**CHANGES IN MALE BODY IMAGE**

A. The pressures on women to look slender, youthful and attractive have been extensively documented, but changing expectations for women's bodies have varied widely. From voluptuous and curvy in the days of Marilyn Monroe, to slender and androgynous when Twiggy hit the London scene in the mid-1960s, and then on to the towering Amazonian models of the 1980s and the 'heroin chic' and size-zero obsession of today, it is not just clothes that go in and out of fashion for women. The prevailing notion of the perfect body for men, however, has remained remarkably static: broad shoulders, a big chest and arms, and rippling, visible abdominal muscles and powerful legs have long been the staple ingredients of a desirable male physique.

B. A growing body of evidence suggests this is changing, however. Rootsteins, a mannequin design company in Britain, has released its newest male model—the homme nouveau —with a cinched-in 27-inch waist. 'To put that into perspective,' says one female fashion reporter, 'I had a 27-inch waist when I was thirteen...and I was really skinny.' The company suggests that the homme nouveau 'redresses the prevailing 'beefcake' figure by carving out a far more streamlined, sinuous silhouette to match the edgier attitude of a new generation'.

C. Elsewhere in the fashion industry, the label American Apparel is releasing a line of trousers in sizes no larger than a 30-inch waist, which squeezes out most of the younger male market who have an average waistline over five inches larger. Slender young men are naturally starting to dominate the catwalks and magazine pages as well. 'No one wanted the big guys,' model David Gandy has said, describing how his muscled physique was losing him jobs. 'It was all the skinny, androgynous look. People would look at me very, very strangely when I went to castings.'

D. Achieving such a physique can be unattainable for those without the natural genetic make-up. 'I don't know that anyone would consider my body archetypal or as an exemplar to work towards,' notes model Davo McConville. 'You couldn' t aim for this; it's defined by a vacuum of flesh, by what it's not.' Nevertheless, statistics suggest it is not just an obsession of models, celebrities and the media—more and more ordinary men are prepared to go to great lengths for a slender body. One indication is the growing number of men who are discovering surgical reconstruction. Male breast-reduction has become especially popular; in 2009 the year-on-year growth rate for this procedure rose to 44 percent in the United Kingdom. Liposuction also remains popular in the market for male body reconstructive surgery, with 35,000 such procedures being performed on men every year.

E. Additionally, more men now have eating disorders than ever before. These are characterised by normal eating habits, typically either the consumption of insufficient or excessive amounts of food. Eating disorders are detrimental to the physical and mental condition of people who suffer from them , and the desire to achieve unrealistic physiques has been implicated as a cause. In 1990 only 10% of people suffering from anorexia or bulimia were believed to be male, but this figure has climbed steadily to around one quarter today. Around two in five binge eaters are men. Women still make up the majority of those afflicted by eating disorders, but the perception of it being a 'girly' problem has contributed to men being less likely to pursue treatment. In 2008,male eating disorders were thrust into the spotlight when former British Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, admitted to habitually gorging on junk food and then inducing himself to vomit while in office. 'I never admitted to this out of the shame and embarrassment,' he said. 'I found it difficult as a man like me to admit that I suffered from bulimia.'

F. In some respects, the slim male silhouette seems to be complementing, rather than displacing, the GI Joe physique. Men's Health, one of the only titles to weather the floundering magazine market with sales increasing to a quarter of a million per issue, has a staple diet of bulky men on the cover who entice readers with the promise of big, powerful muscles. Advertising executives and fashion editors suggest that in times of recession and political uncertainty, the more robust male body image once again becomes desirable. Academic research supports this claim, indicating that more 'feminine' features are desirable for men in comfortable and secure societies, while 'masculine' physical traits are more attractive where survival comes back to the individual. A University of Aberdeen study, conducted using 4,500 women from over 30 countries,found a pronounced correlation between levels of public healthcare and the amount of effeminacy women preferred in their men. In Sweden, the country considered to have the best healthcare, 68 percent of women preferred the men who were shown with feminine facial features. In Brazil, the country with the worst healthcare in the study, only 45 percent of women were so inclined. 'The results suggest that as healthcare improves, more masculine men fall out of favour,' the researchers concluded.more masculine men fall out of favour,' the researchers concluded.more masculine men fall out of favour,' the researchers concluded.

G. Ultimately, columnist Polly Vernon has written, we are left with two polarised ideals of masculine beauty. One is the sleek, slender silhouette that exudes cutting-edge style and a wealthy, comfortable lifestyle. The other is the 'strong, muscular, austerity-resistant' form that suggests a man can look after himself with his own bare hands. These ideals co-exist by pulling men in different directions and encouraging them to believe they must always be chasing physical perfection, while simultaneously destabilising any firm notions of what physical perfection requires.

H. As a result, attaining the ideal body becomes an ever more futile and time-consuming task. Vernon concludes that this means less time for the more important things in life, and both sexes should resist the compulsive obsession with beauty.