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ORIGINAL

Body image distortion and its relationship with the frequent use of social networks. The effects they can cause to the body and mind

Distorsión de imagen corporal y su relación con el uso frecuente de las redes sociales. Los efectos que pueden causar al cuerpo y mente

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: body image distortion (BDD) is a disorder in which the person has the inability to adequately and realistically recognize the size and shape of their body. This disorder leads people to compare themselves excessively with other bodies, mainly in social networks; thus, generating low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, eating disorders (ED): anorexia nervosa, bulimia, compulsive eating, depression, anxiety and body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) where the person has a compulsive obsession with self-image. It is also necessary to talk about the unnecessary aesthetic procedures that more and more people are undergoing due to social pressure, just to fit the beauty standards.
Objective: perform an analysis of body image distortion and how social networks (Instagram, twitter, tik tok) and their easy access can influence this problem leading to other serious disorders.
Method: the data collection was based on article searches in the following sites: PubMed, SCIELO, Google forms, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar.

Keywords: Body Image Distortion; Eating Disorders; Social Networks; Aesthetic Procedures; Body Dissatisfaction.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la distorsión de imagen corporal (BDD, por sus siglas en inglés) es un trastorno en la cual la persona tiene la incapacidad de reconocer adecuadamente y de forma realista el tamaño y forma de su cuerpo. Este trastorno lleva a las personas compararse excesivamente con otros cuerpos, principalmente en las redes sociales; Generando así baja autoestima, insatisfacción corporal, Trastornos de la conducta alimentaria (TCA): anorexia nerviosa, bulimia, compulsión alimentar, depresión, ansiedad y el trastorno dismórfico corporal (TDC) donde la persona presenta una obsesión compulsiva por la propia imagen. También hay que hablar de los procedimientos estéticos innecesarios que cada vez más las personas están se sometiendo debido la presión social, solo para encajar a los estándares de belleza.
Objetivo: realizar un análisis de la distorsión de imagen corporal y como las redes sociales (Instagram, twiter, tiktok) y su fácil acceso pueden influir en esta problemática llevando a otros trastornos graves.
Método: la recolección de los datos fue atrás de búsquedas por artículos en los sites: Pubmed, SCIELO, Google forms, ScienceDirect, Google Académico.

Palabras clave: Distorsión de Imagen Corporal; Trastornos Alimentares; Redes Sociales; Procedimientos Estéticos; Insatisfacción Corporal.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, social media (virtual spaces where people connect and share various types of information with different people) has expanded dramatically, with it, social pressure based on "beauty ideals." This has led to a strong concern about people's appearance, where they want to change their "real" form at all costs to get as close as possible to the beauty standards imposed by society.[1,2] Easy access to social media influences comparisons with other bodies, which in most cases are not even "real," and this generates body image distortion, precisely the inability of a person to recognize their real body shape and size when looking in the mirror.[3,4]

The search for the "ideal body" can trigger more serious health problems, such as eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, which is defined by significant weight loss for age and height; bulimia nervosa, which is the presence of recurrent episodes of binge eating followed by intense feelings of guilt and inappropriate compensatory behaviors; compulsive eating, where the person eats compulsively).[5,6] In addition to these eating disorders, body image distortion can also trigger mixed anxiety and depression disorders, where the person may experience low mood, leading to low self-esteem and, along with this, excessive concern about achieving a body that is accepted as "ideal" or "beautiful" by society.[7,8]

The influence of social media, through "fitness influencers," who are digital influencers who show a reality that is often fantastical, such as their routines, exaggerated diets, and the use of filters and Photoshop to mask any signs of an "imperfect life," leads people who follow them to believe that it is easy to achieve the image they want to convey. This causes people to confuse what is real with what is not, leading to dissatisfaction with their lives and a relentless pursuit of a standard of perfection that often exists only on screen.[9]

Body dissatisfaction causes people to increasingly undergo unnecessary cosmetic procedures precisely because of this pressure caused by the internet that they must be "perfect." They can change this through surgery and other methods if they are not. In addition, digital influencers make all these procedures seem like positive changes, creating a desire in people to "attack" their bodies with invasive procedures such as diets and medications that can put their lives and health at risk.[10] This has become a social health problem due to the psychosomatic disorders that have been triggered over the years by this medium of excessive comparison, where men and women of all ages and social classes are involved in this unhealthy scenario. As a result, a photo can trigger various insecurities, causing one to desperately seek mechanisms that will bring them closer to this "fantasy ideal," interfering with their mental and nutritional state. The objective of this study was to analyze, through research in articles and a questionnaire with multiple questions, how social media can influence body dissatisfaction, triggering eating disorders and mood swings and leading people to resort to cosmetic procedures to achieve beauty standards. This research will provide information for people of all genders and ages to become aware of this issue.

METHOD

VARIABLE	MEDIDA	ESCALA DE MEDICION
Edad	Años	Numérica
Frecuencia con que utiliza las redes sociales	Horas	Numérica
Que tipo de rede social mas se utiliza	Especificar	Nominal
Si les gustan tu cuerpo	Si No	Nominal
Si tienen preocupación excesiva con tu cuerpo	Si No	Nominal
Comparas tu cuerpo con el de otras personas en las redes sociales	Si No A veces	Nominal
Con que frecuencia comparas tu cuerpo con los que ves en las redes sociales	Siempre Frecuentemente A veces Nunca	Nominal
Al ver las imágenes de otras personas en estas redes sociales como te sentís con tu cuerpo	Bien Triste Insatisfecho No me afecta	Nominal
Sentis que las imágenes de las redes sociales generan una presión para que tengas el cuerpo perfecto	Si No A veces	Nominal

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Sentis que las imágenes de las redes sociales generan una presión para que tengas el cuerpo perfecto	Si No A veces	Nominal
Alguna vez te sentiste inseguro de postar alguna fotografía por miedo o vergüenza de tu cuerpo	Si No	Nominal
Suelen de utilizar filtros o Photoshop en las fotos antes de publicarlas	Si No A veces	Nominal
Cuanto es importante para vos estar o parecer delgada frente al espejo	Mucho Poco Nada	Nominal
Las redes sociales ya te han influenciado hacer alguna dieta	Si No	Nominal
Tenes algún trastorno alimentario	Si No	Nominal
Cual trastorno alimentario tienes	Especificar	Nominal
Alguna vez te has aislado de la sociedad porque te sentía estar con sobrepeso	Si No	Nominal
Alguna vez te has sometido a algún procedimiento estético para mejorar tu apariencia	Si No	Nominal
Alguna vez has tomado medidas extremas para perdida de peso	Especificar	Nominal
Alguna vez has tomado alguna medida extrema para ganar peso	Si No	Nominal

Figure 1. Operationalization of variables

This is an observational, descriptive study conducted at the faculty, where the study factor was limited to observing, measuring, and analyzing certain variables without exercising direct control over the intervention. Through this study, we sought to describe the situation through various articles and research. To select the sample, I used an online questionnaire created in Google Forms consisting of 23 questions, which provided information from different people of both sexes aged between 14 and 35, including people who use social media frequently who have developed eating disorders due to the influence of social media, who use filters and Photoshop, and who have undergone cosmetic procedures. The exclusion criteria were people over 35 who do not use social media.

Resources needed:

- Notebook with good internet access.
- Questionnaire created in Google.

RESULTS

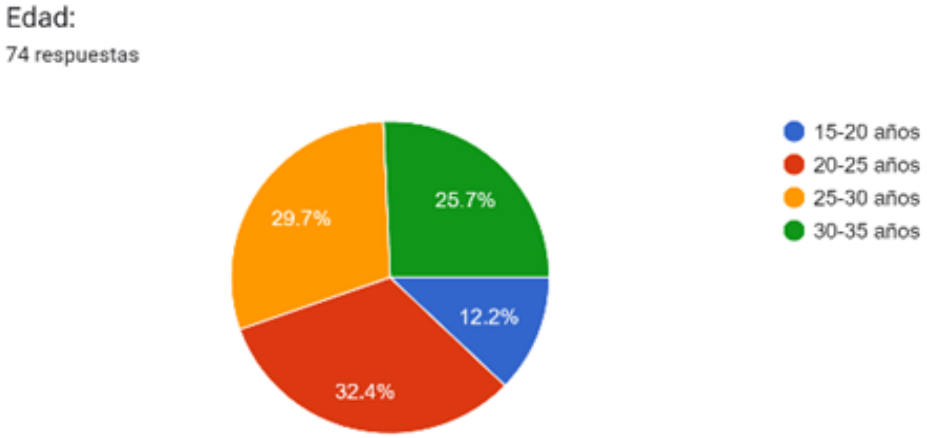

Figure 2. Age

The results obtained from the survey distributed via WhatsApp and Instagram are presented here. The survey included 74 people from Brazil and Argentina, 83,8 % female and 16,2 % male. The survey consisted of 23 questions that analyzed body image on social media, eating disorders, methods used for weight loss, and how social media affects these issues. The age range was between 15 and 35 years old, and the results were well distributed, mainly between 20 and 35 years old with 25,7 %, 29,7 %, and 32,4 %, with the majority between 20 and 25 years old with 32,4 %. The 15-20 age group participated the least in the questionnaire, accounting for only 12,2 %.

The most used social networks were Instagram (82,4 %) and TikTok (13,5 %). The frequency of use was highest between 3-4 hours (29,7 %) and more than 5 hours (24,3 %) per day.

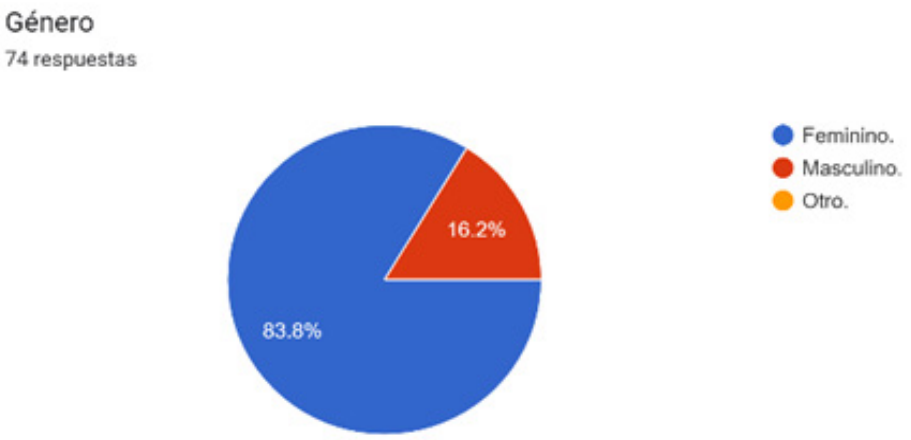

Figure 3. Gender

Figure 4. How often do you use social networks?

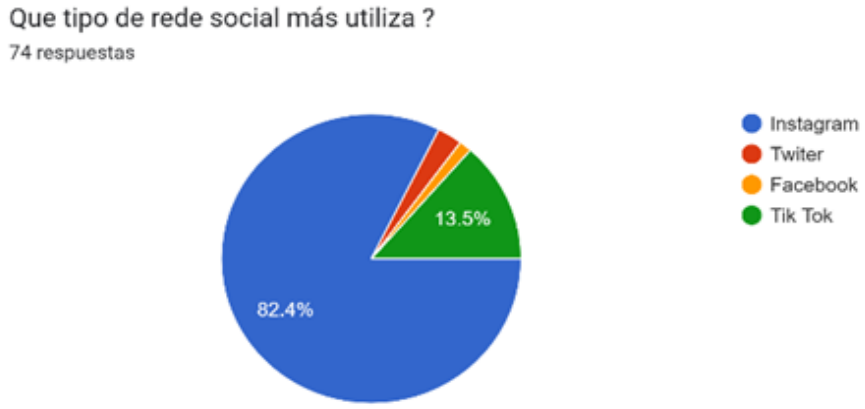

Figure 5. What type of social network do you use most?

Some questions were asked about whether they liked their own bodies, how people felt when comparing their bodies to others on social media, and how often they compare bodies. These were the results:

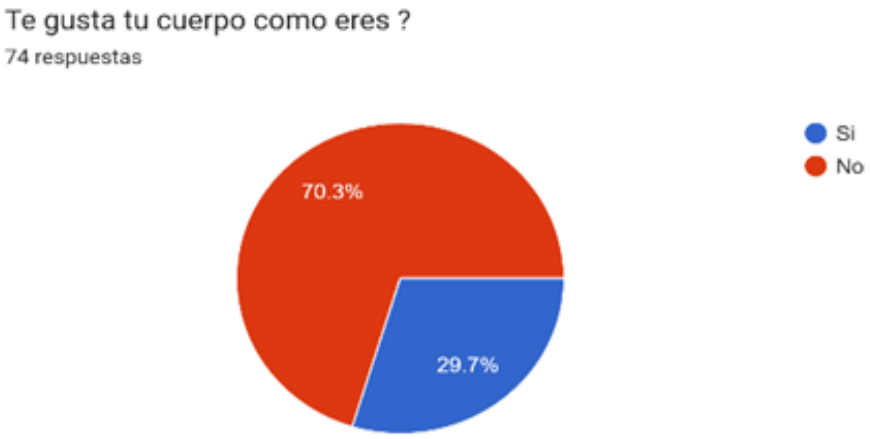

Figure 6. Do you like your body the way you are?

Figure 7. Do you have excessive preoccupation with your body?

Figure 8. Do you compare your body with other people's on social networks?

The results obtained from the survey distributed via WhatsApp and Instagram are presented here. The survey included 74 people from Brazil and Argentina, 83,8 % female and 16,2 % male. The survey consisted of 23 questions that analyzed body image on social media, eating disorders, methods used for weight loss, and how social media affects these issues. The age range was between 15 and 35 years old, and the results were well distributed, mainly between 20 and 35 years old with 25,7 %, 29,7 %, and 32,4 %, with the majority between 20 and 25 years old with 32,4 %. The 15-20 age group participated the least in the questionnaire, accounting for only 12,2 %.

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Figure 9. How often do you compare your body with those you see on social networks?

The most used social networks were Instagram (82,4 %) and TikTok (13,5 %). The frequency of use was highest between 3-4 hours (29,7 %) and more than 5 hours (24,3 %) per day.

Comparison of images on social media and Photoshop:

Figure 10. How do you feel about your body when you see other people's images on these social networks?

Figure 10 shows how people view images of other people on social media and how they feel about their bodies. 59,5 % feel dissatisfied, 18,9 % are not affected, 13,5 % feel sad, and 8,1 % feel fine.

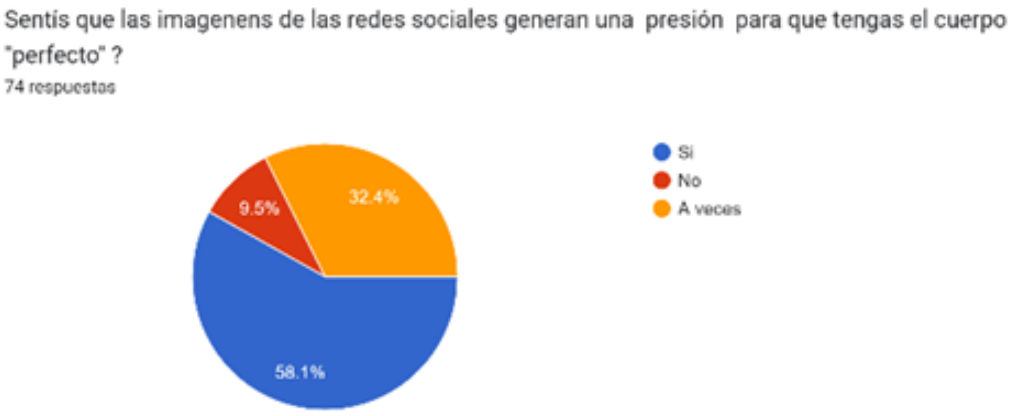

Figure 11. Do you feel that the images on social networks generate pressure to have the perfect body?

Figure 11 analyzes the question: do you feel that images on social media create pressure to have the perfect body? The results were: 58,1 % yes, 32,4 % sometimes, and 9,5 % unaffected.

Figure 12 asks if respondents have ever felt insecure about posting a photo because of fear or embarrassment about their bodies. The results were 82,4 % yes and only 17,6 % no.

Figure 12. Have you ever felt insecure about posting a picture because of fear or embarrassment about your body?

Figure 13. Do you usually use filters or Photosghop on your photos before posting them?

Figure 13 asked: do you use filters or Photoshop on your photos before posting them? The results were 44,6 % no, 33,8 % sometimes, and 21,6 % yes, they use filters.

Feeling good in front of the mirror and diets:

Figure 14. How important is it for you to be or look thin in front of the mirror?

The results for looking thin in the mirror were 61,6 % very important, 30,1 % not very important, and 8,2 % not important.

Figure 15 analyzes whether social media influences people to go on a diet. The results were: 64,9 % are influenced, and 35,1 % are not. Of the 64,9 %, only 18,5 % follow up with a nutritionist, and 81,5 % do not follow up with a professional, as shown in figure 16.

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Figure 15. Have social networks influenced you to go on a diet?

Figure 16. If your answer was Yes: Do you often go to a nutritionist?

Figure 17. Have you ever isolated yourself from society because you felt you were overweight?

Figure 17 shows whether anyone has ever isolated themselves from society because they feel overweight. The results were that 63 % did not isolate themselves, and 37 % did.

Eating disorder:

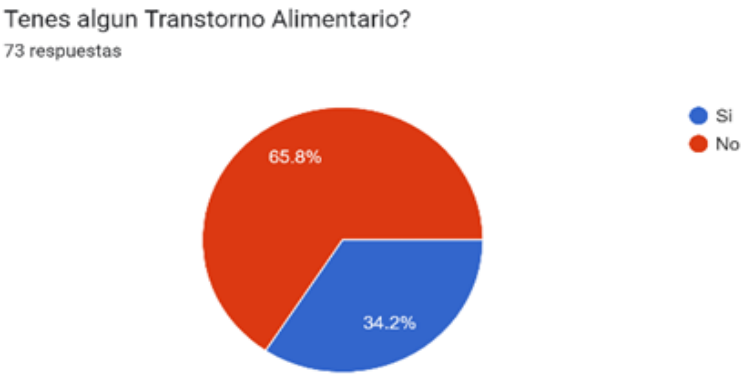

Figure 18. Do you have any Eating Disorder?

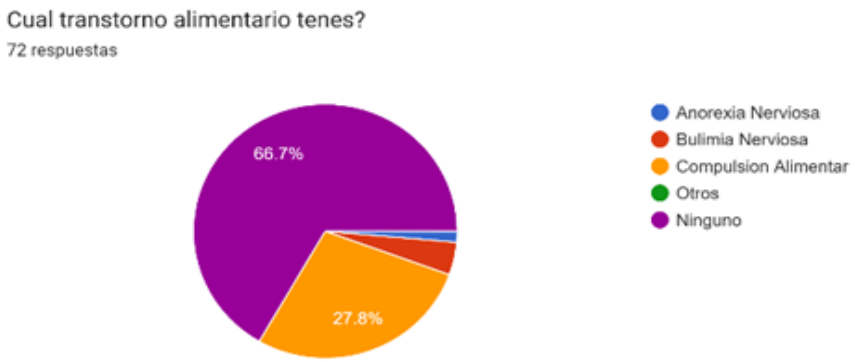

Figure 19. What eating disorder do you have?

The results of the figure 18 show that 65,8 % do not have eating disorders and that 34,2 % suffer from the disorder. Figure 19 shows which eating disorders people suffer from, with 66,7 % having none, 27,8 % having compulsive eating, 4,2 % having bulimia nervosa, and 1,4 % having anorexia nervosa.

Figure 20. Have you ever undergone any cosmetic procedure to improve your appearance?

Figure 21. Have you ever taken extreme measures for weight loss?

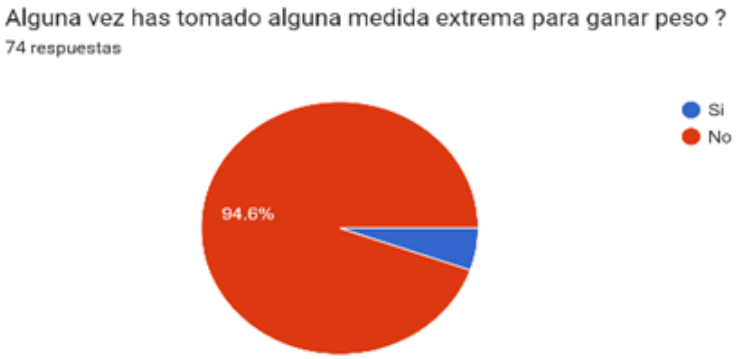

Figure 22. Have you ever taken any extreme measures to gain weight?

Figure 23. Have you ever felt guilty after a meal?

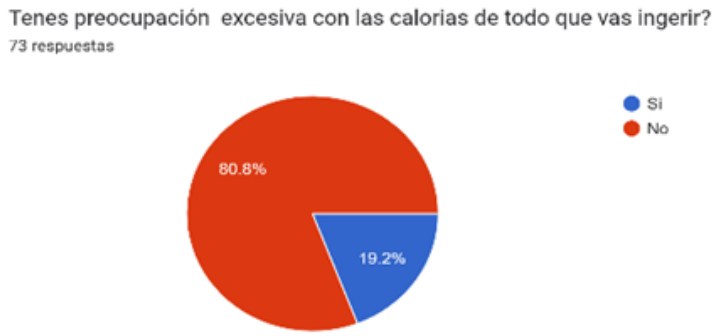

Figure 24. Do you have excessive concern with the calories of everything you eat?

In search of more results on the subject, additional questions were asked, as shown in the first graph: whether they had ever undergone any cosmetic procedures to improve their appearance. The results were that 54,1 % had not undergone any procedures and 45,9 % had undergone procedures.

Figure 21 shows the results on whether people have ever taken extreme measures to lose weight: 47,3 % did not use anything, 28,4 % have used weight loss medications, 12,2 % prolonged fasting, 5,4 % induced vomiting, 4,1 % laxatives, and 2,7 % diuretics. Figure 22 shows whether people have taken extreme measures to gain weight, and as expected, the results were that 94,6 % did not, and only 5,4 % did.

Figure 23 shows whether someone has ever felt guilty after a meal, and the results were that 75,7 % have felt guilty, and 24,3 % have not. The fifth graph asks if someone has shown excessive concern about the calories in everything they eat, and the results were 80,8 % no and 19,2 % yes, which is the smallest number of people.

DISCUSSION

The survey results regarding body dissatisfaction due to comparison on social media are more prevalent among females, which is consistent with the studies I read.[1,5,6] This is due to frequent use of social media, where the more time you spend on social media, the greater the body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem.[6,7] This frequent exposure to content more related to aesthetics and not so much to health makes people start to believe that the ideal of beauty is what is seen in photos posted by influencers who seek perfection through the intense use of filters and Photoshop; this leads to an idealization of physical appearance with something that is not even real, leading to irreversible changes such as plastic surgery, which is what the author comments on [8], fad diets, body treatments, and weight loss products so that they do not feel ashamed or insecure when posting a photo, and in this way achieve the standards of beauty.[9]

When it comes to social media and the slim body, there is an apparent discrepancy between the real body and the ideal body, as people always seek to show the best image of themselves on social media. This is where fitspiration[3] comes in, making thinness synonymous with beauty and influencing people to go on diets without nutritional support or seek other extreme measures, such as the use of laxatives, diuretics, prolonged fasting, induced vomiting, and weight loss medications, all to achieve the “ideal” thin body. Another point to highlight is that it is not only women who are affected by body dissatisfaction but also men, although to a lesser extent. Men are concerned about their muscles and physical strength, seeking ways to achieve their desired body through excessive gym training and even anabolic steroids.

Another critical point to note about eating disorders is that body dissatisfaction is a strong predictor of the development of disorders, as observed by the author in his study r.[3] Social media, such as Instagram, which was one of the most used networks in the survey, acts indirectly on eating disorders. In other words, what social media directly generates are effects related to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, which may or may not end up leading to eating disorders. This can be seen in the survey results and their relationship with the study conducted[1,10] by the authors, where the majority of women in the survey are dissatisfied with their bodies and seek thinness but do not have eating disorders.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows how the use of social media can influence body dissatisfaction, predominantly in women, leading to low self-esteem and a disconnect between the real body and an unreal one. This leads us to think about how much time we spend every day on social media, which can lead us to believe everything we see and look for imperfections in ourselves, thus becoming obsessed with changing our image through surgery, filters, and Photoshop, just to fit into a beauty standard that is not real and is only ideal for society.

Therefore, through this research, I aim to show the adverse effects that excessive use of social media can have on our minds, leading us to constant comparisons, low self-esteem, and even the development of eating disorders and body image distortion.

A helpful tool that I found is the conscious use of social media and managing it dynamically for less time through body positivity and body neutrality, movements that seek acceptance and validation of different bodies with their distinct characteristics: no makeup, stretch marks, cellulite, blemishes, wrinkles, among others. This can positively impact ourselves and our relationship with our body and mind, helping us overcome the obstacle of the beauty standard imposed by society.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Data curation: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.
Methodology: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.
Software: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.
Writing - original draft: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.
Writing - proofreading and editing: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

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