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Body Image During Quarantine; Generational Effects of Social Media Pressure on Body Appearance Perception

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Introduction

Body image changes during the lifespan and it is partially shaped by external social influences. These influences range from friends and family to cultural forces such as the body ideal promoted by the media. Dysfunctional body image or body image disorders appear when the discrepancy between evaluative judgments (self-perception) about the body and its physical characteristics is too large (Pitron, Alsmith, & Vignemont, 2018).

The emergence of virtual forms of social interaction afforded by social media digital tools have introduced novel ways in which the external pressures can influence body image formation. Social media use is associated with body image problems, disordered eating behaviors, and changes in the body in younger generations (Rodgers et al., 2020).

Over the past year, the covid-19 pandemic has been partially curtailed through quarantine measures that have increased the prevalence of negative psychological symptoms (Brooks et al., 2020). Social distancing has changed how we relate to our bodies in fundamental ways; it has constrained our social interactions to virtual means instead and, as a result, has partially isolated us from social pressures introduced by face-to-face full body exchanges.

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Methods

Participants: 957 subjects (528 females, 419 males, 11 other gender; $M = 30.42$ years old, $SD = 11.20$ years). Respondents that completed the whole study ($n=827$) were sorted into groups depending on their gender identity and age.

Generation	Gender		Age	BMI	Social media daily usage
Z(18-25 yrs old)	189	177	21.67 (1.98)	23.84 (12.93)	4.08 (0.84)
Y(26-39 yrs old)	213	138	31.45 (3.83)	24.45 (4.37)	3.40 (0.94)
X(40-65 yrs old)	65	51	45.68 (4.53)	25.88 (4.72)	3.39 (0.96)

Online Questionnaires

- Demographic and social media use
- Modified version of the female and male Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4-Revised (SATAQ-4R):
 - Body Ideal factors** is evaluated according to three categories: (1) Internalization–Thin/Low Body Fat, (2) Internalization–Muscular, (3) Internalization–General Attractiveness.
 - Social Pressure factors:** 4) Pressures–Family, (5) Pressures–Peers, (6) Pressures–Media, (7) Pressures–Significant Others, and (8) Pressures–Social Media
 - Pressures–Social Media:** Items added were identical to those of Pressures–Media factor but for replacing the wording ‘media’ for ‘social media’.

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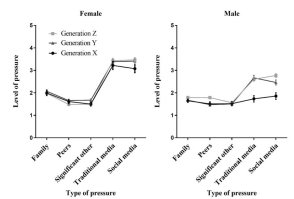
Results

Social Pressure

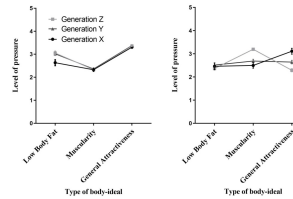
- *Females experience more **family pressure** than males ($F(1, 827) = 22.77, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = .003$)
- *GenZ males experience more **peer pressure** than females ($p < 0.001$) and GenZ males experience more pressure than GenY males ($p < 0.001$)
- *Females experience more **traditional media pressure** than males ($F(1, 827) = 91.96, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = .010$). GenZ males experience more pressure than GenX males ($p < 0.0001$)
- *Females experience more pressure from **social media** than men ($F(1, 827) = 82.85, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = .009$). For males, the impact of social media pressure decreases significantly with age ($F(2, 827) = 10.88, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = .002$).

Body Ideal by Generation

- *GenY: significant effects for gender ($F(1, 698) = 36.61, p = 0.00$) and type of body-ideal ($F(2, 698) = 19.93, p = 0.00$), and their interaction ($F(2, 698) = 26.23, p = 0.00$) in **Females experienced more pressure on the general attractiveness of their body-ideal.**
- *GenZ: significant effects for gender ($F(1, 728) = 35.25, p = 0.00$), and the interaction between gender and type of body-ideal ($F(2, 728) = 95.75, p = 0.00$) **Males experienced more pressure to have a muscular body and females experienced pressure to have a generally attractive body.**



Three-way repeated measures analysis of variance with effect sizes and powers, comparing type of pressure, gender, and generation.



Three-way repeated measures analysis of variance with effect sizes and powers, comparing type of body-ideal, gender and generation.

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Discussion

- Socializing through a virtual self-body image during the pandemic had a different impact on men's and women's body image. Post-pandemic studies should explore if this effect holds up with the return to normal face-to-face social interactions (without masks) and physical activity.
- Social pressures and body-ideal appearance showed distinct effects on individuals' body image depending on their generational belonging. Effects during adolescents should be investigated in future studies.
- Media pressure affected body image satisfaction significantly more than other kinds of social pressure across genders and generations particularly for young males.
- Males experienced more pressure to be muscular and women to be thin; this effect increased for the younger generation.

We should take into consideration how social media affects individuals distinctly based on their gender and age. This would help us develop tools to promote realistic body images, encourage healthier behaviors, and help ameliorate their negative effects on how we construe our body image.

Thanks!!! 😊

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