

Muscle Dysmorphia and the Effects of Emotion Regulation and Fitness Media

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ABSTRACT

Research on Muscle Dysmorphia (MD) has identified various cognitive and behavioral variables related to other psychopathology (i.e., eating disorders, addictive disorders) associated with increased levels of impulsivity, compulsivity, and difficulty regulating emotions. **PURPOSE:** The aim of the current study was to investigate the degree to which emotional dysregulation (EDys), through the mediating effects of compulsivity and impulsivity, influence one's risk towards MD symptomatology. Due to recent findings relating social media and negative regulatory associations, exploratory analyses assessed the effect of 'fitspiration' content on the model. **METHODS:** Using MTurk with a Qualtrics survey, 129 adults (aged 23-69 years) completed a background questionnaire, the Muscle Dysmorphic Disorder Inventory, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, UPPS-P Impulsive Behavior Scale – Short English Version, and the Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale – Modified for Body Dysmorphic Disorder. For mediation analyses, PROCESS Model 4 was used in SPSS, and Model 59 was used to assess if 'fitspiration' exposure moderated any of the paths. **RESULTS:** Higher EDys was related to higher impulsivity ($a_1 = 0.21$; 95% CI [0.15, 0.28]) and compulsivity ($a_2 = 0.39$; 95% CI [0.31, 0.48]). Higher compulsivity was associated with increased MDDI scores ($b_2 = 0.32$; 95% CI [0.12, 0.53]), while impulsivity was not ($b_1 = 0.01$; 95% CI [-0.29, 0.29]). A direct effect was found for both models ($c_1' = 0.68$; 95% CI [-0.56, 0.81]; $c_2' = 0.55$; 95% CI [0.42, 0.69]); only compulsivity mediated this effect ($a_2 \times b_2 = 0.13$; 95% CI [0.04, 0.23]). 'Fitspiration' exposure did not moderate this model ($a_{int} = -0.08$; 95% CI [-0.22, 0.06]; $b_{int} = 0.50$; 95% CI [-0.22, 1.23]; $c_{int} = -0.23$; 95% CI [-0.64, 0.19]). **CONCLUSION:** Compulsivity significantly mediated the relationship between EDys and MD symptomatology, implying higher scores of EDys were associated with greater compulsivity, and increased compulsive scores were associated with more MD-related cognitions and behaviors. While related to EDys, impulsivity was not associated with dysmorphic symptoms. Exploratory analyses found 'Fitspiration' content exposure did not significantly moderate the model utilizing compulsivity as a mediating variable.