

ZOOMING INTO EMOTION REGULATION AND PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF BODY SATISFACTION DURING SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE: A CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATION

Patrícia Oliveira-Silva¹, Rachel Rodgers², Mike Marriott³, Lucia Penalba^{1,3}, Ana Filipa Moreno¹, Joana Coutinho⁴, Bárbara C. Machado⁵, Pedro Dias⁵ & Óscar F. Gonçalves⁶

¹Human Neurobehavioral Laboratory (CEDH), Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Porto – Portugal

² APPEAR — Applied Psychology Program for Eating and Appearance Research, Bouvé College of Health Sciences, Northeastern University, Boston - USA

³School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham – England

⁴Escola de Psicologia, Universidade do Minho, Braga – Portugal

⁵Research Center for Human Development (CEDH), Faculty of Education and Psychology, Porto – Portugal

⁶Proaction Lab, CINEICC – Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. University of Coimbra, Coimbra - Portugal

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Background: A recent initiative to improve the media environment, repeatedly criticized for conveying unrealistic appearance ideals (especially for women), is the addition of disclaimer labels on fashion images indicating that the image has some degree of digital manipulation to correct perceived physical flaws. To our knowledge, no previous studies have explored the emotional impact of short-term exposure to labeled media indexed by more objective and reliable tools such as psychophysiological measures.

Aims: This study aimed to [i] Explore the impact of two strategies aiming to decrease the deleterious effects of media on body image through psychophysiological measures across two cultures (Portugal and England); and [ii] Determine the relationship between psychophysiological reactivity and self-report on body dissatisfaction (BD).

Method: For this study, 162 Portuguese (PT) and 159 British (BR) women (18-35 years old) were randomly assigned to one of the 3 experimental conditions: (1) average-sized models without stamp; (2) average-sized models with “retouch free” stamp; and (3) thin-ideal models.

Results: The PT group presented higher levels of BD, a higher skin conductance level for the condition with average-sized models, a higher level of preference for thin-ideal models portrayed in social media (58%), and less social media consumption compared to the BR sample. The PT group also revealed not trusting the “retouch free” stamp used in media more often than the BR group. Diminished heart rate responses were found in the BR sample when participants were observing average-sized models with “retouch free” stamp, but not in PT sample.

Conclusions:

Our findings showed that BD was not associated with media consumption in the PT group since Portuguese women showed higher levels of BD but lower levels of media consumption than the BR group. However, the overrepresentation of thin bodies in social media, compared to average-models, seems to be more acceptable or even desirable

among the Portuguese women than the British women, as shown by self-report and the psychophysiological data. Considering that BD is a risk factor of eating disorders, especially in young women, psychophysiological approaches can help to understand better the impact of some efforts to mitigate the effects of potential deleterious media practices on women's BD. Also, we believe our study shows that disclaimers may not moderate the deleterious effect of continuous exposure to thin body images.

Keywords: Body dissatisfaction, social media, disclaimer labels, heart rate, electrodermal.

E-mail contact: posilva@ucp.pt