

HEART RATE AND SKIN CONDUCTANCE RESPONSES IN LOW VS. HIGH BODY-DISSATISFIED WOMEN EXPOSED TO THEIR OWN BODY IN A MIRROR

Fátima Servian-Franco, Silvia Moreno-Domínguez, & Gustavo A Reyes del Paso
University of Jaén, Spain

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Weight and shape concerns are widespread in the general population. Mirror exposure has been used to reduce body dissatisfaction but little is known about the mechanisms which underlie this therapeutic technique. The present study examined psychophysiological (heart rate and skin conductance), emotional, and cognitive responses in high and low body dissatisfied women exposed to their own body in a mirror. Forty-one university women (21 high body-dissatisfied, 20 low body-dissatisfied) were confronted with their own body during four 5-min trials in which the participants were instructed to focus their attention on different parts of their body under standardized conditions. Heart rate and skin conductance were recorded continuously. Emotion and cognition measures were taken after each exposure trial. Results showed that high body-dissatisfied women experienced stronger increases in negative emotions and cognitions to the body exposure compared to low body-dissatisfied women but, conversely, they showed a reduced physiological reaction compared to the low body-dissatisfaction group. Emotional and negative cognitions were positively associated with heart rate and/or skin conductance in low body-dissatisfied women whereas no associations were observed in high body-dissatisfied women. These results suggest the existence of a passive-behavioral inhibited coping style in high body-dissatisfied woman and deficiencies in the generation of physiological correlates of emotions in relation to body dissatisfaction.

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