University of Nevada, Reno

**Effect of Targeted LGBT Media on Body Image Perception
Of Gay College Men**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

As the legal status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people improves in the United States, the prevalence of LGBT media increases as well. From homoerotic advertisements to LGBT social media, the images are more common today than during any other time in U.S. history. Currently, there is a limited understanding of how such images affect LGBT people, particularly gay men. With body image dissatisfaction in gay men, this qualitative study addresses whether LGBT media have an effect on the way gay men feel about their bodies. The population was narrowed to college students, as college represents a time in which formation of an LGBT identity is most common. Following an analysis, the first finding includes that gay college men use social media tools, specifically Grindr, for romantic, sexual and friend-seeking motives. Another finding indicated that gay college men perceive higher expectations for their body images based on both the external heterosexual community and internal LGBT community. The last findings showed gay college men perceive that less-muscular bodies become associated with being too flamboyant or feminine. Overall the findings and results indicate that gay college men perceive intense pressures to achieve an idealized body from inside and outside the LGBT community as a result of social media and advertisements, respectively. However, gay men find empowerment and confidence when using narrative and online media.

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Throughout this challenging process, there were times when I did not think I would be able to complete my thesis. However, with the endless support of a few people, I am proud to finish this research – that means a great deal to me – in partial completion of my requirements for the University of Nevada, Reno Honors Program.

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**I. Introduction:**

At a time when there is much discussion about civil rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) individuals in the United States, many college-aged gay men are being impacted by images and messages about the body impacting their own self-perception. From advertisements to social media, these images are omnipresent in all areas of life for gay college men, and impact of such images is still widely understudied. With incongruent rates of body dissatisfaction for gay men as compared to their heterosexual counterparts, it is critical to understand the role that images in the media play. This qualitative research sought to determine the impact of LGBT media on the body image perception of gay male college students.

The United States is in the midst of a civil rights movement aimed at providing legal equality to members of LGBT community. In 2014 alone, 18 states legalized same sex marriage, bringing the total to 35 states and the District of Columbia (Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts, 2014). For the sake of this research, same sex marriage is defined as the legal recognition of two self-identified same sex people as partners – this definition aligns with common usage of the term (Damslet, 1992). These breakthroughs in gender and sexual equality have brought LGBT issues, such as same-sex marriage, to the forefront of American politics and media — particularly in regards to legal policy. However, despite these improvements in the legal status of LGBT people, there are still major social and psychological challenges for members of the community. While more state governments begin to legalize same sex marriage, some individuals have worked to limit and restrict the rights of homosexuals. In March 2015, a California lawyer named Matt McLaughlin proposed that homosexuality be classified as a capital crime in the

state, thus making homosexuality punishable by death. The proposal, which McLaughlin calls "The Sodomite Suppression Act," would require 365,000 signatures to be added to California's 2016 ballot initiative (Ehrenfreund, 2015). Moreover, in March, 2015, the Indiana State Legislature introduced a controversial bill called the Right to Religious Freedom Act, which some Americans believed would make it legal for companies to discriminate against LGBT people. Whether they were customers or employees, the bill would give companies the opportunity to deny service or employment to people on religious grounds, which activists saw as primarily aimed at denying service to LGBT people (Wang, 2015). These two examples, among others, characterize the continued existence of homophobia in America, despite overall improvements.

Prohibition of same sex marriage is only one part of the struggle that homosexuals face regularly. Legal inequality is merely a reflection of social inequality that homosexuals face as well, which manifests in the form of homophobia. Homophobia is defined as "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals" (Merriam-Webster Online). Hogg and Levine (2010) suggest that homophobia continues to exist across the world, particularly in people that come from rural communities and identify with fundamentalist religious groups. Homophobia plays a key role in social antagonization of homosexual men and women, and that antagonization results in a higher probability of substance abuse, depression and suicide (Hogg & Levine, 2010). This phenomenon is particularly true in youth, many of whom are antagonized throughout their K-12 education. A 2011 study from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that high school students ranging from grades 9-12

are four times more likely to commit suicide if identifying as LGBT than their heterosexual counterparts (CDC 2011).

Relative to the scope of other topics, less research exists about LGBT community because a vast majority of published LGBT-based research has only been completed within the last 15 years. Compared to other topics, the idea of studying LGBT people has been popular for a much shorter time. The limited scope of information has left many factors related to the formation of an LGBT identity — and potential suicide — undiscovered or poorly understood. However, certain patterns have come to light, particularly the high risk of mental instability often exhibited by homosexual men. For example, gay men have shown significantly higher rates of body dissatisfaction than their heterosexual male or female counterparts (Siconolfi, Halkitis, Allomong, & Burton, 2009).

Body image research on LGBT people, according to Kane (2009), has been evaluated through one of two lenses: the old orthodoxy (a need to be thin) or the new orthodoxy (a need for muscularity). The new orthodoxy tends to be studied more often than the old orthodoxy in academic research. It is common for researchers, such as Siconolfi et al. (2009), to hypothesize about relationships among gender roles, masculinity and self-satisfaction — often with an emphasis on muscularity as a means to aligning with societal expectations of masculinity.  In fact, Halkitis and colleagues use the term "buff agenda" in their 1999 and 2004 journal articles to characterize the muscular image that gay men hope to attain (Halkitis, P. N., Green, K. A., & Wilton, L., 2004). Although terms like these make it easier for researchers to define the highest body goal for men, they rely too heavily on the new orthodoxy as the only means of evaluation.

Moreover, both lenses — the old and new orthodoxies — tend to generalize the community and ignore prior research that indicates that body image is a complex and distinctive issue for LGBT people that cannot be defined by one line of thinking (e.g. Boroughs & Thompson 2002).

Recent research has identified that homosexual men struggle with their bodies more often than their heterosexual counterparts. One study observed hospital patients with eating disorders and found that a remarkable number of bulimia nervosa cases, 42%, came from homosexual or bisexual men (Carlat, Camarto, and Herzog 1997). In an attempt to isolate the cause of the eating disorder phenomenon, some researchers point to the media as a major influencer in negative body image. Bartlett, Vowels and Saucier (2008) found through interviews that a number of self-esteem and dissatisfaction issues were related to body cues projected in a variety of popular magazines (Lanzieri, 2012).

Insecurities associated with body image affect a wide range of young people throughout the country. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, this study will focus on gay college men and how they interact with different forms of media. Media will be defined as anything that sends a message. The term is intentionally vague as media is displayed across a variety of platforms today and can be created by anyone due to technological improvements in the 21$^{st}$ century (Shirky, 2008). Regardless of whether it is created by a social media user, editorial magazine writer, or advertiser, it is considered media if it conveys a message. The medium may include advertisements, entertainment across platforms and social media. Although studies have indicated a level of body dissatisfaction in both homosexual and bisexual men, research also indicates important differences between the two groups. Snyder and colleagues broke identity into

four areas of study: gender-typical behavior, sex role, ego strength and lipid levels. They found that while bisexual and homosexual men indicated similar results for gender-typical behavior, sex role and lipid levels, the ego strength of bisexual men was significantly lower than those who identified as homosexual (1994). The results of that study showed that bisexual men show lower rates of self-esteem, higher rates of depression and overall more intense feelings of loneliness than homosexuals. As a result of those major differences, the study focused only on homosexual men. To minimize the risk of mixed data this study did not include people who identify as bisexual. A homosexual is defined as a male that self-identifies as having sexual attraction exclusively to other males.

The study used a focus group, in-depth interviews and a researcher's journal to identify and characterize the physical and emotional responses of gay males in college. In these interviews and focus group, members of the demographic audience were asked their opinions about targeted LGBT media. Targeted LGBT media markets specifically to the LGBT community were based on relevant community content. While the focus group and interview questions were guided, this qualitative study did not limit participants in the scope of their answers, as long as they continued to address LGBT media in some capacity. Ultimately, while various forms of media provide short-term satisfaction and improved self-esteem, the overall effect of targeted LGBT media was negative due to the hyper masculine images that reinforce the social and historical pressures that force gay men to feel the need to compensate for their sexual identities.

This study served to provide insight into gay male body image issues of gay college men. It narrowed the study specifically to the relationship between media and

body image in order to confidently assert whether media plays a role in homosexual body satisfaction. There is limited research on this age group's response to LGBT media. Being that 78% of people attending college regularly engage with social media (one of the categories falling under "media" throughout this research), it was expected that the subjects chosen for the interviews and focus group would likely provide a wealth of data in exploring the potential relationship between media and body image (Social Networking Factsheet, 2013). This research contributes to other studies that look for potential contributing factors to body dissatisfaction in homosexual men. By adding to the slowly growing body of research in the area surrounding the LGBT community, this study seeks to support or disprove the effect of targeted LGBT media on body image, thus allowing others to delve further into what may cause body dissatisfaction in gay men.

Being that the LGBT movement is so strong in the 21st century's social and political climate, it is important to gain a better understanding of what factors are driving the formation of LGBT identity. To further strengthen the movement, those companies and firms who advertise to gay men and counselors on college campuses must realize how they can empower gay men to form their own identities. For that reason, this study focuses on three research questions that address the issues of LGBT media on body image perception in gay men: What messages in the media resonates with gay men? How do gay men describe incidents in the media that impact their body image? What specific online sites or applications impact gay men's body image?

**II. Definition of Terms:**

Given that this study focuses primarily on gay college men, it is important to define a few terms that will be used throughout the research. The LGBT community has developed some vocabulary that is familiar within the community but may seem unfamiliar to those who do not identify as LGBT. These definitions do not come from a specific source; rather, they are defined relative to the way they were used throughout the study. The terms are as follows:

Media: Anything that sends a message; can be found on a wide variety of platforms (e.g. social media websites, TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, and advertisements), (Shirky, 2008).

Grindr: A mobile and tablet application targeted for gay men to socialize. Based on Grindr's website, its mission statement is to "help you meet guys while you're on the go." The app aggregates its gay male users into digital communities based on proximity and allows them to strike up conversations with others in their area. There is no filtering system, so any person can contact any person (Grindr – Learn More).

Tribe: A term most commonly used on Grindr that represents a person's categorization based on their body type, which accounts for weight, body hair or muscularity. In particular, there are 12 tribes that users can identify themselves with: Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz, Rugged, Trans, and Twink. While most focus on physical appearance such as bear, clean-cut, daddy, geek, jock, otter, rugged and twink — others are used to express sexual fetishes, gender identity and HIV status such as leather, trans, and poz, respectively (Hernandez, 2014).

Tinder: A mobile and tablet application that can be used by heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual people based on user preferences. The app intends to give users the chance to find potential romantic partners in their community by allowing users to "like" or "dislike" others based on basic profiles and relative proximity. Conversations only start when there is a match, which means both users chose to "like" the other. The need to "like" another person serves as a filtering system, so that only certain people can speak with each other (Witt, 2014).

On the DL/Down Low: As defined by participants in this study, DL refers to users of Grindr that do not show pictures of themselves with the intention of hiding their identity from others.

Hooking-Up: Some form of sexual activity between partners, with little to no intention of romance after the encounter. Hook-ups often take place between individuals who do not know each other previous to the sexual act, though it may sometimes occur between casual friends or acquaintances.

## III. Literature Review:

The Gay Rights Movement has made substantial progress in fighting for legal equality over the past six years. The military repealed its "don't ask, don't tell" policy in 2010, which made homosexuality a punishable offense if discovered — this policy operated under the agreement that officers would not ask each other about sexual preferences (Branigin, Wilgoren, & Bacon 2010). In 2012, President Barack Obama publicly announced his support for same-sex marriage, making him the first president in United States history to promote such an idea (Wallsten, Wilson 2012). A final breakthrough for the LGBT community was when The Supreme Court struck down major

pieces of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which barred same-sex couples from receiving the same benefits as heterosexual couples (Barnes 2013). The combination of these breakthroughs in conjunction with the changing tide of marriage equality in the United States demonstrates a shift in popular opinion regarding sexual orientation. In fact, a 2014 Gallup poll indicates that the number of people who support marriage equality eclipsed the number of people who opposed it in 2012, reaching an all-time high of 55% (McCarthy, 2014).

Although the United States has been making legal strides toward gender and sexual equality, there are still deep-rooted perceptions of homosexuals that come as a result of prolonged socialization. Gender roles hold a strong foundation in the U.S. and influence societal expectations of males and females. For example, young boys are expected to "[…]adopt socially positive characteristics such as strength, dominance, and assertiveness[…]" (Greene 2013). While these qualities tend to be expected of boys from a young age, they are also major predictors of homophobia later in life (Martino, 2001). In delving deeper into gender role variables, it has been observed that beliefs in traditional gender roles, modern sexism and hyper masculinity are all clear predictors of homophobia as well (Whitley, 2001). Whitley further posits that this phenomenon is troubling for the LGBT community as, during adolescence, clear gender roles are defined from a young age. The strong association between masculinity and dominance that is expected from boys may actually be contributing to their perception of homosexuals as they grow older.

In Kimmel and Mahler's analysis of violence and random school shootings, the researchers hypothesize that homophobia, in and of itself, is a trait that is associated with

masculinity (2003). Birkett and Espelage (2015) characterize hyper masculinity as displaying qualities of dominance through physical muscularity and overpowering personality traits. They further explain that hyper masculine men assume the role that they do as a response to their fear that they will seem gay if they do not appear masculine. For adolescents, the use of intense bullying and homophobic name-calling assert one's dominance. Birkett and Espelage dug deeper into the role of masculinity in homophobia research by conducting a social network and multilevel modeling analysis that analyzed the effect of masculinity in groups of adolescent peer groups (2015). At a young age, boys who are bullied or called homophobic names are more inclined to tease their friends and others using the same terms as a show of masculinity in the male-dominated group. Thus, homophobia becomes a cycle in which male peer groups feel the need to use homophobic terms to assert their masculinity, which leads to a higher probability of victimization using the same homophobic words to assert the user's own dominance and masculinity (Birkett et al. 2015).

The need to convey hyper masculinity and the resulting homophobia continues into adulthood as individuals show disdain for homosexuals who do not align with typical gender roles. Cohen, Hall, & Tuttle (2009) asked college-aged, heterosexual men and women to read descriptions of a traditional masculine gay man and a feminine gay man, then take a survey evaluating the person using a variety of factors, including likability. The study found that heterosexual men typically liked the masculine description more while heterosexual women were more open to both options. Additionally, a similar study was conducted in 2004 that yielded comparable results. The research proved that

heterosexual men and women viewed a feminine man as "[…]more shy, yielding, and insecure than his feminine female counterpart" (Prentice, Carranza 2004).

With the societal expectation in the U.S. that gay men often display feminine qualities, homosexual males often focus more deeply on establishing themselves as dominant, masculine figures in order to prove themselves. The struggle to display masculinity is even more intense for ethnic minorities, who use their muscular bodies and anti-feminine attitude to break the cycle of societal oppression (Fields, E., Bogart, L., Smith, K., Malebranche, D., & Ellen, J., 2015). Although this study does not distinguish the participants between race, it is important to recognize that this phenomenon represents an extreme case of how homosexuals feel whether they are a non-white minority or not. Fields et al. make the point that gay black men, in particular, feel an extra pressure to embody hyper masculinity based on their minority status in both racial and sexual identities. "Stereotypical Black male gender roles of hypermasculinity (i.e., exaggeration of traditional masculine roles through behaviors such as sexual prowess, physical dominance, aggression, and antifemininity) have been described as a way for men disempowered by racial oppression to demonstrate power and authority" (Fields, et al. 2015). When seeking physical dominance over another individual, muscularity plays a critical role in how men perceive their challenger proven by the aforementioned masculinity analysis. Ultimately, the desire to compensate with muscle mass pushes gay men to aspire for the bodies they do.

While many researchers agree that homosexual men aspire to muscularity for the purpose of appearing masculine to the rest of society, other experts in the field point to historical context to characterize why gay men maintain a fascination with health and

strength. Halkitis et al. (2004) explain how the 1980s changed the progression of gay

culture forever. Prior to the 1980s, gay advocates were pushing for a masculine gay

culture distinct from heterosexual culture — more in line with the old orthodoxy.

However, with the outbreak of the human immunodeficiency virus or "HIV," gay

communities, especially in urban areas, suffered from rapid health deterioration and death

in large numbers. At the end of 1981, 121 men died from HIV, baffling scientists and

government officials alike. By the end of 1989, despite having isolated the virus, AIDS

had killed 27,408 people (Geiling, 2013). Gay men were perceived by society as fragile,

sickly and anything but masculine. Halkitis and colleagues (2004) explain what happened

next,

> "In order to combat the physical weakness brought on by the virus, many HIV-positive gay men undertook complementary therapy measures such as steroid replacement as well as weight training and nutritional supplements to increase strength and maintain health. Today, while these therapies are still important elements in the lives of HIV-positive gay men, they have moved beyond the goals of health and survival and have become associated with a physically based conception of masculinity espoused by many gay men, regardless of HIV serostatus."

By the end of the 1980s, gay men strived to improve their bodies, not only because of the

social stigma associated with being gay and feminine but for their health as well.

Expectations (both internal and external) of muscularity often create body

dissatisfaction in people who believe they are too skinny — a quality more frequent in

gay men (Frederick, Peplau, & Lever, 2006; McCreary & Sadava, 2001). The transition

from the old orthodoxy to the new orthodoxy happened in part because of HIV,

ultimately shifting the idealized gay body away from being thin in favor of muscularity.

Since the 1980s, that idealized image has played a role in how body image affects a gay

man's self-confidence. Reilly and Rudd (2006) posit that gay men spend excessive amounts of time bodybuilding in hopes of impressing other gay men, and also the external society. Gay men perceive their time in the gym and subsequent muscle mass to mean they are overcoming any feminine stereotypes. As Yelland and Tiggemann (2003) discovered, upper body strength, more specifically the chest, has a direct correlative link to self-esteem and attractiveness in both heterosexual and homosexual men. Despite the time gay men spend developing their bodies, gay men struggle to be comfortable with their physical features when compared to heterosexual men. When compared side-by-side, gay men often focus on their dissatisfaction with their body parts that society emphasizes as the ideal male physique (e.g. waist, biceps, arms, stomach) (Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin 1989).

Although the new orthodoxy tends to dominate more recent conversations in the academic world about homosexual body perception, it is important to note the existing research about gay men who desire to be thin. A 1991 study compared homosexual men to heterosexual men, contrasting their desired weight and ideal body type. In light of the disproportionate cases of bulimia nervosa in homosexual men, researchers wanted to measure body dissatisfaction to identify any patterns that may exist. In a study of 75 men (32 heterosexual and 43 homosexual), it was found that homosexual men were more inclined to be underweight (23.3%) as compared to heterosexual men (3.1%) (Herzog, Newman, & Warshaw, 1991). Moreover, homosexual men often scored lower composite scores on their body satisfaction survey than their heterosexual counterpart. While the idea of body dissatisfaction is common amongst most gay men, this study demonstrates the difference in how some gay men perceive the idealized body (some thin, some

muscular). However, it is also important to note that the research was published in 1991, just on the heels of the HIV epidemic. While many suffered and fought for their strength, it is possible that some who were not infected continued to pursue the idea of the old orthodoxy. While the methodology of the study is sound, it is important to take historical context into consideration when deciding how indicative this study might be of homosexual culture in 2015. Original research to be conducted in this thesis could potentially shed some light on what body type young gay men work for in the 21$^{st}$ century.

Social expectations, gender roles, homophobia and the HIV epidemic all contribute to the belief that gay men have something to prove in their body image. Gay men often use this mindset to find and emulate what they believe is a strong male figure. Gay men are more easily influenced by media, and in this case, print media such as men's magazines because they hope to emulate the "tall, muscular and mesomorphic" man on the cover (McCreary 2000). Magazine distributors and advertisers took note of this phenomenon and accordingly adjusted their advertising budgets to reach a larger audience of homosexual males. During the 1990s, advertisers more than doubled their LGBT spending — starting at $61.6 million and raising it to $158.3 million by 1999 (Saucier and Caron 2008). The decision to raise the levels of spending paid off in the end as advertising revenues grew six times faster for the LGBT press than for any consumer magazine (2011 Gay Press Report).

Beyond the new LGBT-targeted strategy, the content of the magazines was also tailored over the past thirty years to reflect how an ideal man should look and act.  Over those years, men's magazines started to include more columns, articles and

advertisements that promoted tips to building muscle, exercising and a maintaining a strong physique (Law & Labre, 2002). To put it into perspective, men saw three times as many advertisements promoting muscle growth and body formation than they saw promoting weight loss or dieting (Andersen & DiDomenico, 1992). Eventually, the ads, images and content morphed into something unattainable for a vast majority of American men. Both homosexuals and heterosexuals were affected, as the muscular body type became the standard across different media. However, the impact was greater on homosexual men, especially in conjunction with the redirection of LGBT advertising.

Prior research has shown that gay men are more susceptible to images of hyper masculinity than heterosexual men are. Overall, magazines and digital publications rarely display the natural image of men or women. With the development in editing technology over time, publications have become increasingly reliant on digital tools like Photoshop and airbrushing to remove imperfections from models (Escalda, 2015). The unrealistic airbrushed body affects gay men more deeply than heterosexual men as gay men feel more pressure to be a certain, "ideal" size. Herzog's (1991) study measured more than just body dissatisfaction, it also asked heterosexual and homosexual participants to evaluate what body type they felt a potential lover would desire, then express what they felt would be an ideal body for themselves. The results indicated that gay men understood what a lover would want, and consequently, chose the same option for their ideal body. Conversely, heterosexual men believed women would want a larger man than the ideal body they hoped to achieve. In essence, heterosexual men felt less external pressure to achieve their ideal body while homosexual men were entirely aware of what a potential lover or member of the gay community wanted. In relating back to airbrushing,

homosexual men are more inclined to work toward achieving the airbrushed, "ideal" gay body, whereas heterosexual men feel comfortable that they can attract others without achieving the same level of idealism (Herzog, et al., 1991).

Between projected images in LGBT advertising and societal pressure to maintain masculinity, gay men have a much higher probability of developing eating disorders (Brown, 1987). There are a number of outside factors that contribute to the higher probability of eating disorders. Some researchers attribute the eating disorders to the gay community's obsession with the perfect body image and need to impress; some researchers believe it is more directly connected to self-esteem issues, which would mean women and gay men develop eating disorders for the same psychological reason. Another theory that a few researchers have proposed is that gay men struggle with internalized homophobia, which manifests in the pursuit of the perfect body (Ballantyne, 2011). While many argue that images portrayed in magazines, televisions and advertisements negatively impact body image perception in gay men, it is possible that other targeted-LGBT media serve a different, more positive purpose.

Other than magazines and advertisements, a growing trend among homosexual men is the use of LGBT-targeted social media. Popular mobile applications like Grindr and Adam4Adam have permeated gay culture, creating a space for gay men to interact with each other. David Gudelunas (2012), characterizes the apps as Social Networking Sites or "SNSs." The primary goal of these sites is to connect people of a given community in one platform with websites like Facebook as a primary SNS. However, as Gudelunas revealed through focus groups with users of the apps, Grindr and Adam4Adam (among others) have become a platform to find sexual partners. A

particular quote from the article brings attention to the anonymous, random sex that occurs as a result of using the app, "Grindr is great because you can find sex but still be anonymous. I have my face obscured, and a lot of other guys do the same," (Gudelunas, 2012). Moreover, in a nonscientific experiment, college student and newspaper contributor, Josef Edwards discussed uploading two photos to two separate accounts on Grindr. In one picture he was photographed without his shirt, while in the other he only showed his face. A few hours later, the picture of him without a shirt received far more attention than the picture of his face (Edwards, 2014). While there is no explicit academic value in his anecdote, his experience has an implicit value in revealing how gay men interact with social networking apps intended for those who identify with the LGBT community. The increased attention to his profile demonstrated users' interests in provocative images. Users are more inclined to message other users that seem interested in some form of sexual intercourse.

Considering the effect that external pressures have on homosexual esteem and body image, it begs the question of whether apps like Grindr are hurting or helping the self-esteem of members of the gay community. In her dissertation, *All the Wrong Places: Homophobia, Self-esteem, and Anonymous Sex among Gay Men* the researcher, Esparza, conducts interviews with ten openly gay men who have participated in anonymous sex in some capacity. She defines anonymous sex as, the "criteria for such an encounter usually involved not knowing their sex partner's name, or knowing only his first name, and meeting that person for [the] first time for the sole purpose of having sex" (Esparza, 1996). Throughout her interviews, nine of the ten men express that having anonymous sex contributes to building their gay identity, while one dissenting participant expresses

that he only receives physical fulfillment. Only four participants expressed any health concerns associated with anonymous sex, each of whom mentioned HIV (Esparza, 1996). Ultimately, her interviews reveal that anonymous sex boosts the confidence and self-esteem of her subjects. Considering the overwhelming anecdotal evidence in Gudelunas' study, LGBT SNSs are used for anonymous sex and an overall improvement in a homosexual's self-esteem and personal identity when using Grindr or Adam4Adam as a targeted LGBT media platform. At this point, it is important to note that, while anonymous sex raises self-esteem, anonymous sex is still a high-risk behavior that is associated with low self-esteem in the long run.

A major difference among various kinds of LGBT media is the ability for gay men to opt in or to have media forced upon oneself. For example, while mass media moves in the new direction of portraying bodies that are unattainable — targeted-LGBT social media give homosexual users the ability to choose what they see, with whom they speak and whether to use the service at all. Apps such as Grindr and Adam4Adam provide a safe medium for homosexuals to join a community, be it sexual or platonic in nature. Researcher, Richard T. LeBeau conducted an open-ended survey in 2008 that included 129 gay men discussing the variety of features associated with identifying as part of a gay community. LeBeau admittedly leaves the interpretation of a "gay community" open, in hopes of finding a wide spectrum of answers. In the survey, 40.2% of respondents claimed that they maintain their association with a gay community specifically for social reasons (both for romantic and friendly reasons) (LeBeau, 2009). This finding is a possible justification as to why gay men engage with and maintain positive feelings about LGBT-targeted social media, as it provides them an outlet to

communicate with other members of their community, while also providing romantic opportunity. Conversely, 15.1% of respondents claimed they have a distaste for gay communities specifically due to self-destructive tendencies. LeBeau characterizes the response in this way:

> "Several participants (15.1%) expressed the risky, reckless behavior of gay men as a factor that hindered their involvement in thegay community. One participant responded, "When I look at gay youth, seeing the drugs, the deliberate effort to get AIDS [through unsafe sexual practices], the tobacco smoking, the irrelevance of their lives, I get so disheartened. Why … do we bother?" (2009).

Again, LGBT-targeted social media act as important tools for openly gay men as they provide them the opportunity to connect to a gay community with the option to opt out at any time. If a person attempts to illicit unprotected or unsafe sex on Grindr, the user has the option to simply block the other person or simply delete the app itself.

In terms of body image perception, the ability to opt in and out of LGBT-targeted social media empowers users to decide when enough engagement is enough for them. When evaluating other forms of mass media, it would be possible to argue that gay men are negatively impacted by images portraying muscled, unattainable bodies. The use of models, airbrushing and content centered around vanity influences a community that is already susceptible to manipulation, intimidation and coercion.

The issue of body image transcends simple bad feelings while looking at a buff man in a magazine — homosexual young people, 14-21, have alarmingly high rates of suicidal behavior. D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington (2001) found that 25% of LGBT young people had seriously considered suicide in 2001, 33% having made an attempt, with 10% having made an attempt as compared to 1.5% for heterosexual peers.

There are a number of difficult variables that contribute to the lives of homosexual youth: the fear of losing friends when coming out, the higher probability of ending up homeless (Walls & Bell, 2011). Identities are complex and cannot be narrowed to one quality, but the wealth of existing research points toward media and social pressure as causes of body dissatisfaction. How strongly does body image correlate to the formation of identity? And if they are correlated, is there something that needs to change?

**IV. Methodology:**

The research for this study is qualitative. As the literature review has shown, the issue of body image perception is complex and nuanced. It would be difficult to identify a numerical scale that accounts for the variety of factors that contribute to the formation of self-identity relative to body image perception; studying the lived experiences of college-aged gay men will provide a better understanding of the phenomena. All of the members of this study met three criteria: they are openly gay, attended a university and self-identify as a male. Although the research is focused on analyzing body image specifically, freeform and candid discussions regarding issues of identity helped in identifying what role body image does or does not play for homosexual males. The data enabled this researcher to make an informed conclusion about how body image directly impacts self-esteem.

**The Institutional Review Board**

The University of Nevada, Reno's Institutional Review Board (IRB), approved the study. The recruitment flyer (Appendix A), verbal consent form (Appendix B) and research protocol were sent to the board along with a detailed application explaining the nature of the research. IRB expedited the review, and returned the application with two

small changes to the focus group protocol. Originally, there were questions regarding when a person came out of the closet, which IRB viewed as a sensitive subject. Consequently, the questions were removed and the research was approved before any contact was made with participants.

**Recruitment**

The recruitment flyer (Appendix A) was posted around the University of Nevada, Reno, but the most successful recruitment came from tapping into networks of LGBT people. Professor Dr. Todd Felts informed his students about the study and allowed them to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. Furthermore, a message was put out to students involved in the Queer Student Union, which is the only LGBT club at the university. Between those two efforts, six students reached out with interest in the research. Subsequently, those six students informed their friends about the research and four more students that met the criteria ultimately contacted the research team.

**Demographic Table**

The following table indicates the age, year in school and academic standing for all of the participants of the study.

| Name | Year in School | Age | Ethnicity | Focus Group or One-on-one Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aaron | Junior | 21 | White | One-on-one |
| Cameron | Senior | 22 | Latino | One-on-one |
| Collin | Junior | 21 | White | One-on-one |
| Quinton | Senior | 22 | White | One-on-one |
| Dylan | Senior | 22 | Latino | One-on-one |
| Shane | Senior | 22 | White | One-on-one |
| Jeremy | Junior | 23 | Muslim | Focus Group |
| Thomas | Senior | 22 | White | Focus Group |
| Antonio | Junior | 21 | Latino | Focus Group |
| Dominic | Sophomore | 20 | White | Focus Group |

*Table 1:* **List of participants**

**Focus Groups**

Four homosexual men between the ages of 19-25 participated in a discussion regarding body image. The participants had the research verbally explained to them (Appendix B) and each gave their own verbal consent to participate. The participants were asked questions regarding their initial opinions about body image in the LGBT community — what have they noticed about it? How important is it in finding a partner? All of the questions can be found in Appendix D. They were then prompted to discuss their experiences with LGBT media and what they have noticed about it. Finally, they discussed their perceptions of how it impacts the LGBT community and their own body images. The discussion was recorded on video based on unanimous consent. The interview lasted a little over an hour. All of the participants' information will remain confidential to any person except the researcher and mentor.

**In Depth Interviews**

Six individuals were chosen to participate in one-on-one interviews about LGBT issues. The participants had the research verbally explained to them (Appendix B) and each gave their own verbal consent to participate. The discussion questions started more broadly than the focus group, as it was an opportunity to gain more personal insight into the range of individual factors that impact identity. The questions then targeted body image perception and self-esteem. All of the questions can be found in Appendix C. The interviews were audio recorded based on permission from the participants.

**Researcher's Notebook**

While the focus groups and interviews occurred, the researcher observed and wrote down the participants and identified nonverbal body language, reactions or emotional responses. This method served as an indicator of how participants felt about

the questions or opinions of others regardless of whether they made their opinions outwardly known. In keeping this notebook, the qualitative results had more depth and richness due to the thorough adjudication of the subjects.

The method of analyzing the data will be further explained in the findings.

## V. Findings

Based on the focus groups, individual interviews and researcher's notebook, three themes developed throughout the discussion. When analyzing the data, patterns were found through a process of coding. The coding aligned with the process explained by Saldana (2009), which encourages researchers to find words that come up often, categorize those words into common groups and finally develop general themes based on those groups. Three major themes were found, with categories underneath each of them. Each theme is explained broadly, while the categories give a more specific perspective of why those themes are relevant.

## Theme Summary I: Social Media as a Tool in the Community

Throughout the interviews and focus group, participants often mentioned the prevalence of LGBT-targeted social media applications for smart phones and tablets. Two mobile applications came up most often in the study: Grindr, which is targeted only for use by gay men and Tinder, which is available to males and females with the option of setting a sexual preference.

The applications were used for a variety of reasons: romantic, sexual and friend-seeking motives. Overall, gay millennial men use the apps to maximize their opportunities to meet other members of the LGBT community. However, along with the applications come a slew of negatively perceived consequences. The outcome of using

targeted LGBT social media relied heavily on which app was being used and what the primary motives were behind using the app.

All of the participants shared common viewpoints about how the apps were primarily used by the community. There was some variance in the perception of the apps' usefulness. While some participants perceived the apps more favorably, others expressed overt disgust with the way the apps were used by other members of the community. With that said, all ten of the participants reported having used both apps at least once in their lifetimes; that fact demonstrated the widespread usage of the apps across these 10 members of the millennial LGBT community.

**Social Media Tools for Hooking Up**

Throughout the research, all participants, with the exception of Dylan (refer to table in methodology), noted the frequency of LGBT social media as a tool in initiating sexual "hook-ups" with other members of the community.

Nine out of 10 participants expressed their distaste for hooking-up, claiming that apps like Grindr actually detracted from their ability to find a more serious romantic partner. In particular, Collin noted an experience in which he was hoping to make a romantic connection with a person on Grindr but ultimately had to turn the potential partner down due to his persistence in desiring a hook-up. Collin said:

> "This one guy seemed nice at first, then he was like, 'I don't date, I only hook up.' I told him I wasn't interested in that and he said, 'c'mon you're only two miles away.' All I could think was, 'I'm two miles away from a KFC too, but that's not a good idea either.' That's generally how people on Grindr are and it just creeps me out I guess."

All other participants (except Cameron) expressed similar experiences to Collin, claiming

that they were often turned off by the pushiness to initiate a hook-up. They believed that

other users were too forward in their sexually-driven motives, which often made the

participants feel uncomfortable. Aaron explained his experience with Grindr, in

particular, as "abrasive." He, along with Shane and Quinton, provided examples of times

in which they received unsolicited pictures of other users' genitalia. Those who were

critical of the hook-up culture on Grindr aligned with the viewpoint that the users were

just too aggressive. Despite criticizing the aggressiveness of the hook-up culture, Quinton

and Collin admitted that there were some sexual motives behind downloading the app.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Cameron was happy to explain his

intentions of hooking-up when using Grindr. He claimed that hooking-up was his primary

intention when using the app, and even went as far as to claim he was "really good at it,"

when talking to other users. He was proud of his knowledge of how to communicate

using the app and was unashamed by his open desire to hook-up. Cameron went on to

explain his interpretation of the images a user finds when viewing other profiles:

> "You'll find different kinds of profiles. If you do have a picture up then… well if
> you think you're handsome – you have a face picture. If you have a good body –
> then it's a body pictures, mostly ripped or semi-fit guys. If not, then it's just
> beautiful men who know they are good to go. Or if they've been modeling, they'll
> show their modeling picture."

Cameron also noted that he found, "blank profiles for DL people." He explained that

some users are not out of the closet and use the app as a means of finding partners they

can hook-up with in secret. The gay community has unofficially labeled those users,

"DL" to mean down low. While Cameron was unphased by the phenomenon, Aaron

expressed disgust with users who remain on the "DL." He said about Grindr that, "there

are also a lot of discreet profiles — and that's something that really bothers me. Discreet

men, which end up being closeted men using gay men for their sexual pleasure and it's

just not a reciprocal relationship, I saw a lot of that."

Based on the conversations conducted in the interviews and focus group, Grindr,

specifically, is known for its hook-up culture. Shane jokingly mentioned in his interview

that more than half of the Grindr population were interested in nothing but hook-ups. The

conversation surrounding Tinder seemed to be more focused on building different types

of relationships than those formed on Grindr.

**Being Organic and Transparent on Social Sites**

Participants described a difference in how different social applications work. A major

difference between Grindr and Tinder was described by the integration of one's Facebook

profile when using Tinder. Participants explained that instead of providing the user's own

photo and choosing the information to be shared as on Grindr, Tinder takes a user's

pictures and interests from Facebook to build the foundation for the profile. While users

can ultimately change their photos if they choose to do so, the interview participants

believed posting fake photos is far less common on Tinder. Aaron explained Tinder's

interface in this way:

> "On Tinder, it was far more personal. You have five pictures and you got a lot
> more from those pictures. Were they artsy? Were the pictures edited in a cool
> way? What were their friends like in those photos? You had the occasional first
> picture is a dude with his shirt off but far less on Tinder than on Grindr."

The ultimate effect of this difference as explained by Collin is that Tinder feels more like

an "organic meeting." He explained that he's made far more friends on Tinder than on

Grindr. On Tinder, based on photos, both users must show positive interest in the other person's physical appearance by "liking" the other user before a conversation can begin. This feature appeals to Cameron who believes physical attraction is the foundation of starting any type of relationship with another person — be it sexual or romantic.

However, it should be noted that the four focus group participants — Jeremy, Antonio, Thomas and Dominic — did not share the same characterization of Tinder. Jeremy believed that, despite allowing users to choose their sexual preference, Tinder was primarily targeted toward the heterosexual community. The other three members of the focus group agreed and little conversation was had about Tinder. Consequently, Tinder was a topic that was discussed much further in each of the six interviews.

Other than just establishing sexual or romantic connections, Quinton, Cameron and Collin all expressed the belief that both Grindr and Tinder have helped them become more connected to the LGBT community overall. Quinton and Collin are from the same small town, and they both expressed the idea that Grindr helped them connect to other gay people when moving to another city for college. However, all participants (in the focus group and interviews) expressed their dissatisfaction with the small size of the gay community in Reno. Quinton, Cameron and Collin commented that LGBT social media apps were important in finding at least a few other openly homosexual men in the city.

Beyond establishing connections in their own cities, Cameron also discussed the advantages of LGBT social media when traveling. He explained:

> "When I go somewhere on vacation, then I use [the LGBT apps] more to make friends to hang out with and go out with. I may not travel with a gay friend, so I will use them to find gay friends. I'll be like, "where should I go? Can we meet up

and hang out?" More of a friend-making app when I'm on vacation, and then some hook-ups, but not really dates."

Ultimately, the LGBT social media apps serve as a mechanism for establishing contact with other openly gay men anywhere. While the interview subjects tend to disagree on why or how the apps are used, the majority of subjects believe that the apps serve some purpose in establishing connections within the gay community — especially a community as small as Reno.

**Objectification of Men**

Although there were some positive perceptions of LGBT social media (with Cameron as a primary proponent of them), the general attitude toward the apps were negative in nature. Dylan, an openly gay Latino man, made the point that LGBT social media apps tend to lead to racial discrimination in some ways. He pointed out that, particularly on Grindr, users go out of their way to, "say what they do like or don't like," in terms of racial preference.

Jeremy, an openly gay Muslim, made the point that racial discrimination within the gay community can be damning. He said that, "it's a dangerous path to go down because we are marginalizing entire groups of people who are even further stratified from normal society — excuse me, regular society, not normal." As two ethnic minority men, Dylan and Jeremy believed that discriminating against minorities on LGBT social media hurt the community as a whole. Dylan specifically believed that LGBT social media allow for ethnic and religious discrimination to exist in an overt way.

Aaron and Cameron (despite being a proponent of LGBT social media) both made the point that the apps allow for the objectification of men. Aaron said, "On Grindr — I

mean we talk about objectifying women and that's an important conversation to have but, I think we need to have a conversation about what objectifying men looks like, especially in the gay community." Objectification was a concern to Aaron. He feels that it could potentially hurt the overall self-esteem of gay men when they evaluate their own body images.

When discussing LGBT social media, four different interview participants made the point that there is a greater pressure to look good for other users if he intends to find a romantic or sexual partner. When describing his experience with Grindr, Cameron shared his belief that people must maintain a certain body type to attract more partners: "jocks attract jocks because we put ourselves to the highest standards. Young, 20-year-old, masculine men are probably the biggest…uh, we are the main criteria for what a hot gay man would be in our community." Dylan felt like the increased pressure to maintain a good body when using LGBT social media results in gay men, "talking themselves up physically."

Furthermore, all of the research subjects made note of the fact that the majority of men show off their torsos instead of their faces on Grindr to attract the right kind of audience. Aaron posed the idea that men who struggle with body image on LGBT social media end up becoming the aggressive users that send unsolicited nude photos, primarily of their genitalia.

Ultimately, the negative effects of LGBT social media, primarily Grindr, have been felt by nearly all of the participants in the study. Six out of the ten mentioned that they had deleted Grindr at some point. Aaron spoke most candidly when he said, "With Grindr, I downloaded it a few times, then I deleted it, then I convinced myself to

download it again. It was a process of download, check it out, delete, but I never met anyone off of it before." He went on to further question its utility at all, as Grindr did not provide him with any interesting romantic partners or friendships.

**Theme Summary II: Body Image Expectations**

Throughout the interviews and focus group, it became clear that openly gay millennial men perceive higher expectations for their body images based on both the external heterosexual community and internal LGBT community. Gay men are often left with the task of reconciling the way the outside community views them as well as the way the LGBT community self-polices, which only exacerbates the problem. Openly gay men struggle more often in loving the bodies that they have because the community with which they identify expects them to be a certain way; if they do not meet that expectation, that failure leads to varying forms of isolation or lack of identity within the LGBT community.

Based on the testimony, LGBT community roles rely more heavily on body types when compared to the heterosexual community. While body image is not the only factor in creating an identity within the LGBT community, it is significant in forging a specific role that others use to identify gay men. The overall effect of this phenomenon is nuanced, but the findings demonstrate that body image is significant to members of the LGBT community.

**Categorization of gay male body types**

A common trend that was noticed by nine out of the ten participants is the categorization of gay men based on body types. The categories are primarily based on weight, age, amount of hair on the body and general physical appearance. All nine of the

research subjects indicated their familiarity with the system and were able to explain the majority of the different categories. For example, Quinton explained his understanding of the categorization in this way:

> "[…] on the other end there is the prevalent use of declaring body types into categories which are used far more than in heterosexual or bisexual communities — twinks, bears, otters, and those are use not just when it comes to porn sites but also just in conversation. And I haven't seen it in any interaction with any heterosexuals."

Quinton was one of multiple subjects that pointed out that these labels only exist within the LGBT community. While none of the subjects were able to explain why animals were discussed by gay men so often, Jeremy guessed in the focus group that the hair on a person's body along with the imagery of the person's overall appearance is related to the hair of an animal.

When prompted with the question of why labels have become so important in the community, Cameron explained his belief that LGBT people define what they like sexually more clearly: "They're pretty defined within the gay community. I don't know why we label so much. It helps us identify what we like more. I don't know why we do it actually. We are so used to being labeled maybe that's because we want to be in more control of what we like." As Shane further explained, often times, these labels are seen on LGBT social media apps and sites, giving users the chance to immediately start differentiating among the people they may or may not want to interact with.

The clear delineation among the different groups creates subsets of the gay community where some individuals devote themselves to pursuing only a certain type. Shane explained that gay men exclusively pursue bears and otters if they have an interest

in hair, whereas they take interest in "twinks" if they like men who are skinny and hairless. In media, particularly pornography and LGBT social media, people use these categories (or "tribes" as referred to on Grindr) to choose their preference. In the case of social media, Cameron said, "if you say you're more of a twink or bear but don't show a picture, then I won't be inclined to talk to you."

Quinton tends to believe that the categorization comes from the prevalence of labels in gay pornography. In order to find what a person is sexually attracted to, pornography websites allow users to choose among a variety of different body types each with their own distinct label. He posits that people feel comfortable being judgmental in terms of body type. Being choosy is encouraged when it comes to pornography.

A majority of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the labels, claiming they did associate with certain labels just because they look a certain way. In the focus group, Antonio discussed the way he has been labeled as a "twink," and how he feels about that association: "It's just the label, nobody ever wants to be labeled, you know? Maybe it was cool back in 70s or 80s but now it's just literally a label. But in all reality, what defines that? What really makes me a twink? I don't think I'm a twink." Jeremy responded with his different experience of being called a "bear:" "If I'm called a bear, I'm bothered because I'm not fat, I mean what are you talking about? But it doesn't have the same connotation as being called a twink." Both men expressed their frustration with the labels, despite being different labels. This sentiment was shared across all of the participants except for Cameron who embraced being what the LGBT community called a jock.

**Internal expectations of others in the gay community**

Beyond the labels associated with body type in the LGBT community, many of the research subjects believed that there were certain characteristics that were perceived as inherently negative for gay men. Quinton explained that the desire to have a muscular body results in the judgment of the opposite type of body — one that is perceived as too feminine or physically weak. Less-muscular bodies become associated with being too flamboyant or feminine. Quinton explains:

> "The fantasy that is sold through the Adonis complex is the Chippendale's, like this person is a construction worker — the masculine ideal does appeal to a lot of people, so in a sense, flamboyant becomes a bad word. People say, "I'm not that gay" and flaming gay becomes associated with what we consider effeminate or a higher octave voice — less what we would see in a heterosexual male. It becomes a way of self-policing, like 'you're too gay,' or 'you're flaming gay' when it comes to people who are viewed as queens."

This sentiment was reflected in a number of conversations. Ultimately, gay men create negative associations with being an effeminate man and believe in straying away from feminine behavior. Dylan made the point that it might have something to do with compensation. When describing what the "ideal" body type is for a gay man, he said, "they should be 6 foot or taller. More masculine. There seems to be a want for compensation if you're an effeminate gay, you'll want to be equally in size as well. Not effeminate hair." The last point about effeminate hair was particularly interesting as Dylan, himself, currently has blue hair that might be considered less masculine or out of the norm.

Many of the participants also expressed a difference in the way gay men perceive what a skinny or thin body looks like. Antonio said, "there's a difference between skinny and skinny gay — there's a total difference. In the gay community, your body and you

are the main thing. Your body is what defines you, you know?" Participants explained

that gay men are more judgmental about body type — thinness in particular — and have

a different perception than their heterosexual counterparts. Shane echoed Antonio: "Gays

tend to be judgmental – super judgmental. I've seen on a TV show, you're a skinny

straight boy but you're a fat gay boy, making a ratio or something. You would be

considered skinny if you were straight."

Despite being more judgmental about being thin, participants also believed that

members of the gay community judge people for being too skinny or less attractive to

people who lack muscle. Collin made the point in his interview that, "there's muscular

and very buff then there's toned and skinny, and then there's actually very skinny. I think

the gay community will always be interested in the bigger, buffer guy." The judgment of

what skinny is in the LGBT community combined with the lack of perceived romantic

interest in those who are skinny results in body image problems among those who are

classified as skinny. Aaron has struggled with being too thin and explained his

experience:

> "I definitely think that in the LGBT community in America, there is an
> expectation to be buff, and to have muscle. It's not as accepted to be skinny as it
> is to be muscular. That's a struggle sometimes because you want to aspire to that
> level of body image. I think that leads to body image problems for sure. People
> think that poor body image comes from people who are overweight or obese, but
> there are problems with people that are skinny too. So that's something that I've
> struggled with. I've never talked to people in the LGBT community about body
> image problems, but I know I've struggled with it myself."

**Theme Summary III: Narrative and Online Media**

One of the primary findings in the discussion of LGBT people and their interaction with

media is that gay men's interactions depends heavily on what type of medium the person

is using. For example, LGBT-targeted advertisements tend to reflect one specific body type that all of the research subjects believed exacerbated stereotypes and created expectations of the LGBT community. Conversely, LGBT news sources tend to act as a tool of empowerment within the community, keeping the individual updated on events that are happening in terms of their rights as marginalized people. Finally, in some ways, LGBT men tend to believe that some lines have blurred between mainstream media and LGBT-targeted media that affects the way they consume these messages.

**LGBT Media Reporting of Community Issues**

LGBT-targeted blogs and news sites were often reported as a means of staying up-to-date on issues affecting the gay community. While this media was not as popular as other media such as LGBT social media (with only six out of ten people reporting their use of it), blogs and news sites give consumers a more balanced and positive perspective of the community. In particular, Aaron and Dylan both discussed *The Huffington Post's Gay Voices* section as a thorough and comprehensive medium for covering gay issues. Dylan explained, "Huffpost is what I read most often for the Gay Voices section. It sometimes directs me toward other blogs and sites, but I most focus on Huffpost." Aaron spoke more to the content that attracts him to websites like *The Huffington Post* when he said,

> "There's some stuff that would only be appealing to someone that is part of the community. One thing on *Huffington Post* gay that was like 'what my queer self would tell me at 8-years-old.' A lot of it is like Indiana's governor signing this law or the Supreme Court takes a case that could strike down the ban on gay marriage. Stuff like that."

Each of the six times that news sites came up, the subjects spoke about the importance of understanding the status of basic rights — marriage equality in particular.

Quinton and Shane both discussed signing up for email blasts from the Human Rights Campaign as a means of knowing what is happening in regards to marriage equality. Shane described his experience with the Human Rights Campaign:

> "The only one that I've researched is the HRC. They have blurbs at some parts. They have huge celebrations when another state passes legislation to legalize gay marriage. Whenever I see that come up or I get an email from them, like "hey you might be interested in this." Right when I registered to donate with them, I put Nevada as my home state. As soon as Nevada got passed, I got a congratulatory email."

When discussing social and political issues related to the LGBT community, marriage is the most important. The participants that brought up marriage spoke excitedly about the strides that had been made in terms of fighting for equality. Shane explained that the shifting tide made him feel like the LGBT community had made a number of strides in terms of creating equality in the United States. Furthermore, he described the No H8 campaign, which focuses on eradicating hate. The prevalence of such a campaign helps him realize how much progress has been made in the gay community. He said, "I've seen a lot of the No H8 campaign. […] There is more positivity in this generation than in past generations. I have two gay uncles on both sides of the family. They've seen way worse situations than I have — way more negativity."  Ultimately, these media target the LGBT community and help participants feel more positive and included in the LGBT community.

**Portrayal of Body in LGBT Advertisements Online and Print**

Despite the positivity felt in a variety of LGBT blogs and news sites, gay men believe that LGBT advertisements focus on one specific body type and image. In the focus group, Jeremy expressed that, "I think the imagery that is painted a lot of the gay

community is that it's all a big party and that there's nothing serious going on." All of the participants in the focus group overwhelmingly agreed.

Furthermore, this type of perception is isolating as described by Collin in his interview. First he made the point about the look of the advertisements: "They are always trying to be really exciting and party culture. I don't know, basically trying to get across the idea that our site or product has really exciting people that are really attractive and like to go crazy and party." When asked about how that image affects his identity within the gay community, he said: "I'm not into the same culture as what a lot of the people in the gay community are into: the party, shirtless, crazy culture is not something that I'm interested in. It tries to homogenize the gay culture, and say we're interested in the same thing, but I'm not really into the crazy gay parties."

While partying is the primary theme of the advertisements, the images of what men should look like can be isolating as well. Both Dylan and Jeremy, two ethnic minority participants in the study, explained that they felt the advertisements do not properly reflect the diversity of the LGBT community. Dylan explained what the typical gay man looks like in advertisements: "Majority Caucasian, majority taller — 6' or taller, buff, muscular, and younger, you don't see older, definitely the millennial age range." Jeremy focused more on how isolating this phenomenon can when he said:

> "I think that popular LGBT media is still very whitewashed […] If we alienate, as the LGBT community, people of color or of different religions by portraying these skinny white party boys as being the face of the gay community, then I think that is betraying the entire movement and betraying our history as the LGBT community."

The lack of racial diversity in LGBT advertising is not the only problem that participants saw in reflecting the gay community. Participants also felt that there is only one

appropriate body type found in gay advertisements: muscular. When asked about his feelings of advertisements in the gay community, Thomas said, "there is no positive body image in advertising for men, especially as a gay man. Nobody is sitting there saying it's okay that you don't have a six-pack. It's more like, step aside because there are 400 other guys that do." He elaborated later in the conversation that LGBT advertisements tend to create similar problems to that which are often seen in the female community. He said:

> "In the same way we have issues with how gay media looks — it's similar to the way bodies are portrayed for women. Okay, the models don't look like what normal people look like. When my friends, I mean female friends, talk about their issues, I can really identify with them. I don't think I've ever had that conversation with a straight guy."

This portrayal of bodies has been a particular concern for participants, including Aaron and Jeremy, who feel that there are too few movements that empower gay men and their body images in advertising. Jeremy said, "There are so many body movements for women, which I think is great, but men are just cast aside. Gay men are just more sensitive to it than straight men."

## VI. Results

The interviews, focus group and researcher's notebook revealed three major results that both supported and disagreed with existing research. This section will outline the findings and how they compare to the secondary research.

### A. Hooking up via social media causes a heightened awareness of body image

All of the research participants, with the exception of Dylan, indicated that gay men use LGBT social media to "hook-up" and find sexual partners. This study is consistent with Gudelunas (2012) who found that gay men use apps to find sexual partners. His characterization of "SNSs" or "Social Networking Sites" included Grindr

and Adam4Adam. Even though Adam4Adam was never mentioned by the participants, Grindr was the mobile application that was discussed most heavily as driving the search for sexual partners. Building on Gudeluna's (2012) study, "Grindr is great because you can find sex but still be anonymous. I have my face obscured, and a lot of other guys do the same."

As Esparza (1996) discovered in her research, anonymous sex is a common theme in the gay community with nine out of ten research subjects feeling favorably about anonymous sex as a means of addressing intimate desires. This study revealed similar results that hook-ups are perceived as being more normalized in the LGBT community as was the case when Collin said, "This one guy seemed nice at first, then he was like, 'I don't date, I only hook up.'" However, the findings deviated from Esparza's results in that nine out of ten of her subjects expressed satisfaction with random hook-ups, while nine of the research participants in this study did not enjoy the "hook-up culture" that exists on LGBT social media.

The participants expressed concerns that social media set certain expectations of the LGBT community that affects the way they view their bodies. Four different interview participants made the point that there is a higher pressure to look good for other users if he intends to find a romantic or sexual partner, particularly when using LGBT social media. The same was also noted by Herzog (1991) when he asked participants to evaluate the body type they felt a potential lover desired, finding that a statistically significant portion of the population felt they were not meeting that body type. Ultimately, body dissatisfaction was apparent among users as they felt they were not the right body type for others.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that the pressure is amplified when dealing with racial minorities. Dylan and Jeremy, both racial minorities, discussed the way people discriminate against certain races on LGBT social media. Dylan pointed out that social media users go out of their way to, "say what they do like or don't like," in terms of racial preference. Fields et al. indicates that black men feel a need to display "hypermasculinity (i.e., exaggeration of traditional masculine roles through behaviors such as sexual prowess, physical dominance, aggression, and antifemininity)," to break through forms of oppression, (2015). This analysis is similar to Jeremy's interpretation of the type of discrimination that occurs over LGBT social media. The phenomenon was clear when he said, "It's a dangerous path to go down because we are marginalizing entire groups of people who are even further stratified from normal society."

Despite the generally negative attitudes that existed when discussing LGBT social media, such as objectification discussed by Aaron and Cameron, body type categorization discussed by Shane, Collin, Quinton and all members of the focus group and discrimination discussed by Dylan and Jeremy, the outlier was Cameron who felt that using LGBT social media brought sexual satisfaction. He used the social media apps to hook-up. Cameron was honest about his intentions of hooking-up and claimed that he was "good at it," when using LGBT social media. Based on his upbeat and candid nature when discussing hook-ups, it was clear that he enjoyed using social media, such as Grindr, for sexual satisfaction. Esparza (1996), too, found sexual satisfaction from the nine men that enjoy anonymous sex and hook-ups.

Cameron happily embraced the body type labels that exist within the gay community. He explained himself as "somewhere between a twink and a jock." His

discussion indicated that while Herzog (1991) did properly identify that gay men feel a higher pressure to find sexual partners, some gay men (as was the case in the minority population of his study) feel that their bodies are sufficient in finding romance within the gay community. Cameron said, "jocks attract jocks because we put ourselves to the highest standards. […] we are the main criteria for what a hot gay man would be in our community." His inclusive language indicates that he feels happy about his body, and consequently, believes that LGBT social media have its positives in creating hook-ups for the community.

**B. Advertising makes gay men perceive that fun is reserved for men with perfect bodies.**

When discussing LGBT advertising specifically, participants often pointed to an "idealized" body type in media. In the focus group, Thomas noted the feeling that is created among LGBT advertisements when he said, "There is no positive body image in advertising for men, especially as a gay man. Nobody is sitting there saying it's okay that you don't have a six-pack. It's more like, step aside because there are 400 other guys that do." This statement is supported by Law & Labre (2002) who conducted a study about the images that exist in magazines for men throughout the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. They point out that magazines started to include more columns, articles and advertisements that promoted tips to building muscle, exercising and a maintaining a strong physique.

Although the Law & Labre (2002) study focused on all males, including heterosexual men, the increase in body-focused advertising also applies to LGBT advertising. As Saucier & Caron noted, during the 1990s, advertisers more than doubled

their LGBT spending — starting at $61.6 million and raising it to $158.3 million by 1999 (2008). That timing correlates with the time period of Law & Labre's (2002) study. Saucier & Caron's (2008) study showed the increased prevalence of LGBT ads in general. Since research shows that advertising revenues grew six times faster for the LGBT press than for any consumer magazine (2011 Gay Press Report), each research participant specified that he had seen an LGBT advertisement before, particularly in magazines. Jeremy made the point that even some advertisements that society normally characterize for the whole community end up being LGBT targeted in nature. He said: "In terms of print, I mean, I've been looking at Vogue since I was 12 and every Dolce and Gabanna ad since 1985 has featured a bunch of gay guys, and they are homoerotic by nature. That's what Dolce and Gabanna does."

That study shows that LGBT ads are more prevalent, and they idealize body types. Participants felt that the bodies are often unattainable. Dylan expressed that most LGBT ads have one specific look in them. "[The] majority [are] Caucasian, majority taller — 6' or taller, buff, muscular, and younger, you don't see older, definitely the millennial age range." The idea that men in LGBT advertisements tend to have unrealistic bodies is supported by the fact that models are constantly airbrushed today to remove any imperfections (Escalda, 2015). The images that Dylan describes are reflections of this research, showing that such bodies do not exist in reality.

The participants in the study associated muscularity with having fun. Both Collin and Jeremy made mention of the party, body-driven images that they see in advertisements. Collin expressed how advertisers are "basically trying to get across the idea that our site or product has really exciting people that are really attractive and like to

go crazy and party." The portrayal of gay men as focusing on partying, fun and socializing in advertising reflects the research that LeBeau and Jellison (2009) found when surveying gay men about their identity within the gay community. They conducted a survey and found that 40.2% of gay male respondents claimed that they maintain their association with a gay community specifically for social reasons.

Consequently, gay men feel that advertisements drive them away from identifying with the gay community in general, more commonly if they do not identify with the correct body type. LeBeau and his colleague (2009) indicate a connection between socializing/partying and the gay community. While the research participants show a connection between perfect bodies and socializing/partying in advertisements, Collin, the subject who said advertising portrays gay parties, clearly demonstrated that he does not identify with that type of culture:

> "I'm not into the same culture as what a lot of the people in the gay community are into: the party, shirtless, crazy culture is not something that I'm interested in. It tries to homogenize the gay culture, and say we're interested in the same thing, but I'm not really into the crazy gay parties."

**C. LGBT media narratives empower gay men to overcome body image concerns – specifically *Huffington Post*.**

A number of research participants discussed the ways in which they interact with LGBT online platforms, such as blogs, news stories and other forms of narratives. All of the participants believed that these platforms helped the men stay informed on their civil rights, an important issue for each of them. In particular, marriage equality was a hot button issue among the participants.

As CNN mentioned, in 2014 alone, 18 states legalized same sex marriage, bringing the total to 35 states and the District of Columbia (Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts). The majority of participants mentioned that they stay up to date on issues regarding marriage equality. Shane and Quinton mentioned the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) as a means of receiving news about marriage equality. In particular, Shane's quote was, "Whenever I see that come up or I get an email from them, like 'hey you might be interested in this.' Right when I registered to donate with them, I put Nevada as my home state. As soon as Nevada got passed, I got a congratulatory email." Both Quinton and Shane elaborated that marriage equality makes them feel more included in the rest of society and less stigmatized for being openly gay.

Beyond the HRC, other participants, Dylan as the primary example, use LGBT online media to read narratives about issues related to the LGBT community. In particular, he feels good about following blogs that reflect the experiences he has had in his own life. He said, "I follow a woman named Amelia who has a blog about having an out gay son. I also follow some YouTubers. There is what is called Flama and they actually cover Hispanic LGBT issues. [Also] the New York Youth Leadership Council and they run a blog about being an illegal immigrant and being gay or queer." The logic behind why he uses these media is explained more clearly by Cameron in his interview when he said, "[LGBT blogs] captures gay people more effectively because we know what we like. We feel more comfortable talking about things than with other people because we know we can relate to each other more." The participants spoke about how online media connects them to the LGBT community as well as to the heterosexual community as they feel more equal.

Ultimately, three of the participants mentioned *The Huffington Post Gay Voices* section as a primary means of absorbing LGBT news and narratives. It was mentioned more often than any other outlet. Aaron, Dylan and Quinton were all regular users of *The Huffington Post*. Aaron discussed that the content keeps him tuned into the community. He said, "A lot of it is also like Indiana's governors signing this law or the Supreme Court takes a case that could strike down the ban on gay marriage. Stuff like that." Being that *The Huffington Post* is ranked number-one in terms of news site visitors, with approximately 110,000,000 visitors each month, it clear that LGBT issues are being brought to the forefront of discussion in the United States (eBizMBA, 2015). Furthermore, *The Huffington Post Gay Voices* section published an article about rising support for gay marriage in the U.S. It said:

> "According to a press release sent to *The Huffington Post*, even the state with the lowest support for same-sex marriage -- Alabama -- saw support more than double between 2004 and estimates for 2016. The study also found that in 2014, Vermont was the state with the highest level of public support at 75 percent and the District of Columbia had 86 percent support," (Nichols, 2015).

The support for marriage equality suggests that rates of homophobia will likely drop as well, making gay men feel more supported in society. Websites like *The Huffington Post Gay Voices* section show young gay men that tides are changing for the LGBT community in terms of civil rights. Cohen, Hall, & Tuttle study (2009) found that heterosexual men display forms of homophobia in feeling that gay men should be more masculine as opposed to feminine. Moreover, Siconolfi et al. (2009) found that society places an emphasis on muscularity as a means of aligning with societal expectations of masculinity. A decrease in homophobia — even if perceived by the reader of LGBT

media such as *The Huffington Post Gay Voices* — will result in a decrease in social pressure to build muscularity as a means of displaying masculinity.

**VI. Conclusions**

Drawing from the findings and results presented in chapters IV and V, the conclusions are provided in the context of responses to the three research questions that guided this study.

**What messages in the media resonate with gay men?**

The messages that resonate with gay men vary based on the medium with which they interact. When using LGBT social media, gay men are affected by the syphoning off into different categories, feeling a pressure to identify with a specific category in order to appeal to a romantic partner. Based on their weight, amount of hair on their body and their muscularity, they are only attractive to certain people, and potential partners that use LGBT social media make their feelings clear. LGBT social media apps push gay men to identify with a given category, adding another element of pressure from within the gay community itself. This comes on top of the societal expectations that already exist regarding the way gay men's bodies should look. The message is straightforward: "your body will fit into a category, and you will be perceived as a member of that category by the rest of the gay community; if you do not like your category or fail to fall into one of those categories, then you will struggle to find a romantic partner."

When absorbing LGBT advertisements, gay men are exposed to the message of one ideal body type: white, muscular, tall and good looking. Advertisements align most closely with the new orthodoxy and tend to promote masculinity as a means of fitting into the LGBT community. The ads relay the idea that the gay community is full of fun and

partying as a means of selling the company's product or service. Consequently, the message conveyed is that socializing, having fun, and partying are accessible only if a gay person maintains a muscular body. The advertisements also tend to convey the idea that the entire gay community is this way.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn is that gay college men replicate what they see in advertisements when using social media. The focus group indicated that gay college men are able to recognize and explain the ideal body type that is portrayed in LGBT advertising. Consequently, when they use apps such as Grindr, they recreate the images they see in an attempt to be viewed as sexually or romantically interesting. Ultimately, they feel a need to meet the standards that have been set in advertisements in hopes of fulfilling their sexual needs via LGBT social media. LGBT advertisements contribute to the hypersexualization of the gay community in mainstream media and LGBT social media.

In conclusion, when using online media such as news sites and narrative blogs, gay men believe they are not alone in their struggles. They feel unified as a community and use their internal battles as a rallying point for the community to come together. These media tell gay men that there is a community to which they belong, and their shared experiences becomes a form of empowerment. Beyond the unifying element, online media convey the idea that the world is changing and they are on track to becoming accepted in society. The breakthroughs in civil rights make them feel proud. Even further, when there are situations that seem like setbacks for the community, gay men see a community response, which makes them feel empowered as well.

**How do gay men describe interactions in the media that impact their body image?**

The first conclusion that can be drawn is that gay college men have a narrowed vision of the definition LGBT media. When asked to describe their experiences with LGBT media, the answers always focused on Grindr, Tinder, and narrative and online media. For that reason, these media have the most power in influencing the gay community and individuals identify with that community. The aforementioned media set the standard for the LGBT community and gay college men interact with and respond to the media messages. Considering the value that all of the research participants placed on LGBT media, each of them are heavily influenced by apps such as Grindr, Tinder, *The Huffington Post* and other online, narrative media.

Overall, most forms of LGBT media hurt body image perceptions in gay college men. In terms of social media, gay men feel attacked by their own community and often judge their own physical appearances based on the way potential lovers view their bodies. In the cases where a person does not want to identify with a given body-type category, he feels an inability to identify with the LGBT community in general. Gay men feel shame that they may not have enough hair, muscle or weight to be part of any given category, leading to self-doubt and hatred. This is the most intense form of body shame because it is coming from their own community. Whereas, they can tell themselves that advertisements are portraying impossible body types, it is far more difficult to love themselves when they do not have the right body to find sexual or romantic partners.

A clear conclusion is that gay men also feel body dissatisfaction as a result of the images they see of men in LGBT advertisements. Although they can dismiss advertisements as airbrushed or unattainable, the idea remains in their heads that they do not have the ideal body type. Many of the participants believe that advertisements

generally reflect what the LGBT community would be attracted to and consequently feel that they are attractive enough. Furthermore, racial minorities feel marginalized even more than other gay men because there is little to no representation in the advertisements that minorities see. This is hurtful to minority gay men and they feel an increased pressure to be a certain way in the LGBT community. They feel that advertisements are homogenized and do not celebrate the diversity of the community, which ultimately sets everyone back. These setbacks are what lead to individuals feeling more alone in their own community, which only exacerbates the internal struggles that they may have with their own bodies.

Conversely, online media balance the scales with social media and advertising. While the online media don't seem to affect their body image, those media do have a significant effect on the way they identify with the LGBT community. The online media help when a person begins to put himself down. A conclusion that can be made is that by feeling more a part of the LGBT community and seeing the diversity on a variety of blogs and news sites, they remember that the gay community is diverse and they celebrate those differences. In those cases, gay men tend to feel more proud of their bodies because they recognize that it is OK to be different from those around them. Breaking through the homogeny of advertising gives them a chance to cope with the body issues they may struggle with routinely.

**What specific online sites or applications impact gay men's body image?**

The most common social media are Grindr and Tinder. Although Tinder can be used by homosexuals and heterosexuals, gay men tend to believe that it is more personable and less judgmental. It gives them a stronger sense of self-identity because it

gives reminds them that people will be attracted to their bodies. Grindr, on the other hand, often feels like it is only used for sexual hook-ups. The need for sexuality and hook-ups drives men to feel more pressure to look good in order to stand out among other users. People are less likely to set up dates on Grindr as compared to any other app, which means gay men need to have muscles or identify with a specific category if they hope to receive attention.

*The Huffington Post* was the most popular online site that drives gay men to read about their own culture. Gay men seem to gravitate toward for a few reasons. First, it is one of the most popular news sites in the world, so it feels accessible to anyone. Second, it gives a diversity of articles including news, narratives, links to other blogs and empowering stories all related to the LGBT community. It acts as a medium for gay men to have conversations that only they would understand, which gives them a chance to celebrate diversity. The wide spectrum of gay opinions and stories reminds them to love their bodies in order to celebrate that diversity.

## VII. Recommendations for Professionals

With the presented findings, results and conclusions regarding gay men, media and body image, there are a few recommendations worth considering.  There are two primary audiences that could benefit from the results and consider recommendations including college counselors who work with gay men and advertising professionals who target gay men

### A. For Advertising Professionals

### i. Diversify body images in LGBT advertisements

College men are responsive to the images that are portrayed in various types of media. More specifically, gay men are sensitive to the male images as they are a body conscious group to begin with. While the common trend seems to be displaying muscled bodies that look the same as most other advertisements, gay men would notice if a company took the time to show off diversified bodies; the bodies should not only have various weights and heights but also races. Gay men who feel underrepresented already due to their minority status would notice even further as images are important to them in finding their identities in the LGBT culture.

**ii. Capitalize on current trends occurring in LGBT rights**

While it is true that some of the LGBT population enjoys partying and socializing, research does not indicate that these activities are truer for the heterosexual community. Gay men stay up to date on the status of LGBT civil rights, and there is an opportunity to use advertisements to address that interest. Stay cognizant of any updates that may be occurring across the country, particularly in marriage equality. By using those types of events to sell a product, the community will be more responsive and also most likely favor the product more as they will create a positive brand association with a product that seems to understand their interests.

**B. For college counselors working with gay men**

**i. Work to bring various tribes of gay men together**

Gay college men tend to turn to social media as a means of finding partners, companionship and sexual relationships. However, when they turn to mobile applications such as Grindr, they're often left feeling discriminated against based on their bodies. Being that gay men hold a wide variety of preferences when it comes to interacting with

other gay men, work to bring all types of LGBT men together to catalyze the process of building a community. If they have a community to which they feel that they belong, they will be less inclined to turn to LGBT social media. This is especially true in college campuses in smaller towns. The study was conducted in Reno, Nevada and often dealt with the issue of gay men turning to social media due to Reno's small openly gay community.

## ii. Follow up with LGBT ethnic minorities

With the images projected in media and increased social pressure to break through oppression, openly gay ethnic minority men often struggle to a greater magnitude when it comes to body image and identity. It is important that a counselor keep this in mind when working with members of the community because the problem may not always be evident at first glance. Research participants believe that some of the images and messages being projected are normalized in our culture, and it is difficult to break through those messages. As a counselor, one should be aware of those messages might affect minorities students to a greater degree.

## VIII. Recommendations for further research

The results of this research could be expanded and diversified by conducting the study in a wider variety of community sizes. Many of the participants expressed only seeing LGBT advertisements online and occasionally (though rarely) in print. Larger cities have a higher probability of displaying mainstream LGBT-centered advertisements in more public places. That phenomenon could potentially affect the way gay men respond to the type of advertising they are seeing. The topic of homoerotic fashion came

up, but was not elaborated on too strongly — perhaps new results could be found in cities with a larger fashion scene.

It would be beneficial to study further how narratives in LGBT media empowers gay men.  This single idea could uncover important guidance on ways to help suppress depression and other issues facing young gay men.

Furthermore, different sized cities might yield different results in terms of social media usage and what that might look like. A city like San Francisco will most likely show different results than a city like Reno or even a city like Elko, Nevada. The openly gay community impacts the way men view themselves and the media that they interact with, so having a larger or smaller community could affect the frequency and overall impact of media interaction.

**Summary**

The United States is experiencing a shift in opinion and political status of LGBT people. However, while the legal status of gay men may be improving, societal pressures, from within the gay community and outside of it, continue to plague people who identify as LGBT. There are still a number of alarming statistics regarding drug addiction, depression and body dissatisfaction among gay men – youth in particular. As an openly gay man, this study acted as an opportunity to empower myself to find a potential source of body dissatisfaction and contribute to the conversation about how to address it.

Gay men are constantly bombarded by LGBT media that, at times can be empowering, but overall tends to raise the expectations that they feel on an everyday basis. Time and time again, research reveals that gay men are harder on themselves in terms of body image than their heterosexual counterparts, and occasionally, even female

counterparts. Images of the ideal body in advertisements and categorization on social media exacerbate the idea that gay men are required to have specific bodies – images and ideas that are powerful and also devastating. Media have power to shape a person, and it's time society start acting that way. Gay men do not have to feel shame about their bodies – in fact, they should celebrate their diversity.

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**Appendix A: Research Flyer**



**Daniel Coffey is Recruiting Volunteers for a Research Study**

**Research Title**

Effect of Targeted LGBT Media on Body Image Perception in Gay Millennial Men Attending a University

**Research Objectives**

This study examines the effects that media have on homosexual men at a young and formative age. With an emphasis in body image, the study hopes to identify some key factors in media that affect the formation of self-identity in gay male college students ages 18-32. Throughout the months of March and April, one hour long one-on-one interviews and 90-minute focus groups will be conducted in Reno, Nevada to address the aforementioned research objectives.

**Information for Demographic Requirements**

Potential participants must meet four specific criteria:

1. Biologically male
2. Age 18 – 32
3. Current college student
4. Identify openly as a homosexual

This research is being conducted as a degree requirement for the University of Nevada, Reno Honors Program. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Principal Investigator and Reynolds School of Journalism professor, Dr. Todd Felts.

The research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board.

**If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact:**

**Daniel Coffey**

**702-287-4737**

**DanielCoffey1113@gmail.com**

**Appendix B: Consent Form**

**Consent Form**
Verbal Consent Script to be read for focus groups and interviews

**1. Title of research study:** Effect of Targeted LGBT Media on Body Image Perception in Gay Millennial Men Attending a University

**2. Researchers:** Dr. Todd Felts, Principal Investigator & Daniel Coffey, Co-Investigator, University of Nevada, Reno

**3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study**: You have been asked to participate in this research because you claim to meet the four criteria of being homosexual, a millennial, a current college student and a male. Do (each of) you fit those four major criteria?

\*Do not continue until verbal confirmation is received from everyone\*

**4. What you should know about a research study**
- Your participation is voluntary, meaning the decision to participate is in your hands.
- Should it feel necessary, you are free to drop out of the study at any time with no penalty or consequences.
- Nobody will hold personal feelings against you if you drop during the study.
- Questions are highly encouraged before we begin or receive formal consent.

**5. Who can you talk to about this research study?** If you have questions or concerns about the study, contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Todd Felts at mfelts@unr.edu. This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects so that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans subjects taking part in the research. You may talk to them at 775 327-2368 for any of the following:
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

**6. Why is this research being done?** The purpose of this thesis is to examine the impact that media have on homosexual men at a young and formative age. The study will also delve into the issue of body image and the role it plays in the formation of one's own identity.

**7. How long will the research last?** The duration of the subject involvement.

**8. How many people will be studied?** We expect approximately 15 gay millennial men.

**9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?**

- Prior to the start of your participation, Todd Felts, the Principal Investigator will review this form with you and gain your verbal consent to participate in this process.
- You will be asked to participate in either the one-on-one interview or the focus group but not both. You will interact with Daniel Coffey, co-investigator and Honors Diploma Candidate for the one-on-one interviews, or Dr. Todd Felts, primary investigator and professor of the Reynolds School of Journalism if you are a participant in the focus group.
- The one-on-one interviews and focus groups will be held in room 207 on the second floor of the Reynolds School of Journalism located on the University of Nevada, Reno's campus, 1664 N. Virginia St, Reno, NV, 89503.
- The interview and focus group research is planned to be conducted during March and August 2015.
- You will participate in a single conversation for 60 minutes or a 60 - 90 minute focus group. At either session two digital recorders will be used to assure a verbatim record of the questions and responses.
- To maintain your confidentiality you will only be identified by a pseudonym and identified throughout the study on the recordings and in any transcriptions, analysis or reporting by this label.

**10. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?** You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

**11. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?**
If you agree to take part in the research now, you can stop at any time; it will not be held against you.

**12. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?** There is no inherent risk to participation in this research study including physical, psychological, privacy, legal, social or economic risk to the participants.

**13. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?** There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

**14. Will being in this study help me in any way?** No benefits can be guaranteed for taking part in this study. There will also be no monetary retribution.

**15. What happens to the information we collect?** Our team will try our best to minimize any potential risk of sharing information. Other than the research team, the University of Nevada, Reno's Institutional Review Board and University administration have access to the data. Following the completion of the study, the Principal Investigator will maintain in a locked cabinet in his department at UNR for a period of three years.

**16. Can I be removed from the research without my OK?** The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. We will inform you about any new information that may affect your welfare or choice to stay in the research.

**17. What else do I need to know?** This research study is being conducted by Daniel Coffey as part of his Honors Program Diploma requirements.

Do you understand this research and your role here today? If you do not, please ask all necessary questions before answering yes. A 'yes' answer to this question does *not* mean you are consenting to the study, only that you understand what the research hopes to discover.

*Receive verbal confirmation and/or questions from all people before continuing*

**Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

**Interview Protocol**
Effect of Targeted LGBT Media on Body Image Perception in Gay Millennial Men Attending a
University

Time of Interview:
Date:
Location/Setting:
Co-Investigator: Daniel Coffey
Interviewee:
Position of Interviewee:

Before the interview is conducted:

- Thank the participant for taking time out of his schedule to be part of the research.
- Explain the purpose of the study
- Inform participant approximate length of interview (60-90 minutes)
- Inform participant that interview will be recorded using a computer or audio recorder.
- Inform participant that confidentiality is important. The participant will not be named, however, he will be identified by a pseudonym
- Remind the participant that his participation is voluntary and he has the option to end the interview at any time and withdraw from the study.
- Reconfirm with the participant that they wish to participate in the interview.
- Receive verbal consent.

Open-ended interview questions:

1. How long have you been openly gay?
2. How often do you use your digital devices (laptop, smartphone, tablet, etc.)?
3. When using your devices, what do you spend the most time doing (social media, playing games, texting, etc.)?
4. How often are advertisements involved in the media you use?
5. Do you ever receive targeted LGBT advertisements? If so, where do you see them most?
6. Explain the content of LGBT advertisements: models, tone, visual design, etc.
7. Do you believe the targeted LGBT ads are effective in catching your attention? Selling the product?
8. Do you respond differently to LGBT advertising than other forms of advertising?
9. Beyond advertisements, do you have any mobile applications targeted at gay people?
10. How often do you use gay mobile apps compared to other types of apps?
11. What are some of your primary motives when using gay apps (socializing, discovering nightlife, romantic pursuits, etc.)?
12. Explain the common images you might find in a gay themed mobile apps.
13. Do you read or absorb any gay media such as blogs, magazines, or websites?
14. What are some of the common themes and topics you might find in gay media?
15. Are you more inclined to read gay media than media intended for all people? If so, why?

16. What have you noticed about body image in the LGBT community?
17. How important is body type in finding romantic partners in the LGBT community?
18. Is there an ideal body type in the LGBT community? Why or why not?
19. Do the images in LGBT advertisements and media reflect the current trends of the community?
20. Does your consumption of gay media affect how you view the LGBT community? Does it affect how you view yourself?

**Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol**

**Focus Group Protocol & Questions**

Effect of Targeted LGBT Media on Body Image Perception in Gay Millennial Men Attending a University

Before the interview is conducted:

- Thank the participant for taking time out of his schedule to be part of the research.
- Explain the purpose of the study
- Inform participant approximate length of interview (60-90 minutes)
- Inform participant that interview will be recorded using a computer or audio recorder.
- Inform participant that confidentiality is important. The participant will not be named, however, he will be identified by a pseudonym
- Remind the participant that his participation is voluntary and he has the option to end the interview at any time and withdraw from the study.
- Reconfirm with the participant that they wish to participate in the interview.
- Receive verbal consent.

Open-ended interview questions:

21. What has your experience been with targeted gay advertising? Explain how it looks, your response, how effective it is, etc.
22. Describe the images and content you might find in gay media such as blogs, magazines, mobile applications, gossip websites, etc.
23. Do LGBT media effectively represent the cultural and social trends you might find in the LGBT community?
24. How important is body type in forming an identity in the LGBT community?
25. What major trends, if any, have you noticed regarding body image in the LGBT community?
26. What are some of the key differences you notice between mainstream media and LGBT media?
27. Do you feel represented in LGBT media? Why or why not?