



# Effects of different types of Instagram posts on college-age women's body image

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## Background

- Social media is a relatively new platform for social comparison and identity formation, and its societal implications are yet to be fully understood.
- Research shows that following social media pages that post idealized female bodies is correlated with drive for thinness, thin-ideal internalization, and body surveillance (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017).
- In one study, participants who were briefly exposed to body positive social media posts showed an increase in positive mood, body satisfaction, and body appreciation (Cohen et al., 2019).
- Perloff named three possible types of social media posts that could increase positive body image. These include posts that violate the knowledge bias, posts that utilize the social norms theory, and posts that draw on positive psychology (Perloff 2014).
- **Current study:** An online survey and brief exposure to different types of body positive Instagram posts were used to examine how these different posts impact body image.
  - Participants were randomly assigned to view two Instagram posts, one text-based and one image-based, that either violated the knowledge bias, took advantage of the social norms theory, drew on aspects of positive psychology, or served as controls (i.e., architecture images).
  - Participants reported their body dissatisfaction before and after exposure to the posts.

## Method

- 63 cisgender women ages 18-25 who reported active Instagram use were recruited via convenience sampling methods at a large Midwestern university.
- A randomized control design was used to determine which participants were assigned to view each of the four pairs of Instagram posts.
- Participants were sent a Qualtrics® survey which included this body image measure taken before and after exposure to the Instagram posts:

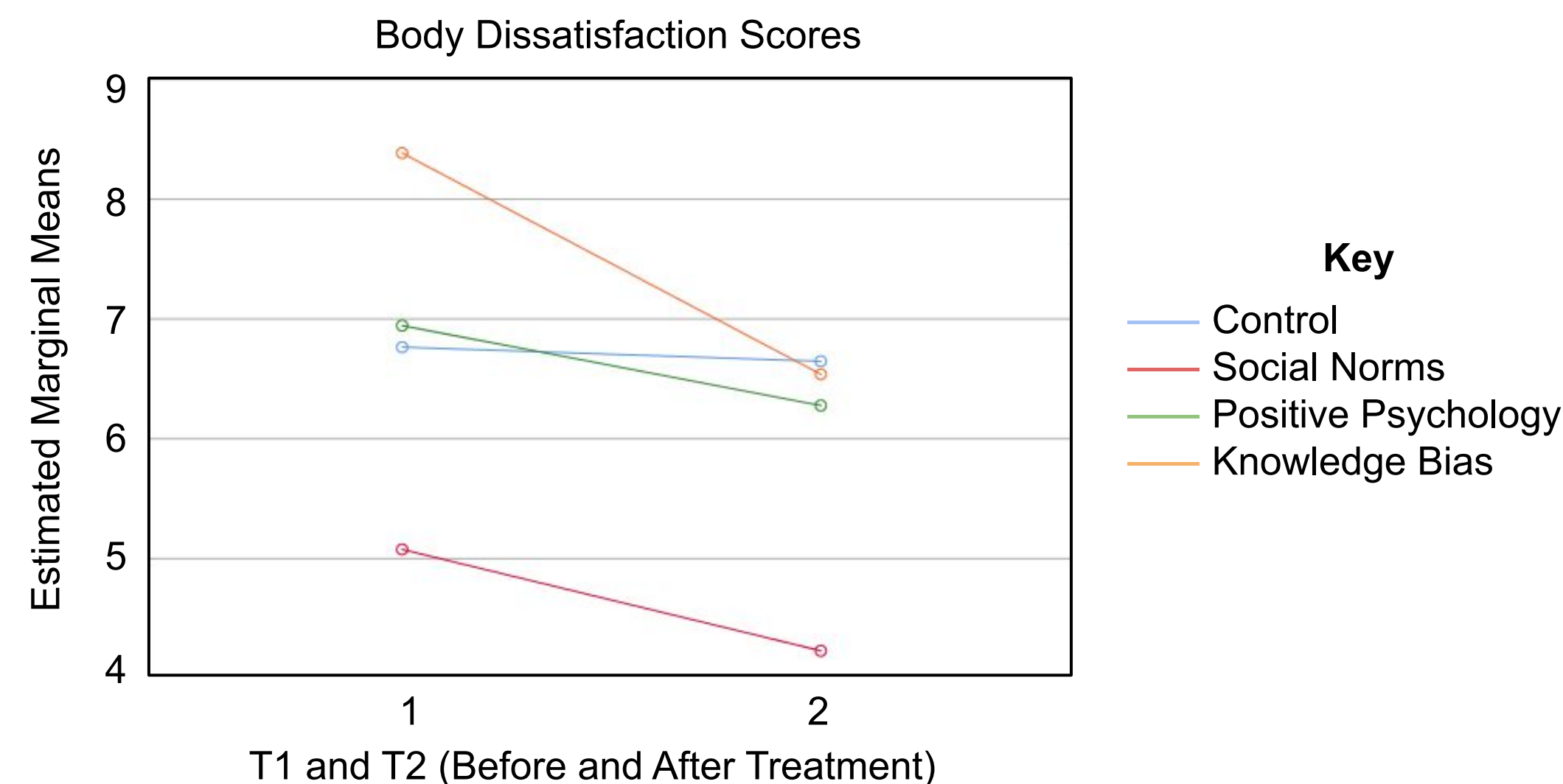
### Body Dissatisfaction (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983)

- 9 items: e.g., “I think that my stomach is too big.”)
- 6 response choices ranging from “Never” to “Always.”

## Analytic Plan: Changes in Body Dissatisfaction

- Participants were randomly assigned to three treatment groups and one control group.
- The relationship between changes in body image for each treatment group and time factor were tested using a repeated measures general linear model.
- Body dissatisfaction was tested before and after exposure to the Instagram posts the participants were randomly assigned to.
- Changes in body image x post type interactions were of main interest in these analyses.

## Results



SUMMED SCORES BEFORE TREATMENT	POST TYPE	M	SD	N
	Control	6.76	6.026	17
	Social Norms	5.08	4.462	13
	Positive Psychology	6.94	6.044	18
	Knowledge Bias	8.38	5.938	13
SUMMED SCORES AFTER TREATMENT	Total	6.80	5.680	61
	Control	6.65	6.041	17
	Social Norms	4.23	3.632	13
	Positive Psychology	6.28	5.592	18
	Knowledge Bias	6.54	4.789	13
	Total	6.00	5.167	61

- There was no significant difference between levels of body dissatisfaction before and after exposure to all post types [ $F(3, 57) = 1.833, p = .151$ ].

## Participant Demographics

CHARACTERISTIC	PARTICIPANTS (N = 63)			
	N		%	
RACE				
WHITE/CAUCASIAN	55		87.3	
BLACK/AFRICAN	4		6.3	
AMERICAN	4		6.3	
ASIAN	2		3.2	
NATIVE AMERICAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	2		3.2	
ETHNICITY				
NOT HISPANIC/LATINX	58		92.1	
HISPANIC/LATINX	5		7.9	
SEXUAL ORIENTATION				
HETEROSEXUAL	48		76.2	
LESBIAN	2		3.2	
BISEXUAL	11		17.5	
QUEER	1		1.6	
ASEXUAL	1		1.6	
POST TYPE				
CONTROL	17		27	
SOCIAL NORMS	15		23.8	
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY	18		28.6	
KNOWLEDGE BIAS	13		20.6	
CHARACTERISTIC	Min	Max	M	SD
AGE (YRS)	18	25	20.87	2.225
BMI	17.19	54.18	23.491	5.238

## Discussion

**Conclusion** There was no significant difference detected in levels of body dissatisfaction before and after viewing the different types of Instagram posts. However, there appears to be a promising trend in the slight decreases shown for the three treatment groups.

**Limitations** A larger sample size was needed in order to receive a significant result. Additionally, the limited population demographics could decrease generalizability.

**Future directions** There is plenty of room for more research in this expanding area of study. Ultimately, more participants are needed to identify any possible significant effects relating to social media use and body image.

## References

- Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019). #BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women's mood and body image. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1546-1564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819826530>
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