

Gender Differences in Body Esteem Following Social Media Exposure

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has uncovered upwards of 90% of college students feel dissatisfied with their body image or appearance. Social media is one of the biggest influences of negative body image by pressuring individuals to adhere to often unrealistic appearance ideals. Women often have a more negative view towards their body, but the rate of males with body image disturbances has increased substantially. In addition to gender differences, ethnic differences have also been found in body image or body esteem, however, the majority of research has focused on Caucasians. This has created a need to examine body esteem in other ethnicities. **PURPOSE:** To investigate gender differences in body esteem of college students at a Hispanic serving institution after viewing Instagram images. **METHODS:** A total of 84 college students (32 male; 52 female) participated in this study. Participants were blinded to the true purpose of the study and were instead told the aim was to examine the effect of Instagram images on memory recall in college students. Participants completed various body esteem measures then viewed 16 Instagram images of either average individuals or fitness models/personalities accounts (media ideal). Participants were then instructed to complete a filler task to discourage rehearsal of the images, but actually completed the body esteem measures a second time. Finally, participants were given a memory recall task, which was used to determine if participants attended to the images shown and also to assess if participants had uncovered the true purpose of the study. Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted to assess differences between genders (M/F) on pre to post change in the following dependent variables (DVs): drive for muscularity (DMS), body satisfaction (BSat), body appreciation (BApp), and self-compassion (SCom). **RESULTS:** Data are reported as median, mean \pm SD. No significant differences ($p>0.05$) were found between genders for DMS (M=1.0, -0.94 \pm 4.6, F=1.0, 0.91 \pm 4.7), BSat (M=-1.67, -2.9 \pm 7.3, F=-0.33, 2.5 \pm 12.9), Bapp (M=-0.67, -0.51 \pm 7.0, F=-1.3, 1.8 \pm 16.9), or SCom (M=2.0, 0.85 \pm 7.0, F=0.5, 1.41 \pm 10.5). However, some trends in the data were observed. Namely, males increased in most measures of body esteem following exposure to social media, while females decreased by a small amount. **CONCLUSION:** The trends observed in the data support the existing literature on body esteem, suggesting that exposure to social media may impact body esteem of students at a Hispanic serving institution in a similar fashion as Caucasians. However, while the trends observed in the data support current research, the findings were non-significant. Given body esteem has not been well-studied in minority ethnic groups, future studies are warranted to further explore the impact of social media on body esteem in minority populations.