The Impact Of Social Media On Body Image For Young Adults

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Introduction

In our world today, social media is a life essential. At any given second, not only can one communicate with one's relatives or friends, but millions of people across the globe. Social media is things such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tiktok, and Instagram. These applications have allowed thousands of people to grow into who they are today, making their views their salary. Sadly, not everyone was lucky enough for this to happen due to the fact that platforms such as social media have created body image issues for young adults all around the globe. The purpose of this study is to get to the core of what creates body image issues for young adults all around the globe.

Research Question

How does social media impact the body image of young adults?

Literary Terms:

Social Media- Social media is considered to be anything website or application that allows people to create or share context as a method of social networking.

Body Image-Body image is a person's perception of their physical self.

Body Dissatisfaction- When a person starts to have negative feelings and thoughts about their own bodies.

The Sociocultural Theory- The Sociocultural Theory of learning claims that we as humans learn things from our social interactions.

Influencers- An influencer is someone who has: - the power to affect others' purchasing decisions because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience.

Literature Review

For starters, let's discuss what exactly body image is. This can be learned from a research article named *Processing Body Image on Social Media: Gender Differences in Adolescent Boys' and Girls' Agency and Active Coping* written by two psychologists Ciara Mahon and David Hevey from the School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland. According to this article, Body image is how people think and feel about their own bodies. In today's society, with the growing sense of ideal body image, this is because of the unrealistic beauty standards that are portrayed online. This is an era in which everyone wants to look 'picture perfect.' The selfies with no flaws are the ones with the most likes, and the people with either the thinnest or curviest bodies are the biggest influencers. The most popular social media platforms used by adolescents such as Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, and Snapchat portray millions of pictures and videos that pertain to the idealized body. For men, it is muscular ideals such as a v-shaped torso, visible abs, large biceps, and low body fat. For women, it is more so curvy ideals such as a thin waist and large breasts, and a large bottom. It has been proven that adolescents have been found to endorse and strive for these ideals, despite acknowledging the unrealistic nature of these bodies (Mahon and Hevey, 2021). The amount of time that young adults spend on social media, plus the number of unrealistic body standards they see are having a major impact on the wellbeing of these young adults.

In addition to that this rise in social media usage is also a rise in mental health issues, specifically pertaining to body image. This can be explained through a research article: *Social Media, Thin-Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction, and Disordered Eating Attitudes: An Exploratory Analysis.* This article has been composed by several authors: Pilar Aparicio-Martinez, Alberto-Jesus Perea-Moreno, María Pilar Martinez-Jimenez,María Dolores Redel-Macías, Claudia Pagliari, and Manuel Vaquero-Abellan. Due to these unrealistic body ideas, disordered

eating attitudes are increasing at a rapid pace. This is especially applicable to young women in their twenties. This is due to the fact that social media usually portrays attractive women as compared to men. One may have noticed various photo-shopped picture-perfect women whilst scrolling through social media platforms. This is a very universal experience. These disordered behaviors result from the interaction of several factors, including beauty ideals. Many things lead up to this disordered eating. This contradiction between what society portrays as a role model and the real body that many young women have has resulted in body concerns (Aparicio, 2019). A significant factor is social media, by which unrealistic beauty ideals are popularized and may lead to these behaviors. In the current societal circumstances, body image varies from person to person. Some people are thin, while others are not, and this can be due to their biology as well. When women see other women that society has set as a beauty standard, they ideally want to look like them. Typically, all of these women have a flat stomach or a stomach with little to no fat. This in turn makes women not eat as much, and this results in eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia.

A great example of this is Instagram. On Instagram, many women photoshop their bodies and use apps such as FaceApp to completely alter their facial structure. It has gotten to the point where because of these pictures, many women look similar, which is adding to this whole 'beauty standard' (Tiggemann, 2019). In addition to this, the most common mental problems that arise because of social media are behavioral, emotional, and hyperkinetic disorders. Among these illnesses, disordered eating behaviors are rapidly increasing in a short time, especially among young women. People who suffer from these disorders usually present altered attitudes, behaviors, weight perception, and physical appearance (Aparicio, 2019). Moreover, disordered eating behaviors or attitudes are defined as unhealthy or maladaptive eating behaviors. This has

become a growing concern for health care professionals because this is more than just physical health, this is a matter of mental health as well. Many people will not reach out to therapists because they feel as if looking like these unrealistic beauty standards is normal and achievable.

Theoretical Framework

As one has realized thus far, one of the biggest impacts that social media is having on the body image of young adults is creating Body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is when a person starts to have negative feelings and thoughts about their own body. This type of body dissatisfaction can be proven by the sociocultural model. The sociocultural model originates from the Sociocultural Theory of learning. The Sociocultural Theory of learning claims that we as humans learn things from our social interactions. This can either be done through face-to-face interactions or through online interactions. This theory states that learning first happens through social interaction, and then later through individual internalization of those learned social behaviors. According to the sociocultural model, most adolescents receive messages about what their bodies should look like from different sources, such as their parents, peers, and in this case, social media. The type of messages that these adolescents receive from social media can emphasize the fact that it is important to be thin, or curvy, and/or muscular. Due to the internalization of these appearances, adolescents start to compare themselves to these body ideals. If their appearance does not match the body ideals, adolescents are more likely to feel body dissatisfaction (Veris, 2019). For instance, at this given moment, it is very ideal for women to have a curvy body. This could be due to the fact that the Kardashians have normalized curves to the point where everyone wants them now. Many women all over social media go through massive procedures to give themselves that same curvy look. This leaves many young adults to either believe that all of those procedures are natural. Which then will make many young adults

second guess if their body is supposed to look like that or not. If the young adults are aware of the plastic surgeries, they might just want them, not realizing the amount of money it costs or how many health problems come with it.

It is very unfortunate that in a world with a large amount of diversity, there is only one beauty standard. People with big followings have no idea who their viewers are. For the most part, it typically is young adults. People who are influencers, all the way to A list stars, all photoshop their pictures because they want to look picture perfect.' In reality, they themselves do not look like that either. Social media is a pretty toxic environment once one realizes that almost everyone is not truly being themselves. This illusion of perfection leads people to hate themselves as they want to look like the people they idolize. Yet, that is not humanly possible.

Conclusion

If celebrities and influencers were more open about their experiences with photoshopping and plastic surgery, a lot of these issues that young adults face could be reduced. In the end, one can not get rid of insecurities from every individual. People with big platforms should be open and honest about their faces and bodies. Many people do not realize that these people spend hours in hair and makeup chairs, are heavily photoshopped, have very strict diets, and spend thousands on plastic surgery and maintenance. At the end of the day, one can not even say that these people themselves are insecure because if they were not, they would never go to the extent of completely changing how they look. In reality, when one is a celebrity or someone with a big following, one always has to look picture-perfect. As the whole world is watching and criticizing. Yet, there is a possibility that if they ever came out and spoke about their reality, it would help many young adults around the world who are dealing with body image issues and other mental health disorders.

At the end of the day, it is no one else's responsibility to take care of anyone else's mental health besides their own. Yes, people photoshop themselves and get surgery, but one has to become internally strong within themselves that one does not compare themselves to others. Social media is a powerful tool, if used correctly. Always be kind to everyone, especially behind the screen. As no one ever knows what is truly going on in other people's minds.

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