Fitspiration vs Self-Compassion: The Effects of Instagram Images on Body Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Mood, and Exercise Motivation

Allison Ludwig & Bridget A. Hearon
Psychology Department, Albright College

Introduction

- Social media use among young women in the U.S. has been increasing for several years (Greenwood, Perrin, & Dugan, 2016). Young women are more likely to use Instagram than their male counterparts (Greenwood, Perrin, & Dugan, 2016).
- Women who view fitspiration images have greater body dissatisfaction levels (Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2013), negative mood (Pritchard et al., 2020; Rounds & Stutts, 2020; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015) and appearance comparison tendencies (Engeln et al., 2020).
- Women who view fitspiration images experience a decrease in their self-esteem (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).
- Viewing self-compassion images has increased body satisfaction (Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017) and mood (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015; Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017).
- There is limited research examining self-compassion and fitspiration in conjunction.

We hypothesized:
1) that exposure to the fitspiration condition would have a negative impact on state body satisfaction, state self-esteem, and state mood, while also increasing state exercise motivation.
2) that exposure to the self-compassion condition would result in less detrimental effects to state body satisfaction, state self-esteem, and state mood.
3) that the negative effects of the Fitspiration condition would be more pronounced for self-reported sorority membership, eating disorder behaviors, and higher levels of physical appearance comparison.

Method

Participants
- A total of 210 women participated in the study. The age of the sample ranges from 18 to 76 (M = 35.54, SD = 13.76).
- 31 participants were undergraduates at Albright college. 179 participants were women from Amazon’s mechanical Turk system.
- The race of the sample was 60% Caucasian, 11.4% African American, 9.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 18.6% Asian, and 1.4% identifying as other. The ethnicity of the sample was 21.4% Hispanic or Latinx.

Procedure
Female participants completed a survey anonymously on Qualtrics. Undergraduate students at Albright College were recruited using an identified list of individuals who were available to participate in experimental studies. The survey was posted on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk system which allowed participants to complete the survey for monetary compensation. Mild deception was employed, as the study was advertised to examine factors that influence memory of social media posts. After providing informed consent, participants completed all post-condition questionnaires. Participants were then randomized to one of the four conditions for 5 minutes, fitspiration, self-compassion, fitspiration and self-compassion, or the control. Participants completed all post-condition questionnaires.

Measures for Moderators
- Eating Disorder Inventory
- Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised
- International Physical Activity Questionnaire-Short
- Body Appreciation Scale

Measures for Dependent Variables
- Body Satisfaction Visual Analogue Scale
- Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale
- Mood Visual Analogue Scale
- Exercise Motivation Visual Analogue Scale

Results

- No significant effects emerged when examining condition on state body satisfaction, state positive affect, state negative affect, state exercise motivation, and state self-esteem.
- There was a significant 3-way interaction between trait body appreciation, state body satisfaction over time and condition, ($F(3, 200) = 3.30, p = .02$).
- There was no significant interaction between the condition and body satisfaction over time for participants with high trait body appreciation ($F(3,110) = .63, p = .60$). There was a significant interaction between the condition and body satisfaction over time for participants with low trait body appreciation ($F(3,90) = 4.10, p = .01$).

Discussion/Future Directions

- The results revealed that participants with low trait body appreciation who viewed the self-compassion condition experienced a significant increase in state body satisfaction while those in the remaining conditions experienced slight decreases.
- Our results suggest that viewing self-compassion based media increases body satisfaction, therefore acting as a buffer against the negative effects of Fitspiration based media. Self-compassion based media may be particularly impactful for individuals with pre-existing difficulties with body satisfaction.
- The viewing conditions were not an interactive feed presented on Instagram, therefore limiting our ability to view how participants would have interacted or viewed the images on Instagram. The participants of the study were female, thus limiting the generalizability of our findings to other gender identities.
- Further research should continue to examine the effects of Fitspiration and Self-compassion images on high-risk populations. Future research should continue to assess self-compassion media as a buffer, by further examining how this media may increase body image for women.

References