

### **Abstract**

Men's hair removal practices are becoming mainstream, seen as a consequence of changing masculine norms and men's relationships to their bodies. This is often presented as a straightforward 'shift' from men's ideal bodies as naturally hairy, to increased hairlessness, and the consequence on men's body concerns as inevitable. This paper analyses qualitative survey data from Aotearoa/New Zealand using critical thematic analysis, and describes three themes. Two themes capture contradictory ideas: that men's body hair is natural, and that men's body hair is unpleasant. A third theme introduces the concept of 'excess' hair, which allowed sense-making of this contradiction, mandating men's grooming of 'excessive' hair. However its vagueness as a concept may provoke anxiety for men resulting in hair removal. This paper adds to a body of research demonstrating a cultural transition: the ways changing masculinities, increased commodification of male bodies, and shifting gender roles impact on men's hair removal practices.

Keywords: Men, body hair removal, qualitative survey data, thematic analysis

The ways that men in the West are responding to hair on their bodies appears to have undergone some significant changes in the last two decades. Anecdotal evidence from the 2012 Olympic Games suggests these changes may be manifesting in different ways across various Western contexts. For instance, many of the German male athletes, much like their female compatriots, had completely hairless armpits; an observation that seems grounded in empirical research (e.g., Brähler, 2011). In contrast, the majority of male athletes from Britain and the United States (US) sported a full, bushy look, suggestive of not shaving their armpits - although the same could not be claimed of their chests, backs and abdomens. These cultural differences in depilation appeared almost a reversal of female Olympic athletes' hair removal practices (or lack thereof) during the 1970s (Lenskyj, 2012). In this earlier period, a number of East German female athletes had hair growing in their underarms, a feature that was located more broadly within wider policing of ideal Olympian femininity, and was viewed as indicative of something being 'wrong' with these women (Rosen, 2008). Negatively associated with performance enhancing drugs and differing ideals around feminine athletic embodiment, an ideal image of the female athletic body based in Anglo-gendered-norms was noticeable (Lenskyj, 2012). This criticism was combined with what was already considered a European sensibility (Basow, 1991), still used in negative stereotyping of European women today (see, for instance, Fahs, 2013a).

This evidenced current variation in male hair removal practices across various contexts raises a number of questions about contemporary cultural differences, but perhaps more importantly, the relative silence about men's hairless (or hairy) armpits and bodies in this instance is jarring, when compared to ongoing talk about women's body hair practices. Much of this difference may be seen as a consequence of the ways in which gender is socially constructed within Western contexts, in particular, the narrowly defined understandings of beauty and acceptable hair practices afforded women when compared with men (Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998). Although there appears to be increased media-driven expectation toward 'manscaping' through removal or reduction in hair from male bodies (Frank, 2014), it does not appear to be as simple as male hair removal is good,

while hair retention is not. In other words, as Terry and Braun (2013) have argued, many Western cultures seem to be in a state of flux with regard to men's hair removal practices, and this could be a trend that follows women's, or potentially shifts in other directions. However, what seems clear, is that this flux is likely associated with changes to the ideals of hegemonic masculinities within the West, as masculinities adapt to increasing equalities for women and increasing consumer pressures on men (Frank, 2014).

Connell (2009) has argued that bodies, and what we do with and to them, are important to gendered meaning making and performance – which she understands as being structured around the continuation of privilege of men over women within the West. Gender within this framework is not limited to the biological, nor is it a fixed set of internal traits “always and everywhere the same” (Connell, 2005, p. 76), but should be seen as sets of practices, accomplishments, and relational activities that guarantee the person a recognisably masculine or feminine identity within their given context and point in history. This is always done in reference to a particular ideal – in the case of men, what Connell (2005) refers to as hegemonic masculinity – the expression of masculinity which guarantees the most social privilege for men. Very few men, according to Connell, can act as pure exemplars of this ideal masculinity, but most men are complicit with their local expression - and especially the rewards it offers - trying to approximate it in various ways, according to the resources available to them. An individual man may more closely approximate hegemonic masculinity through the accumulation of ‘masculine capital’ via displays of masculine competence in particular arenas, such as in sport (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009). This may be especially necessary for men when they have been marginalised from the hegemonic ideal through various social indicators (e.g., age, race, class, sexual orientation), which can place limits on the economic and social privilege a man can garner, depending on the society they live in.

Research evidence has begun to document some changes in the way men are responding to their body hair in the US (e.g., Boroughs & Thompson, 2013; Fahs, 2013b; Frank, 2014), Australia (Tiggemann, Martins, & Churchett, 2008), and Aotearoa/New Zealand (e.g., Terry & Braun, 2013).

Although men have engaged in various forms of body hair removal at different points and places throughout history – for instance, wealthy men in ancient Rome and Egypt were known to remove body hair (Boroughs, Cafri, & Thompson, 2005; Cokal, 2007; Hope, 1982) – it is not a practice strongly that has been associated with dominant Western masculinities. Body hair has been symbolically intertwined with masculine virility and ruggedness for much of the last two centuries in the West (Herzig, 2015; Tiggemann et al., 2008). Even in a period that seems to be defined by a decrease in the public presence of male body hair, having some body hair continues to be reflective of ideal masculine embodiment, with the absence or presence of hair symbolically reinforcing gendered differences (Boroughs, 2012; Toerien, Wilkinson, & Choi, 2005). For instance, men undergoing chemotherapy express concern about loss of hair on the body rather than the head (Hilton, Hunt, Emslie, Salinas, & Ziebland, 2008), indicating that where given a choice, some body hair is still preferred. Fahs (2013b) research in the US demonstrated that even among men with heightened awareness of gender norms and their impacts, a temporary removal of terminal (visible) body hair (e.g., legs, underarms) was experienced as troubling to their sense of masculine identity. Some research has also identified beardedness as a way for men to enhance perceptions of their maturity and social status (e.g., Oldmeadow & Dixon, 2015), suggesting that certain types of male body hair remain strongly associated with gendered difference.

Research concerning hair removal has primarily (and up until recently, exclusively), focused on the ‘hairless ideal’ (Basow, 1991) expected of women. This hairless ideal operates to produce an environment where body hair removal is so normative that the presence of body hair is constructed as unnatural. Although the absence of many forms of hair on men’s bodies is becoming less commented upon, its presence is still a long way from being treated with the disgust and eradication that women’s hair is (Fahs, 2011, 2013b; Fahs & Delgado, 2011; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004). Men’s bodies are, however, becoming increasingly visible in many Western countries, a new focus of attention in advertising, in health campaigns and across broader media, and it tends to be a minimally hairy male body that is made visible (Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005). Perhaps as a

consequence, many men are becoming progressively defined by body consciousness and awareness (e.g., Pope, Olivardia, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2001; Tiggemann et al., 2008; Tiggemann, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007; Yang, Gray, & Pope, 2005); this may be reflected in body practices such as hair removal or trimming of body hair – particularly if it is perceived as enhancing muscularity (Boroughs & Thompson, 2014).

However, Terry and Braun (2013) have argued that, in contrast to women, men still have a high degree of flexibility around their hair removal – in other words hair removal is still seen as a choice for men, and further more a choice in terms of how much or little one needs remove. This highlights, perhaps, a distinction between body hair removal as the mandated norm (for women), and as a viable – possibly even desirable – option for men, but associated with an ideal rather than normative state of embodiment. Men (and others) seem generally to understand what this ideal expression of masculine embodiment is (Tiggemann et al., 2007), but, much like hegemonic masculinity more generally, men can be complicit with, be marginalised from, outright reject, or a hybridise any of these (e.g., Gough & Flanders, 2009; Hennen, 2005; Lin, 2014; Paxton, 2013). However, more broadly, it is the bodies of men who do not have significant financial and institutional power are somewhat contradictorily constructed as ideal within mainstream media (Gill et al., 2005): younger men's bodies, especially muscular, hairless younger men's bodies, are often presented as an ideal expression of physical masculinity and masculine attractiveness (Drummond, 2010). This seems to follow a broader pattern identified within research that men occupying a marginalised social position tend to focus more attention on their bodies as a way of providing them with increased status or social power (e.g., Swami, Diwell, & McCreary, 2014; Swami et al., 2013; Swami & Voracek, 2013). Furthermore, an 'appearance potent' seems to be stronger for many gay men than it is for the among straight men – and sociocultural pressure to embody a physical ideal of mesomorphic body, full head of hair, and largely hairless body, seems to be more intense for many gay men (Jankowski, Fawcner, Slater, & Tiggemann, 2014) – although there are certainly resistances to, and rejections of, this ideal within various gay subcultures (see, for instance, Hennen, 2005).

Comparing younger gay and straight men, Lanzieri and Cook (2013) noted that although a muscularity ideal was similar for both groups, ideal body fat percentages seem to be lower, and presented as an ideal for gay men. Body hair removal facilitates display of both muscular size and definition, and both younger gay and straight men have been found to want less body hair and more muscularity (Martins, Tiggemann, & Churchett, 2008; Tiggemann et al., 2008). It seems that among younger men in particular, ‘improving’ the body in such ways can gain them masculine capital, and body hair removal is generally a fast, low cost way of making such improvements.

As men’s body hair often increases with age, especially in areas such as the back and shoulders (Price & Griffiths, 1985), it is very likely that for many men, and for those sexually attracted to men, that this increase in body hair is viewed in relation to this ideal masculine embodiment (Basow & O’Neil, 2014). This may have some potential to result in increasing body image concerns among men as they age and as the ideal becomes more muscular and more hairless. However, a focus on the body may be alleviated by men attaining success in other spheres, and also through the mediating effects of being in a secure long term relationship. In contrast to women, as men age and/or access greater professional success, their physical appearance is understood as becoming less important to their sense of worth and desirability (Connell, 2005). Some authors have argued this may be changing, as men’s relative power is reduced within Western societies – a so-called crisis in masculinity – and that this current state of flux around men and body image concerns is a consequence of a reduction in overall power share among men (Frank, 2014). It may also be that the wider presentation of youthful, relatively hairless bodies in media has simply made ‘minor’ body modification such as back hair removal more acceptable to men concerned with arresting some of the visible effects of a changing body.

Body image remains the primary construct with which we examine the impact of social norms upon individual sense of worth. Within this paper we understand body image to be a contextual construct and as such we will both use and trouble its status in relation to men’s bodies, specifically in the ways men’s bodies are talked about and made sense of. Frith and Gleeson (2008)

suggest more work needs to be done to analyse people's accounting for the everyday practices that they engage in, and how these shape and are shaped by fluctuating relationships with bodies and society. The specific objectives of this paper were to a) understand the ways young men and women (18-35 years) within Aotearoa/New Zealand constructed the cultural salience of men's body hair and hair removal practices, and b) to identify patterns within these constructions that highlight the relationships between new and existing ideals for masculine embodiment in Aotearoa/New Zealand (A/NZ). In this paper we seek to turn our discursive attention to the responses of both men and women in an attempt to make sense of some of the shifting cultural imperatives for men in A/NZ.

## **Method**

### **Design**

This paper analyses qualitative data generated through an online survey on the topic of body hair views and practices. The 'Body Hair and its Removal and Alteration' (BHRA) survey contained a number of qualitative questions related specifically to men's hair practices in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context (see Appendix). Our approach to research design has been described as a 'Big Q' approach to qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kidder & Fine, 1987), set in contrast to a 'small q' orientation, where research concerns (e.g., reliability, avoiding bias, generalisability) stem from a 'scientific' positivist-empiricist quantitative orientation.

### **Participants**

A total of 1000 people from the general population provided some data or began the survey. Selection criteria (being aged 18-35, and identifying as a New Zealander) were defined in the Participant Information Sheet, consent form and survey proper, but were occasionally ignored by some participants. The age group criterion was selected due to this group being identified as more likely to embrace or reflect contemporary changes in body hair removal practices. The nationality criterion was selected for the purpose of locating the study within a particular sociocultural context.

After excluding those who did not meet the selection criteria for participation (12.3%), and those who had solely provided demographic information (29.3%), 584 'completed' surveys

remained, which comprised the dataset analysed here. Of these, roughly equal numbers identified as female (50.4%) or male (48.8%); three identified as “other.” The mean age was 26.13 (SD: 5.64) and the mean time spent living in New Zealand was 22.93 years (SD: 8.44, range 1-35 years).

Ethnically, 87% of participants identified as Pākehā/New Zealand European/Other ‘white’, 9% Asian (or of Asian ancestry), 5% Māori (or of Māori ancestry), 3% Pasifika (or of Pasifika ancestry), <1% Middle Eastern (some participants identified with more than one ethnicity). Heterosexually-identified participants made up 79.9% of the sample; gay-(male and female participants identified this way) - identified 10.3%; bisexual-identified 6.7%; other-identified 2.7%; lesbian-identified 0.3%. In terms of relationship status, 40% were single; 27% partnered; 20% married; 5% ‘in a relationship’; 3% engaged; 2% de facto; 1% other. All geographic regions in New Zealand were represented: participants resided in Auckland (51.4%); Wellington (15.8%); Canterbury (10.4%); Otago (7.3%); Manawatu/Taranaki (3.6%); Bay of Plenty (3.1%); Waikato (2.4%); Hawkes Bay (1.4%); Southland/West Coast (1.2%); Northland (0.7%); and Nelson/Marlborough (0.7%).

## **Materials**

The BHRA survey was a mixed (qualitative dominated) design (see Authors, in press) with questions and structure developed from the second author’s previous hair removal research survey tool (reference removed for review), and on hair surveys made available by other hair researchers (Basow, 1991; Riddell, Varto, & Hodgson, 2010; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). The survey was then subjected to peer review by a group of expert hair researchers, and underwent piloting (N = 65), followed by refinement. Refinements included the deletion of questions judged repetitive or redundant, merging of questions that captured similar data, and moving the demographic information section from the end to the start of the survey. The final survey contained 92 questions, distributed across four sections: (1) Demographic information (18 questions), (2) Body Hair and Men (19 questions), (3) Body Hair and Women (19 questions), and (4) Your Own Body Hair and Practices (36 questions). These sections were formulated thematically, and sections were not



counterbalanced. This paper reports on responses to questions 1 and 2 of Section 2 of the survey (See Appendix).

### **Procedure**

We recruited participants using a variety of methods: advertising via posters placed in cafes, bars and on university campuses; a Facebook page for the project; a national media press-release; and word of mouth and snowballing using the researchers' personal networks, which included using 'recruiters' to promote the study within their large social networks. The press-release was the most successful recruitment strategy: almost two thirds of the overall sample (approximately 650 respondents) completed the survey following a news piece in a key national newspaper (and its online counterparts); less than two days after the story, we closed the survey with 1000 responses received. Participation was voluntary, but participants were advised of the opportunity to enter a draw for \$200 worth of vouchers of their choice, upon completion (173 participants did). The survey was delivered online through SurveyMonkey for a period of 2 months. Everyone who clicked the survey link was first directed to a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) briefing them on the purpose of the study. After reading the PIS, they were required to indicate their informed consent, confirm they were 18 or over, and confirm they were a New Zealander. If all criteria were confirmed, they were directed to the first page of the survey. Overall, the survey took most participants between 30 and 45 minutes to complete, typing in responses to qualitative questions and clicking radio buttons for quantitative questions (see Appendix). No identifying information was collected, the survey was encrypted, and participants were not debriefed post-survey. Potential for duplications was minimised through SurveyMonkey limits of one survey per IP address. Surveys were also cross checked to ensure no other duplications had occurred. The project received ethics approval from The University of XXXX Human Participants Ethics Committee.

### **Analysis**

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012; 2013) method for thematic analysis, which we have found offers the most theoretical independence/flexibility for a wide variety of

qualitative data, especially when dealing with a large qualitative dataset. Our analysis focused on both semantic and latent features of the data, and we took a critical realist perspective to them. We used a primarily inductive approach to thematic analysis, where codes and themes were developed from the data content. In practice, this meant familiarisation of the survey responses through reading and re-reading, then a recursive coding of the data, where codes were returned to, improved upon, and revised as the coding process proceeded. Codes were then clustered together into candidate themes to give some indication of their prevalence, and test their value in giving an overall account of the data and whether patterns described were across the entire data set (see Braun & Clarke, 2012). Five candidate themes were initially identified, which were then collapsed into the three presented in the results section below, after an initial thematic map identified theoretical overlap between four themes. In the interpretative stages of analysis, analysis was informed by critical discursive psychology (CDP) (Wetherell, 1998): a synthesis of the participant action orientation approaches of conversation analysis (i.e., what people are doing with their talk), and the more global understanding of discourse associated with poststructuralist discourse analysis (i.e., wider cultural ideas). CDP enabled us to identify some of the rhetorical strategies deployed by participants to bolster arguments and establish the ‘truth claims’ of their commentary (Edley & Wetherell, 2008; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell, 2007). Data extracts will be used: (1) illustratively: as exemplars of the data found within themes, and (2) analytically: where salient features of the data are discussed in more detail (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, forthcoming). Qualitative survey data can sometimes be slightly ‘thinner’ than methods such as interviews, we have attempted to alleviate this with a higher ratio of extracts when using data descriptively (see Authors, forthcoming).

## **Results**

We generated three salient themes related to accounts of men’s body hair within the dataset: men’s body hair as natural; men’s body hair as generally unpleasant; and men’s body hair as needing management if ‘excessive.’ Almost all of the data was included in these three predominant themes.

**“It is just hair, perfectly natural part of being a man if you happen to have it”**

The first theme captured the way body hair on men was often described as a natural phenomenon. Hair was often portrayed as somehow an essential quality of manhood or, more often, a simple outcome of their biological predisposition to grow hair. Many participants made statements similar to the following:

“It is just hair, perfectly natural part of being a man, if you happen to have it” (P62, male, 36, heterosexual, married).

Overall, hair was identified as ‘natural’ for men, in some form, by approximately half of the participants. This suggests that in Aotearoa/New Zealand, despite some greater shifts toward and idealisation of male hairlessness internationally (Basow & O’Neil, 2014; Boroughs et al., 2005; Fahs, 2013b; Martins et al., 2008), having at least some body hair is still considered a dominant expression of masculine embodiment.

Participants who identified male body hair as natural would often evoke a natural sexual dimorphism, with men’s hairiness contrasted with women’s bodily hair state.

“Men are physiologically different to women, we ought to look different too.” (P256, male, 34, heterosexual, married).

“Men are meant to be hairy naturally because of high testosterone” (P133, male, 32, heterosexual, single).

“Men are naturally supposed to have more body hair than women” (P260, male, 34 heterosexual, long term partnership).

In making such ascriptions, participants state (or infer) that men should be hairy, and women should be ‘hairless’. Although women have less terminal (and therefore less ‘visible’) body hair than men on average (Price & Griffiths, 1985), such formulations also evoke two different things: men’s biologically-located embodiment (a certain au-naturelle hairiness) and women’s socially located embodiment (worked upon and produced ‘hair-free’ bodies). These accounts work to naturalise and essentialise these differences, and to thus situate male body hair as beyond the realm of removal. In

fact, all three of the extracts above, use imperatives (“ought”, “meant”, “supposed”) about men having body hair to emphasise this point. Men have body hair, and men should have body hair, ‘case closed.’

However, the story was somewhat more complicated, and did not always seem to indicate a ‘hairy ideal’ in opposition to the female ‘hairless ideal.’ Male participants often showed some degree of ambiguity toward their own body hair, even as they described it as natural, and even reported engaging in ‘unnatural’ hair management practices. For example:

“I would put myself slightly towards the hairier end of the spectrum, and I'm proud of it. I think body hair on men is a sign of manliness, however I'll admit to being corrupted by popular fashion and I do do some man-scaping. Overall, I'd rather have the body hair that I have than not have it.” (P31, male, 23, heterosexual, partnered).

P31 was unusual amongst the participants for describing himself as “proud” of his hairiness. In describing practices out of line with his own hair-pride, and himself as being “corrupted” by culture, his hair practices are positioned as beyond his better judgement or his authentic self – they are the result of outside cultural influence. Within this rubric, P31’s ideal picture of masculine embodiment is currently being suppressed beneath the limited-time expectation of “man-scaping” – rather than understanding the practice itself as being or becoming normatively masculine. Indeed, use of the term manscaping suggests a degree of unease about the practice of male hair removal more widely, loaded as it is with references to “men” and “landscaping”(Immergut, 2010). These descriptors distinguish it from feminine hair removal practices, which P31 may be seeking to distance himself from. P31’s orientating of his manscaping to “fashion” suggests he expects it to pass, and his natural hairiness – and potentially more robust masculine embodiment – can return.

Although there was variation in hair practices reported by participants within each of the two largest sex categories (male/female), and variation across many other identity intersections, between-sex differences were still the key difference between people that participants referred to in the data. With participants often relying heavily on binary notions

of sex (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2012), this construction was often most strongly indexed when talking of sexual attraction. Body hair (and lack thereof) was recognised by participants as a key factor in making sense of sexual attraction for one sex or the other. For instance, one gay man commented:

“Personally I enjoy body hair on men, I find it gives men a more masculine and genuine look and for me is a definite plus should I be looking/judging a man on his appearance alone. There is something about an un-groomed man with a 'take me as I am' aura that is much more appealing to me than a man who has clipped and trimmed and shaved in order to place emphasis on the parts of his body he is most proud of while trying to hide anything he perceives as an imperfection” (P247, male, 21, gay, partnered).

This sort of account stands in contrast to the expectations placed on women to be viewed as attractive and/or desirable, and to engage in body hair removal to be so (e.g., Basow, 1991; Basow & Braman, 1998; Fahs, 2011; Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008). There is certainly no room allowed within dominant and normative discourse or practice for a women to have a “take me as I am aura” without receiving some sort of censure (see Fahs, 2012). The ‘natural’ difference between ‘the sexes’ becomes emphasised by the work that women do on their bodies; in this extract, a man attempting the same is seen to be ‘hiding something’ – not genuinely masculine. This sort of account implicitly naturalises the clipping, waxing, trimming and shaving that are a part of most Western women’s (routine) bodily practices, while criticising the ‘cultural influences’ that may cause a man to do the same.

Relying on a ‘difference is sexy’ discourse, the majority of the male-attracted participants who evidenced the naturalness discourse would make some reference to men’s body hair in terms of sexual attractiveness. For instance:

“I think it looks masculine and sexy” (P30, male 34, gay, single).

“Well, I like hippy boys, so plenty of body hair kinda comes with (frequently). The earthiness/naturalness of body hair suits that look and is quite sexy” (P562, female, 27, pansexual, casual/open relationship).

“I find a reasonably high amount of it (i.e. when it doesn't resemble a carpet) sexually attractive. I find men with body hair more manly, rugged and all-round appealing” (P513, female, 22, heterosexual, single).

The twinning of a hairy masculine embodiment with sexual attractiveness was common across the dataset, with responses from both gay men and heterosexual women offering this perspective. The argument presented in these accounts is that having body hair makes a man ‘properly’ masculine. This masculinity is one associated with ‘the wild,’ it is unmanaged and uncommodified, with men’s hair symbolically representing virility (Immergut, 2010). As with P31’s account, there is a clear sense that participants were responding in reference to existing and increasing pressures for men to remove hair. Perhaps in recognition that body hair on men is becoming less desirable socially, some participants emphasised its appeal in highly specific terms:

“I find it rather more than sexually arousing” (P204, male, 28, gay, married).

“Love it. I am a gay hairy man who loves gay hairy men” (P291, male, 34, gay, partnered).

“I have a strong preference for men who have natural body hair” (P354, female, 23, bisexual, single).

The treatment of body hair as extremely sexually appealing was common enough in the data that we could characterise it as a sub-theme of ‘naturalness’. It seems unlikely that this was a particularly ‘fetishised’ or marginal perspective on men’s body hair – the hairy chest look sported by ‘sex icons’ of different eras (e.g., Burt Reynolds and Sean Connery in the 1970s-1980s) has a longer cultural salience than the current trends around toward reduced hairiness. Even so, emphasis on it being “more” than simply arousing, having “strong” preferences, or preferring men who “do not groom themselves” indicates this position is acting as a rhetorical counter to the encroaching tide of normative male hair removal.

Despite emphasis placed on the natural (and unnatural) differences between men and women, there were still limits to ‘appropriate’ hairiness that were delineated for men within the data; an equivalent limit to hairlessness wasn’t articulated for women (for analysis of meaning around hair and women, see Authors, forthcoming). Participants often used extreme or maximum case formulations (Edwards, 2000; Pomerantz, 1986) when delineating the optimum extent of male hairiness. Extreme case formulations (ECFs) are rhetorical tools which use an extreme or totalising claim is made (e.g., every time) to bolster an argument. For example, one participant noted:

“It has to be really bad to be horrible on men, like when they take off their shirt it looks like they are wearing another shirt underneath” (P256, male, 28, heterosexual, single).

“Really bad” here is the ECF: within the naturalness motif, body hair on men’s bodies was positioned as problematic when it was situated as uncommonly, almost unrealistically, thick. Underlying this is an assumption that hair is generally unproblematic on men due to its naturalness, and the implication that it does not take much (if any) visible hair on women’s bodies to be considered “horrible.” Although any measure of how much hair would be “horrible” is highly subjective, the participant here evoked an ‘objective’ measure (‘the hair shirt’) to identify what was unacceptable to them. It was this sort of loose definition that provided much of the rhetorical power of this sort of discourse, as it was flexibly applied and therefore robust.

Not all participants used ECFs to position male body hair as problematic, with almost as many participants identifying men’s body hair as a source of disgust, dislike, or as simply unpleasant, as those who described it as natural. Like the naturalness theme, there was much variation in the unpleasantness theme, but across this variation, there seemed to be a shared sense of providing a counter discourse for men to simply leave their hair as it grows.

### **“Nasty! More hair = closer to being an ape!”: Men’s body hair as unpleasant**

A large number of extracts contributed to the second, contrasting, theme of men’s body hair as unpleasant. Data within this theme were from participants of all ages, sexual orientations, ages, and relationship status. This theme operated at various levels, with some participants articulating

mild, often qualified, dislike (e.g., “Back and buttock hair is not as attractive - makes me think they are too mature” - P99, female, 26, bisexual, partnered) and others expressing extreme, almost caricatured, distaste directed at all male body hair (e.g., “Awful. Should be banned” – P10, male, 35, heterosexual, married); it also included simple expressions of disgust (e.g., ewwww – P440, female, 34, heterosexual, married). The connection between women’s body hair and ‘disgust sensitivity’ has already been identified by Tiggemann and Lewis (2004), but their sample did not make the same levels of negative attributions about male body hair that our participants did. We do not treat disgust language as a straightforward reflection of an internal affective state (Wetherell, 2012) but instead, in line with our theoretical position, as discourse, and as much about creating meaning as expressing it.

Similar to the image of ‘the hair shirt’ discussed in the previous section, certain types of metaphors were used by participants to identify the quantity of body hair that might evoke disgust. This was often expressed in relation to the idea if should be kept hidden/private. For example:

“If you have a rug on your torso or back then try not to display it in public” (P163, male, 24, bisexual, partnered).

Accounts of male body hair within this theme often contained directives to action. This extract contains a fairly soft version of this sort of approach (e.g., “try not to...”), which allows some leniency for targets of this rhetoric. Typically, however, these sorts of directive comments would take the form of imperatives (using terminology such as “should”, “must,” “have to”) – for instance:

“I think back hair is disgusting and men who get this should get it waxed!” (P87, male, 19, gay, single).

As articulated here, the focus of expressed disgust or revulsion across the data was often on back hair, and this seemed to be evident across age, sexuality, and relationship status in our dataset. Even when participants spoke about other hair more broadly as “fine,” back hair was often considered to be a justification for not engaging romantically with someone (or even breaking up with them), as implied in the following contrast between a hairy back and pubic area:



“I feel men should remove back hair, it's disgusting! All other hair is fine as is although would be nice if they trim pubic hair since us women have to but it's not a deal breaker.” (P312, female, 30, heterosexual, married).

Although marriage is not an indicator of length or stability of relationship, responses like this from married or partnered participants might suggest that long term relationship commitments offer limited protective effects in terms of male hair standards. Given the association between back hair and certain hair practices as “deal breakers” implied in this extract, the pressure for men to conform when their partners reproduce this idea would likely be extremely strong.

Some participants would acknowledge the biologically normative status of back hair for men, but still identify it as a target for negative language, often inflecting it with claims to affect:

“abundant back hair, although could be classified as 'normal' still makes me feel gross (P61, male, 35, heterosexual, engaged).

Later in the survey, P61 described his own body hair as “very light” and that he has never removed any body hair, which suggests the “grossness” he feels is directed at other men’s bodies. Such variation in men’s body hair growth patterns might serve to enhance social expectations around hair removal, with some men being constructed as ‘lucky’ and certainly ‘more ideal’ than others. As such ideas develop more dominance within Western societies, it seems likely that hair removal will only gain more traction.

The levels of distaste or disapproval expressed in these quotes, and corresponding imperatives for men to ‘do something about it’ was far higher for back (and shoulder) hair than for any other area of the male body. This may be because the back is among one of the last areas for men to grow hair, and is therefore associated with the ageing male body, but also with an increase in body hair more generally. The requirement to “get it waxed!” (P87, male, 31, gay, single) was similar in intensity to imperatives concerning women’s hair removal that have been identified in other research (Braun, Tricklebank, & Clarke, 2013; Fahs, 2011, 2012; Fahs & Delgado, 2011).

Contrary to prevailing discourses of choice and freedom of personal expression (Braun, 2009; Stuart

& Donaghue, 2012), and a higher degree of flexibility associated with men's body hair retention and removal practices (Basow & O'Neil, 2014; Terry & Braun, 2013), this sort of language body hair in certain places and of certain extents, as an infringement on the rights of the viewer; the rights of the 'hair bearer' seem to take second place (see also, Braun et al., 2013). The 'hairy man' in question was often positioned as ignorant of the impact their body hair had on others, and 'intervention' analogous to that needed with cigarette smoking or alcohol abuse was described in some cases.

Other attributions about (unpleasant) 'hairy' men included similar framings to those around women who retain body hair (see for instance, Fahs, 2012; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004), and in particular that it was a sign of not caring for the self:

"Yuck! Good sign they do not look after themselves" (P261, female, 25, heterosexual, single). These sorts of comments were expressed across the participants, including by men who identified themselves as having hairy bodies, and, in particular, hairy backs. Some of these men articulated disgust at their own body hair, demonstrating that the current context provides a framework for men to dislike their own body hair, in a similar way to what women have expressed in the past (see, for instance Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004):

"I hate it! Especially back hair. I can cope with hair on my chest and legs, but would prefer no hair at all" (P322, male, 33 heterosexual, single).

"On myself however I strongly dislike it, and find it very depressing to have to "see it"" (P34, male, 28, gay, single).

Men's expressed distaste about their own body hair (expressed by this latter participant as impact his mental health), was not particularly common across the dataset analysed in this paper – however, questions in these sections did not ask for personal experience, but for broader views and perspectives (see Appendix). There were certainly indications of men struggling with the hair on their bodies, with a stronger appearance potent (Jankowski et al., 2014) evidenced among younger men and gay men in our sample (see Authors, 2013). As men's bodies continue to be commodified, and if definitions of ideal masculine embodiment continue to narrow, these sorts of body image

concern and impacts on mental health will likely only increase for these particular groups, and may even widen.

In explaining why men should remove (undesirable) body hair, an account of physical evolution being slower than social evolution was frequently evoked:

“I think body hair is relatively pointless in this day and age and in certain areas (underarm/pubic area) is not as hygienic compared to a removal of hair” (P392, male, 26, gay, partnered)

A discourse of body hair being as “unhygienic” or “pointless” has existed with regard to women’s body hair for some time (see Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008), despite research pointing to the hygiene functions hair does provide (Herbenick, Schick, Reece, Sanders, & Fortenberry, 2010). Such meanings are firmly established ‘truth claims’ (Foucault, 1977) within contemporary discourse about (female) body hair. Hair remains as a ‘hangover’ from a period in human evolution when it was necessary, and provided some benefits, but – within the rubric of the discourse – this time is past. Such discourse both naturalises the presence of hair, on all bodies, and rationalises the removal of hair, from all bodies. Implicitly drawing on an evolutionary discourse, a typical formulation used by participants to express disgust attributed certain levels of male body hair to being animal-like:

“Nasty! More hair = closer to being an ape!” (P90, male, 32, heterosexual, married).

“I don’t take too much notice, except if the guy is crazy hairy - like a gorilla” (P559, female, 24, heterosexual, single).

Participants most commonly used the metaphor of great apes to describe – or evoke – very hairy men, in particular referring to them as gorillas or gorilla-like. The ape metaphor is often used to represent brutishness, a throwback to the primeval, or someone who is considered unevolved or uncivilised in comparison with the speaker – most often used in relation to racist stereotyping (see Billig, 2001; Braun, 2009; Dixon & Brooks, 2013). Its use in relation to hairy men situates such men as not fully evolved, not even fully human – which stands in direct contrast to the naturalness theme above (Paxton, 2013).

Some participants softened the gorilla metaphor, with phrases like ‘seem,’ ‘a bit’ or ‘a little’ or using it as a simile. For instance:

“Hair on the shoulders and back can seem a bit gorilla like” (P49, male, 30, heterosexual).

Such softened versions of the gorilla metaphor potentially work to ameliorate any sense of offensiveness associated with racist discourse, and to some extent even distance the speaker from full alignment with that viewpoint. Almost all the participants who used a softened formulation specified areas where hair needed to grow for a person to receive the gorilla label:

“Facial hair and leg hair is socially fine. Back or neck not so much. Most people do not like a hairy gorilla” (P19, male, 23, heterosexual, partnered).

Here again, a participant identifies what is appropriate and inappropriate hair. The suggestion that facial hair is “socially fine” is one that has had even more fluctuation and variation within popular fashion than body hair more generally, with beardedness potentially inflected with various social meanings (e.g., Dixon & Brooks, 2013; Janif, Brooks, & Dixon, 2014; Oldmeadow & Dixon, 2015). Despite being the most visible of male body hair, P19, like most of our participants, did not associate beardedness with ‘gorilla-ness,’ suggesting the term is used to manage socially undesirable hair rather than as an indication of the proportion of visible hair on a man’s body. It was primarily the back (or ‘high back’) and neck and shoulders that received the clearest expressions of disgust from participants, with emphasis often placed on the loss of sexual attractiveness a man suffers if such hair is allowed to grow ‘out of control.’ A social injunction to remove hair in ‘gorilla-like’ instances was not always explicitly articulated; instead language implying some kind of moral judgment (e.g., “socially fine” versus “not so much” and “most people do not like”) was used to place the burden on the hairy individual – suggesting that although hair removal/grooming is a choice, it is one with social (and likely romantic) consequences:

“No-one likes someone that looks like a gorilla” (P126, 19, heterosexual).

“Some men are real gorillas who like to wear speedos at the beach, and they consequently get dirty looks” (P278, male, 24, heterosexual)

In these latter quotes, loss of sexual attractiveness was used to highlight the way negative feeling associated with male body hair is something men need to attend to if they are conscious about their looks. Implicit in some responses was the idea that a man could be attractive to the person in every other way, but uncovering a hairy back would effectively override an attraction:

“I think gorilla-like back effusions of hair are rather a turn-off” (P204, male, 28, gay)

ECFs like “effusions” were commonly deployed by participants to identify men who could no longer be viewed as attractive, due to the ‘outlandish’ levels of hair on their body. By extremising the amount of body hair, especially by using references to animals, some men are being situated as unusually hairy and thus particularly unattractive. But this also situates them as unusual. The language of excess seemed to be a tool used by a large number of the participants to understand the balance between men’s hair being simultaneously ‘natural’ and also ‘unpleasant’ – an invisible (and subjective) line divides hair into attractive and unattractive [disgusting]; appropriate and inappropriate. This idea is discussed in more detail in our third theme below.

#### **“I don't like excessive body hair on a man”: ‘Excess’ body hair needs to be ‘managed’**

This theme suggests participants needed to manage an ideological dilemma, produced by apparent instability of cultural ideals about men’s body hair display, retention and removal. The concept of ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) suggests that the ways people can make sense of an experience, issue or topic hardly ever involves just one particular idea or ideal. Rather, people are more likely to (have to) manage multiple, and often competing, claims and positions provided for them in their sociocultural context. Even if meaning-frameworks directly contradict one another, they can be ‘held in tension’ and deployed in different ways across different contexts by individuals, according to the situation or need of the moment. Two or more constructs can sometimes clash in ways that need resolution (producing the dilemma), and the ways people resolve this offers insight into the dominance or alternative status of certain ideas.

As our themes above evidence, our data often depicted body hair on men is ‘natural’ (as opposed to the ‘unnatural’ body hair on women’s bodies (see also, Authors, forthcoming); in partial

contrast, such body hair was also depicted as disgusting, distasteful, or unsexy. These two ideas capture a tension between different essential ideas about men, bodies, and appearance, and indeed traditional gendered role expectations in the West (Synnott, 1987), and this appeared to create a dilemma participants needed to manage. The notion of ‘excess hair’ was deployed as the interpretative framework participants typically used to manage this contradiction between men’s body hair as natural, and men’s body hair as unpleasant. We don’t treat claims of “excess” as reflecting material embodied states, as truth, something reflective of hair of a certain length or density. Instead, we treat it as a rhetorically-deployed concept – providing a hard-to-resist rationale to justify the articulated expectation of body hair management or grooming by men. For instance one participant identified that:

“I don't like excessive body hair on a man, and prefer if they are trimmed or have the excess hair removed” (P131, male, 35, gay)

Men’s body hair per se can thus be understood as natural, even attractive, with “excessive” hair the point at which disgust is evoked: “excessive is pretty gross” (P13), “excessive amounts a bit off-putting” (P10) “Acceptable as long as it's not overly long or bushy” (P11). Responding to a question of whether it is socially acceptable for men to remove body hair, participants evoked the gorilla metaphor to identify the point of “excess” hair” – at which removal meets social approval:

“If men 'suffer' from major hair growth (gorilla style), then yes” (P86, female, 23, heterosexual).

“More acceptable to look groomed than like a hairy gorilla” (P259, female, 25, heterosexual).

However, and in contrast to the idea of hair as natural, “excess” hair was often constructed in a way that evoked moral judgement or accountability, similar to way women’s body hair display provides the basis of moral evaluations of a woman’s character or value (e.g., lazy, dirty, disgusting) (see, for example, Fahs & Delgado, 2011). Unlike for women, where the baseline for judgement is low – and fairly absolute - there seemed to be more flexibility for men in terms of amount of hair display and ‘management’ before being called to account (see also, Terry & Braun, 2013). Important

considerations hinged on the individual man's investment in being seen as attractive to potential partners, and their own personal preferences – this meant, if they did not remove “excessive” hair, they were choosing to be unattractive.

Although flexibility appears to offer freedom of choice to men, the data suggest instead a (fluidly applied) ‘sweet spot’:

“Body hair on men should be moderate. Never hairless! But definitely maintained. So if a man has excessive hair on his back, shoulders or lots of it in his ears or nose, it's nice to have that removed or taken care of. But a man is a man, he should have a nice hairy chest and a maintained beard is attractive” (P560, female, 25, lesbian).

“It can be sexy at the right places...but there's a fine line between too much and just enough” (P135, female, 30, heterosexual)

This notion of a moderate amount of hair, in all the ‘correct’ places, pervaded the data. It was often presented in a matter of fact fashion, almost as if it described a new form of ‘natural’ male embodiment – the ‘moderate ideal.’ But what was striking was the variation in what was defined as acceptable: where, and how much, was considered appropriate. A number of male-attracted participants identified an effective ‘wish list’ of appropriate hair display. Such lists ranged from the broad and vague:

“Men should have some body hair, but should definitely not have too much or too little” (P43, male, 21, heterosexual)

“Not a fan of excessive hair, find it off putting. A little hair is ok, no hair is like prepubescent” (P383, female, 20, heterosexual)

To the very specific:

“I would prefer it if men did not have hair on their back, abdomen or chest as I find it unattractive. I do not think that a hairless back, abdomen or chest makes the man less masculine but I would if for example, I saw a man with hairless legs or no armpit hair” (P499, female, 19, heterosexual).

“Back, shoulder and upper arm hair is yuck. Chest and stomach ok as long as it's maintained. Leg (upper and lower), armpit (to a degree), facial are all normal. Pubes as long as they're maintained. Not bushy” (P17, male, 21, heterosexual)

“Legs, arms - universally fine. Chest- generally fine. Belly- Less fine than chest, but a small amount is ok. Pubic- trimmed is much appreciated. Back and buttocks- quite off putting/unattractive” (P95, male, 22, gay)

Such highly detailed listing was relatively common (although we acknowledge such specificity was perhaps facilitated by the survey format); the lists prioritised various body parts over others, and emphasised the acceptability versus the desirability of body hair in various ways (see also, Terry & Braun, 2013). Often, this was defined in terms of preference, or what the participants themselves found attractive (both on others’ bodies, and on their own, for men). However, what underpinned this was the idea that most men need to groom in some way. A ‘new’ culture of men’s grooming was presented as a way to maintain the (youthful) appearance of a man’s body, and therefore their ongoing attractiveness. The rhetoric associated with the importance of grooming was similar to notions of grooming and self-care articulated in regard to women’s bodies for decades (Basow, 1991; Basow & Willis, 2001; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004). Occasionally the historically different treatment of women’s bodies was noted:

“If a guy has really thick hair in the pubic region, it wouldn't hurt them to groom a little bit. It only seems fair to put a little effort in when women are expected to always put a massive effort in” (P231, female, 21, heterosexual)

This ‘gender equality’ argument was more often evoked by women than men, although not exclusively. In this extract, constructing male ‘grooming’ as requiring “little” effort, compared to the “massive” effort women engage in, positions men who ignore ‘grooming’ as selfish. But the gendered expectations remain uneven. This uneven effort argument was applied to areas beyond pubic hair removal, and ties back to the idea that men are only required to remove hair deemed excessive. Indeed, some participants identified negative implications if too much hair was removed:



“When men shave their pubic hair it makes them seem sleazy to me, as though they are interested in showing it off” (P366, female, 22, heterosexual).

“A man with no hair at all is practically trying to be a child and it seems/looks unnatural. Chest hair makes a man look more masculine in my opinion and men without leg hair just seems weird - unless they are cyclists or have a hobby/job that requires them to” (P110, female, 18, heterosexual).

“My partner trims his leg and chest hair - which I hate him doing! When he does it, he looks like a plucked turkey, and is scratchy” (P65, female, 23, heterosexual).

This line – where male hair removal shifts from desirable ‘grooming’ to ‘sleazy’, ‘prepubescent’ or looking like a plucked turkey – was vaguely defined around this notion of excess. The flexibility in men’s hair removal practices we have identified elsewhere [ref removed for anonymity], here seems to be turned in on itself – creating a situation in which men lack clarity as to what a prospective sexual partner (or wider society) might want from their body hair distribution. Although ‘shopping lists’ gave some direction (indeed directives), these seemed to be highly individualised, not as clearly or consistently defined as the ‘hairless ideal’ for women. However, although flexibility might prove a challenge, it also carries benefits. Men’s hair-embodiment still appears to offer more positions to take up than women’s – more body projects (see Gill et al., 2005) are available, creating a greater sense that removal and modification is an individual choice, one that acts as an expression of the self rather than a social mandate.

One important exemption to this variability needs to be noted: any back hair was always deemed excessive by almost all participants. Even amongst those participants who expressed ambivalence or acceptance of male body hair typically identified the back as a problem area:

“I feel that having hair or not doesn't really matter, it's the guys choice. Back is an exception. I feel that if someone has back hair, he should laser it off” (P529, male, 20, heterosexual).

Back hair seemed worthy of disgust, even in small amounts. Grooming or managing back hair was thus entirely interchangeable with removal (e.g., “laser it off”) in most of the participant responses, and clearly situated as in the past, something we ought to move beyond:

“I believe back hair or excessive hair is definitely on the way out and is not a good look” (P19, male, 23, heterosexual)

The idea of back hair removal seemed to carry similar weight to that of leg hair removal for women: back hair display it evokes high levels of disgust, as does women’s leg hair (Fahs, 2012; Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). However, while women’s fashion continues to be shaped by the expectation that legs could be on display at any time, men’s backs are not regularly visible. Aside from with sexual partners or in specific contexts (swimming, saunas), men’s backs are not typically on display, and thus only add to the degree of flexibility men have, even with regard to their most socially undesirable hair.

This theme captured data than seemed to involve participants managing a tension between two culturally salient, but contradictory ideas, that men’s body hair is both natural, and unpleasant. We noted that a large number of participants used the terminology of excess, or extremetising certain body hair ‘types’ as animalistic, brutish, or ‘ape-like’ to manage this tension.

### **Discussion**

Using a critical thematic analysis with qualitative survey data, we have been able to identify some of the culturally shared ideas deployed by men and women in Aotearoa/New Zealand concerning men’s body hair and its removal. We have found online qualitatively orientated surveys to be a rich source of low resource qualitative data, despite their relative invisibility in qualitative methods texts (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004; Authors, forthcoming). They are a low resource (i.e., time, money) approach to the generation of qualitative data from large numbers of participants. This is especially useful for newer or under-researched areas of study. There are certainly implications for our findings from our sample selection and methodology more generally. The fixed nature of questions in surveys means that probing and follow up is limited. This means that participants may

have been constrained in their responses – especially in some areas which were not directly questioned (e.g., beardedness). More work might be done in probing areas that produced strong responses that were not often unpacked (e.g., more fully understanding why back hair in particular is such a problem for many). Future work might also engage in more specific accounting for various groups of men, rather than ‘men’ more generally as we have done here. Detailed, textured accounting for variations within masculinities is in short supply.

The critical realist and Big Q approach we took to our research design may mean that researchers with a more positivist approach to hair removal practices may find our data less applicable to their own work, however we think their wider utility can be further explored within positivist designs. As the participants in our survey were a young cohort there was perhaps a greater premium placed on attractiveness in general, as opposed to attractiveness for a specific partner – further research may seek to explore this area. Further, as one feature of longer term relationships can be greater acceptance of changes that occur through the aging process, with other aspects of the relationship given greater priority (see Terry & Braun, 2009), older survey participants than ours, or participants in stable relationships for longer periods of time than ours, may have given a different perspective on hair removal practices. The hair removal practices of older men (40+) remains under-researched, and may well provide a rich source of data for future work.

Despite the social location of Aotearoa/New Zealand being only one expression of wider Western norms, there may be wider explanatory utility for the three themes identified in this paper. Variations upon them might help explain the differences in hair removal seen in various Western countries, as per the differences among Olympic athletes discussed in the introduction. More work might be done to identify their salience within other Western contexts.

Our data indicate that the idea of men’s body hair as natural, and unproblematically indicative of masculinity, has been unsettled in its cultural dominance; it now jostles with a meaning more commonly associated with women’s body hair: that much of men’s body hair is unpleasant, even disgusting. The tension between these two positions was managed by invoking a concept of

excessive hair: excessive hair requires 'grooming' and 'management', but not all male body hair is excessive. As 'excessive' was a fuzzy, unclear, rhetorical claim, rather than a clearly identified material state (as it is for women), expectations of hair removal or reduction for men remain relatively ambiguous. As Terry and Braun (2013) have identified, there seems still to be a high degree of flexibility and choice given to men with regard to their body hair and its removal; the data here suggest that the notion of excess is a way that men (and their intimate partners) may navigate this flexibility. Further, shifts in all Western contexts, where commodification of bodies is increasing for both men and women (Gill et al., 2005; Immergut, 2010), has resulted in an arena where physical attractiveness might be seen as a form of 'currency' for some men. Men's modification of their bodies – particularly in ways that emphasise muscularity – may be seen as one new avenue for them to generate masculine capital, especially if these modifications are tied into existing neoliberal discourses, being viewed as individualised expressions of the self (Gill et al., 2005). The conflict between older and newer discourses of hair removal may also go some way to explaining the counter-intuitive overlap between increases in beardedness and wider acceptance of male hair removal within the current domain. Increased beardedness might be becoming invested with the same symbolic associations with masculinity, virility, and ruggedness that body hair more generally once had.

Another possibility is that the ever-increasing expectations of women's hair removal, including full pubic hair removal (although see Terry & Braun, 2013 for some querying of this) have provided space for men's grooming to become more naturalised. It may also be that some of these expectations/pressures for hair removal, especially around back hair, have existed for some time, but have become more salient and acceptable in the last decade or so, with increasing use of relatively hairless male models in advertising (Basow & O'Neil, 2014), and extensive advertising of male hair removal products. Hair removal products for men seem to be burgeoning market. As long as there is potential for income, there is opportunity for advertising companies to take advantage of new and existing discourses, even those that are only developing in dominance, and apply them to

new markets invoking the choice and control of the consumer (Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008).

Discourses of disgust fit well within such consumer markets for hair removal products (Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004).

Unfortunately, the vagueness of ‘excess’ in lay discourse may also have the potential to provoke anxiety among many men, who may otherwise feel that they have no need to groom or manage their body hair. In combination with advertising techniques, many men may feel the safer course of action is to remove as much hair as possible. Some evidence already suggests that for men with an increased drive to appear more muscular, or with broader body image concerns, hair removal and reduction act as straightforward, relatively cheap methods of apparently improving self-esteem (Boroughs & Thompson, 2013) along with increased apparent muscularity. It should not be seen as somehow liberatory for women that men are now developing the same concerns and engaging in similar projects of hair removal to women, as this may only tighten the socially inscribed limitations to which they must respond (see Authors, forthcoming). However, as we understand masculinities to be multiple, following Connell (2005), we would suggest that men with various experiences of status, privilege, and the ways these might manifest in various subcultures, might be provided with a variety of expectations of what might be understood as ‘ideal’ – multiple ideal emodiments. Drawing attention to this variety through further research may well provide protective effects for men experiencing body image concerns within their social context.

## Endnotes

Pākehā is a Maori term for those of European decent. It is a disputed term, and not all white New Zealanders will identify with it, as can be seen by some participants’ use of terms such as ‘NZ European,’ or the ethnically unmarked ‘Kiwi’ or ‘New Zealander.’

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### Appendix: BHRA Survey Section 2: Body Hair and Men

Please answer the following questions about body hair in men, with reference to hair other than facial hair.

1. How do you feel about body hair on men? (Free format response (FFR))
  2. Does this apply equally to all areas of body hair? Please explain (FFR)
  3. Please tick the areas you think it is acceptable for men to display body hair  
 Legs-lower ☐ Legs-thigh ☐ Arms ☐ Armpits ☐ Face ☐ Chest ☐ Abdomen ☐  
 Back ☐ Pubic area ☐ Other ☐ (Specify – FFR)
  4. Please tick the areas you feel it is desirable for men to have body hair  
 Legs-lower ☐ Legs-thigh ☐ Arms ☐ Armpits ☐ Face ☐ Chest ☐ Abdomen ☐  
 Back ☐ Pubic area ☐ Other ☐ (Specify – FFR)
  5. How do you feel about men removing body hair? (FFR)
  6. Does this apply equally to all areas of body hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  7. How do you feel about men who alter their body hair in other ways (e.g., trimming their chest hair) (FFR)
  8. Why do you think men might remove or alter their body hair? (FFR)
  9. Do you feel it's socially acceptable for men to remove body hair?  
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ It depends  
 Please explain (FFR)
  10. Does this apply equally to all areas of body hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  11. Do you think men should remove or alter their pubic hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  12. Why do you think men might remove or alter their pubic hair? (FFR)
  13. Do you think it's socially acceptable for men to leave their body hair the way it is?  
☐ Yes ☐ No  
 Please explain (FFR)
  14. Does this apply equally to all areas of body hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  15. Do you think men should remove or alter their body hair, or leave it the way it is? Please explain. (FFR)
  16. Does this apply equally to all areas of body hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  17. Is it more acceptable for certain types of men to remove body hair? Please explain. (FFR)
  18. What would you think if you saw a man with hairy legs? (FFR)
  19. What would you think if you saw a man with hairless legs? (FFR)
  20. What would you think if you saw a man with hairy underarms? (FFR)
  21. What would you think if you saw a man with hairless underarms? (FFR)
  22. What would you think if you saw a man at the beach and some pubic hair was visible beyond his togs/swimsuit? (FFR)
  23. Do you have any other thoughts or views about men, body hair, and body hair removal and alteration practices? (FFR)
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