

ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEAUTY STANDARDS IMPOSED BY SOCIAL MEDIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE POSSIBLE FORMATION OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN YOUNG WOMEN

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Abstract: Goal: The objective of this research was to analyze the relationship between anxiety and depression in young women aged 18 to 26 and the beauty standards imposed by social networks. **Methods:** The study carried out is a quantitative, exploratory, descriptive research, in which an online questionnaire was administered to women in this age group. The analysis of the questionnaire results was carried out using a scale based on the diagnostic criteria established by the DSM-5, with regard to the disorders under study. **Results:** The questionnaire responses of 191 women were analyzed, who predominantly chose the options where it is possible to observe a greater concern with the standard of beauty imposed by social networks and their incessant search for this utopian image presented. **Conclusions:** This analysis, combined with other studies collected, highlights the constant female concern with the standards imposed by social networks, and what can result from this incessant search for unattainable beauty, such as eating and sleeping disorders, in addition to developing or worsening conditions of depression and anxiety.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Social Networks, Beauty.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, beauty culture has been constantly reaffirmed and sought after, regardless of the period in which it was experienced. As the years progressed, mirrors, widely used by the former elite, transformed into digitized forms and began to be reproduced by cell phone cameras. Therefore, the acclaimed selfie is one of the most used terms currently on social media, being a neologism coming from the word “self-portrait”, which means self-portrait in the English language.^{1,2,3}

This way, the demands for a stereotypical

and perfectionist standard of beauty became normal, and the search for this utopian model led to excessive demands on society, generating feelings of insecurity and sadness when ideal standards are not met. According to a digital detox survey by Scope of 1,500 social media users, almost a third of respondents say they feel lonely when looking at their feed. Another article, carried out by BBC News in the United Kingdom in 2017, states that Instagram is the social network considered the most influential on the mental health of young people, as it is considered the application where social perfection is most imposed and physical⁴.

The unrealistic and utopian expectations imposed by these beauty standards lead to a reduction in self-esteem and, consequently, to feelings such as depression and anxiety. These diseases are defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as psychiatric disorders that directly influence the lifestyle of their victims and, when left untreated, can lead to emotional instability, phobias and possibly suicide.^{5,6,7}

METHODS

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

The participant sample is made up of 191 young women between the ages of 18 and 26, who were invited to answer an online questionnaire on the Google Forms platform. Exclusion criteria include males and females outside the age range established for the research.

MEASUREMENTS

The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire composed of questions that seek answers to the project's questions/problems. This was approved by the Ethics Committee with opinion number 5,488,180.

The analysis of the research results was done through the selection of some diagnostic

criteria established by the DSM-5 with regard to depression and anxiety. The questionnaire consists of 11 questions, among which there are 6 answer options:

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Almost never
- 2 - Sometimes
- 3 - Regularly
- 4 - Almost always
- 5 - Always

The selected DSM-5 criteria for comparison were as follows:

Persistent Depressive Disorder
(Dysthymia)

- Criterion B. Presence, while depressed, of two (or more) of the following characteristics:
 1. Decreased appetite or overeating.
 2. Insomnia or hypersomnia.
 3. Low energy or fatigue.
 4. Low self-esteem.
 5. Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions.
 6. Feelings of hopelessness.
- Criterion H. Symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, professional functioning or other important areas of the individual's life.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder:

- Criterion C. Anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some of them present on most days in the past six months).
 1. Restlessness or feeling of being on edge.
 2. Fatigability.
 3. Difficulty concentrating or "blank" sensations in the mind.
 4. Irritability.
 5. Muscle tension.
 6. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or unsatisfactory and restless sleep).

- Criterion D. The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning in the individual's life.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Final Considerations at the discretion of the C.E.P.: We consider the research approved in accordance with CNS Resolution 466/2012. Opinion number: 5,488,180

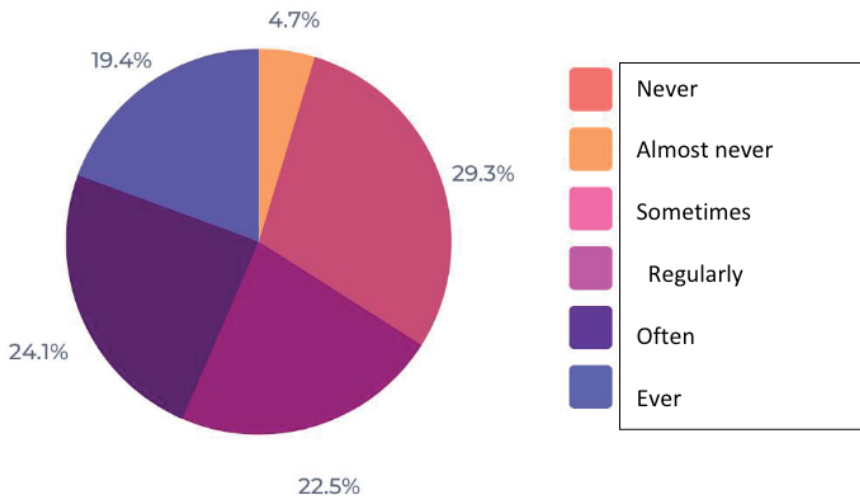
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The idealization of the "perfect body" imposed by society means that women are constantly trying to fit into aesthetic standards that are often unattainable. A highly relevant factor that promotes this idea is the exploration of the image of the female body as a product, through social media. As a consequence, many women compromise their mental health by always striving to achieve what is considered perfect.⁸

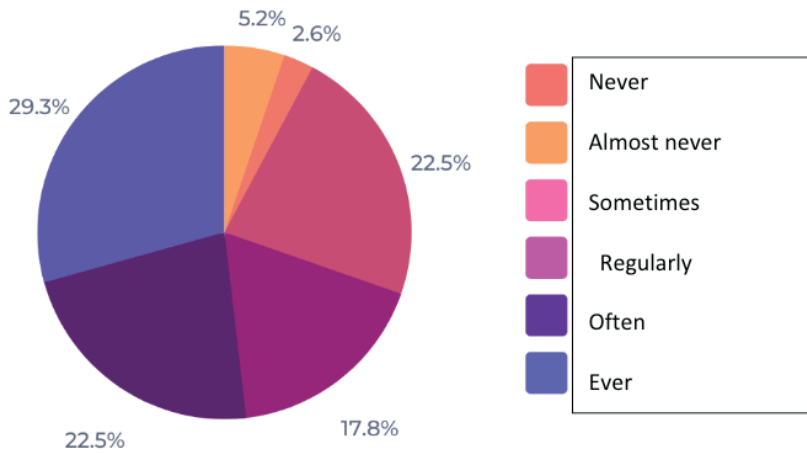
Therefore, the most relevant graphs for the research were gathered, which demonstrate the influence of social media on the well-being of young women:

Analyzing the graph above, it is possible to observe that around 66% of women who responded to the survey feel anxiety and worry most of the time due to the standards imposed by the media. In this way, it is clear that the "perfect reality" presented on social networks generates feelings of incapacity and insecurity when the individual realizes that they will not be able to reach the proposed standard, which can result in disorders such as anxiety and depression.^{5,6}

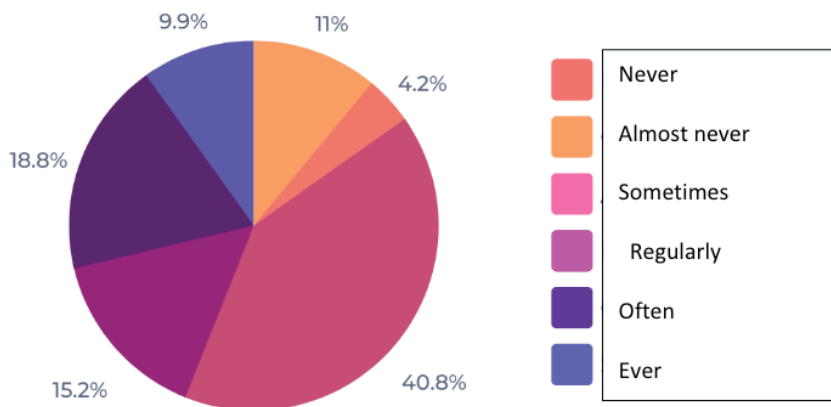
Other responses collected through these graphics demonstrated how beauty culture and its extremely high and unattainable standards resulted in greater female insecurity, creating uncertainty in society. According to the results



Graph 1. Women who have already felt anxiety and worry due to the standards imposed by social media.



Graph 2. Women who have stopped publishing something on social media for fear of not meeting standards.



Graph 3. Women who have felt irritable when using social media and realized that perhaps they do not fit the standards.

of this survey, around 43% of participants indicated that they had stopped leaving home for fear of not meeting the imposed standards.

With this in mind, the distortion of one's own body and the shame of one's self-image take on drastic proportions to the point that they begin to influence both the social and professional spheres. The fear of not fitting into a specific stereotype, created and idealized as a "fake perfect" affects women's lives so intensely that it even harms their social relationships, bringing a constant feeling of discomfort towards themselves and their body images.^{9,10} In view of this, this research can demonstrate the large number of women who have already felt and observed losses in their lives due to the standards imposed, with a predominance of 44.5% of affirmative responses when approached about this topic.

Furthermore, it is documented in the literature that overweight and obese women experience greater pressure to fit into beauty models required during job interviews. This, in addition to the fact that they already feel insecure about themselves, and set themselves a standard that they will never reach, corroborates insecurities related to professional pre-judgment and social exclusion.¹¹

The answers to the question "Have you ever lost opportunities (professional or social) because of the insecurity of not meeting the standards required by social media?" carried out within this survey surprisingly resulted in approximately 30% of affirmative answers to this question, and 26% of "Sometimes" answers, demonstrating how media standards have the power to influence even professional situations.

It is clear how the media has a strong influence on posts on social networks, as around 70% of the responses were positive, demonstrating the fear of not fitting into the imposed standard. This insecurity comes

especially from what is promoted by big brands, which modify images, faces and bodies of people so that they reach a desirable standard, making the merchandise to be sold more coveted. Therefore, many women begin to consume these products seeking to achieve the perfect image, and when, when comparing themselves with the created standard, they realize that they are not achieving it, they transform this frustration into feelings of anxiety and depression, which can lead to disorders both bodily and sleep disorders^{12,13}.

In view of this, it is clear how concern about beauty standards has become a nuisance for most participants. This is because, when feeling constantly judged by society, women end up worrying too much about their appearance in search of social approval, as demonstrated by the prevalence of positive responses on the research topic "Do you find it difficult to control your concern because of the standards imposed by social media?", bringing around 80% of affirmative responses¹⁵. In order to achieve the unrealistic standards imposed, many individuals feel frustrated and dissatisfied, which can lead to the development of health problems, both physical and mental¹⁴.

The discomfort felt by participants using social media becomes visible when we analyze the graph above. With a predominant percentage of positive responses of 43.9%, and around 40.8% occurring "a few times" in these women's lives, it is possible to observe the influence of the standards imposed on them. These feelings of insecurity and irritability come especially from what is seen, desired, but not achieved, such as the perfect body of a model who appears in bikini advertisements or the flawless skin of an actress in a publication on Instagram^{15, 16}. This leads to both physical and mental exhaustion, resulting in fatigability and tiredness, as evidenced in the topic "Have you ever felt fatigability (tiredness,

weakness) when using social media?” brought by this research, which presented around 68% of affirmative answers.

These images published on social networks often do not represent reality, since photo and video manipulation programs are used, and as a result a utopian and unattainable standard is disseminated, which simulates ideal beauty standards and “perfect” lives 16, 17. Therefore, the incessant search for surreal beauty leads to the search for aesthetic procedures that aim to enable the user to achieve the idealized body, and when they realize that they will never fit into the standard proposed by the media, female society, feeling powerless in the face of In this situation, you can develop both anxiety and depression 18.

CONCLUSION

In short, it becomes evident from this research that the beauty standards considered perfect by social media directly or indirectly influence the well-being and daily lives of young women. These, therefore, become frequently connected to their social networks, which can lead to feelings of sadness and anxiety, in addition to psychological and mental exhaustion, which can harm both their social and professional life at some point.

INTEREST CONFLICTS

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