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Posting Selfies on Social Media: The Role of Appearance-Contingent Self-Worth

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In this “two-part study”, women’s motivation to post *selfies*, defined as self-taken photographs of only themselves, and the impact of feedback received on these images on self-esteem was investigated. In Study I, it was hypothesized that women higher in appearance-contingent self-worth would post selfies on social media more frequently. Further, it was hypothesized that this would occur because women higher in appearance-contingent-self would have a stronger desire for positive appearance feedback, and that this would result in more frequent selfie posting, as this could be a means of soliciting positive feedback. In Study II, it was hypothesized that women higher in appearance contingent self-worth would be more strongly impacted by receiving more or less likes than expected on a posted selfie than would women lower in appearance contingent self-worth given that this feedback could be perceived as being appearance-based. Data were collected from female undergraduate students who were recruited through the participant pool.

In Study I ($N = 297$), survey-based data were collected, and the results indicated that although the correlation between appearance-contingent self-worth and frequency of selfie posting was not significant, there was a significant indirect relationship through the desire to obtain positive appearance feedback. Thus, it appears that women higher in appearance-contingent self-worth have greater desire for appearance feedback, and in turn, post selfies more frequently. Although the focus of Study I was on selfie-posting, an exploratory analysis found that there was a significant relationship between appearance contingent self-worth and the extent to which women edit photographs of themselves. Further, the desire to obtain positive appearance feedback mediated this relationship. This suggests that editing photographs may be the truly appearance focused act, as posting selfies is only indirectly related to appearance contingent self-worth.

In Study II ($N = 175$), an experimental design was used to determine whether receiving more or less likes than expected on a posted selfie affected women's state appearance and social self-esteem and resulted in changes in women's global state self-esteem. The results indicated that receiving more or less likes than expected on a selfie affected changes in global self-esteem, such that women who received more likes than expected experienced increases in state global self-esteem. Appearance contingent self-worth was assessed as a moderator of these potential effects, but was not significant. However, appearance contingent self-worth affected the interpretation of women's number of received likes. Women higher in appearance contingent self-worth were more likely to attribute their number of received likes to their appearance than were women lower in appearance contingent self-worth.