Social Media Influence on Eating Behaviors
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Introduction
I am interested in the development of eating disorders and how social media plays a role. Nishizawa et al. (2003) looks at the influence of physique perception on eating behaviors and wanting to be thin. Wade and Lowes (2002) looks at perfectionism and body index as the primary influencers of the overvalued fixation on body image. However, there is no current research on Instagram pages influencing the eating behaviors of women.

Hypothesis 1:
People with body image anxiety are most likely to pick more healthier food items to eat than those who do not have body image anxiety.

Hypothesis 2:
People with no body image anxiety are most likely to pick more unhealthy food items to eat than those who have body image anxiety.

Method
• I had 11 participants view two different Instagram pages (a model’s and a “real” person) with a gap of 20-30 minutes in between both pages.
• After viewing the pages, they took a survey rating from 1-7 their desire to eat the food item written if presented at that moment.
• The sum of the scores for each food item in Unhealthy, Healthy, and Neutral food groups gave me the statistics I needed to run my analysis.

Results
A paired samples t test was calculated to compare the mean unhealthy food items of page A to the mean unhealthy food items of page B. The mean of the unhealthy food items of Page A was 9.2000 (SD = 3.45768), and the mean on the unhealthy food items of Page B was 13.4000 (SD = 2.71621). A significant difference from page A to page B was found (t(9) = -3.042, p = .014).

A paired samples t test was calculated to compare the mean healthy food items of page A to the mean healthy food items of page B. The mean on the healthy food items of Page A was 13.2000 (SD = 4.91709), and the mean on the healthy food items of Page B was 12.4000 (SD = 4.06065). No significant difference from Page A to Page B was found (t(9) = .840, p > .05).

A paired samples t test was calculated to compare the mean neutral food items of page A to the mean neutral food items of page B. The mean on the neutral food items of Page A was 12.5000 (SD = 4.17000), and the mean on the neutral food items of Page B was 12.5000 (SD = 4.24918). No significant difference from Page A to Page B was found (t(9) = .000, p > .05).

Discussion
• There seemed to be a significant difference between looking at a model’s Instagram page (which society deems perfect) and a “real” person on the choice of eating more or less unhealthy food items.
• I found there was less desire to eat unhealthy foods after viewing the model’s page.
• There was no difference in neutral food items, which I did expect considering they were universal (neither bad or good, normal).
• Surprisingly there was no difference between the healthy food items for the two pages.
• My limitations of this study are the small sample size and not true randomization of participants in the study.
• This study shows the importance of social media usage and the influence it has.
• The influence is important to acknowledge because of the effect it may later have on abnormal eating behaviors (eating disorders).

References