

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

→ 6 X 1 min survey a day for 7 days = 42 assessments

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
($b = 1.17, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = .18$)

This effect varied significantly across individuals ($p < .001$)

Moderated by pressure from media ($b = 0.43, p = .022, R^2 = .05$)

→ 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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