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Engagement with Influencer Content on Instagram in Relation to Satisfaction with Physical Appearance

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INTRODUCTION

- According to research conducted by Choukas-Bradley et al., (2019) 92% of young adults ages 18-29 own a smartphone.
- Physical appearance is a principal focus of photo-based social media platforms, which may impact the mental health of females (in particular) given the importance assigned to women's bodies in Western cultures (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019).
- Because individuals are likely spending more time on social media as a result of the pandemic, the impact of influencer images on body image and self-esteem is even more relevant.

Hypothesis:

- Participants who were randomly assigned to see influencer images on Instagram would report lower body image/self esteem than participants who were randomly assigned to see nature pictures.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

- 169 participants recruited through UMW psychology department subject pool and social media (Instagram)
- Mean Age = 20.55 ($SD = 4.01$)
- Predominantly female (94.3%)
- Predominantly Caucasian (47.9%)

Procedure

- Participants were randomly assigned to view social media influencer images (i.e., experimental group) or nature images (i.e., control group).
- Then they answered questions about objectified body consciousness and social media attitudes.
- Conducted via Qualtrics Survey

Measures

- **Objectified Body Consciousness Scale** (McKinley & Hyde, 1996): Higher scores reflect increased objectified body consciousness on each of the subscales.
 - Body Shame
 - Body Surveillance
- **Social Media Engagement:** participants were also asked whether their time on social media has increased, stayed the same, or decreased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1

Participants were randomly assigned to view social media influencer images or nature images:

Example of social media influencer image shown to participants:



Example of nature image shown to participants:



RESULTS

- The social media influencer image group and nature image group did not significantly differ on objectified body consciousness (Figure 2).
 - $t(108) = -1.06, p = -0.291$
- Additionally, although not significant, the group differences were in the opposite direction of the prediction, with the nature group reporting greater objectified body consciousness.
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 79.1% reported social media usage had increased, 15.5% reported social media usage remained unchanged, and 5.5% reported social media usage decreased.

DISCUSSION

- The current results do not suggest that body image/self esteem in females is impacted after exposure to social media influencers as opposed to nature images.
- These results should be interpreted in the context of several limitations, such as the homogenous sample (predominantly 20-year-old, Caucasian, female college students), along with threats to internal validity in the sense that the control variable did not differ enough from the independent variable to evoke significantly different responses.

- Contrary to pre-existing research, these results indicated no relationship between social media influencer content and body image/self esteem in females. Future research on this subject could potentially explore and reconcile the differences between our findings and former studies. Additionally, a more diverse range of participants, for example non-college students, could impact future findings.

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FIGURE 2

Independent Samples T-test: Testing group differences on objectified body consciousness.

