The Effects of “#fitspiration” Instagram Photos on Adolescent Girls' Self Perceived Body Image

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the social media photo sharing application “Instagram” on perceptions of body image in adolescent girls. There has been much work exploring the effects of media and body image. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of studies with an experimental design adolescent girls reported significantly more body dissatisfaction, depression, and anger along lower levels of self esteem and positive feelings when they were exposed to media that showed a thin model (Phares, 2014, p. 370). A research study by Bell and Dittmar (2011) found that regardless of media type, experimental exposure to the “body perfect” ideals led to significantly higher body and appearance dissatisfaction, compared to control images. A more recent study conducted by Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat, & Anschütz (2016) found that girls exposed to the manipulated Instagram photos showed to have a significant lower body satisfaction ($M = 4.57; SE = .13$) compared to girls exposed to the original photo.

Instagram is a steadily growing photo sharing site with over 600 million users, 1 million of whom signed up in just the past 6 months (Instagram Press, 2017). Instagram launched in 2010 and has only become widely popular in the past three years. Academic discussions of Instagram are just beginning. I am interested in using previous knowledge pertaining to the negative effects of manipulated images to explore possible negative outcomes of frequent Instagram exposure.

I would like to further this academic discussion and explore the effects of manipulated and non-manipulated “#fitspiration” accounts. Fitspiration is any message whose supposed intent is to encourage or inspire people to attain their fitness goals. Often these messages are tacked
onto an image of a hyper-fit person engaged in some impressive physical feat. Although these accounts are meant to be inspiring and support clean lifestyle choices I predict they can actually be detrimental to adolescent girls body confidence, especially when these images are altered with photoshop.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and twenty adolescent girls (ages 13-17) were recruited from middle schools throughout the Greater Victoria Region. Each teen was randomly assigned into one of three conditions (n = 40): non-manipulated fitspiration accounts, manipulated fitspiration accounts, and no exposure.

Design

The study will use a one way factorial design (exposure conditions: manipulated, non-manipulated and control) to determine whether the exposure to Instagram photos will have an effect on adolescence girls perceived body confidence.

Procedure

Participants will be asked to attend a faux marketing meeting. Their input will be requested on a new Instagram activewear fitspiration page. Before beginning the experiment all participants will be asked to fill out an initial survey that will be guised as a product preference form, but will actually measure each individuals levels of perceived body image and confidence. The participants will be randomly assigned to one of the three groups (40 people per group, having random age distributions). Group one will be exposed to 15 manipulated (photoshopped to create thinner bodies, mask imperfections, altered colour and lighting) Instagram photos. Group two will be exposed to the same 15 photos without manipulation. Group three will be told
there was a technical difficulty with the slideshow and subsequently see no photos. All participants will be asked to fill out an additional survey with new questions pertaining to marketing, but also repeated questions from the initial survey measuring any consequent change in body image and confidence.

Results
A one factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be conducted to determine the effects of fitspiration pages on adolescent girls self-perceived body image. It is hypothesized that participants in group 1 (viewing manipulated photos) will have a decrease in body image confidence, group 2 (non-manipulated photos) will also have a decrease, and those in group 3 (control condition) will stay relatively stable (see hypothesized data table below). The dependent variable in this experiment is perceived body-image and will be measured by pre and post exposure surveys with Likert like scale questions with minimum score being 1 (strongly disagree) and maximum score being 10 (strongly agree) (see sample question below).
References


Table 1
Hypothetical Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-manipulated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No exposure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample question:

You feel a connectedness to your body?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree
Research project design specifications

Independent variable 1:

**Exposure condition**

Level 1: **Manipulated**

Level 2: **Non-manipulated**

Level 3: **No exposure**

Independent variable 2:

Dependent variable:

Minimum score: 0  Maximum score: 10