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Social Media and Ideal Body Image Representation

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Abstract

This research is an independent study of Social Media and Body Image representation focusing on 2015-2017 trends. Over the years, the issue on how the ‘ideal’ body image is represented on social media has created cause for concern about misrepresentation and health behaviors, but enough research hadn’t been conducted on the topic.

In the first section, the author defines body image and social media as simple terms to understand and also talks about the works that scholars have done on the topic. The first goal of the research is to find out the norms of presenting body image on social media. The second goal was no determine the extent of which these norm influence health behaviors of social media users.

The author also provides results from textual analysis and surveys based on 80 participants. The final section gives recommendation for future research and further readings.


**Literature Review**

Body Image is defined as a subjective picture of one’s own physical appearance established by both self-observation and by noting the reaction of others. (Merriam-Webster, 2002). The term body image was first coined by the Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder in his book *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1935). The reaction of others on body image can be widely observed through social media.

Social Media is explained as forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Webster, 2004).

Health and fitness related social media content has received significant media attention for often containing objectifying and inaccurate health messages (Carrotte *et al*, 2015). Over the years, social media and body image have been an issue of concern when both words are in context together, usually the role that social media plays on the body image perspectives i.e Ideal body image.

Various researches have been conducted in trying to understand the issues surrounding body image and social media intervention. It has been debated over time whether or not social media is detrimental to body image of individuals who actively participate in social media activities. In his article on sex roles, Perloff proposed a transactional model of social media effects on body image concerns that emphasizes the role played by individual vulnerability characteristics, gratifications sought from social media, and a host of mediating psychological processes. (Perloff, 2014). Commentators offered thoughtful responses to the model, pointing to strengths, but also targeting a number of areas for additional emphasis and ameliorative attention.
Research is needed to more fully evaluate youth’s experiences of online appearance culture and how this may foster both negative and positive peer interactions. Scholars have encouraged other researchers to broaden the scope of research on body image concerns and social media, through commentaries and thoughtful suggestions, which leads to the research questions involved in this study:

1. What are the norms of presenting body image on social media?
2. To what extent do these norms influence people’s health behaviors?

In this upcoming research, more studies which compare the influences on social media with other media forms as there is no clear evidence that social networking sites are more detrimental to one’s body image than other forms of media (Williams et al, 2014).

To add to the knowledge about social media and body image concerns, the two research questions above will be carefully studied since there is no current knowledge on these questions.

**Methodology**

**Textual Analysis:**

Instagram, and Snapchat. These two social media apps play a major role in promoting body image and fitness. There are numerous accounts with faces behind them that showcase their daily routines and general lifestyles. Fans and Followers keep up with these personalities and take these personalities lives as inspirations and huge influences over their own lifestyles. These three apps have shown the highest rate of body image activities, hence its inclusion for this analysis. Personalities who are the most followed on these sites will be studied as well as their contents on these sites.
INSTAGRAM- Instagram is a primarily a picture and video app which allows users to connect all over the world. Instagram allows users post 60 second videos and up to 10 photos at a time. Recently, they added the story feature, which allows users to post 15-second videos and pictures, which disappear after 24 hours.

Top 9 followed instagram accounts in the United States

-Selena Gomenz - 116 Million Followers (weight 59kg/130 lbs)
-Taylor Swift - 99.9 Million Followers (weight 54kg/119 lbs)
-Ariana Grande – 101 Million Followers (weight 47kg/104 lbs)
-Beyonce – 98.6 Million Followers (weight 62kg/137 lbs)
-Kim Kardashian – 97.3 Million Followers (weight 54.5kg/120 lbs)
-Kylie Jenner – 90.6 Million Followers (weight 63kg/139 lbs)
-Dwayne Johnson – 81.9 Million Followers (weight 119kg/262 lbs)
-Kendall Jenner – 77.7 Million Followers (weight 59kg/130 lbs)
-Nike – 70.5 Million Followers

(Source: Instagram.com, Healthyceleb.com)

All these celebrities mentioned above tend to have one thing in common; All the females weigh under 65kg and are regarded as fit and #bodygoals on the internet at large. They have the most liked pictures of Instagram and these pictures stem from make up shoots, to full body pictures, and gym pictures, which show the physique of these celebrities. Nike on the other hand is a fitness apparel brand, which happened to be one of the most followed Instagram account.
The most liked pictures and most viewed videos come from these celebrities. Apart from these celebrities, fitness accounts have a significant amount of views on videos and likes from fitness posts.

There has been a significant growth rate in the marketing area of Instagram as well. Beauty and Fitness products sales are rampant on this particular site.

Products that are being sold are listed below:

- Slimming Teas
- Waist Trainers/Corsets
- Slimming Sweat Suits
- Make Up Products

In this past year, this has been a trend on the feminine aspect of Instagram.

On the male section, promotion of growing beards and muscles are also rampant. This observational research lasted for 6 months between September 2016 and March 2017. Products like hair growth pills and body building supplements are being marketed as well. There is also the selling of faux beards, which allow for men to participate in the “ideal” facial hair for men on social media. This trend is known as (#beardgang).

SNAPCHAT- Snapchat is a story telling based app. This app allows its users to post pictures and 10-second videos each day narrating their daily activities. After 24 hours posts are automatically deleted for a fresh start of story telling. Snapchat connects users from different spheres in the world, it has various location geofilters which allow users post their locations, along side various animated filters, bitmojis and editing features which makes the app so fun to use. Recently, users
began to use their snapchat accounts to show their work out routines, meal-planning preparations, and make up tutorials.

Snapchat’s top user and most followed account DJ Khaled (@djkhaled305) is professionally known as a record producer and record label executive. However, on his snapchat account, he is popularly known for his daily motivational stories as he encourages people to go to the gym, eat right and his popular quote “Don’t you ever play yourself”.

(Source: Snapchat.com)

In January of 2017, Turbo Tax released an advertisement titled “DJ Khaled The Exercise Program G.” The advert portrayed DJ Khaled as a personal trainer, encouraging and motivating his trainees to work out harder. Turbo released this as a way to answer questions about tax implications of DJ Khaled’s new side hustle. Although DJ Khaled does not engage in healthy eating behaviors or actual work out routines, he encourages other people to do so, which is the irony this commercial is trying to portray. (Source: TurboTax.com)

These norms observed have a common thread- the promotion of self in a certain light through social media.

**Discussion**

Results from the textual analysis ponderously represents only a fraction females of the U.S. population, and scarcely and inadequately representing the males. Such result should not be ignored, contunuous research should be conducted in the next year to see if these trends stay the same or change in puny or gigantic strides. The realization of the top followed accounts on these social media sites is cause for concern and should be scrutinized further to clearly understand the momentousness of under representation or the lack of entirely.
Limitations

A facilitated focus group involving heavy social media consumers will delineate the extent to which mainstream body image on social media affects consumers more efficiently. The underrepresentation of men, fails to portray accurate results of body image and effects masculine users on social media. Accuracy is therefore faltered and could be more effective if accurate representation is available.

Appendices and Article Reviews


In an article in this issue of Sex Roles, I proposed a transactional model of social media effects on body image concerns that emphasizes the role played by individual vulnerability characteristics, gratifications sought from social media, and a host of mediating psychological processes. Commentators offered thoughtful responses to the model, pointing to strengths, but also targeting a number of areas for additional emphasis and ameliorative attention. This article, with a focus on the U.S. context, reviews each of the papers. It summarizes their main suggestions, and pulls together the host of forward-looking ideas, including the role played by cultural forces, the interplay between social and conventional mass media, and an emphasis on the salutary effects of social media on body image processes.

The article 'Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research' by Perloff () extends the study of media effects on women's body image concerns by including social media. His article is important because of the increasing use and unique nature of social media, and it can provide an avenue for future research. The main focus of this commentary is to critically examine the arguments of Perloff () and to provide suggestions on how to extend his model. We begin by emphasizing the importance of culture on body image and provide a theoretical extension based on the theoretical construct of self-construal. Next, we propose to differentiate social media use as motivated by general social media use (e.g., socializing and entertainment) from that driven by specific needs related to body image concerns (e.g., pro-eating disorder sites). In addition, we suggest differentiating mere exposure to content from the active use of social media, such as commenting and posting. Finally, we recommend advancing the research on body image beyond the thin ideal because body dissatisfaction can be related to various body parts (e.g., breast size, skin color, and eye shape), and we recommend including participants beyond adolescence, integrating multiple methods, and conducting research on interventions. The aim of this commentary is not to provide a framework for specific cultures or social contexts, but to offer suggestions that encourage researchers to broaden the scope of research on body image concerns.

3. Williams, Robert1, rjwilliams14@bigpond.com, and Lina2, lina.ricciardelli@deakin.edu.au Ricciardelli. "Social Media And Body Image Concerns: Further Considerations And Broader
In this paper we provide a commentary on Perloff's theoretical perspectives and agenda for research that examines the effects of social media on young women's body image concerns. Social media are the main form of mass media being used by the youth of today, and researchers in the U.S. and Australia have commenced studying how these may be affecting body image concerns. However, the processes underlying how social media may influence young people's body image appear to be no different from underlying other forms of mass media. Research is needed to more fully evaluate youth's experiences of online appearance culture and how this may foster both negative and positive peer interactions. We also need more studies which compare the influences on social media with other media forms as there is no clear evidence that social networking sites and other forms of social media are more detrimental to one's body image than other forms of media. We also consider factors that may protect young people from internalizing appearance ideals that are promoted by the mass media. In addition, we consider broader conceptualizations of body image so that a wider range of human experiences can be studied.


This commentary in response to Perloff () suggests considerations for studying social media's potential influence on body image. These are derived from Perloff's transactional model of social
media and body image. In investigating how social media use may influence body dissatisfaction in the United States, scholars should consider how the purposes and functions of social media differentiate them from traditional media effects theories. Individuals may be more likely to encounter unsought messages in social media than in traditional media. Social media messages have the potential to present much more diverse representations of female and male bodies because they are mostly produced and disseminated by individuals. Finally, social media offer the ability to reach a variety of at-risk groups with media literacy training. Media literacy training educates audiences about the purposes of messages, which can increase skepticism and possibly reduce message effects. Thus, media literacy training may address the media-related aspect of body dissatisfaction because it teaches critical and analytical skills. Theoretically driven models such as Perloff's transactional model of social media and body image provide a fruitful basis of research.


Although there is a voluminous literature on mass media effects on body image concerns of young adult women in the U.S., there has been relatively little theoretically-driven research on processes and effects of social media on young women's body image and self-perceptions. Yet given the heavy online presence of young adults, particularly women, and their reliance on social media, it is important to appreciate ways that social media can influence perceptions of body image and body image disturbance. Drawing on communication and social psychological
theories, the present article articulates a series of ideas and a framework to guide research on social media effects on body image concerns of young adult women. The interactive format and content features of social media, such as the strong peer presence and exchange of a multitude of visual images, suggest that social media, working via negative social comparisons, transportation, and peer normative processes, can significantly influence body image concerns. A model is proposed that emphasizes the impact of predisposing individual vulnerability characteristics, social media uses, and mediating psychological processes on body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Research-based ideas about social media effects on male body image, intersections with ethnicity, and ameliorative strategies are also discussed.


This study examined the relationships among social media use for information, self-status seeking and socializing, body image, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, and some cultural effects moderating these relationships. Americans (n = 502) and Koreans (n = 518) completed an online survey. The main findings showed that (a) social media use for information about body image is negatively related to body satisfaction in the United States and Korea, while social media use for self-status seeking regarding body image is positively related to body satisfaction only in Korea; and (b) body satisfaction has direct and indirect positive effects on
psychological well-being manifested in similar ways in the United States and Korea. Implications and future research directions are discussed.


The present study experimentally investigated the effect of Facebook usage on women's mood and body image, whether these effects differ from an online fashion magazine, and whether appearance comparison tendency moderates any of these effects. Female participants (N=112) were randomly assigned to spend 10min browsing their Facebook account, a magazine website, or an appearance-neutral control website before completing state measures of mood, body dissatisfaction, and appearance discrepancies (weight-related, and face, hair, and skin-related). Participants also completed a trait measure of appearance comparison tendency. Participants who spent time on Facebook reported being in a more negative mood than those who spent time on the control website. Furthermore, women high in appearance comparison tendency reported more facial, hair, and skin-related discrepancies after Facebook exposure than exposure to the control website. Given its popularity, more research is needed to better understand the impact that Facebook has on appearance concerns.

Adolescence and young adulthood are key periods for developing norms related to health behaviors and body image, and social media can influence these norms. Social media is saturated with content related to dieting, fitness, and health. Health and fitness-related social media content has received significant media attention for often containing objectifying and inaccurate health messages. Limited research has identified problematic features of such content, including stigmatizing language around weight, portraying guilt-related messages regarding food, and praising thinness. However, no research has identified who is "liking" or "following" (ie, consuming) such content.


This article presents the introduction to the special issue Clinical Social Work Journal. This special issue of the Clinical Social Work Journal looks at problems in eating and body image from a twenty first century perspective. The current volume is made up of articles by authors with a wide range of contemporary perspectives on eating disorders and body image. Their blend of expertise and innovative thinking takes us on a journey into an extremely important aspect of eating disorders: the crucial interplay of body image and disordered eating issues. The articles in this special issue each add something to a discussion that is just beginning. With the impact of social media, technology and cultural demands for a universal ‘perfect’ body, there is now, more than ever, a need for clinicians to understand the interplay of culture, psyche, body and
mind in the development, maintenance and treatment of these symptoms in an ever-increasing client population. Each of the contributions included in this issue offers thoughtful clinical and theoretical insights on these issues.


The purpose of this study was to examine the predictors and consequences associated with Instagram selfie posting. Thus, this study explored whether body image satisfaction predicts Instagram selfie posting and whether Instagram selfie posting is then associated with Instagram-related conflict and negative romantic relationship outcomes. A total of 420 Instagram users aged 18 to 62 years (M = 29.3, SD = 8.12) completed an online survey questionnaire. Analysis of a serial multiple mediator model using bootstrapping methods indicated that body image satisfaction was sequentially associated with increased Instagram selfie posting and Instagram-related conflict, which related to increased negative romantic relationship outcomes. These findings suggest that when Instagram users promote their body image satisfaction in the form of Instagram selfie posts, risk of Instagram-related conflict and negative romantic relationship outcomes might ensue. Findings from the current study provide a baseline understanding to potential and timely trends regarding Instagram selfie posting.

This article explores how men’s everyday dress practices and associated social media usage influence their thoughts and feelings about their bodies. Through interviews with 20 young men of diverse ethnicities, body shapes, and sexual orientations, findings reveal that young men’s engagement with fashion and social media merge to create a cultural climate of heightened body consciousness. Contemporary slim-fit clothing trends magnified men’s appearance fixations and incited body surveillance in compliance with conventions of male attractiveness. The proliferation of outfit posts and selfies on social networks have further caused appearance anxieties as Web 2.0 apps impelled participants to compare themselves against their peers. This study concludes that men’s body image pressures have only reinforced hegemonic masculine boundaries and the subsequent power for those who conform to them. Men with bodies that deviate from the appearance ideals experience daily anxiety because they perceive their bodies as culturally deficient.

A cross-sectional survey (N = 186) was conducted to examine the relationships between young women’s and men’s social media use and body image attitudes—the drive for thinness and the drive for muscularity. Prior research has found relationships between exposure to traditional mass media and body image concerns. Drawing on social comparison theory, this study attempted to determine if similar relationships could be found for social media use. Results of this study indicated that simple exposure (time spent on social media) was not related to body image concerns. Online social grooming behaviors, such as viewing and commenting on peer’s profiles, however, were significantly correlated with the drive for thinness for both female and male participants. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that appearance comparison mediated the relationship between social grooming behaviors and the drive for thinness.


Societal notions of masculinity have changed greatly in the last two decades and males appear more interested in improving or maintaining their appearance in ways traditionally reserved for women (such as the use of cosmetic grooming products). Where female body dissatisfaction and drivers of appearance-related image modification have been studied from a feminine perspective, little research has focused on the perspective of men in relation to these issues. The current study thus examines how males of different ages perceive their physical appearance and what motivates them to undertake activities related to changing or maintaining that appearance. The study does this by asking males to compare themselves to male body images as constructed in the media and by society more generally. An exploratory approach to research is undertaken,
utilising focus groups and depth interviews with males in two age cohorts (18–25 years and 33–45 years). Results suggest that there is a difference in overall perceptions of body image between the two groups, with younger males striving for a lean and muscular body and older males focused on health and lifespan concerns. In contrast to research examining female body perceptions, this study indicates that the media and social comparison act as positive motivators rather than sources of body dissatisfaction.


Research has consistently shown that exposure to ideal female images negatively influences women's self-evaluations (e.g., Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992; Henderson-King, Henderson-King, & Hoffman, 2001). However, minimal research has examined the effects of media-portrayed male images on men's self-evaluations. This article presents an exploratory investigation into the impact of media on men's views of themselves and their bodies. It was hypothesized that compared to men who viewed neutral images, men who viewed ideal physical images of other men or images depicting status and wealth would report lower levels of body esteem and self-esteem. Analysis revealed significant group differences on the Physical Condition and Physical Attractiveness subscales of the Body Esteem Scale (BES; Franzoi & Shields, 1984); however, no significant differences in group scores emerged on the State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES; Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). In general, these findings fit with current
literature regarding media effects on men. Limitations, applications, and future research considerations are discussed.


This study examined the association between anabolic–androgenic steroid (AAS) use and dominant sociocultural factors, specifically media exposure to idealized images of male muscularity, and mediated social comparison trends among a sample of young Arab adults. The study found evidence that participants more exposed to content that promotes muscularity and those who idealize images of muscularity and perceive them as motivators for achieving muscularity are more likely to be AAS users. It also found that a significant percentage of participants used at least one kind of dietary supplement and that the level of AAS use among health club participants indicates it is a significant public health problem in Lebanon. The study suggests that dealing with this problem requires a unique approach, beyond the typical awareness of risks strategy, since some users were well aware of the risks yet continue to use AAS, and their motivations pertain more to body image and sexuality. A stronger approach that utilizes critical media literacy teaching that ingrains these issues into school and university curricula will have a more lasting impact.

**Social Media Used**

Snapchat.com

Instagram.com