

Research shows that exposure to sexualised images on Instagram leads to greater body dissatisfaction

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The research team studied 247 Italian women aged 19 to 32 who were recruited to this study that considered reactions to both Instagram imagery and the comments alongside those images.

Participants were asked to fill out several questionnaires, including one on [body dissatisfaction](#). Then, after being exposed at random to one of four videos of Instagram images (sexualised or non-sexualised) combined with comments, they completed follow-up questionnaires on [body dissatisfaction](#), mood and future [cosmetic surgery](#) intentions.

The research revealed that young women exposed to sexualised imagery reported increased body

dissatisfaction compared to pre-exposure levels. However, those exposed to non-sexualised images did not report an increase in body dissatisfaction, indicating that the sexualisation of images on Instagram is an influential factor in [body image](#). Conversely, the type of comments on the images did not appear to affect participants' body dissatisfaction.

The study also looked at the role of Instagram addiction proclivity (IAP), with those who had higher problematic use of the platform compared to those who used it more sporadically. The findings suggest that women who used the platform more frequently would be more likely to consider cosmetic surgery, especially after being exposed to objectifying features (sexualised imagery or appearance comments) on Instagram feeds.

Dr. Francesca Guizzo, co-author of the study and Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Surrey, said: "This is an exciting study that brings together different dimensions in [mental health research](#) and highlights risk factors; findings such as these show there is a clear link between the sexualised imagery [young women](#) are exposed to on Instagram and how they feel about themselves. Given Instagram's popularity as one of the world's most popular [social media](#) platforms and the increasing prevalence of cosmetic procedures, these findings are of particular interest. More needs to be done to counteract body negativity; actions such as spreading body positivity messaging may work to improve female body satisfaction."

Katrina Jenkins, Targeted Programmes Manager at the Mental Health Foundation, said: "This valuable new research adds to the weight of evidence about the harmfulness of the sexualised images of people that are so common on social media. It also echoes the findings of our own research with a diverse

range of adults, who urged us to work to counter the effects of such imagery. We created our 'Mind Over Mirror' campaign accordingly, offering tips and strategies to address this challenge. For instance, it can be useful to be mindful of what we view on social media and how it makes us feel. Unfollowing Instagram pages that encourage negative self-comparisons can also help us to take control over the effect of social media on our body image and mental health."

The research has been published by the journal *Body Image*.

More information: Francesca Guizzo et al, Instagram Sexualization: When posts make you feel dissatisfied and wanting to change your body, *Body Image* (2021). DOI: [10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.06.005)

Find out more about the Mental Health Foundation's 'Mind over Mirror' campaign [here](#).

Provided by University of Surrey

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