

The portrayal of body image in social media

Social Medias Effect on Body Image in Women

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Introduction

Many women believe they do not look good in a certain outfit, or that they won't be viewed as beautiful because of the way women's bodies are portrayed on social media. Certain creators receive more views, likes/love or even clout and hype compared to other women because of their body type. This develops a mental block that results in body dissatisfaction because of the fact that their body is different than another girl that is viewed as "perfect". When in reality, social media is not real. It doesn't show the normal view vs the ideal view. People pose in certain ways and or get the right angles. And on top of that all bodies are different. To determine if body image is affected negatively due to social media, the psychology discipline was utilized to see how women view themselves. On top of that, the effects on a person's biological body are viewed as well, to understand different body types and what negative body image can do to one's health. Additionally, to fully grasp the idea, the influence of cultural and ethnic studies will help determine that *women's body image is negatively affected because of how they are portrayed on social media.*

Psychology

Body image is what the person themselves sees and thinks about their own body. It ties in with their emotions and is overall basically how the person sees themselves on the outside. When they look in the mirror, they may see something totally different than someone looking at the same body from outside of their mind. Body image reflects social constructs, which depend on a society's culture and norms. With the frequent usage of social media, the mind can be influenced to think that their bodies are imperfect because of the attention other women get. Media has been idolizing thinner women and promoting it. The ideal of thinness is linked to success and beauty.

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One of the most studied psychological constructs in body image disorders is body dissatisfaction.

“Body dissatisfaction is characterized by an inconsistency between one’s real body and the idealized body,” (Jon-Patrick Alle, para 2). Body dissatisfaction is linked to psychological distress and can lead to a risk of developing an eating disorder.

Research has shown that those with a positive body image, overall, have better health outcomes than those with a negative body image. “Adolescent body image is shaped by media influence, athletics and personal relationships,” (Hartman-Munick, para 3). To get a positive body image to be promoted/practiced, the provider, which could include patient interaction, within the school/community, healthcare education etc. should bring up ways to practice positive affirmations for the patient. This will help the mind see and think better about themselves when thinking and or looking at their own body. Another way to promote body positivity is by incorporating body positive captions. This encourages the self-acceptance of appearance while working through the unnatural perspective of social media content. This psychology discipline differs from the other perspectives by the fact that it focuses on how social media affects the minds self-image of its own body negatively. It shows that with constant use of social media, the mind will start to believe that thinness equals success.

Biology/Physiology

There are many different body types. Meaning genetically, we look the way we do for a reason. Someone could weigh the same exact weight as another but look completely different. Some are taller, some have wider rib cages, or broad shoulders and do not realize that this is naturally their body type. Someone may have a thinner, longer friend, and will alternate their habits to try to look like them. For example, they go out to eat and that person might get what

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their friend gets or less than that because that is what they think will get them to look alike.

When in reality, people are completely different when it comes to what they eat, what they do to workout etc. Just like on social media, you never know what they are doing in order to appear fit or have certain beauty standards such as appearing skinny. A study for example, showed Instagram images vs reality images of the same person. The comparison showed that there are different camera angles, flexing certain muscles that changed their appearance drastically. This method proved that no one is perfect and social media can be altered to be fake, (Beauty by Disaster, 2019; Messina, 2017, para 7).

Body dissatisfaction developed from social media can lead to a change in the physiology of one's body. The risk of this change is that some want fast changing results which can lead to eating disorders. The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA, 2005) states that because of body image dissatisfaction through social media in college students, they have started engaging in disordered eating patterns such as an obsession with weight dieting and eating restraint. NEDA has reported statistics that between 70-94% of females in college strive to lose weight because of their social setting. They also bring up the fact that “college students are highly susceptible to eating disorders due to peer pressure, media, stress, and more.” (Heather Dye, page 101). Most young adults are influenced by media messages due to their social environment. This physiology discipline differs from the other perspectives because it shows that social media can be negatively affecting a person's body and health. It shows that social media can cause a stressful environment for themselves and can lead to an obsession with their eating habits and exercising.

Cultural and Ethnic Studies

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There has been research done to explore the effects of media on body image of young women from different racial and ethnic groups. White girls use peer culture and media images as role models for themselves. Tests show that two groups of white girls from two different schools, both looked through social media, or magazines and that is how they determined, “how well they fit in, or what groups they belonged to,” (Melissa A. Milkie, page 197). They also stated that girls that did not use media to determine their social status were very independent and did not care about other people's opinions. This shows that it is common for women, in this case White women, to check social media to alter the way they look in order to fit in without being themselves.

In addition, studies and reports have found that young Hispanic women have tried the most at weight loss attempts. They also have been the most reported at trying to take on difficult diets, causing eating disorders such as anorexia and binge eating to develop. (Sarah J. Erickson, page 69). Compared to other ethnic groups, Hispanic, along with Asian and African American women, was reported higher rates of eating disorders compared to Caucasian women ranging in the age of 12-21 years old. The reason behind the strive for a different body is that there is a comparison between all women and the ideal image that media has created. Body dissatisfaction is developed in many young women because of the fact that any form of social media, whether it is on the internet or in a magazine, shows and idolizes this perfect image of a skinny, long, petite girl. It comes across as the media saying, you need to look like this in order to be pretty and successful. Of course this is not the case, but these young women do not realize that because they are so fixated on fitting in on socials and in person such as in school for example.

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Self-Reflection

Personally, I struggle with a positive body image of myself. The reason I picked the topic is because I wanted a better understanding on why my thoughts and actions have developed this way. This research has helped me figure it out and understand why I feel the way I do about my body. I do a lot of comparing on social media, and since quarantine, it has gotten worse because I never have a break from the internet, and I have quick access to social networks. My self-perspective has changed by the understanding of why I think so low of myself and how to fix it. The skills I acquired during this assignment is understanding how to use the school's databases. As a new student, this came in handy and made it easier to find reliable articles and journals. It was easy to find peer-reviewed journals based on the database that I have never used before, and now I can use that to my advantage for future assignments. I definitely know I am not an amazing writer, but with the researched information, I was able to understand what I wanted to write about. My future self will now use positive affirmations every day and bring the attention of these affirmations to other people in my life. This will help me see myself in the views of others and understand that everybody is different.

Conclusion

Social media has created an unhealthy impression on the body image women should have to be success or beautiful. This idea effects many women, especially adolescents developing in their body and learning what their body type is. Psychologically, their minds might not understand that they have this body type, and it is not going to change genetically. This ties in with the physiological aspect and that since young women do not realize what their body type is, they could risk taking drastic measures to reach an ideal image of themselves. This includes

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developing eating disorders, or not properly working out and giving their body a rest. All bodies are different, especially culturally. Many ethnicities have different types of body types within one another. Therefore, comparing oneself to another is never the answer due to the fact that genetically, all bodies will look different and that is natural. All forms of social media should work on creating a positive place with affirmations that many young women growing up can understand and therefore develop a positive body image of oneself.

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