The effect of Fitspiration on Body Image and Eating Patterns: An Ecological Momentary Study

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INTRODUCTION

- Fitspiration (fit + inspiration) → Aimed to promote healthy and fit lifestyles – often termed “Fitspo” (see image below for an example).
- Studies have shown a positive relationship between viewing Fitspo images, body dissatisfaction (BD) and disordered eating (DE).
- No experimental Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) study exposing women to Fitspo images in real life.

OBJECTIVES

To assess:
1.) the effects of Fitspo images (relative to neutral) on felt pressures to attain an idealized physique, BD and DE → STATE VARIABLES

2.) whether trait BD, thin ideal internalization and various sources of pressures, moderated these effects. → TRAIT VARIABLES

METHODOLOGY

Sample
- 85 female participants
- Mean age: 19.68
- Mean BMI: 22.06
- University students: 80%
- Viewing fitspo: 62.4%
- Posting fitspo content: 15.3%

Measures
- Phase 1: TRAIT assessment
- Phase 2: STATE assessment

Design
- Random assignment to view fitspiration or neutral image
- Post-image ratings
  1. Pressures to change body image
  2. Satisfaction variables
  3. Disordered Eating

RESULTS

1.) Exposure to fitspiration images predicting felt pressure to attain an idealized physique
- Viewing fitspiration images compared to control images
- ↑ Pressure to attain an ideal physique (b = 1.17, p < .001, Cohen’s d = .18)
- This effect varied significantly across individuals (p < .001)
- Moderated by pressure from media (b = 0.43, p = .022, R² = .05)

- For individuals with elevated perceived pressure from media, the impact of fitspiration image exposure was magnified

2.) Exposure to fitspiration images predicting satisfaction variables
- Viewing fitspiration images compared to control images
- ↓ Fitness = b = -0.07, p = .025
  Weight = N.S.
  Muscle tone = N.S.
  Health = N.S.
  Sex Appeal = N.S.

- Lower fitness satisfaction scores after exposure to the fitspiration images relative to neutral images
- This effect DID NOT vary significantly across individuals
- NO moderation analyses

3.) Exposure to fitspiration images predicting DE variables
- Viewing fitspiration images compared to control images
- Binge eating = N.S.
  Exercise to lose weight = N.S.
  Dietary restraint = N.S.
  Skipping a meal = N.S.

CONCLUSIONS

- Manipulation worked
- HOWEVER, effects not observed for most follow-up for most satisfaction or DE variables.
- Even when we limited time lag to less than 2 hours, effects were still mostly N.S.
- It may be that these images produce transient effects – as is often found in lab based body image studies – but this may not be sufficient to translate to subsequent DE outcomes.
- AND/OR the relationship may be more complex, and require further rumination etc. to then lead to DE outcomes.

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