchers that 'advises Government and other policymaking and service delivery agencies' on 'issues of concern to men and boys' (<http://www.comab.org.uk/>). Perhaps the most notable and enduring impact of the research is inclusion in the Wikipedia entry for the UK version of *Men's Health* magazine (which Giles had no involvement in writing). Although *Men's Health* was only one of several titles featured in the study, the page carries the following quote: "The UK version [of the magazine] received strong criticism from psychologist Dr David Giles from the University of Winchester because of its promotion of a muscular physique as a sign of health", followed by a quote from the BBC Health article. The entry's author had clearly made the association between the research and the fact that most of the media sources reporting the findings had used *Men's Health* (and images of the magazine) as a typical example of the type of publication referred to in the paper.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- COMAB (2009). *Man Made: Men, masculinities and equality in public policy*. Accessed online at <http://www.xyonline.net/content/man-made-men-masculinities-and-equality-public-policy>
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7318411.stm>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men's\\_Health\\_\(British\\_magazine\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men's_Health_(British_magazine))
- <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.co.uk/2008/04/lads-mags-and-feelings-of-physical.html>
- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-535690/How-lads-mags-creating-generation-exercise-obsessed-men-striving-perfect-body.html>
- [http://www.mybodybeautiful.co.uk/Media\\_and\\_Body\\_Image/Men\\_and\\_the\\_Media.htm](http://www.mybodybeautiful.co.uk/Media_and_Body_Image/Men_and_the_Media.htm)
- <http://www.tricitypsychology.com/new-research-finds-link-between-lads%E2%80%99-magazines-and-obsessive-exercise-to-improve-body-image/>
- [http://www.worldhealth.net/news/magazines\\_can\\_impact\\_men\\_s\\_health/](http://www.worldhealth.net/news/magazines_can_impact_men_s_health/)