

Effectiveness of Body Image–Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on Body Image, Social Physique Anxiety, and Appearance-Related Social Comparison Among Young Women Attending Fitness Clubs and Active on Social Media

Boshra. Mohamadi¹, Azita. Chehri^{2*}

¹ M.A. in General Psychology, Department of Psychology, Ker.C., Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Ker.C., Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: azita.chehri@iau.ac.ir

E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
Seyed Hamid Atashpour Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran hamidatashpour@gmail.com	Reviewer 1: Hajar Torkan Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch (Khorasgan), Isfahan, Iran. h.torkan@khuisf.ac.ir Reviewer 2: Farhad Namjoo Department of Psychology and Counseling, KMAN Research Institute, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. Email: farhadnamjoo@kmanresce.ca

1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction paragraph beginning with “The influence of social media on body image is not uniform...”, the manuscript appropriately discusses image-based platforms but should distinguish between general social media use and appearance-focused social media engagement. The current argument occasionally implies that duration of social media use itself is harmful, whereas the cited literature increasingly emphasizes content type, passive versus active use, appearance-related engagement, and social comparison. The authors should revise statements such as “repeated exposure to such content may distort perceptions of normative appearance” by explicitly identifying the relevant exposure mechanisms and avoiding overly broad causal interpretations.

In the Introduction paragraph beginning with “Social comparison theory provides one of the most important frameworks...”, the theoretical framework should be made more explicit. The manuscript explains upward and downward comparison but does not clearly formulate how social comparison is expected to connect the three study outcomes. The authors should articulate a conceptual pathway in which exposure to idealized appearance content increases upward appearance comparison, which may

subsequently contribute to poorer body image and greater social physique anxiety. This would substantially improve the coherence between the theoretical background, the intervention components, and the dependent variables.

In the same participant paragraph, the eligibility criterion requiring scores “below the theoretical midpoint on the body image measure and above the theoretical midpoint on the Social Physique Anxiety Scale” should be justified. The authors need to explain why these specific cutoffs were selected and whether they have established clinical or psychometric meaning. A theoretical midpoint is not necessarily a validated screening threshold. In addition, it should be clarified whether participants also had to demonstrate elevated appearance comparison or whether only body image and social physique anxiety were used for screening. Without this information, the sampling procedure may introduce range restriction and affect generalizability.

In the Methods statement that participants had “no severe psychological disorders or other conditions that could substantially influence the study outcomes,” the assessment procedure is unclear. The authors should specify how psychiatric exclusion criteria were evaluated. If this determination was based only on self-report, it should be stated explicitly; if a clinical interview or screening instrument was used, the instrument, administrator, and diagnostic criteria should be reported. Likewise, “other conditions” is too vague for reproducible methodology and should be replaced by a predefined list of exclusion conditions relevant to body image or participation in CBT.

In the MBSRQ paragraph beginning with “Body image was assessed using the Multidimensional Body–Self Relations Questionnaire...”, there is an important measurement issue that requires clarification. The cited Persian validation by Hasanpoor-Azghady et al. concerns the MBSRQ-Appearance Scales, whereas the manuscript describes a 46-item version containing appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body areas satisfaction, fitness evaluation, fitness orientation, and overweight preoccupation. The authors should verify that the cited validation corresponds exactly to the version administered. They should also specify precisely how the total “body image” score was calculated because the MBSRQ is multidimensional and some domains, such as appearance orientation or

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Introduction paragraph discussing fitpiration and stating that “fitness-oriented social media content introduces an additional layer of complexity”, the manuscript should more clearly justify why women who both attend fitness clubs and actively use social media constitute a theoretically distinctive group. The current discussion treats gym attendance and social media exposure as parallel appearance pressures, but their interaction is not fully developed. The authors should explain whether fitness-club participation is hypothesized to amplify body surveillance, expose individuals to additional comparison targets, or alternatively provide protective experiences through competence and physical functionality. This distinction is particularly important because exercise can have either favorable or unfavorable associations with body image depending on motivation and context.

In the final paragraphs of the Introduction, the research gap should be stated more precisely. The sentence indicating that “few intervention studies have simultaneously examined body image, social physique anxiety, and appearance-related social comparison” is plausible but presently too general. The authors should identify exactly what is novel about the present study: whether novelty lies in the Iranian context, the population of female fitness-club members, the integration of media literacy into CBT, the simultaneous examination of three appearance-related outcomes, or the direct targeting of social-media-related comparison processes. A sharper gap statement would strengthen the scientific contribution and prevent the study from appearing as a conventional pretest–posttest CBT evaluation.

In the Methods paragraph beginning with “The present study was applied in terms of its objectives and employed a quasi-experimental design...”, the terminology regarding study design requires correction. Participants were reportedly “randomly assigned” to experimental and control groups after purposive recruitment. If group allocation was genuinely randomized, the design has an experimental component and should not automatically be labeled quasi-experimental without explanation. The

authors should clarify whether randomization was performed using a random-number generator, sealed envelopes, drawing lots, or another procedure, who generated the allocation sequence, and whether allocation concealment was implemented. The manuscript should use design terminology consistent with the actual assignment procedure.

In the participant paragraph stating that “40 participants were enrolled and randomly assigned to either the experimental group ($n = 20$) or the control group ($n = 20$)”, no sample-size justification is presented. This is a major methodological limitation. The authors should report an a priori power analysis or another defensible sample-size determination procedure, specifying the assumed effect size, α level, statistical power, number of groups, and number of dependent variables or covariates. Because MANCOVA with several dependent variables and covariates can be sensitive to small samples, the adequacy of $n = 40$ should be explicitly demonstrated rather than assumed.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.