

Just as Barbie dolls have taunted little girls with an impossible ideal of the female body, G.I. Joes have morphed over the last three decades into muscle-bound hunks that can harm the self-esteem of boys, according to a new study.

Dr. Harrison Pope, a Harvard psychiatrist, studied

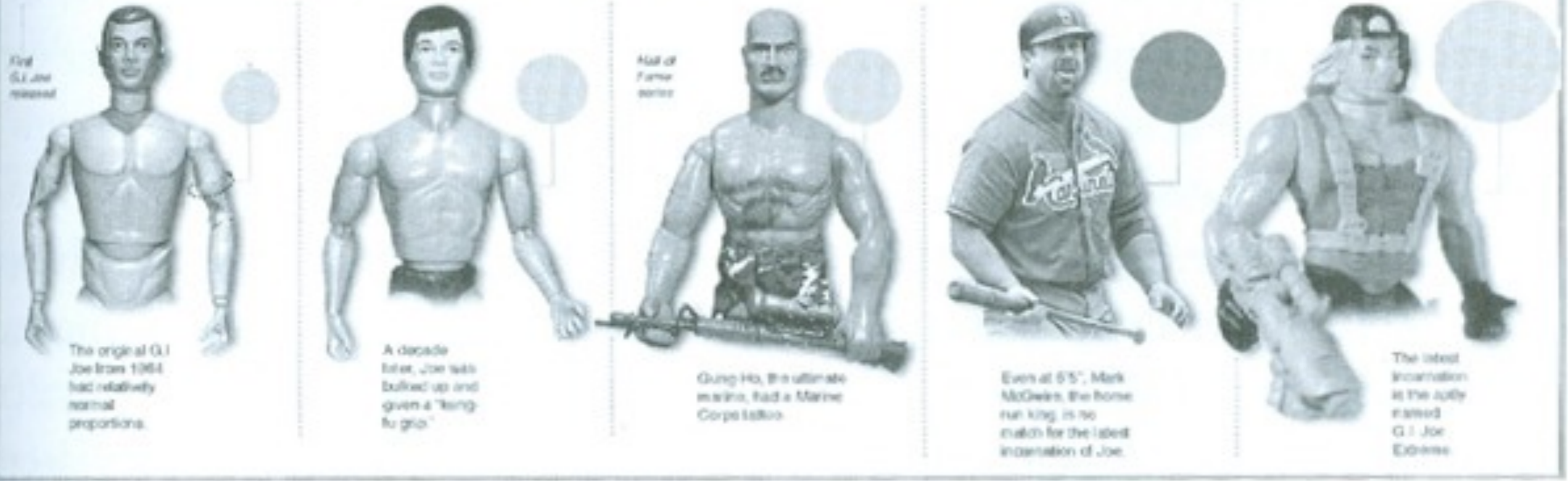
the evolution of American action figures over the last 30 years to learn whether there was a connection between the toys and an increase in "body-image disturbances" among men. Pope and his researchers purchased G.I. Joes and other action figures manufactured since the 1960s, measured their waists,

closets and biceps, then calculated the figures for a 6-foot man. The results were stark.

"Many modern figures display the physiques of advanced bodybuilders and some display levels of muscularity far exceeding the outer limits of actual human attainment," according to the study, published this

month in the International Journal of Eating Disorders.

More research is needed to determine the effect on boys and, ultimately, adult men, the study warned, but added, "the impact of toys should not be underestimated."



1964 Original G.I. Joe--relatively normal proportions, Biceps: 12.2"

1974 G.I. Joe--bulked up with Kung Fu grip, Biceps: 15.2"

1994 G.I. Joe Hall of Fame--"Ripped" bulkier, Biceps: 16.4"

1998 G.I. Joe Extreme--Bigger yet, Biceps: 26.8"

1998 Batman--Superhero, Biceps 26.8"

1998 Wolverine--Superheor, Biceps 32.0"

G.I. Joe has become more muscle-bound over the last three decades. The latest G.I. Joe, G.I. Joe Extreme, has a body that is unattainable by even the largest bodybuilders. Is the current North American cultural ideal of the male body so large and muscular that it represents an unattainable standard?