

Social media: does it contribute to disordered eating in adolescent girls?



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Abstract

The use of social media is a relatively new concept and has quickly become a worldwide form of communication. As the use of social media readily increases psychologist worry about the negative effects it could have on its users. This literature review will focus on the use of social media and its effects on body image, and whether it has an impact on disordered eating in adolescent girls and young women. Some themes that we look at will include, what types of social media uses have the most impact on body image and disordered eating, online communities on social media sites that support disordered eating, and ways to minimize the impact social media has on adolescent girls' body image and disordered eating habits. Lastly, a client recommendation will be made to address concerns regarding the negative effects social media may have on body image and disorder eating.

Social media is prevalent in the lives of adolescents with 90% of adolescent and young adults reporting to be active social media users (Ofcom, as cited in Turner & Lefevre, 2017). Disorder eating is also prevalent among young women with 11%-20% of college aged women report partaking in some form disorder eating ranging from the use of laxative pills to binge eating and fasting (Sonneville et al, as cited in Walker et al, 2015). Many researchers in recent years have questioned whether social media use could be contributing or worsening these behaviors. In this literature review I will be exploring the connection between social media, body image, and disordered eating in adolescent girls and young women. In particular, I will look at, what types of social media use are the most predictive of disordered eating habits in adolescent girls and young women, social media sites where online

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communities exist to support and encourage disordered eating, and what can be done to minimize these risks.

The use of social media is on the rise with adolescents with researchers estimating that they are frequently using these sites for more than 2 hours a day (Tsitsika et al, as cited in McLean, Wertheim, Masters & Paxton, 2016). There are many social media platforms adolescents commonly use with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr being among the most popular. Social media sites offer a unique platform for their users. Users of these platforms are then able to create a profile page, then post content, status updates, and images to their personal profile. Social media has become a daily fixture in these adolescent and young adults lives, and it leads researchers to question whether it could be influencing body image and disordered eating habits. Body images concerns among adolescent girls and its connection to mass media has been well documented and now researchers looking at to see if social media use has a similar effect (Tiggemann and Slater, 2017).

Social media has become an active platform for adolescent girls and young women to engage in body comparison which often leads to body dissatisfaction. By engaging in these types of behaviors young women and adolescent girls are increasing their risk for developing disordered eating habits (Mabe, Forney, & Keel, 2014). While several studies have established that social media usage increases body dissatisfaction there have been inconsistencies. For example, in one study Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian and Halliwell (2015) looked to establish that brief exposure to Facebook would lead to body dissatisfaction and surprisingly found no significant association <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-does-it-contribute-to-disordered-eating-in-adolescent-girls/>

between the two. This has led several researchers to begin to look at other explanations for the connection beyond just general use, such as the type of engagement with social media sites.

One study by Tiggeman and Slater (2017) looking to examine the relationship between Facebook and body image concerns and drive for thinness, which can lead to disordered eating, found that the number of friends on Facebook was a better indicator of engagement with Facebook than time. In concurrence with other studies like Fardouly et al (2015), Tiggemann and Slater (2017) found no significant relationship with time spent on Facebook and body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness. However, they did find that the number of Facebook friends was a predictor for body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness (Tiggeman & Slater, 2017). Studies like the ones above show that it is not just the use of social media that leads to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, but perhaps how the sites are being utilized.

As researchers consider the relationship between social media and disordered eating they have found that how social media is being used plays a large role in how it affects disordered eating. One study by Walker et al (2015), looked to establish Facebook intensity, which was classified as time spent on Facebook, number of friends on Facebook, and integration of Facebook into their daily lives, and maladaptive approaches to using Facebook, such as fat talk or body comparisons, would lead to an increased risk of disordered eating. The results of this study produced some interesting insight. Walker et al (2015) found that those who used Facebook as a medium for comparison between themselves and their peers these <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-does-it-contribute-to-disordered-eating-in-adolescent-girls/>

individuals also had increased disordered eating behaviors. In contrast, they also found when appearance comparison was absent and Facebook was used to engage in communication with friends, family and peers those individuals were less likely to engage in disordered eating behavior (Walker et al, 2015).

Another way in which social media can be used, is when users seek out feedback on photos or status updates they post. Young women and girls who post to seek out feedback from their peers also show a greater eating pathology (Mabe et al., 2014). Some individuals may also engage in seeking out negative feedback. One study by Hummel and Smith (2015), found that those who share negative self-disclosures about themselves and seek out negative feedback also showed a higher tendency for greater eating pathology. These finding further confirm it is not necessarily the time spent on social media sites, but how that time is spent that can have a negative effect on disordered eating and body image.

One particular area of concern when looking at social media usage and disordered eating is selfie sharing. Selfies usually are up close photos of yourself marking a moment, such as a good hair day or a day at the beach. Some users will take multiple selfies in an attempt to find the most flattering angle, use filters to enhance the photo, or even edit the photo with an app to slim, whiten teeth, remove blemished, ect. One study looked to see if these selfie behaviors played a role in disordered eating and body disaffection issues. Cohen, Newton-John and Slater (2018), had several interesting findings in their study. First, they found that selfie activities were a better measurement of users' body dissatisfaction and disordered eating than just time spent on social media sites. They also found that greater photo

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investment, which was classified by time spent to select a photo and photo manipulation, was associated with greater risk of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction (Cohen et al., 2018). However, in contrast Cohen et al. (2018) surprisingly found that posting more selfies was associated with higher positive reinforcement from peers which resulted in greater body satisfaction. So, while selfie posting was not found to increase body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, photo investment was.

Another way that users can use social media that could result in a negative outcome is when users of social media look to confirm or seek support for their disordered eating. Some of ways that this is accomplished is through the hashtags #thinspiration or #fitspiration on Twitter, through pro-eating disorder communities, or by following pages or people that promote restrictive diet lifestyles. Tiggemann, Churches, Mitchell and Brown (2018) compare two hashtags used on twitter #thinspiration and #fitspiration. The hashtag #thinspiration is linked to pro-eating disorder websites and is advertised as a lifestyle to achieve the skeletal appearance, while #fitspiration is supposed to encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle, while #fitspiration is more positive in tone it still emphasizes weight loss and sometimes drastic diet restriction is encouraged (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Another social media site, Reddit contains a pro-eating disorder community. In an analysis of these groups, Sowles et al. (2018) shares an alarming figure that " less than 20% of individuals with eating disorders receive treatment" (Swanson et al., as cited in Sowles et al., 2018, p. 137). Within these communities' users seek support, encouragement, and advice on achieving an unhealthy and dangerously low goal weights (Sowles et al.,

2018). Sowles et al. (2018) also noted when a user did express concern or seek help they were met with pro-eating disordered comments. On yet another social media site, Instagram use has been linked to increased orthorexia nervosa, which is the unhealthy obsession with healthy eating (Turner & Lefevre, 2017). Turner and Lefevre (2017) found a significant relationship between orthorexia nervosa and Instagram use. They believe there are several factors for this link. They believe that Instagram's image based nature, the way that users can tailor their content to see only what interests them, and then in turn the limited explore of their healthy eating interests leads them to believe that this disordered eating habit is more common than it is in reality (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

Finally, we are going to discuss ways to mitigate the effects of social media usage on adolescents and young women. The use of social media sites is not going away any time soon and, while its use is not all bad, we need to look at ways to minimize its negative effects. We discussed earlier how the study by Hummell and Smith (2015) found that users who use a negative seeking feedback style on Facebook had an increased risk for disordered eating behaviors. Hummell and Smith (2015) suggested that we may be able to use this information to intervene and help individuals who are at risk for disordered eating behaviors and help prevent negative outcomes. Some individuals benefit mentally from writing about emotion experiences, and this could be used to help users with a negative feedback style to write in a more positive tone (Hummell and Smith, 2015). In another study that focuses on social media literacy, 101 high school girls were involved in an experiment where a group of them were assigned to attend *Boost Body*

Confidence and Social Media Savvy lessons and the control group attended classes as normal (McClean, Wertheim, Masters & Paxton, 2016). The study found that girls that attended the classes reported higher body esteem, less diet restraint, and increased skepticism about social media content (McClean et al, 2016). These findings suggest that social media literacy classes and coping mechanism could benefit adolescent girls and young women, and help provide a barrier to negative body image and disordered eating outcomes.

Last, let's look at way that parental involvement can help mitigate the negative impacts on young girls' body image and disordered eating risks. In one study Latzer, Spivak-Lavi and Katz (2015) looked at parental involvement via discussion of social media content and support, versus parental control via limiting or denying access, and whether these parenting styles influenced the girls sense of empowerment and their risk of disordered eating behaviors. The study found that the parent's greater involvement correlated to higher sense of empowerment in young girls, while girls whose parents used a more control parenting style correlated to lower sense of empowerment (Latzer, et al., 2015). Latzer et al. (2015), also found that a lower sense of empowerment was linked to greater risk of disordered eating in young girls, while a greater sense of empowerment had no significant impact. Helping parents to get actively involved in their children's social media use could be another tool to help combat the negative effects social media use.

In conclusion, as social media use continues to rise and become more common in adolescent girls and young women, we will continue to see how it <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-does-it-contribute-to-disordered-eating-in-adolescent-girls/>

effects their body image and risks for disordered eating. Researching and finding out which online behaviors put this vulnerable population at risk is key. Recognizing behaviors that are associated with higher risk and implementing interventions and programs to help minimize the negative effects of social media uses will be beneficial.

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Purpose and Significance: Young people are reporting using social media platforms on average for more than 2 hours a day. As a growing body of research forms establishing a connection between social media use and eating disorders, research is needed to learn how to best minimize these risk factors.

Hypotheses: The researchers hypothesized that intervention compared with control participants would have improvements in body image and eating outcomes at post-program.

Participants: Participants were a group of 101 adolescent girls with a mean age of 13. 13 (0. 33 SD). Participant were recruited from one co-education public and one private girls secondary school in Melbourne, Australia.

Strategy/Method: Participants in the study self-reports on assessment measures. The participants answered questions to assess body image, disordered eating and eating restraint, internalization of the thin-ideal, and media literacy. The intervention consisted of three 50-minutes classes called *the Boost Body Confidence and Social Media Savvy*.

Procedure: Participants were divided in an intervention and control group. Participants in the intervention group attended three separate class groups delivered weekly by two psychology postgraduate students. The control group attended their usual class schedule. Data from the assessment measures were collected a week before the classes and the week after.

Results: There was no significant difference between the groups at the baseline assessment. Post intervention comparisons showed that the intervention group showed significant improvements in body esteem, dietary restraint and skepticism over the baseline control group.

Limitations: Some limitations in the study were participants were not randomly assign to the conditions because of school time restraints and there was no follow up assessment. Also, the study was conducted with only girls and in the future, it could be beneficial to see how the invention address a co-ed group.

Conclusions: This study's findings showed that social media literacy classes could help address the negative effects social media can have on body image and disorder eating. These types of interventions could potentially help protect adolescent girls who are vulnerable population for disordered eating. In the future studies should attempt to replicate this study with a larger sample size and longer follow up to validate its success.

Turner, P. G., & Lefevre, C. E. (2017). Instagram use is linked to increased symptoms of orthorexia nervosa. *Eating and Weight Disorders - Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 22 (2), 277-284. doi: 10. 1007/s40519-017-0364-2

Purpose and Significance: Instagram is social media platform that image based in style and is widely used by the healthy eating community. One of the common hastags on Instagram is #food. In general, healthy food images with this hashtag tend to get more attention and likes then their non-healthy counterparts. Many pioneers of the healthy food movement have no formal <https://assignbuster.com/social-media-does-it-contribute-to-disordered-eating-in-adolescent-girls/>

education or training in nutrition, yet they influence many people, often suggesting restricting food groups from their diet. The researchers were interested to see if Instagram use influence orthorexia nervosa (ON), which is the unhealthy obsession with eating healthy food.

Hypotheses: The researchers did not state a specific hypothesis in the study. However, the researchers indicated that they believed there may be a positive relationship between symptoms of ON and Instagram use.

Participants: Data was collected 713 participants (23 males, 686 females, 4 other/preferred not to say, with a mean age of 24. 96 years. The number of men recruited was considered to low so the final sample consisted of 680 females with a mean age of 24. 70 years.

Strategy/Method: Participants in the study answered questions in a survey consisting of several parts; questions regarding social media use, for example, what sites one uses, or how many hours spent, questions regarding Dietary choices, such as what food types they include in the diet and how they classify their diet, and demographic. Participants were also asked to take the ORTO-15 questionnaire to assess for ON symptoms.

Procedure: An ORTO-15 score was calculated for each individual, and a BMI was calculated by the height and weight they participants provided. Analyses were run n Microsoft Excel 2016 and SPSS Version 24 to determine if correlation existed between ORTH-15 scores, number of food groups eaten and social media usage.

Results: 80% of participants who used Instagram ranked food as 1st and 2nd most frequent category. 28.4% of participants followed a vegan diet, 24.7% followed an omnivorous diet, with the remaining falling into all other categories. The mean number of foods individual ate was 11.88 out of a possible 19. Researchers found no relationship between ON and number of food types eaten. They did find a negative correlation between participants' ORTO-15 score and Instagram use, although no significant relationship was found with any other social media site except Twitter, which showed a small positive association.

Limitations: 83% of the participants that were recruited came from the authors' Instagram profile which does not represent the general population. The title (Health habits on social media) could have attracted those with interests in that subject. Also, BMI was calculated from self-reported height and weight so there could be error due to misreporting's. This study was correlational in nature therefore, causal relationship can be established.

Conclusions: The current finding found a significant relationship between ON symptoms and Instagram usage. However, there was no correlation between ON symptoms and any other social media platform, except Twitter which should show a positive correlation. More research is needed to establish a causal relationship.