



Social Media Exposure to Body Diversity Reduces Thin & Muscular Ideal Internalization and Body Dissatisfaction Among College Women

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INTRODUCTION

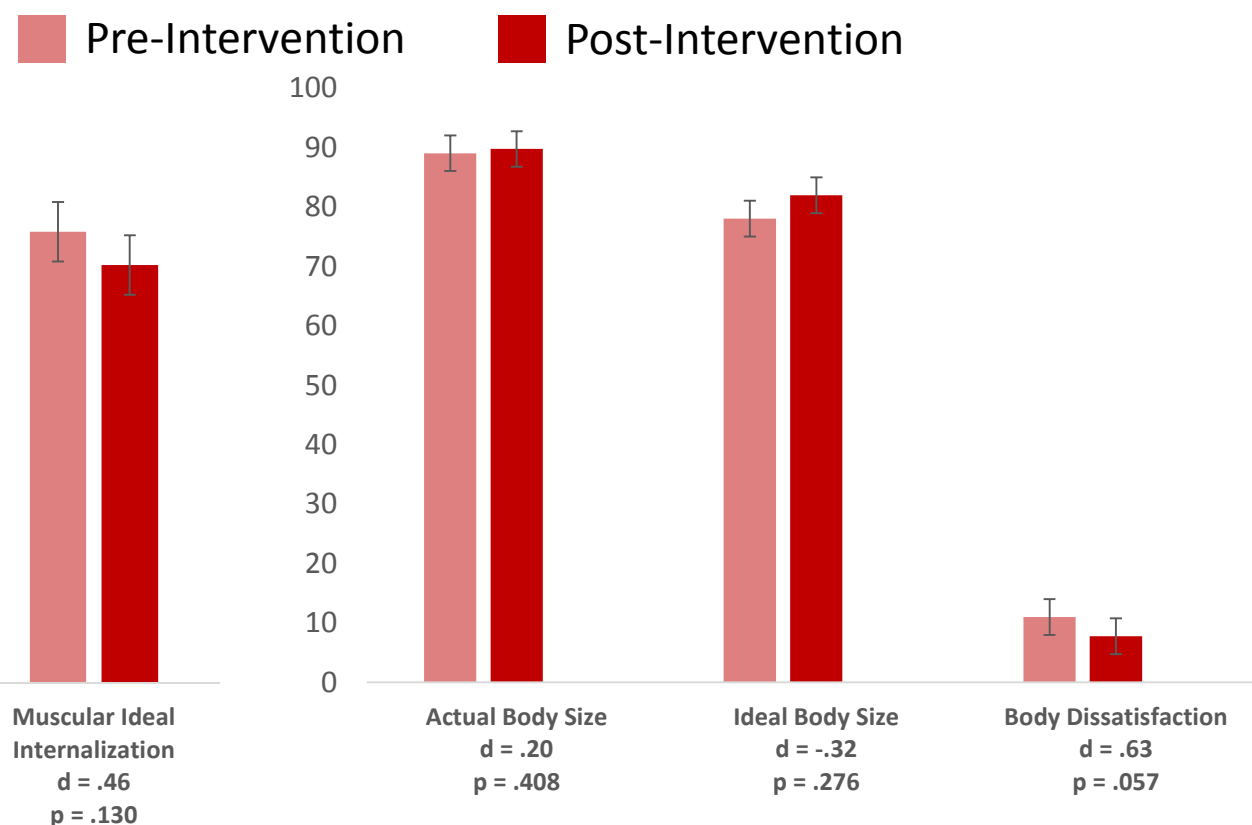
- The Tripartite Influence Model suggests that media exposure influences risk for disordered eating and related constructs by promoting internalization of unrealistic body ideals, leading to body dissatisfaction (Keery, van den Berg & Thompson, 2004).
- Social media exposure is pervasive among college-age women, and portrayals of women’s bodies on social media typically reinforce unrealistic body ideals (RSPH, 2017).
- Social media exposure is associated with increased body dissatisfaction (RSPH, 2017). However, case examples suggest that altering social media consumption to increase exposure to diverse body types may positively influence women’s beliefs about their own and others’ bodies (e.g., Baker, 2015; West, 2016).
- The goal of this study was to investigate the effects of a social media intervention on body ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction among college-age women.

METHOD

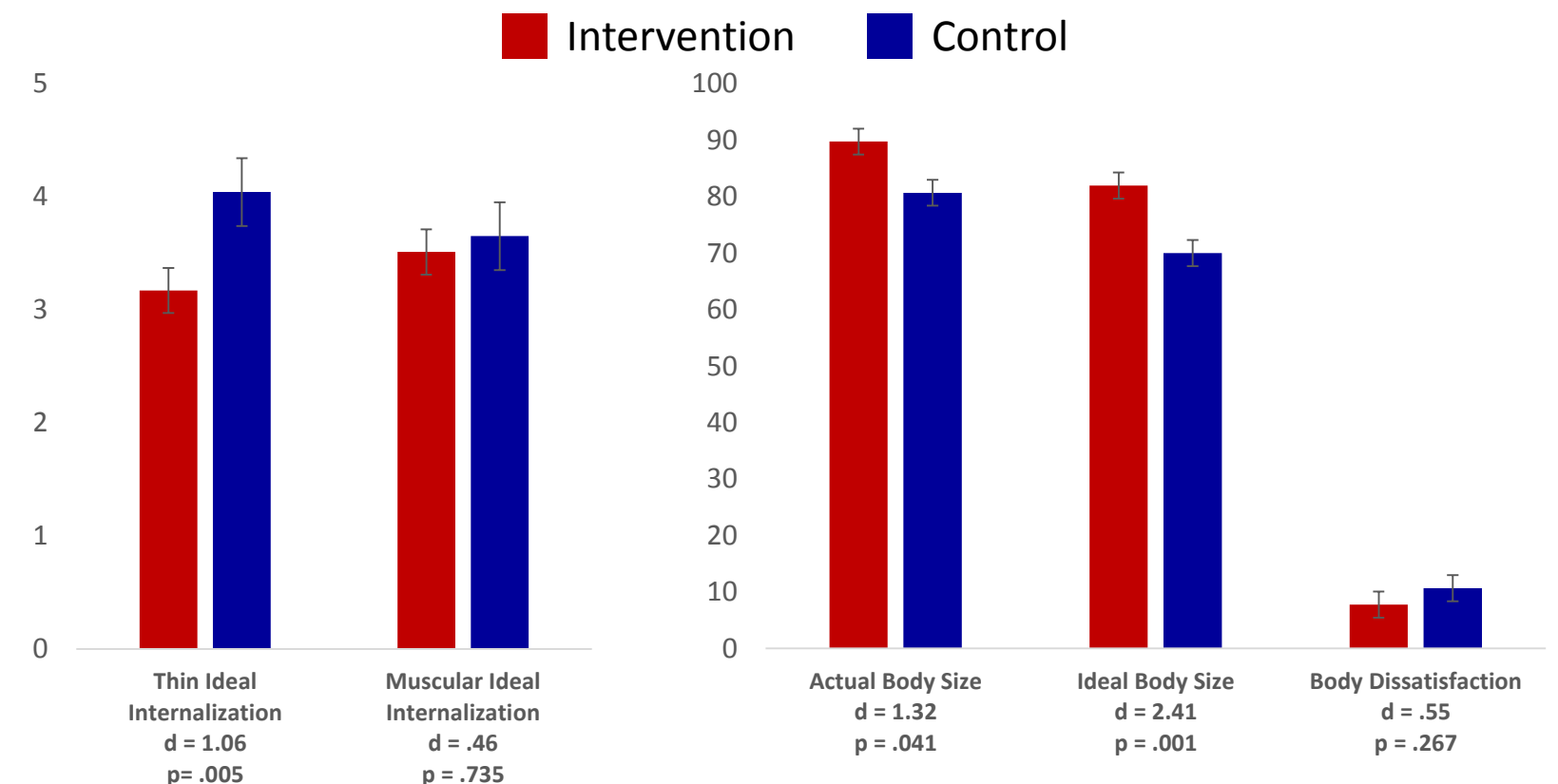
- **Participants.** 40 undergraduate cisgender women reporting regular (daily) use of Instagram.
- **Method.** Participants were randomly assigned to a social media intervention ($n = 20$) or control condition ($n = 20$), and were instructed to follow 25 Instagram accounts over 5 months:
 - **Social Media Intervention:** Accounts depicting fat individuals engaged in a variety of activities, e.g. “Curvy Girl Meets Yoga.”
 - **Control:** Accounts depicting non-body-related content (architecture, books, plants, etc.), e.g., “National Geographic Travel.”
- **Assessments** at pre- and post-intervention included self-report measures of:
 - Thin & Muscular Ideal Internalization (Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire – 4)
 - Actual Body Size, Ideal Body Size, & Body Dissatisfaction (difference between actual and ideal body size) (Body Image Assessment Scale – Body Dimensions)

RESULTS

Change from Pre- to Post-Intervention Within Intervention Condition ($n = 18$)



Post-Intervention Difference Between Intervention ($n = 18$) and Control ($n = 15$) Conditions



DISCUSSION

- This study provides promising evidence that social media exposure to diverse body types may reduce internalization of unrealistic body ideals and decrease body dissatisfaction among women.
- College-age women who followed Instagram accounts depicting individuals of diverse body sizes and types engaged in everyday activities experienced decreases in internalization of thin body ideals and body dissatisfaction.
- These findings suggest that negative effects of social media exposure are dependent upon the content of this exposure, and are not an inherent element of social media use itself.
- This pilot study was under-powered to detect interactions between intervention group and timing of assessment.
- Future research should assess whether similar interventions are beneficial in other populations (e.g., men, other age groups).