

How Social Media Affects Body Image in Young Women

Alyssa Wallech

WITH THE USE of social media becoming so popular in this generation, young women are feeling insecure due to unrealistic beauty standards. They are comparing themselves to images of other women, attempting to edit their pictures, and developing unhealthy eating habits to achieve “thinness.” Oversexualized images on social media may be another culprit of objectifying women as well. These factors may influence young women to digitally alter their bodies, to shrink their waist, increase their breast size, remove their blemishes and slim their waists all in the hopes of validation from others. This idea of image editing influences people’s belief that women are objects while also creating unattainable bodies. Although social media provides widespread communication and other helpful information among young people, research has shown that the constant viewing of certain media negatively affects women’s body image, physical health, and mental well-being.

Our society has been greatly influenced by the media’s objectification and over-sexualization of women. The article “Why Don’t I Look Like Her?” by Alana Papageorgiou, Colleen Fisher, and Donna Cross reveals that sexualized pictures online can increase body dysmorphia and objectification of women in the media. This can result in young females feeling insecure

about their appearance and that “their value is based on their appearance” (Papageorgiou et al. 1). While there are some positive effects of social media usage, such as “increased peer connection and support, and opportunities to learn” (Papageorgiou et al. 1), it also has impacted adolescents’ mental health such as depression and eating disorders.

A qualitative study was conducted in Perth, Western Australia to “explore the unique perspectives of adolescent girls using one-on-one in-depth interviews to elicit their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences” (Papageorgiou et al. 3). The objection theory was used in this study to grasp the understanding of the effects of being a woman in today’s society where they are sexualized. In this research, twenty-four young girls between the ages of 14 through 17 from an Australian student organization were studied. The participants used active social media for one or more hours a day and were then interviewed with open-ended questions using a snowball sampling method. Researchers use the snowball method to find additional subjects by asking their participants if they know anyone who would be a good fit for the study. During the interview process which was recorded and transcribed, adolescents were asked questions concerning their “relation to publicly available images of celebrities

from Instagram using third person disclosures” (Papageorgiou et al. 4). By using this method, it revealed personal experiences, which unfortunately caused some discomfort to the participants. The participants reported that a reason why sexualized images may affect them was because of “self-objectification whereby females internalize an observer’s perspective as a primary view of themselves and their bodies” (Papageorgiou et al 3).

Through conducting this experiment, the researchers were able to conclude that the participants did in fact feel self-conscious and insecure about their bodies from using Instagram. They were able to find a link between social media use, and unhealthy body images which may cause young girls to seek validation through likes and comments, resulting in edited pictures of one’s body. One other possible reason why social media may be negatively affecting young women’s mental health is through the roles of “selfie feedback.”

Selfies are images taken by individuals to capture their self-portraits to post on popular media sites like Instagram. The role of social media is to interact and stay connected with your peers, so when individuals are posting selfies online, it is to put their self-image of themselves for peers to see. Young women will go to great lengths to make sure they provide the best version of themselves to receive comments of praise and compliments along with likes. While it seems like a harmless task, it results in both positive and negative feedback on the physical appearance of an individual.

The article “Body Surveillance on Instagram,” by Chelsea Butkowski, Travis Dixon, and Kristopher Weeks, discusses “how value placed on selfie feedback among young women relates to markers of body image disturbance, including body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and bulimia action tendencies” (Butkowski et al.

385). Social media is a common cause of disordered eating habits such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa, both life-threatening diseases. Young girls have the desire to achieve “thinness” through extreme diets and weight loss methods which is identified as anorexia. Bulimia is when an individual will eat an excessive amount of food followed by purging. Body dissatisfaction is the negative evaluation of one’s self-body image. All three of these factors are consequences of the use of social media.

A study examined how selfie feedback among young women can lead to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. One hundred and seventeen English-speaking women between the ages of 18 through 30 were contacted by Mturk to participate in an online survey. To participate in the experiment, participants were required to be females and have a public Instagram account with at least ten selfies posted. The researchers tested the role of likes and comments young women receive on their selfies and how their body image could be influenced. Two hypotheses were proposed: firstly, investment in selfie feedback will have only a positive correlation, or secondly will have both a positive and negative effect on body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Researchers stated that “the more highly invested individuals are in Instagram selfie feedback the more likely they will be to experience disordered eating symptoms” (Butkowski et al. 389).

This study examined behaviors regarding social media feedback that would play a negative role in body image among young women. Researchers believed that investment in selfie feedback would positively affect body dissatisfaction, the drive for thinness, and bulimia. However, bulimia was not directly correlated with selfie feedback. Results show how the effect of body surveillance behaviors and selfie feedback investment could cause body dissatisfaction and

the desire for thinness. Furthermore, new studies could expand on the current study's focus on selfie feedback by creating and using more thorough quantitative measures of attitudes and behaviors linked to social media feedback across and within social networks. Another study created is appearance related social media consciousness.

In the article "Camera-Ready: Young Women's Appearance-Related Social Media Consciousness (ASMC)" by Sophia Choukas-Bradley, Jacqueline Nesi, Laura Widman, and M.K Higgins, question how is ASMC related to women's constant wondering whether or not she appears attractive to an online following. While using social media, physical appearance can be an important aspect for many young women as it influences their well-being due to unrealistic beauty standards. Recent studies have shown that "specific photo-related online behaviors and attitudes may be more important for body esteem than overall time spent online" (Choukas et al. 7). To be specific, selfies are shown to have a higher risk of body image concerns.

The study investigated the conditions and causes of ASMC with a focus on depression and body image issues. Using the objection theory, researchers were able to provide a helpful foundation for understanding how women perceive themselves to an online audience. In a culture where women are viewed as sexual objects, young girls are being brainwashed to believe their physical appearance does not meet society's beauty standards. With social media becoming more prevalent in young women's everyday lives, photos are being altered to fulfill the beauty "standard" leading to peers comparing themselves.

This research used previous literature and other sources to investigate how "awareness of the social media audience may intrude into her offline experiences in the form of thoughts about how physically

attractive she may look in social media photos"(Choukas et al. 8) in young women. Three hundred-thirty women between the ages of 18 and 19, who were enrolled in a psychology class in large southern colleges, participated in this study. Participants completed a 45-minute survey to report their "time spent on social media, ASMC, body surveillance, body comparison, body esteem, and depressive symptoms" (Choukas et al. 9). Researchers examined how often one may use social media and participate in appearance-related social media consciousness (ASMC), zero to ten hours a day was the average reported time. The researchers used a path analysis method, ASMC, and body image concerns and signs of depression were studied to find a correlation between the three factors.

The results show "the importance of this construct for young women's psychological experiences: ASMC was common in this sample, and higher levels were associated with maladaptive correlates" (Choukas et al. 14). Young women who responded to higher ASMC were more likely to have lower self-esteem, body comparison, and depression. Only one participant reported not having experienced ASMC, while 99.7% of young girls suggested experiencing it. This study revealed that the social media adolescent girls are viewing have more of an impact on their body-related issues, rather than the amount of time spent online. Knowing what young girls are viewing on social media will help with their mental health and may reduce ASMC.

With the introduction and popularization of technologies like the handheld phone and the rapidly growing consumerism that has taken hold of the current generation, it is no surprise that so many young women are developing many different forms of unhealthy habits with dieting, exercising, etc. The intention of this paper was to inform and present information

about the negative impacts that social media has on young women in the hopes that someone can learn about forming a healthy perception of one's self-worth through their own actions and thoughts, rather than having their personal worth tied to a social media account and how many likes one is

getting. Despite the fact that young people frequently communicate through social media, research has found that women's body image, physical health, and mental well-being are significantly affected by constant exposure to particular media and validation from peers on Instagram.

WORKS CITED

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