

The Stories our Bodies Tell

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The term “Dad Bod” has exploded in popular media as a result of an article written by a Clemson University student explaining the recent trend of young men possessing a natural, un-toned body, rather than six-pack abs. The article has been met with no shortage of criticism, mainly speaking to the double standard for women and subsequent reinforcement of gender inequality. As a result, a [New York Times](#) article presented selections of photographs and stories submitted by fathers about their “Dad Bods”. While there has been discussion on “Dad Bod” from a feminist perspective, the NYT hoped to refocus this buzzword to the bodies of actual Dads; full of experiences and marked by the bumps, bruises, and scars that come along with them. Surely the stories our bodies tell are more interesting than scrutinizing the way they may appear.

Taking pride in the experience our bodies demonstrate, frequently physically, is not a new perspective, but a refreshing reminder. Hollywood and the media tend to promote a sleek, blemish-free body image which may cause distress and threaten self-esteem in individuals with real-life experiences and the real-life bodies to go along with them. In some individuals, this distress may even manifest clinically in Eating Disorders, [Body Dysmorphic Disorder](#) and Muscle Dysmorphic Disorder*. Stringent media effects on body image may partially be the result of social comparison, a common behavior in individuals who suffer from clinical body image disorders; the greater the deviation between perceived ideal and self-evaluation, the greater the vulnerability can be for emotional distress and consequent practice of self-defeating behaviors (Bessenoff & Snow, 2006).

Throughout the recent “Dad Bod” phenomenon some readers may wonder – what about *Mom bod*? Shouldn’t women’s bodies be appreciated for the experiences they have endured and lives they have created? What stories do mothers’ bodies have to tell? Women often face a more troubling standard of physical perfection to overcome and less acceptance for a deviation from this ideal. Still, the NYT redirected the gender specific body shaming element of the media’s “Dad Bod” blowout toward a more meaningful goal – cherishing our memories. Overall, the hope should be to surpass the preoccupation with Dad Bod, Mom Bod, Any Bod, and honor our families for what we truly love about them and the time we spend together on any day of the year.

** Body Dysmorphic Disorder is fairly common mental disorder in which an individual becomes severely preoccupied by a perceived defect(s), spending hours worrying or ruminating about their appearance concern and frequently engaging in specific rituals to reduce their distress. BDD may interfere with an individual’s ability to go to school, work or spend time with friends and family. Muscle Dysmorphic Disorder is a form of BDD in which an individual perceives themselves as slight and weak, when in actuality they are often quite muscular and strong; they may engage in excessive exercise to alleviate the distress these concerns cause (MGH OCD).*

References:

Bessenoff, G. R., & Snow, D. (2006). Absorbing society's influence: Body image self-discrepancy and internalized shame. *Sex Roles, 54*(9-10), 727-731.

Parker-Pope, T. (2015, June 8). Show Us Your Dad Bod. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/06/08/show-us-your-dad-bod/>