

# Survivor TV Shows and the Risk of Muscle Dysmorphia

Survivor TV Şovları ve Kas Dismorfisi Riski

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## Abstract

This review paper investigates the correlation between the portrayal of physical fitness and strength in 'Survivor' television programs and the risk of developing muscle dysmorphia—a body image disorder characterized by an obsessive concern with perceived insufficient muscularity. The article examines how these programs, which frequently highlight participants with highly developed and physically strong bodies, may influence viewers' perceptions of an ideal physique. This influence could lead to increased dissatisfaction with one's own body and contribute to the onset or exacerbation of muscle dysmorphia. Through an analysis of various case studies, research findings, and surveys, this review explores the broader impact of media on individual body image perceptions. Additionally, it evaluates strategies to mitigate the negative effects of these shows on viewers, such as promoting media literacy, offering psychological support, and implementing public health initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the media's role in shaping mental well-being, particularly in relation to body image disorders like muscle dysmorphia. This review aims to shed light on the relationship between 'Survivor' TV shows and muscle dysmorphia, emphasizing the need for critical media analysis and the promotion of positive body image.

**Keywords:** Muscle Dysmorphia, Media Influence, Body Image, Reality Television.

## Öz

Bu derleme makalesi, 'Survivor' televizyon programlarında fiziksel form ve gücün tasviri ile kas dismorfisi—yetersiz kaslılık algısı ile ilgili takıntılı bir vücut imajı bozukluğu—gelişme riski arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Makale, genellikle son derece kaslı ve güçlü bedenlere sahip yarışmacıları öne çıkaran bu programların, izleyicilerin ideal fiziksel görünüm algılarını nasıl etkileyebileceğini ele almaktadır. Bu etki, kişinin kendi bedeninden duyduğu memnuniyetsizliği artırarak kas dismorfisinin ortaya çıkmasına veya şiddetlenmesine katkıda bulunabilir. Çeşitli vaka çalışmaları, araştırma bulguları ve anketlerin analizi yoluyla bu derleme, medyanın bireysel vücut imajı algıları üzerindeki daha geniş etkilerini keşfetmektedir. Ayrıca, bu programların izleyiciler üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini hafifletmek için medya okuryazarlığını teşvik etmek, psikolojik destek sağlamak ve kamu sağlığı girişimleri uygulamak gibi stratejileri değerlendirmektedir. Bulgular, özellikle vücut imajı bozuklukları gibi zihinsel sağlığa yönelik medyanın rolünü anlamının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu derleme, 'Survivor' TV programları ile kas dismorfisi arasındaki ilişkiye ışık tutmayı hedeflemekte ve eleştirel medya analizinin ve olumlu vücut imajının teşvik edilmesinin gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kas Dismorfisi, Medya Etkisi, Vücut İmajı, Televizyon Programları.

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## **Survivor TV Shows and the Risk of Muscle Dysmorphia**

The pervasive influence of media on mental health, body image, and cultural standards has become a focal point of concern in contemporary society (Huang et al., 2021). Among the various media formats, reality television has emerged as a particularly powerful force in shaping viewers' perceptions. This review specifically examines the relationship between the popularity of 'Survivor' television programs and the increased vulnerability to muscle dysmorphia—a body image disorder characterized by an obsessive focus on perceived muscular inadequacy. 'Survivor' TV series, which have captivated audiences worldwide, often showcase participants engaged in grueling challenges that emphasize physical strength, endurance, and resilience. These portrayals can significantly shape viewers' ideals of physical fitness and body image, potentially contributing to the development or exacerbation of muscle dysmorphia (Egbert & Belcher, 2012).

Muscle dysmorphia is a psychiatric disorder characterized by an obsessive concern that one's body is not sufficiently muscular or lean, despite often possessing a well-developed and muscular physique (Kanayama & Pope, 2011). This condition has become increasingly prevalent in response to cultural trends that glorify extreme muscularity and fitness (Mueller et al., 2024). Individuals suffering from muscle dysmorphia frequently perceive their bodies as lacking muscle mass, leading to a distorted body image. To achieve their perceived ideal physique, these individuals often engage in behaviors such as intense and sometimes excessive exercise routines, strict dietary practices, and, in some cases, the use of performance-enhancing substances. The impact of muscle dysmorphia extends beyond physical symptoms, frequently causing significant psychological distress and impairing social and professional functioning (Cunningham et al., 2017).

The widespread popularity of 'Survivor' television programs, which often highlight participants who are physically strong and muscular, raises important questions about their potential impact on viewers' body image and the exacerbation of issues related to muscle dysmorphia (Mullick & Grieve, 2023). These shows, by blending entertainment with elements of realism, create narratives that glorify exceptional physical abilities and idealized muscular physiques, potentially setting unrealistic and harmful standards for their audience (Richardson, 2016). This review aims to explore the complex relationship between the portrayal of physical fitness in 'Survivor' TV episodes and the onset or worsening of muscle dysmorphia symptoms in viewers. Through an analysis of existing research, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of how media portrayals influence mental health and body image issues, while also identifying gaps in the current knowledge.

The objectives of this review are multifaceted. First and foremost, it seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of muscle dysmorphia, including its definition, symptoms, and the underlying psychological mechanisms that contribute to its development. In addition, the review aims to analyze how 'Survivor' television programs portray physical fitness and body image, and to assess the potential influence these depictions have on viewers' attitudes and behaviors. Beyond this, the review will consider the broader implications of these findings for clinical practice, media production, and public health strategies. Finally, it will offer recommendations for future research and interventions designed to mitigate the negative effects of media on body image and mental health.

### **Muscle Dysmorphia: Definition, Symptoms, and Relevance**

Muscle dysmorphia, often referred to as "bigorexia" or "reverse anorexia," is a complex psychiatric disorder that falls under the broader category of body dysmorphic disorder (Cooper et al., 2020). This condition is characterized by a persistent and intrusive belief that one's body lacks adequate muscle mass, despite evidence to the contrary. Individuals with muscle dysmorphia typically have a distorted perception of their own physique, believing they are less muscular than they actually are. This

misconception persists even in the face of contradictory information and often leads to significant psychological distress, as well as a notable decline in social and occupational functioning (Grieve, 2007; Çınaroğlu, 2023).

Muscle dysmorphia manifests through a variety of symptoms, all of which are closely tied to an individual's self-esteem and body perception. The primary symptoms include an exaggerated and often uncontrollable preoccupation with muscle size and definition, driving affected individuals to engage in various behaviors aimed at enhancing their physique. This obsession is most evident in the form of frequent and prolonged workout sessions, particularly those centered around weightlifting and bodybuilding. Individuals with muscle dysmorphia may spend several hours each day exercising, often pushing themselves to the point of injury or severe fatigue (Almeida et al., 2019). In addition to intense training regimens, this disorder is commonly associated with strict and rigid dietary practices designed to increase muscle mass or reduce body fat (Contesini et al., 2013). In more severe cases, individuals may resort to the misuse of anabolic steroids or other performance-enhancing substances, which carry significant health risks (Rohman, 2009).

Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often experience significant discomfort in social settings, particularly those where their bodies might be visible or closely scrutinized. As a result, some may avoid situations like swimming pools or gyms and choose to wear loose-fitting clothing to conceal their physical appearance (Olivardia, 2009). This tendency to withdraw from social interactions, coupled with heightened self-consciousness, can lead to isolation and hinder the development of relationships, further exacerbating the psychological burden of the disorder.

The relevance of muscle dysmorphia in contemporary culture is profound, especially in light of prevailing cultural standards regarding physical fitness and attractiveness. Society's emphasis on a lean and muscular physique as symbols of health, success, and beauty has intensified the focus on body image across both genders (Readdy et al., 2013). These cultural expectations, amplified by the widespread availability and consumption of media that often glorifies a specific body type, have created an environment that fosters body image anxieties (Pidgeon & Harker, 2013) and contributes to the rise of conditions such as muscle dysmorphia.

Understanding the relationship between 'Survivor' TV shows and muscle dysmorphia requires a deep comprehension of the nature of this condition and its relevance within the context of contemporary societal standards and media influence. This review aims to examine how these TV series might contribute to the development or exacerbation of muscle dysmorphia, with a broader focus on exploring the implications of media portrayals of physical fitness and body image on mental health.

### **Overview of 'Survivor' TV Shows and Their Popularity**

The 'Survivor' TV series, a hallmark of reality television, have achieved immense popularity and evolved into a cultural phenomenon since their inception. These programs place participants in remote and challenging environments where they must navigate a series of activities and challenges designed to test their physical strength, endurance, strategic thinking, and ability to withstand harsh conditions. The format typically involves isolating a group of participants from the outside world, providing them with limited resources, and having them compete for a substantial reward through a mix of physical trials, social strategy, and elimination rounds (Britannica, 2024).

Physical challenges are a central feature of 'Survivor,' often highlighting tasks that require significant physical exertion, such as obstacle courses, endurance tests, and strength competitions. These challenges serve a dual purpose: they evaluate the participants' physical abilities while also boosting the show's entertainment value and dramatic appeal. Contestants, selected for their physical strength and attractiveness, are often portrayed as epitomes of physical fitness and athleticism. This portrayal

reinforces a specific ideal of physical fitness and appeal, showcasing strong, lean, and physically capable individuals as role models.

The success of the 'Survivor' TV series can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the unique blend of physical competition, social dynamics, and the challenge of survival in extreme conditions draws a wide and diverse audience. The show's unpredictable and dramatic nature, combined with the personal stories and strategies of the contestants, creates a compelling narrative that captivates viewers. Additionally, the emphasis on physical strength and the visual appeal of the participants align with societal standards of beauty and fitness, further enhancing the program's attractiveness.

The widespread popularity of 'Survivor' has significantly shaped societal perceptions of physical fitness and the ideal physique (Egbert & Belcher, 2012). The frequent portrayal of well-toned, athletic bodies in these shows plays a role in reinforcing societal norms and expectations regarding physical appearance. For many viewers, the contestants become benchmarks of physical fitness, potentially influencing their own body image and behaviors.

In the context of muscle dysmorphia, the emphasis on physical power and muscularity in 'Survivor' episodes is particularly relevant. This research focuses on how these portrayals may impact viewers' perceptions and increase the risk of developing muscle dysmorphia. It is essential to explore how the depiction of physical ideals in popular media like 'Survivor' can shape both individual and societal attitudes toward body image.

### **Rationale for Linking 'Survivor' TV Shows with Muscle Dysmorphia**

The rationale for exploring the correlation between 'Survivor' television programs and the susceptibility to muscle dysmorphia lies in the unique and powerful way these shows portray physical fitness and body image. Participants in these programs are often selected for their athletic and muscular physiques, and their physical abilities are prominently featured. This portrayal can have a profound impact on viewers, particularly those who may already be prone to concerns about their physical appearance.

In a society that places a high value on physical appearance, the repeated depiction of highly athletic and strong individuals as successful and admirable can contribute to the creation of unrealistic body image ideals (Cereda, 2023). These portrayals can reinforce the belief—especially among those already struggling with body image issues—that a lean and muscular physique is not only desirable but essential for acceptance and success. This belief can have a particularly strong effect on young adults and teenagers, who are still developing their sense of identity and are more susceptible to the influence of media.

The impact of these shows can be particularly profound for individuals who are at risk of or currently experiencing muscle dysmorphia (Grieve, 2007). Watching participants who exemplify the 'ideal' muscular physique can intensify these individuals' preoccupation with muscle size and definition, reinforcing the mistaken belief that they lack sufficient muscle mass, even when evidence suggests otherwise. This distorted perception can lead to an escalation of behaviors associated with muscle dysmorphia, such as excessive exercise, rigid dietary regimens, and potentially the use of performance-enhancing substances.

Moreover, the competitive and survival-oriented nature of the 'Survivor' television series can further influence perceptions of physical fitness. These programs often glorify not only physical attractiveness but also strength and endurance as essential qualities for success and survival. This emphasis may reinforce the idea that muscularity is not just about aesthetics but also a key indicator of physical prowess and resilience, thereby exacerbating the psychological challenges faced by those with muscle dysmorphia.

## Objectives of the Review

This review paper seeks to deepen the understanding of how 'Survivor' TV episodes may influence the risk of developing muscle dysmorphia. By thoroughly examining this issue, the review aims to provide valuable insights across the fields of psychology, media studies, and public health. The objectives of this review are as follows:

*Examine the Relationship Between 'Survivor' TV Shows and Muscle Dysmorphia:* This review aims to evaluate the potential impact of the widespread popularity of 'Survivor' TV series, which prominently feature physically fit and muscular participants, on the development or worsening of muscle dysmorphia. This includes investigating the psychological mechanisms through which media portrayals may shape perceptions and behaviors related to body image, particularly concerning ideals of muscularity and physical fitness.

*Analyze Existing Literature:* A comprehensive analysis of existing literature and research studies has been conducted to gather data and perspectives on the relationship between media depictions of physical fitness—specifically in 'Survivor' television programs—and the susceptibility to muscle dysmorphia. This involves reviewing research on the impact of media on body image issues and exploring the unique characteristics of muscle dysmorphia.

*Discuss Psychological and Societal Implications:* This review examines the broader psychological and cultural impacts of the interaction between media portrayals in 'Survivor' TV shows and body image. It focuses on understanding how these media depictions influence personal self-esteem, body satisfaction, and overall mental well-being. Additionally, the review explores societal consequences, such as the reinforcement of certain physical standards and the potential effects on public attitudes toward health and fitness.

*Identify Gaps and Suggest Areas for Further Research:* A key objective of this study is to identify gaps in the current understanding and research on this topic. This includes recognizing areas that require further exploration, such as the long-term effects of regular viewership of these programs, the role of demographic factors like age and gender in susceptibility to muscle dysmorphia, and the effectiveness of interventions designed to mitigate the influence of media on body image disorders.

*Provide Recommendations for Future Research and Interventions:* Based on the findings and analysis, this review offers recommendations for future research directions. These may include suggestions for methodological approaches, specific populations to study, and potential interventions aimed at reducing the negative impact of media portrayals of physical fitness on body image and related disorders such as muscle dysmorphia.

Overall, this review aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the potential impact of 'Survivor' TV series on the risk of muscle dysmorphia. It seeks to offer valuable insights for researchers, healthcare professionals, media producers, and policymakers.

## Muscle Dysmorphia: An Overview

### Detailed Description of Muscle Dysmorphia

Muscle dysmorphia is a subtype of body dysmorphic disorder, a group of mental health conditions characterized by an intense fixation on perceived physical flaws. Specifically, muscle dysmorphia involves a dominant preoccupation with the belief that one's body lacks sufficient muscularity or leanness. Even when individuals possess a well-developed physique, this distorted perception persists, leading to significant psychological distress and changes in behavior (dos Santos et al., 2016).

Individuals with muscle dysmorphia experience a continuous internal struggle with their self-image,

unable to perceive their bodies accurately. This skewed perception, where they often believe they have insufficient muscle mass despite possibly having more than average, is a hallmark of the disorder. This misconception is highly resistant to reassurance from others and persists even when confronted with objective measurements or external feedback that contradicts their belief (Grunewald & Blashill, 2021).

The behavioral symptoms of muscle dysmorphia are complex and typically involve efforts to increase muscle mass and reduce body fat. Common behaviors include excessive weightlifting and engagement in rigorous and often intense workout routines that go beyond standard fitness practices. This obsessive focus on physical exercise can lead to overtraining and a neglect of other vital life responsibilities, such as work, education, or social relationships (Olave et al., 2021).

Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often adhere strictly to rigid dietary regimes, typically following inflexible eating plans aimed at enhancing muscle growth or reducing body fat. These diets may lack balance and nutritional adequacy, potentially leading to health problems. In more severe cases, individuals may turn to anabolic steroids or other performance-enhancing substances in their quest for a more muscular physique. While these substances might temporarily boost muscle growth, they pose significant health risks, including hormone imbalances, liver damage, and an increased risk of cardiovascular issues (Strobel et al., 2020).

Muscle dysmorphia can profoundly affect an individual's life, often leading to considerable psychological distress that impacts self-esteem, mood, and overall mental well-being. The relentless pursuit of an unattainable physical ideal can become all-consuming, resulting in social isolation, strained relationships, and a reduced quality of life (Mitchell et al., 2017).

To fully understand the potential impact of media portrayals, such as those in 'Survivor' TV series, on individuals vulnerable to muscle dysmorphia, it is essential to comprehend the complex nature of this condition, including its psychological underpinnings and associated behaviors.

### **Epidemiology and Demographics**

The study of the prevalence and distribution of muscle dysmorphia provides valuable insights into the demographic patterns and occurrence of this condition (Mitchison et al., 2022). Due to its underrecognition and lack of diagnosis, muscle dysmorphia is often overlooked, making it challenging to accurately determine its prevalence. However, research indicates that the condition is more common than previously thought, particularly within certain communities and environments.

Muscle dysmorphia affects individuals across various demographics, but it is predominantly observed in men. The societal emphasis on muscularity and strength as markers of masculinity may contribute to this gender disparity. Men, especially those in environments where physical attractiveness is highly valued, are more susceptible to developing the disorder. This includes individuals involved in bodybuilding, modeling, and certain sports, where a well-developed physique is often considered essential for success and social validation (Bégin et al., 2019).

The disorder is also prevalent among fitness enthusiasts and frequent gym-goers, where the culture often idolizes extreme muscularity and low body fat. In these environments, prolonged exposure to idealized body standards can exacerbate concerns about body image, leading to an increased vulnerability to muscle dysmorphia.

Age is a significant factor in the epidemiology of muscle dysmorphia (Mueller et al., 2024). The disorder often begins to manifest during late adolescence or early adulthood, a developmental period characterized by heightened self-consciousness and concern with physical appearance. Adolescents, who are in the process of forming their identities and are more susceptible to cultural and peer pressures, may be particularly vulnerable to developing muscle dysmorphia. The desire to conform to perceived

standards of physical attractiveness and strength during this stage can trigger or exacerbate the symptoms of the condition.

While muscle dysmorphia predominantly affects males, it is important to recognize that it can occur in individuals of any gender. Women can also experience muscle dysmorphia, although its expression and the factors contributing to susceptibility may differ due to unique socioeconomic and cultural influences (Readdy et al., 2011).

### **Psychological and Physical Health Consequences**

Muscle dysmorphia, although largely a disease related to body image, has wide-ranging implications that go beyond an individual's impression of their physical appearance. The illness has a deep and diverse influence on both psychological and physical health.

#### ***Psychological Consequences***

Muscle dysmorphia has a profound and complex psychological impact, significantly affecting the mental health and overall well-being of those who suffer from this disorder. One of the key psychological outcomes is the development of intense anxiety, particularly related to body image and physical appearance. This anxiety is not just a fleeting concern but a pervasive and debilitating condition that infiltrates every aspect of an individual's life. The constant worry and fixation on muscle size and definition can disrupt daily routines, impair cognitive function, and hinder social interactions. The fear of being perceived as insufficient or lacking in muscularity often leads to avoidance behaviors, which further exacerbate social isolation and psychological distress (Cerea et al., 2018).

Depression is another common psychological consequence of muscle dysmorphia. The relentless pursuit of an idealized and often unattainable physical appearance fosters a cycle of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Individuals with this disorder may experience feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a profound sense of low self-esteem, stemming from their inability to achieve the desired level of muscularity. The gap between their perceived body image and their idealized appearance can lead to a deep sense of inadequacy, significantly impacting their mood and overall outlook on life (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Low self-esteem is closely linked to the psychological effects of muscle dysmorphia. This disorder, which centers on perceived physical inadequacies, can severely undermine an individual's confidence and self-perception. Those affected often engage in negative self-assessment, viewing themselves as deficient when compared to the muscular ideals they strive to achieve. This negative self-perception can spill over into other areas of life, leading to a pervasive sense of incompetence and a diminished belief in one's abilities (Phillips et al., 2004).

At the heart of muscle dysmorphia is a distorted body image, which is the core psychological impact of the condition. The persistent dissatisfaction with one's physique, even in the face of contrary evidence, results in a skewed perception of physical appearance. This distortion goes beyond mere dissatisfaction with specific body parts; it manifests as an all-encompassing and compulsive preoccupation that dominates the individual's thoughts and behaviors. The ongoing negative self-talk, obsession with achieving a more muscular physique, and inaccurate self-perception contribute to a cycle of psychological distress, further entrenching the disorder in the individual's life.

Understanding these psychological ramifications is crucial for comprehending the full impact of muscle dysmorphia. It underscores the need for effective treatments and support for those suffering from this condition and highlights the importance of examining external factors, such as media portrayals of physical fitness, that may contribute to or exacerbate these mental health challenges.

### ***Physical Health Consequences***

Muscle dysmorphia not only has psychological consequences but also significantly impacts physical well-being. A major concern is the potential for harm resulting from excessive exercise (Mosley, 2008). Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often engage in rigorous and prolonged workout regimens, driven by their desire to achieve and maintain a highly muscular physique. This excessive exercise can push the body beyond safe limits, often ignoring signs of pain and fatigue. The result can be a range of injuries, from muscle strains and joint damage to more severe conditions such as stress fractures or chronic overuse injuries. These injuries not only cause physical pain and discomfort but also exacerbate the psychological distress associated with the disorder, as they may temporarily hinder the ability to exercise, further fueling body image concerns.

Another significant physical health risk associated with muscle dysmorphia is the misuse of anabolic steroids or other performance-enhancing drugs. Some individuals turn to these substances in their quest for greater muscle growth and definition, hoping to expedite and optimize the achievement of their ideal physique. However, the use of these drugs can lead to serious and long-lasting health consequences. Hormonal imbalances (Davies et al., 2011) are a common side effect, resulting in issues such as reduced fertility (Whitaker et al., 2021), changes in sexual desire (Amodeo et al., 2022), and mental health problems (Wolke & Sapouna, 2008). The misuse of steroids can also cause liver damage, increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, and potentially raise the likelihood of developing certain types of cancer. These health risks are particularly concerning because the use of these drugs is often hidden due to legal and social stigma. This concealment can delay the seeking of medical help and advice, further compounding the risks.

Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often face nutritional deficiencies due to the disorder's emphasis on strict dietary control. These regimens typically focus on foods believed to enhance muscle growth and reduce body fat. However, such diets can sometimes be unbalanced and lacking in essential nutrients, leading to deficiencies that may affect overall health. Inadequate intake of vitamins, minerals, and other critical nutrients can result in various health problems (Rickard, 2014), including a weakened immune system, reduced bone density, and impaired organ function. In severe cases, these nutritional deficits can have long-lasting and potentially irreversible effects on health.

The physical consequences of muscle dysmorphia highlight the disorder's capacity to impact the body in numerous, often severe ways. Understanding these effects is essential for fully recognizing the disorder's impact and for providing comprehensive treatment and support to those affected by muscle dysmorphia.

### **Potential for Comorbid Conditions**

Muscle dysmorphia, while a significant mental health concern in its own right, often coexists with other psychological conditions (Cafri et al., 2008). It is commonly associated with a range of mental health issues, creating a complex web of psychological challenges for those affected (Pope et al., 2005). Anxiety disorders frequently accompany muscle dysmorphia (Chandler et al., 2009). The chronic preoccupation with physical appearance and the intense desire to achieve a particular body shape can exacerbate or trigger symptoms of generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and panic disorders. This constant state of worry and tension related to body image can profoundly impact an individual's overall mental well-being and quality of life.

Depressive disorders also often co-occur with muscle dysmorphia (Grieve & Shacklette, 2012). The ongoing dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance, the relentless pursuit of an unattainable ideal, and the resulting social and professional limitations can lead to feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a pervasive sense of low self-esteem. This may manifest as major depressive disorder or dysthymia,



further complicating the individual's mental health landscape.

Additionally, muscle dysmorphia is closely linked to obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The rigid and repetitive behaviors characteristic of muscle dysmorphia—such as excessive exercise, strict dietary control, and frequent body checking—bear similarities to the compulsions seen in OCD. The obsessive nature of thoughts about physical inadequacy in muscle dysmorphia may also mirror the intrusive and persistent thoughts experienced in OCD (Frare et al., 2004).

Individuals with muscle dysmorphia often face significant concerns related to substance addiction, particularly the use of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs (Scarath et al., 2023). The use of these substances is typically driven by the desire to achieve rapid and substantial increases in muscle mass. However, this can lead to dependence and addiction, further deteriorating both the emotional and physical well-being of the individual. The combination of health risks associated with substance abuse and the psychological challenges posed by muscle dysmorphia creates a complex and potentially dangerous situation, necessitating comprehensive and multi-faceted treatment strategies.

To fully understand the scope of the issue, it is essential to recognize the potential for co-occurring disorders in individuals with muscle dysmorphia. This highlights the need for a holistic therapeutic approach that addresses not only the symptoms of muscle dysmorphia but also any concurrent mental health conditions. Additionally, it underscores the importance of considering external factors, such as media influences like 'Survivor' television programs, which may contribute to or exacerbate these complex health issues. Media portrayals of physical ideals can significantly shape how individuals perceive their own body image, potentially triggering or worsening symptoms of muscle dysmorphia and related disorders.

### **Survivor' TV Shows and Physical Idealization**

#### **Description of 'Survivor' TV Shows**

The 'Survivor' TV series, including popular Turkish versions like 'Survivor All Star,' epitomizes a distinct and widely embraced genre of reality television. These shows combine survival challenges, physical competition, and strategic maneuvering to create a unique entertainment experience (Champion, 2016). In 'Survivor All Star,' as in other versions, participants are sent to remote locations where they must endure demanding living conditions with limited resources. This particular version, which enjoys significant popularity in Turkey, features former contestants—often fan favorites—who have demonstrated exceptional skills in previous seasons.

The physical aspect of 'Survivor' shows, including 'Survivor All Star,' plays a crucial role. Contestants face physically demanding tasks designed to test their stamina, strength, mental resilience, and strategic thinking. These challenges vary, from endurance competitions like long-distance swimming to strength-based tasks such as lifting or carrying heavy objects. Success in these tasks is often essential for contestants' survival in the game, making physical fitness and strength critical to their performance.

Physical prowess is not only necessary for the survival tasks in these shows but also a key element of their appeal and entertainment value. 'Survivor All Star' in Turkey, for instance, highlights contestants' athletic abilities and endurance, adding excitement and drama to the viewing experience. This emphasis on physicality can influence viewers' perceptions of ideal body types and physical capabilities, often showcasing contestants with muscular and toned physiques (Ayten, 2017).

The consistent portrayal of fit and athletic contestants in 'Survivor All Star' and other 'Survivor' series reinforces specific physical ideals. This portrayal can impact viewers' body image perceptions, setting potentially unrealistic standards of fitness and muscularity. In essence, 'Survivor' TV programs, including international versions like Turkey's 'Survivor All Star,' serve not only as entertainment but

also as platforms that celebrate physical fitness and strength, influencing viewers' attitudes towards physical fitness and body image (Şimşek, 2018).

### **Analysis of the Representation of Body Image and Physical Ideals**

The depiction of body image and physical standards in 'Survivor' TV episodes is a key aspect of their cultural impact. These programs often feature participants who not only excel in survival and strategic games but also possess athletic and physically strong physiques. The selection process for these shows typically favors individuals with a specific physical aesthetic, often prioritizing those who display muscularity, tone, and athletic prowess. This selection bias results in a portrayal of ideal body types that aligns with cultural standards of fitness and attractiveness, highlighting a narrow range of physical forms on the program (Elitaş & Keskin, 2019).

The emphasis on physical fitness and attractiveness among participants significantly contributes to the establishment and reinforcement of certain physical standards for viewers. As viewers repeatedly see these physically strong and muscular individuals competing and succeeding, a narrative emerges that elevates the attractiveness and value of these body types. This portrayal can subtly influence how viewers perceive physical attractiveness and what they consider to be the 'perfect' physique. Regular exposure to these idealized bodies on television may lead viewers to internalize these ideals, potentially altering their own perceptions and desires regarding body image.

The impact of consistently viewing idealized bodies on television extends beyond mere admiration or appreciation. These images can significantly influence certain viewers, particularly those who are already concerned about their physical appearance or vulnerable to body image issues. The portrayal of physical fitness and muscularity as symbols of success, attractiveness, and power may drive these viewers to pursue similar physical ideals, often setting unrealistic and unattainable goals for themselves. This can lead to increased dissatisfaction with their own bodies, an intensified obsession with achieving a specific physique, and, in some cases, the adoption of harmful behaviors aimed at altering their bodies to meet these ideals (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004).

Moreover, the depiction of physical ideals in 'Survivor' television series can contribute to broader societal discussions about body image. These portrayals may reinforce the cultural emphasis on physical attractiveness, particularly the value placed on having well-defined muscles and a slim physique. This can have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only individual viewers but also shaping cultural standards and expectations related to physical health and body perception.

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the depiction of body image and physical ideals in 'Survivor' TV series goes beyond casting choices or entertainment value. These portrayals reflect and strongly influence cultural conceptions of physical attractiveness and what is considered achievable, potentially having a significant impact on viewers' body image and self-esteem.

### **Discussion of Cultural and Societal Impacts**

The portrayal of physical perfection in 'Survivor' television series carries significant cultural and sociological implications that extend far beyond entertainment. By featuring participants who are physically fit, strong, and attractive, these programs contribute to the reinforcement and potential shaping of societal standards and expectations for physical attractiveness, fitness, and strength. The depiction of certain body types as ideal and desirable not only reflects existing societal norms but also has the power to strengthen them. This reinforcement can create a cultural environment where physical fitness and a specific body type are overly emphasized, thereby influencing public perceptions and attitudes toward body image.

The impact of 'Survivor' television programs on viewers' body image and self-esteem is a notable

concern, particularly for certain demographics within the audience. Adolescent viewers, who are in the process of forming their self-identity and body perception, as well as those who are already preoccupied with their physical appearance, may be especially vulnerable to these depictions. Regular exposure to idealized body types can lead individuals to compare their own bodies unfavorably, resulting in dissatisfaction and negative self-assessment (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). This can have a detrimental effect on self-esteem, as viewers may perceive themselves as inadequate or lacking when compared to the highly athletic and muscular participants they see on the program.

Moreover, these portrayals may encourage the acceptance of excessive physical fitness and muscularity as desirable traits. The success and widespread admiration of participants who embody these physical ideals may lead to the belief that achieving and showcasing such levels of fitness and muscularity are not only attainable but also essential for societal approval and recognition. This belief can result in increased body dissatisfaction among viewers as they strive to meet these unrealistic and potentially unattainable standards. In some cases, this dissatisfaction may escalate into more serious issues, such as the development of body image disorders, including muscle dysmorphia. Individuals who are consistently exposed to and influenced by these idealized images may engage in harmful behaviors—such as excessive exercise, restrictive eating patterns, or even substance abuse (Krawiec, 2008)—in an attempt to replicate the physiques they see on the show.

When examining the cultural and societal impact of 'Survivor' TV series, it becomes clear that the portrayal of physical fitness and body image in these programs is not merely a matter of personal preference or entertainment. It has significant implications for how society perceives and values physical standards, potentially affecting the body image and mental well-being of its viewers. This analysis underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the broader effects of media influences on public perceptions of physical standards and the potential consequences for body image and overall well-being.

### **The Psychological Impact of Media on Body Image**

#### **Overview of Research on the Influence of Media on Body Image Perceptions**

The impact of media on body image has been extensively studied (Spurr et al., 2013; Duggan & McCreary, 2013; Leit, 2002), revealing the significant role media plays in shaping individuals' perceptions of body image and ideals of physical attractiveness. Research across various fields consistently demonstrates that media exposure heavily influences the establishment and reinforcement of societal standards of beauty. These studies encompass a wide range of media formats, including television shows, magazine advertisements, social media platforms, and broader advertising campaigns.

One key finding from this research is the link between exposure to media portrayals of idealized body shapes and the development of body dissatisfaction among viewers. Frequent exposure to depictions of slim, muscular, or otherwise idealized physiques can lead individuals to view these body types as the prevailing standard and an ideal to strive for. This exposure often results in distorted perceptions of what constitutes a normal or ideal body shape and size, particularly when media representations do not reflect the diversity of body types found in reality. Continuous exposure to such images can create unrealistic expectations and standards of physical attractiveness, leading to a disconnect between an individual's actual body and the idealized portrayals seen in the media.

Moreover, the media plays a crucial role in shaping and sustaining societal standards of beauty and attractiveness. Media portrayals not only reflect existing cultural ideals but also actively influence and reinforce these standards. The extent of this impact varies across different cultures and historical periods, as each era and community has its own criteria for beauty. These norms are often disseminated and reinforced through various media channels, shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward

physical attractiveness.

The influence of media on body image is a complex issue that extends beyond mere exposure to images. It involves the internalization of these images and the ideals they represent. This process of internalization can profoundly affect an individual's self-esteem, body satisfaction, and overall mental well-being. Therefore, understanding the media's impact on body image perceptions is crucial for addressing the broader social issues related to body dissatisfaction and the pursuit of unattainable physical standards.

### **Connection Between Media Consumption, Body Dissatisfaction, and the Development of Body Image Disorders**

The relationship between media consumption and body dissatisfaction is a critical area of study in understanding the development of body image disorders. Consistent exposure to media that promotes specific body types significantly influences how individuals perceive their own bodies. The frequent depiction of a narrow range of body types as desirable or attractive in the media can set unattainable standards that many viewers find difficult to meet. This repeated exposure often leads to a perceived gap between an individual's actual physique and the idealized images portrayed in the media. The disparity between reality and these idealized standards can result in body dissatisfaction, where individuals feel unhappy or uncomfortable with their own physical appearance (Van den Berg et al., 2007).

Body dissatisfaction is more than just a sense of unhappiness; it can be a precursor to the development of more severe body image disorders. Persistent and intense dissatisfaction can evolve into pathological preoccupations with body shape and size, laying the groundwork for conditions such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and body dysmorphic disorder (Rizwan et al., 2022). Continuous exposure to media portrayals of extreme thinness, for example, can contribute to the onset of anorexia nervosa, a psychological disorder characterized by an overwhelming fear of weight gain and extreme dietary restriction. Similarly, exposure to images that idealize a certain body shape can lead to the development of bulimia nervosa (Naumann et al., 2016), marked by cycles of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors such as purging.

Media exposure can significantly impact individuals with body dysmorphic disorder, particularly those with muscle dysmorphia, a specific form of the condition. Muscle dysmorphia is characterized by an intense preoccupation with the belief that one's body lacks sufficient muscle mass or leanness, often driven by media portrayals of highly muscular and well-defined physiques. The constant exposure to these idealized images can exacerbate the disorder, leading individuals to engage in excessive exercise, strict dietary regimens, or even substance abuse in an attempt to achieve the desired body.

The influence of media on body image varies across different demographic groups (Frederick et al., 2022). Gender differences play a significant role in how media affects body image and the susceptibility to body image disorders. While much of the research on media and body image has historically focused on women and the pursuit of thinness, it is increasingly recognized that men are also significantly influenced by media representations of muscularity and physical fitness. These gendered differences in media influence highlight the need to understand the complex ways in which media impacts body image across diverse demographics, considering factors such as age, gender, and cultural background.

Understanding the relationship between media consumption, body dissatisfaction, and the development of body image disorders is essential for addressing the broader social issue of body image concerns. It underscores the importance of promoting media literacy and advocating for a more diverse and realistic representation of body types in media to mitigate the negative effects on viewers' body image and self-esteem.

## **Muscle Dysmorphia and Media Influence**

### **Direct Link Between 'Survivor' TV Shows and Muscle Dysmorphia Risk**

A crucial aspect of understanding the influence of media on body image disorders is examining the potential direct correlation between the portrayal of physical fitness and strength in 'Survivor' TV series and the likelihood of developing muscle dysmorphia (Mitchell et al., 2017). These reality programs often feature participants who exemplify well-developed, athletic bodies, presenting them as idealized representations of physical power and endurance. The portrayal of these contestants, frequently depicted as the epitome of physical strength and attractiveness, can significantly shape viewers' perceptions of what constitutes an ideal physique. This influence is particularly strong regarding standards of muscularity and physical fitness, as the program tends to exalt and idealize these traits.

Regular exposure to 'Survivor' TV series and its idealized portrayals of physical form may lead to increased dissatisfaction with one's own body. This effect can be especially pronounced in individuals already preoccupied with their muscularity or those aspiring to achieve a similar level of physical fitness. The contrast between the viewer's personal physique and the prominently muscular and fit contestants showcased on the program can amplify feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. For many, this can result in a negative self-image and a compulsion to alter their physical appearance to align with what they see on the screen.

The glorification of exceptional physical fitness and strength in 'Survivor' television programs can set unrealistic and potentially unattainable standards for the human physique. While the show presents these traits as desirable and achievable, they may not be practical or beneficial for the average viewer. Consistent exposure to such standards can trigger or worsen muscle dysmorphia in individuals who are predisposed to it. Those already concerned with body size and muscularity may find that these media portrayals validate their anxieties, leading them to engage in behaviors characteristic of muscle dysmorphia, such as excessive exercise, strict dietary restrictions, or the use of performance-enhancing substances.

In summary, the depiction of physical fitness and strength in 'Survivor' television programs has the potential to shape viewers' perceptions of an ideal physique and contribute to dissatisfaction with their own bodies. This dissatisfaction, in turn, could increase the risk of developing or exacerbating muscle dysmorphia, particularly among those already preoccupied with their level of muscularity and physical fitness.

### **Discussion of How These Shows Might Reinforce or Exacerbate Muscle Dysmorphia Symptoms**

The impact of the 'Survivor' television series extends beyond the potential risk of developing muscle dysmorphia; it also has the capacity to intensify the symptoms in individuals who already suffer from the disorder. Continuous exposure to the idealized, muscular bodies featured on these programs can significantly reinforce and exacerbate the distorted beliefs characteristic of muscle dysmorphia. Individuals struggling with the disorder may find that watching contestants who exemplify their ideal of muscularity and fitness reinforces the belief that their own bodies are inadequately developed. This reinforcement of a distorted body image can worsen the symptoms of muscle dysmorphia, making it more challenging for individuals to overcome their preoccupations and anxieties.

The intense and competitive nature of 'Survivor' TV series is another aspect that may strongly resonate with those dealing with muscle dysmorphia. The program often glorifies physical endurance, strength, and competition—qualities that align closely with the beliefs and behaviors associated with muscle dysmorphia. Individuals with the disorder may find that the emphasis on physical challenges and the success of participants with well-developed muscles reinforces their drive to engage in excessive

training and their desire for an extremely muscular physique. This validation can exacerbate harmful behaviors such as overtraining, restrictive dieting, and the use of performance-enhancing substances. The show's portrayal of physical strength as essential for success and admiration may intensify the cognitive patterns linked to muscle dysmorphia, further entrenching individuals in the cyclical nature of the condition.

Furthermore, by emphasizing physical strength, 'Survivor' television programs may indirectly suggest that these qualities are not only desirable but also essential for achieving success and societal approval. This message can be particularly harmful to individuals with muscle dysmorphia, as it reinforces the belief that their self-worth and societal value are tied to attaining a certain level of muscularity. The potential for these shows to validate and intensify the harmful behavioral and cognitive patterns associated with muscle dysmorphia highlights the need for a thorough examination of media portrayals and their impact on mental well-being.

In exploring the connection between 'Survivor' TV series and muscle dysmorphia, it is crucial to understand how these widely viewed media representations may contribute to the perpetuation and worsening of the disorder. Developing a comprehensive understanding of this relationship is essential for creating effective strategies to mitigate the negative effects of media on individuals struggling with muscle dysmorphia.

### **Case Studies and Empirical Evidence**

An in-depth analysis of individual case studies and empirical data provides a clearer understanding of the correlation between 'Survivor' TV episodes and muscle dysmorphia. The study conducted by Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2009) explored the relationship between muscle dysmorphia, social comparisons, and body schema. Their research revealed that males susceptible to muscle dysmorphia exhibited altered patterns of social engagement, underscoring the significant impact of body image concerns on social behavior. This finding suggests that media portrayals of idealized body types, such as those featured in 'Survivor' television programs, may amplify feelings of social isolation and exacerbate symptoms of muscle dysmorphia.

In a pivotal study by Pope et al. (1997), muscle dysmorphia was defined as a subtype of body dysmorphic disorder characterized by an excessive preoccupation with perceived insufficient muscle development. This research highlights the powerful role of media in shaping individuals' perceptions of physical size and muscularity. The study's findings indicate that regular exposure to highly athletic and muscular individuals in media, such as in reality TV series like 'Survivor,' can significantly contribute to the onset and worsening of muscle dysmorphia symptoms.

Blond (2008) conducted a study in the field of body image, examining the effects of exposure to images of idealized bodies on male body dissatisfaction. The review suggested that such exposure can lead to negative body image perceptions and potentially contribute to the development of disorders like muscle dysmorphia. This study indicates that 'Survivor' television programs, known for their focus on physically strong and muscular participants, may influence viewers' perceptions of their own bodies and contribute to the development of body image issues.

These studies, conducted by leading scholars in the field, provide important insights into the correlation between media consumption—particularly reality TV programs like 'Survivor'—and the risk of developing muscle dysmorphia. They highlight the importance of considering the impact of media portrayals on viewers' self-perception and the potential for these depictions to contribute to the onset and exacerbation of muscle dysmorphia and other body image disorders.

## **Mitigation and Intervention**

To mitigate the detrimental effects of 'Survivor' TV shows and similar media on viewers' body image, a comprehensive strategy is essential. This approach should include educating viewers, fostering media literacy, and providing psychological support and public health initiatives.

Education is a crucial component in reducing the negative impacts of these shows. It is important for viewers to understand the realities of media production, including the use of editing, lighting, and casting, which can create unrealistic and unattainable body ideals. By gaining awareness of these aspects of media creation, viewers can develop a more critical perspective and are less likely to internalize harmful body image standards. Additionally, promoting the representation of a diverse range of body types in media can help normalize various body shapes and sizes, thereby reducing the emphasis on a single, idealized body type. Implementing educational programs in schools that address topics such as body image, media influence, and self-esteem can be particularly effective, especially for young people who are in the process of developing their body image and self-perception.

Media literacy plays a crucial role in addressing the impact of media on body image. Media literacy education empowers individuals to understand and critically analyze the content they consume. The focus should be on developing the ability to recognize and evaluate media messages related to body image and physical ideals. By incorporating media literacy programs into school curricula and public education campaigns, individuals of all ages can be equipped with the skills needed to critically assess media content and mitigate its negative effects on body image.

Psychological support, including counseling and therapy, is essential for individuals struggling with body image issues or disorders such as muscle dysmorphia. This support can address underlying issues, boost self-esteem, and help individuals develop more positive body image perspectives. Public health initiatives can also play a significant role in raising awareness about the impact of media on body image. These initiatives should promote positive body image messages, encourage the acceptance of diverse body shapes, and provide resources for those seeking help. Collaborations among mental health professionals, educators, and media creators can lead to more thoughtful and compassionate portrayals of body image in media.

To effectively reduce the negative impact of 'Survivor' TV shows and similar media on body image, a holistic approach is necessary, incorporating elements such as education, media literacy, psychological support, and public health campaigns. These efforts can foster a healthier and more realistic understanding of body image in society, helping viewers navigate media content with a well-informed and critical perspective.

## **Conclusion**

This review has explored the complex relationship between 'Survivor' television programs and the susceptibility to muscle dysmorphia, thoroughly investigating various aspects, including the portrayal of physical fitness and strength, the impact of media on body image perceptions, and the potential exacerbation of muscle dysmorphia symptoms. The key findings suggest that the depiction of idealized, muscular physiques in these television programs can significantly influence viewers' perceptions of their own bodies and self-worth, potentially leading to body dissatisfaction and the onset or worsening of muscle dysmorphia.

The research presented underscores the importance of understanding the impact of media on mental well-being. In the context of muscle dysmorphia, it is clear that media portrayals of physical fitness and strength can profoundly affect body perceptions, particularly among individuals already vulnerable to body image issues. Continuous exposure to idealized body types may set unattainable standards, leading

to harmful body perceptions and intensifying symptoms of muscle dysmorphia.

This review emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate the negative effects of media on body image. Efforts in education, media literacy promotion, psychological support, and public health campaigns are essential in fostering a healthier and more realistic understanding of body image. By addressing these issues, we can cultivate a more informed society that is better equipped to navigate the often idealized representations of body image in the media.

Ultimately, examining the connection between 'Survivor' television programs and muscle dysmorphia sheds light on the broader implications of media's influence on mental well-being. It calls for a thorough analysis of media content and a concerted effort to promote positive and diverse representations of body image. Understanding and addressing the media's impact on mental health, particularly in relation to body image disorders like muscle dysmorphia, is crucial for the overall well-being of individuals and society.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

### **Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval for this study is not applicable.

### **Author Contributions**

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

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