SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION: NEGATIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA
ON FEMALE SELF-ESTEEM

By

Tejinder Sandhu

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APPROVED BY

Bruce Hardy, Ph.D., Thesis Supervisor, Counsellor Education Faculty
Svetlana Vasilyeva, M.C., Faculty Reader, Counsellor Education Faculty

Division of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

In today's world, the use of social media has become a necessary daily activity. Social media is typically used for social interaction and a way to connect with one another. Social media in high doses does not do any good for one's mental health and it seems to have a particularly strong effect on women. Women try to lose weight to seek the acceptance of their appearance from others, which is never a successful approach on weight loss and pursuing a thin-ideal. Hence, this sends women further down the spiral of a negative outlook towards their physical appearance and this has become out of control due to technology. This manuscript-style thesis, grounded in a self-objectification theoretical framework, argues that social media has a negative impact on a woman's self-esteem and body image. First, it presents an overview of the definitions of all the important concepts being discussed. It further dives into the harsh realities of being a woman on social media and the feminine beauty ideals which are presented in the media and how these force woman to compare themselves to others whom they consider beautiful. Eating disorders and mental health issues arise from the thin-ideal internalization. This thesis encourages the ability to be kind to oneself and engage in mindful social networking. Clinical recommendations for other sources of theoretical modules, limitations to the thesis, and personal reflections will be discussed as well.

Keywords: social media, self-objectification, body image concerns, self-compassion and mindfulness, beauty ideals, upward social comparison, low self-esteem, thin-ideal internalization

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Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my beloved parents and family. For their love, endless support, encouragement, and sacrifices. Thank you for being the most supportive family one could hope for and encouraging me and giving me the strength day in and day out to reach for the stars and chase my dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social media is becoming one of the most popular forms of communication. Young girls and women witness pictures which define perfection, what is considered beautiful, and use these images to make comparisons to themselves. As a result, these images are becoming engrained in the brains of females and have plummeted their self-esteem. This thesis looks into the negative impacts of social media on female body image and self-esteem. Poor body image comes from negative thoughts and feelings about one's own physical appearance. An analysis is done to look at the impact of self-compassion and mindfulness in counselling. Self-compassion involves one treating the self with kindness and acceptance. It involves being mindful and recognizing one's own humanity. Self-compassion works to encourage acceptance of imperfections and reduces body shame and self-criticism. This thesis examines the negative impact of social media on female body image and self-esteem and works to cultivate a practice of self-compassion and mindfulness in counselling to address low self-esteem and self-criticism.

The first chapter of my manuscript will consist of introducing the topic, the negative impact of social media on female self-esteem. Furthermore, it will advocate the practice of self-compassion and mindfulness in counselling. It will also consist of the definitions for the major concepts explored such as social media, self-esteem, self-criticism, as well as, self-compassion and mindfulness. The first chapter will explore my reasons for choosing this particular topic. Social media such as, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, are a growing source of communication and there is an unrealistic portrayal of body images being displayed. The media is also a powerful conveyer hence, the influence of media on self-esteem is increasing. Women are placed in these sociocultural factors in which body image dissatisfaction is on the rise and it has become a major source of suffering in females.

Purpose

The purpose and importance of this thesis is to contribute to existing literature and discussion around the negative impact of social media on women's body image. This will be done by merging and consolidating the literature about the effects of social media on one's view of themselves. The purpose is to critically assess the role of social media in the lives of women and address the ways in which many woman are impacted by the media. This work is intended to inspire mental health practitioners as well as, women, to exercise self-compassion and mindfulness daily. It is intended to encourage individuals to make it part of their daily routines and notice its ability to enhance ones well-being. The objective is also to bring forth clinical recommendations and to inspire future empirical research on this topic.

Significance

Social media has become one of the most popular sources of communication for millions of individuals. For young people growing up in today's society, social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have provided pictures and news that have become the first thing that their eyes see in the morning and the last thing that they see before bed. These images have provided unrealistic standards as to what is considered beautiful by men and women in today's society. As young girls and women refer to these images as a form of comparison, it has created harmful effects on their well-being. Accounts on Instagram encourage thigh gaps, unhealthy fitness standards, and sexual encounters. They have become engrained in the brains of women that they must look like this in order to be successful and desired by others. According to Perloff (2014), "internalization of thin-idealized female beauty is a key element in a culturally stereotyped standard of beauty that is ubiquitously communicated in contemporary media throughout Westernized societies" (p. 364). Media depictions of women both reflect and reinforce the importance of physical appearance in women's lives (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). Females are surrounded by unrealistic expectations and this creates idealized standards which are

in fact, not ideal. Due to the increase in popularity of social media, today's generation, as well as the upcoming generations, are bombarded with unrealistic standards when it comes to beauty. When young girls and women first turn on their cellphones, iPads, and computers, more often than not, they refer to a social media site. For example, this can be Instagram, where people can post pictures and followers can "like" to show their approval or post comments. Similar examples of other media outlets include Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat.

The objectification theory is a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argued:

> Objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring, which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states (p. 173).

In today's society, women's bodies are looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified. According to Kaschak (as cited in Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), "the most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted-and arguably the most ubiquitous-is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body" (p. 175). Objectifying gaze is played out in three related arenas. First, it occurs within actual interpersonal and social encounters. Studies have shown that women are in fact gazed at more than men and are more likely to feel 'looked at' in interpersonal encounters. In addition, men direct more nonreciprocated gaze toward women than vice versa, and lastly, men's gazing is often accompanied by sexually evaluative commentary towards women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Making matters worse, the mass media's proliferation of sexualized images of the female body is fast and thorough. Confrontations with these images then, are virtually unavoidable in western culture. "The sexual objectification of the female body

has clearly permeated our cultural milieu; it is likely to affect most girls and women to some

degree, no matter who their actual social contacts may be" (p. 177).

The media's portrayal of women is often sexually objectifying and greater exposure to

objectifying media is associated with higher levels of self-objectification among young women.

One reason why media usage may be associated with self objectification is because women may be

comparing their appearance to others in the media. According to Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian,

and Halliwell (2015) , the relationship between Facebook usage and self-objectification was

mediated by comparisons to one's peers on Facebook and their findings suggest that appearance

comparisons can play an important role in self-objectification among young women.

Objectification theory proposes that the negative consequences of self objectification may result

from women continually comparing their appearance to an unattainable cultural thin ideal and

coming up short (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Social media platforms have become exceedingly popular, exemplified by the frequency

with which individuals use them and the various communicative purposes they have come to serve.

"Social networking sites (SNSs) provide emerging adults with extreme and unprecedented

transparency, exposing them to a plethora of opportunities for social comparison" (Stapleton, Luiz,

& Chatwin, 2017, p. 142). "Instagram, an online mobile SNS that provides users with an

immediate means to capture and share their experiences, is rapidly becoming one of the fastest

growing social media platforms" (p. 142). Feedback from the social context within which the

individual operates has a profound impact on identity consolidation. In today's digital age,

emerging adults have to navigate the task of identity formation utilizing SNSs. As a result, self-

esteem that is "contingent on one's physical appearance reflects a high level of concern for

meeting either internal or external criteria or standards for how attractive an individual believes

that he or she needs to be in order to feel good about oneself" (p. 110). It has been widely argued

that the media, particularly beauty and fashion advertisements, provide images of an unattainable

"ideal," in which these images may have a cumulative effect on women's satisfaction with their appearance. Hence, "the more pervasive is media imagery, the more women feel that they must meet these unattainable standards and the less positive they feel about their bodies" (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997, p. 399).

Theoretical Framework

This thesis is guided by the objectification theory, proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), which focuses on the idea that society's objectification of women's bodies may increase their vulnerability to a wide range of psychological issues, such as eating disorders. False images of idealized beauty are displayed right in the field of vision by social media. Young girls and women take this in and internalize this unrealistic portrayal of beauty. At a psychological level, "it coaxes girls and women to adopt a peculiar view of self… posits that the cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 177). It negatively impacts a woman's mental health. The objectification theory's outline of inherent pressures from society result in women being more susceptible to various mental health problems. Viewing thin models in the media results in women criticizing and evaluating their own bodies. The media acts as a means of conveying the idealized culture of beauty, which negatively impacts women such that media exposure may be harmful to women's well-being. As Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) stated, women feel the pressure to comply to "minimally sufficient external pressures, proceeds through interpersonal identification, and ends with individuals claiming ownership of socialized values and attitudes, often by incorporating them into their sense of self" (p. 178). The external pressures that encourage women's preoccupation with their own physical appearance include for example, the array of life benefits which physically attractive, or "eye-catching," women receive in the Western culture.

Method

The type of thesis I will be writing is a manuscript thesis. The research problem that will be explored, is the negative impact of social media on female self-esteem. The research question will explore in what ways social media negatively impacts female's body image and self-image. It will look at how it leads to self-criticism and what causes females to wreck havoc on their self-image. For some, especially young girls and women, social media is an enjoyable way to share and document one's own experiences, until it turns into an obsession for belonging and approval from others which can destruct one's body image and self-esteem. Chapters two, three, and four can be read as stand-alone papers as they are the three manuscripts covering social media and women, women and self-esteem, and the third manuscript which will delve into self-compassion and mindfulness. The reader will be exposed to different levels of experience of women and will explore the importance of bringing awareness to this topic. The reader will be presented with literature focusing on the role of social media in the lives of women, the triggering effects on women's self-esteem as a result of exposure to ideal beauty in the media, and lastly, clinical recommendations for exploring self-compassion and mindfulness to curtail self-criticism.

This thesis will consist of conducting a thorough review of the existing literature surrounding the topic of social media's negative impact on women's body image. It will consist of clinical recommendations for working therapeutically with women who are impacted by the use of self-compassion and mindfulness. There will be a critical analysis of the proposed therapeutic frameworks to highlight the benefits for women whom are suffering.

Definition of Terms

This section will provide definitions which have been chosen to provide clarity and consistency throughout this work.

Social Media

For this paper the definition of social media is borrowed from Merriam Webster dictionary. Social media is seen as forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, pictures, and other content (such as videos). For this paper, we look social networking sites as providing the opportunity for self-presentation and impression management. Presenting a positive image through ones' profile picture is becoming increasingly easy with new technology (Lowe-Calverley & Rachel Grieve, 2018). Social media inherently involves self-displays to a virtual audience.

Self-Esteem

The term self-esteem will be conceptualized using Coopersmith and Rosenberg definition (as cited in Barry et al, 2017) as one's positive and negative evaluations of himself or herself and, relatedly, one's approval or disapproval of the self. "It is conceivable that social media could enhance self-esteem, as individuals have the ability to self-select how they wish to present themselves and because they may receive social support or positive social feedback not acquired elsewhere" (Barry et al., 2017, p. 50). However, for the purpose of this paper we will focus on the ways in which social media may foster low self-esteem through the inherent opportunity to compare oneself to others and the possibility that one may receive negative, or no, social feedback.

Self-Compassion

Compassion involves sensitivity to the experience of suffering, paired with a deep desire to alleviate that suffering one is experiencing. It is sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. According to Kristin Neff, she defines self-compassion

simply as compassion directed inward, relating to ourselves as the object of care and concern when faced with the experience of suffering. She describes it as extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Kristin Neff has defined self-compassion as being composed of three main components – self-kindness versus self-judgement, common humanity versus isolation and mindfulness versus over-identification (2003).

According to Neff, self-kindness entails being warm and understanding towards ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties is inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. As Neff (2003) states, people cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied, or fought against, suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration and self-criticism. When this is accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced among individuals.

Frustration at not having things exactly as we want leads many to believe that "I" am the only person suffering or making mistakes. However, self-compassion recognizes that all humans suffer. The very definition of being "human" means that one is mortal, vulnerable, and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience which is something that we all go through rather than it only happening to me (Neff, 2003).

Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. Mindfulness is a non-judgmental, receptive mind state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. At the same

time, mindfulness requires that we not be "over-identified" with thoughts and feelings, so that we

are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

 Mindfulness

Bishop et al. (2004) proposed that there are two essential components that constitute

mindfulness as discussed in the literature. It constitutes an open attention to one's present

experience accompanied by a nonjudgmental, accepting, attitude towards whatever one

encounters. These complementary elements can be easily identified as a nonjudgmental moment-

to-moment awareness. "A person's experience refers not only to what is occurring around her or

him (e.g., sights, sounds, events) but also what is most often unattended to: internal experience

(e.g., physical sensations, emotions, thoughts)" (Brown, Marquis, & Guiffrida, 2013, p. 96). As

Epstein (as cited in Brown, Marquis, & Guiffrida, 2013) succinctly put it, "mindfulness is quite

literally coming to one's senses" (p. 96). This paper will explore mindful social networking

which includes adopting a more accepting and positive view of the self which may help to battle

the heavy media exposure of idealized and unrealistic female images.

Body Image

"Body image is a multidimensional, subjective and dynamic concept that encompasses a

person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body" (Neagu, 2015, p. 30). Neagu

(2015) stated:

> Body image does not simply reflect the biological endowment of the individual or the
>
> feedback received from the significant others. While these factors might indeed influence
>
> the level of body satisfaction, what is decisive is the way the body is experienced and
>
> evaluated by subject himself (p. 30).

As social media continues to play a central role in the lives of young girls and women, its

influence on body image and the perception of beauty continues to grow. Social media provides

exposure to certain beauty standards and cultural ideals of womanhood, but emerging research

shows it may contribute to the development of eating disorders as well. Social media has become

a toxic mirror for body image. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook have become

engrained in the lives of countless women. These women tend to think thin people are more

attractive and may be more self-conscious about how they themselves look and hence, take action to

improve their body image.

Limitations and Scope

There are several limitations in this scope of work. The most common one is that social

media may act as a source of empowerment and positive impact on women. However, the

entirety of this paper focuses on the negative impact of social media on women. Social media

also allows women to practice self-care in their use of social media. There are many campaigns

that are shared on social media which spread positive messages such as "Dove campaign for real

beauty." The major innovation was to use ads that featured real women rather than airbrushed

models or celebrity spokespersons (Celebre & Denton, 2014). This campaign ad is aimed at

building girl's self-esteem. The main issue being targeted was the repetitive use of unrealistic,

unattainable images, which consequently pose restrictions on the definition of beauty (Celebre &

Denton, 2014). This campaign is only one example of the many which are out there. Campaigns,

ads, and videos exist in which they are created from a vision where beauty is a source of

confidence and in which the mission is to ensure that individuals grows up enjoying a positive

relationship with the way they look. They help women and young girls raise their self-

esteem and realize their full potential. Secondly, there are many theoretical models for

therapeutic work with women who suffer from poor body image and not all are reviewed here.

Therefore, without empirical support to validate the efficacy of other models and authors, those

models and authors which have been omitted from this thesis should be considered no more or

less relevant to working with women who are faced with low self-esteem and body image as a

factor of the influence of social media. Furthermore, this manuscript thesis does not conduct original empirical research, and therefore includes no research participants.

Situating the Author

I identify myself as a 24 year-old cisgender, heterosexual woman. My family moved to Canada 27 years ago. I identify as an Indo-Canadian woman who follows Sikhism. I am currently living in the climax of the social media era. An era in which many my age communicate with one another via social media. I have a passion in therapeutic work involving self-compassion and mindfulness. One's compassion should include oneself as it allows trust in your soul. I have begun to follow the path of loving and forgiving myself and living in and embracing the present moment-to-moment life I am living. It is my personal interest and obligation as a counsellor to become knowledgeable about the effects of social media on the lives of women and also, to assess my role as an efficacious, responsible, and mindful counsellor.

I recognize that my own biases as a therapist and researcher, and also as a woman who has been impacted by social media, do exist. Being a woman in the social media revolution has allowed me to recognize my own struggles with body image. I have completed this research as a member of the group of women who are impacted by the portrayal of ideal body images in the media. I believe that my work should assist women to exercise self-compassion and indulge in mindfulness. It is important to help women who have been negatively impacted by the media to prevent self-criticism and low self-esteem. I will be presenting this topic through the lens of social media. It will be presented through the most common forms of social media, some of which are Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Being a user myself, and being surrounded by those who have adopted social media as a main form of communication, I will present this topic along this axis.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter two will be the first manuscript and it will focus on social media and women. This manuscript will explore the popular forms of social media, the power and influence of social media, and what the media considers "beautiful." This chapter will dive into the negative impact on women within social media and explore social media and self-criticism. Furthermore, chapter three will be the second manuscript and it will look at the link between self-esteem and women. It will explore why some women have low self-esteem and examine poor body image as a result from negative thoughts and feelings about one's appearance. This manuscript will also examine the impact on self-esteem when one believes she does not meet the standard of what society considers beautiful. In addition, it will illustrate the ways appearance is used to enhance self-esteem. Chapter four is the third manuscript which will delve into self-compassion and mindfulness in counselling. It will explore the gap between low self-esteem and self-compassion and the role of self-compassion and mindfulness. This manuscript will illustrate the ways in which the practice of self-compassion and mindfulness enhances self-esteem. Chapter five is the last chapter and it will look at the other side of things, social media enhancing self-esteem and the ways in which it is linked to empowerment in females. This chapter will illuminate the conclusions of the three manuscripts and consider limitations and directions for future research. It will conclude with a review of the implications and recommendations and a discussion of the limitations of this thesis and proposals for future research.

Chapter 2: Realities of being a Woman on Social Media

Chapter two will be the first manuscript and it will focus on social media and women. This manuscript will explore the popular forms of social media, the power and influence of social media, and what the media considers *beautiful*. This chapter will dive into the negative impact on women within social media and explore social media and self-criticism. "Young adults of the 21st century are growing up among a momentous sociocultural change catalyzed by the international growth of the Internet, social media, and social networking sites (SNSs)" (Stapleton, Luiz, & Chatwin, 2017, p. 142). Furthermore, Instagram is becoming one of the fastest growing social media platforms which provides users with an immediate means to capture and share their experiences. Sociological and psychological literature on the phenomenon of media effects has shown that exposure to media depictions of the thin ideal can have damaging effects for women. Body of literature has shown that media exposure to body shape ideals (e.g., thin women) is related to weight concerns, body dissatisfaction, as well as disordered eating behavior in women. "Women often feel dissatisfied with their appearance after comparing themselves to other females who epitomize the thin-ideal standard of beauty" (Evans, 2003, p. 209). Most importantly, research has shown that while the ideal standard of beauty for females portrayed in the media has become thinner compared to the past, the average body size of adult North American females has increased (Evans, 2003). A growing critique of contemporary media points to the pervasiveness of idealized depictions of female attractiveness, which are difficult as well as, impossible for most women to attain, and these flawless images place a psychological toll on females (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2001). Increased attention is currently being devoted to the pressures faced by women to concern themselves with physical attractiveness.

In particular, Kilbourne (as cited in Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997) stated that, "it has been argued that the media, particularly beauty and fashion advertisements, provide

images of an unattainable 'ideal,' and that these images may have a cumulative effect on women's satisfaction with their appearance" (p. 399). Media depictions of women both reflect and reinforce the importance of physical appearance in the lives of women. As stated by Furnham et al. (as cited in Bell & Dittmar, 2011), "negative body image is a growing concern amongst female adolescents in the UK, where body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviour are believed to have reached normative levels" (p. 478) and this trend is mirroring that of westernised countries such as the USA and Australia. According to socio-cultural theory, negative body image arises from a perceived environmental pressure to conform to a culturally-defined body and beauty ideal. "The mass media may be seen as the single biggest purveyor of this ideal, promoting an unrealistic and artificial image of female beauty that is impossible for the majority of females to achieve" (Bell & Dittmar, 2011, p. 478). One of the conclusions made by the authors suggest that regardless of media type, experimental exposure to the ideal, perfect body led to significantly higher body and physical appearance dissatisfaction, compared to control images, but primarily amongst those girls who strongly identified with media models. Internalization of thin-idealized female beauty plays a critical role in culturally stereotyped standard of beauty that is ubiquitously communicated in contemporary media throughout Westernized countries.

Forms of Social Media

Social media is becoming a common source of communication among individuals especially women. It is used in many ways which help shape careers, business, politics, productivity, world culture, careers, education, socialization, and allows individuals to reconnect with old friends. Few of the many social media services include Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr. WhatsApp, and Twitter. It is a tool which is used by individuals all around the world and it serves the purpose to promote and aid communication. It is believed that the overuse of social media is becoming a main form of communication among individuals. As stated by Perloff

(2014), social media in our digital world is overtaking other forms of mass media, as the main medium, where the young and the not so young source information about body image ideals.

Williams and Ricciardelli (2014) state that, "social media and contemporary digital technologies are the playing field of today's youth, places where lessons are learned, attitudes are formed, and body image concerns can be cultivated and metastasized into convictions" (p. 389). Prior research has suggested that enjoyment and usefulness are key factors in the continued use of social networking sites and it allows users to meet their personal and social needs. The leading social networking site, Facebook, can compensate for weak social skills, enable the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, pass time, and relieve boredom (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Hence, social media is becoming an integral part of life.

One of the major sociocultural influences on female body image is by the media and this influence can come in forms such as magazines, movies, and television (Hall et al., 2011). Contemporary media technologies include the Internet, Websites, and an array of "social media sites—Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest—that allow for the rapid creation and sharing of user-generated messages, as well as instantaneous communication with other uses on a plethora of hand-held devices" (Perloff, 2014, p. 365).

Women driving the Social Media Revolution

"Women are very active on social media and they communicate naturally across them because they share similar communicative logic. By definition, they are very expressive and feel comfortable holding several conversations at a time," says Gabriela Oliván, expert in Corporate Communications. Hence, women are more active on social media; they use it more and participate more than men. This is why it is believed that they will mark trends from now on, since they have typically adapted more and better to the technology (Connect Americas, April 5th, 2018). Oliván explains, when "women participate in social networks they can, for instance, upload photos on Instagram and at the same time 'like' a post on Facebook and share a link on LinkedIn. Men, in

contrast, have a more linear participation" (Connect Americas, April 5th, 2018). Social networking

sites, such as Facebook, have attracted millions of users in which majority of them are women.

Social networking is "embedded in our daily routines, providing us with environments that

facilitate communication, organisation, self-presentation, and relationship building" (Lowe-

Calverley & Grieve, 2018, p.186). Social media plays a central role in the lives of women

including, adolescent girls. Its influence on body image, and the perception of beauty, is on an up

rise. It plays a hand in contributing to the development of body image concerns in women as a

result from exposing them to certain beauty standards and cultural ideals of womanhood. Social

media platforms have been dominated by women and driven social communications. An article

written on Forbes, indicated that according to the Pew Research Center for Internet and

Technology, 83% of online women use Facebook, compared to 75% of online men, 45% of online

women use Pinterest versus 17% of online men, 38% of online women use Instagram versus 26%

of online men (Brenman, 2017, August 02). According to a study from Business Insider, 70% users

of Snapchat are women.

As Perloff (2014) has stated, social media in Western countries, have infiltrated

individuals' lives in ways that was not possible with previous mass media. Researchers that have

evaluated the use of the social media in western countries have highlighted how the social media

are omnipresent and available anywhere and anytime. "They allow the easy transmission of images

and ideas around the globe; they allow instantaneous and interactive communication with others;

and they provide easy access to one's peers" (Williams & Ricciardelli, 2014, p. 389). Social media

offer "more personal outlets than conventional impersonal mass media. People can bond with

technology, and content can revolve around the self, illustrated by the contemporary parlance

(Facebook personal profiles, YouTube, selfies or digitized self-portraits, and, more broadly, the i-

phone)" (Perloff, 2014, p. 366). Self-disclosure has long played a prominent role in computer-

mediated communication which manifests itself in the multitude of blogs, personalized sites, and

digitized pictures that "depict the self, friends, or strangers an individual personally admires, available on Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, with its visual story application" (p. 366).

Feminine Beauty ideals

Social media has become a platform for glorifying certain beauty ideals. Presumably, the more pervasive is media imagery, the more women feel they must meet these impossible standards and as a result, the more negative they feel about their bodies (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). Social media is flooded with the emphasis on the thin ideal and as a result, women become dissatisfied with the way they look. Body weight tends to be a leading concern for women who experience low self-esteem in regards to body image. During the past decades, social media has grown its contribution to feminine beauty ideals and has had a more negative impact than other forms of media because it plays an integral role in the lives of women. There is absolutely no doubt that Western women are subject to a great deal of pressure to conform to the thin feminine beauty ideal.

The thin ideal is one of the main concepts which describes an ideally slim female physique, with a tiny waist, who carries little body fat. The size of the thin ideal is decreasing and more and more women are struggling to achieve that ideal, hour glass figure. This creates a gap between the real appearance of an average woman's body and the ideal appearance which, depending on the extent to which the ideal is internalized, may have distressing psychological effects.

The perception of body or face shape ideals is also an important aspect of beauty ideals because it is related to cosmetic surgery behavior. Cosmetic surgery can lead to serious psychological and physical consequences and media effects research shows an increase in the promotion of cosmetic surgery. For example, American women have a preference for a slender ideal with medium sized breasts and African American women prefer a curvier ideal with medium-sized breasts and large buttocks (Prieler & Choi, 2014). In North America, many

women are concerned and dissatisfied with their body weight and they generally express to lose

this weight, even when they are not even when they are not overweight and do not perceive

themselves to be overweight (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). The concern for body

weight has resulted in many women and young girls pursuing Instagram accounts to achieve

thinness and beauty.

Instagram, a popular site dedicated to the posting and sharing of photos. Fitspiration (fitness

and inspiration) consists of images and text that are designed to inspire people to pursue a healthy

lifestyle through exercise and eating well. The majority of "fitspiration images are of women

exercising or in exercise gear, sometimes overlain with inspirational quotations (e.g., "Strong beats

skinny every time"). A search (March 11, 2015) of the #fitspiration hashtag on Instagram returned

over 5.2 million pictures" (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017, p. 77). Despite the positive intentions

associated with fitspiration, there are several elements associated with it which are concerning.

These include the repeated representation of only one body type which is lean and toned and this

is unattainable for most women. Fitspiration encompasses the promotion of appearance related,

rather than health related, benefits of diet and exercise. "A further concerning element is the

promotion of extreme attitudes toward exercise (e.g., "Crawling is acceptable, puking is

acceptable, tears are acceptable, pain is acceptable. Quitting is unacceptable)" (Holland &

Tiggemann, 2017, p. 76). Compulsive exercise often coexists with dietary restrictions, purging,

and other forms of unhealthy weight loss behavior. The aim of this study was to investigate

disordered eating and exercise in women who post fitspiration on Instagram. The participants were

101 women who post fitspiration images on Instagram and a comparison group of 102 women who

post travel images. Both groups completed measures of disordered eating and compulsive exercise.

The results indicated that women who post fitspiration images "scored significantly higher on drive

for thinness, bulimia, drive for muscularity, and compulsive exercise. Almost a fifth (17.5%) of

these women were at risk for diagnosis of a clinical eating disorder, compared to 4.3% of the travel

group" (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017, p. 76). Furthermore, compulsive exercise was associated with disordered eating in both groups, but the relationship was significantly stronger for women who post fitspiration images. Women tend to compare to those with whom they believe are accurate representations of what is considered attractive. They compare themselves to Instagram models, fitness models, and women showcased in forms of thin-ideal advertisements. When one falls short, they will take the necessary steps to meet those standards otherwise, it will result in low mood and distress.

The study conducted by Bessenoff (2006), explored body image self-discrepancy, which is characterized by representations in the self-concept of ways in which one falls short of some important standard. Furthermore, high levels of self-discrepancy have been linked to "various types of emotional distress, including disappointment and dissatisfaction, feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and chronic emotional problems such as clinical depression and social phobias" (p. 240). They explored self-discrepancy as moderator and social comparison as mediator in the effects on women from thin-ideal images in the media. Female undergraduates (N = 112) with high and low body image self-discrepancy were exposed to advertisements with thin women or without thin women ideal (neutral advertisement control). The results concluded that "exposure to thin-ideal advertisements increased body dissatisfaction, negative mood, and levels of depression and lowered self-esteem. In addition, social comparison processes mediated the relationship between exposure to thin-ideal advertisements and negative self- directed effects. Notably, self-discrepancy moderated this mediation. "Women with high levels of body image self-discrepancy were more likely to engage in social comparison from exposure to thin-ideal advertisements, as well as more likely to have those comparison processes induce self-directed negative consequences" (p. 239).

Selfie Love

Young girls not only have to deal with the objectification of famous women's bodies in the media, but those of their peers as well. They are often subject to objectification through the posting of what's come to be known as *selfies*, a photograph taken of oneself and posted on social media. According to Martino and Walker (as cited in Barry et al., 2017), achieving the perfect selfies, "can perpetuate insecurities and high self-consciousness; meanwhile, the absence of feedback, specifically positive feedback, on a selfie has been proposed as potentially dangerous for one's confidence and self-esteem" (p. 49). Social media platforms have become popular, depicted by the frequency with which individuals use them and the various communicative purposes they serve. As stated by Pincus and Roche, Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan (as cited in Barry et al., 2017), "social media inherently involves self-displays to a virtual audience and because narcissism includes preoccupation with favorable regard by others, individuals with narcissistic tendencies may be more apt than others to post selfies on social media" (p. 48). Furthermore, because the format of many social media sites allows individuals to carefully choose, edit, and even delete what they post and manage who is allowed to access their posts, individuals with low self-esteem may be more inclined to self-disclose on social media as opposed to making overt displays of their appearance or personality during face-to-face interactions (Barry et al., 2017).

In relation to posting pictures on social media, Tazghini and Siedlecki (as cited in Barry et al., 2017) stated, that individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to take down unflattering pictures of themselves and are less likely to report sharing photos on Facebook than those with higher self-esteem. "Facebook users can manage their self-presentation through their posts and profiles, consisting primarily of text or images. Images, particularly images of the user (self-photos, or 'selfies'), are especially crucial for self-presentation" (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018, p. 187). As stated by Dutta et al. (as cited in Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018), "one study

of school-aged adolescents found that 18.1% of girls and 15.2% of boys clicked more than four

selfies per day, with 10.9% of these participants reportedly editing their selfies 'very often' to

make them look more appealing" (p. 187). Furthermore, Sung et al. (as cited in Lowe-Calverley

& Grieve, 2018) found that, there are several reasons for wanting to share self images and this

includes attention seeking, defined as the desire to attract attention and show off; to gain self-

confidence, acknowledgement, and affirmation through others' reactions; and to attract potential

partners.

     According to Meier and Gray (as cited in Chua & Chang, 2016), "social media present

new interactive platforms in which self presentation and peer influences interact to co-construct

the standards of beauty" (p. 190). Social network sites such as Instagram and Facebook have

facilitated peer comparison about looks and images among teenagers. As outlined by Kaplan and

Haenlein (as cited in Chua & Chang. 2016), more teenage girls today engage in online self-

presentation such as posting selfies of themselves and sharing outfit-of-the-day photos to observe

and compare themselves against their peers. This article centers around the idea that teenage girls

seek to present a good image of themselves but are also anxious about how other individuals will

perceive them. Hence, self-presentation of beauty and concern about others' perceptions of them

play a vital role in developing their identities and self-esteem. The media depicts what is

considered to be idealized beauty and its depictions of peer portrayals of beauty standards impact

young girls' understanding and reproduction of the meanings of beauty. In a study conducted by

Mclean, Paxton, Wertheim, and Masters (2015), greater tendencies to manipulate images of the

self and greater investment in the self-images prior to sharing on social media were associated

with greater overvaluation of shape and weight, body dissatisfaction, and dietary restraints.

Body Image Concerns

     Many women may experience body dissatisfaction arising from weight concern and a

majority will actively seek to reduce their weight. Body dissatisfaction describes negative

evaluation of one's body (either specific body parts or the body as a whole) and has been found

to moderate the effects of thin-ideal media exposure on body esteem, weight satisfaction as well

as, mental illness. Thin-ideal internalization characterizes acceptance of, or overt agreement

with, social standards of thinness and has been found to moderate the effects of exposure on

body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behavior (Bessenoff, 2006). Body image disturbances

may lie beyond the thin ideal and include various body parts such as size of breasts, colour of

skin, and shape of eye. "One construct that has been found to influence body dissatisfaction in

women is their dispositional level to internalize sociocultural attitudes about their appearance"

(Hall et al., 2011, p. 939).

　　　According to the meta analysis conducted by Groesz et al. (as cited in Hall et al., 2011),

it was found that females with higher levels of body image disturbances and internalization at

baseline were more likely to be adversely affected by media images. There are many needs

driven by social media for instance, the use of social media may be driven by general social

media use motivations, such as socializing or entertainment, such as Facebook or YouTube, or

from use that is driven by a specific need related to body image concerns. As Perloff (2014)

mentions, this may include reassurance of one's own physical attractiveness and offer as an

escape from appearance-related personal distress. "It is unlikely that the gratification sought

from Facebook would be the same as that sought from pro-eating disorder sites. Subsequently,

the effects of these two types of media use on body image disturbances and the process in which

they operate would not be the same" (Prieler & Choi, 2014, p. 381). For example, young women

may use Facebook for socializing and may encounter pictures of thin women posted by their

peers. Depending on the women's level of self-esteem or the centrality of appearance to their

self-worth, such social media content may be more or less influential in eliciting body

dissatisfaction. That is, in this case, "individual vulnerability factors serve as moderators of the

effect of social media use on body image disturbances rather than as precedents for the

gratification sought from social media" (p. 381). The work done by Craike et al. (2016)

examined trends in body image of adolescent females in metropolitan and non-metropolitan

regions and stated that adolescent females experience early and increasing body size

dissatisfaction and dieting as they age. They also stated that, recent research on the factors that

influence negative body image perceptions has focused on the role of the social media and

"evidence suggests that the use of social media has a negative influence on body image, which is

concerning given the high use of the internet and social media sites by adolescents" (Craike et

al., 2016, p. 7).

The study conducted by Harper and Tiggemann (2007) used an experimental design to

examine the effects of media images on self-objectification. A total of 90 Australian

undergraduate women aged 18 to 35 were randomly allocated to view magazine advertisements

featuring a thin woman, advertisements featuring a thin woman with at least one attractive man,

or advertisements in which no people were included. They concluded that participants who

viewed advertisements featuring a thin-idealized woman, "reported greater state self

objectification, weight-related appearance anxiety, negative mood, and body dissatisfaction than

participants who viewed product control advertisements. The results demonstrate that self-

objectification can be stimulated in women without explicitly focusing attention on their own

bodies" (p. 649).

Results of these studies indicated that engagement with certain SNSs, such as Facebook,

Instagram, and Snapchat, may lead to negative outcomes for body dissatisfaction and disordered

eating due to the appearance focused nature (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015).

Body dissatisfaction is associated with the tendency to compare one's body to others' bodies. In

addition, measures of thin-ideal internalization include statements assessing level of comparison

to thin ideals, such as *I wish I looked like a model*. "Perhaps this tendency to compare oneself to

others possessing the thin ideal is the main source of the negative effects produced by exposure

to thin-ideal media" (Bessenoff, 2006, p. 239).

Upward Social Comparisons

Women engage in upward social comparisons, not only with attractive advertising

models in the mass media, but with attractive peers via social media as well (Prieler & Choi,

2014). As a result, depending on the women's level of self-esteem "or the centrality of

appearance to their self-worth, such social media content may be more or less influential in

eliciting body dissatisfaction" (Prieler & Choi, 2014, p. 381). As stated by Markus and Kitayama

(as cited in Prieler and Choi, 2014), people from individualistic cultures like the United States,

tend to view the self as an independent entity and tend to focus on demonstrating their own

uniqueness to maintain their self-esteem. By contrast, people from collectivistic cultures, such as

Japan, tend to construe themselves in relation to others (i.e., independent self-construal) and tend

to base their self-esteem on demonstrating their ability to fit into the group. As a result, for

people with high levels of independent self-construal (how individuals define and make meaning

of the self), "'others are a source of social comparison for confirming one's uniqueness,' whereas

for individuals with high levels of interdependent self-construal, 'social comparison is used to

determine whether one is fulfilling obligations within those relationships'" (p. 380). White and

Lehman (as cited in Prieler & Choi, 2014) conducted a study in Canada which suggests that

people with interdependent self construal are more likely to engage in upward comparison. What

is arguably problematic about this tendency is, body image literature has demonstrated negative

consequences of upward comparison. For example, in Han's (as cited in Prieler & Choi, 2003)

study with Korean female college students, exposure to images of thin women in magazine ads

was related to a greater level of upward comparison along with, body image dissatisfaction and

eating disorders. Furthermore, similar findings have been reported by other studies in the United

States and Canada. Perloff (2014) notes the negative consequences of upward social comparisons

exists particularly with attractive peers via social media, not only with attractive advertising models in the mass media.

Several qualitative studies with samples of adolescents and emerging adults demonstrated that social comparison frequently takes place on SNSs. Vogel et al. (as cited in Stapleton, Luiz, & Chatwin, 2017), "found that the more participants used Facebook, the more they are engaged in social comparison on Facebook. Social comparison theory posits that individuals learn about the self by comparing themselves with other individuals" (p. 143). Results from the study conducted by Bessenoff (2006) states that, exposure to thin-ideal advertisements increased body dissatisfaction, negative mood, and levels of depression and lowered self-esteem in women. In addition, social comparison processes mediated the relationship between exposure to thin-ideal advertisements and negative self-directed effects. Women with high levels of body image self-discrepancy were more likely to engage in social comparison from exposure to thin-ideal in the media as well as, more likely to have those comparison processes induce self-directed negative consequences (Bessenoff, 2006). "Upward comparisons serve to enhance the self by eliciting behaviors to improve oneself; when discrepancies between the self and the comparison standard arise, people are motivated to change the self to be more like the comparison standard" (Bessenoff, 2006, p. 240). Furthermore, when the study participants engaged in social comparison to thin models (upward comparison), both adolescent girls and college-aged women suffered increased negative mood, greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms, as well as, negative lens of their own physical attraction.

The study conducted by Engeln-Maddox (2005) was designed to explore whether generating counter arguments and/or social comparisons in response to idealized media images is associated with appearance–related dissatisfaction, internalization of the media ideal, or importance of appearance. It explored college women's cognitive processing of print advertisements featuring images of highly attractive female models. The relationship between

counterarguing (critical processing) and social comparison in response to these images with a number of body image–related variables was examined. Participants were 202 undergraduate females. Research was conducted in two phases. In one phase, "participants wrote their thoughts in response to three advertisements taken from recent women's magazines. In the second phase, women completed a number of self–report measures focusing on body image, along with a number of distracter measures" (Engeln-Maddox, 2005, p. 1114). Results suggest that making upward social comparisons in response to such images is significantly associated with greater internalization of the thin ideal and decreased satisfaction with one's own appearance.

Social media is the domain of peers, and peer comparisons are highly salient to young girls and women. "Intriguingly, upward social comparisons with attractive peers can actually lead to more negative self-attractiveness ratings than comparisons with attractive advertising models, who are perceived as less similar and therefore a less diagnostic comparison group" (Perloff, 2014, p. 369). The online environment is filled with pictures of peers and opportunities for social comparisons. Negative comparisons can be particularly likely when young women compare their online pictures with peers, without not knowing their peers have altered their pictures digitally. Women may feel dissatisfied with themselves upon comparing with thin media ideals because such standards "induce women to imagine an alternative world where they could lead very different lives if their physical appearance were altered. Thus, the possible selves that women generate for themselves may influence feelings about the current self" (Evans, 2003, p. 210). "The concept of possible selves is defined as the elements of one's self-concept that represent a sense of what one might become, what one would like to become, and what one is afraid of becoming" (p. 210).

Summary

Social media includes various networking sites such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, or Tumblr and number of body of literature has concluded that, women outnumber

men in use and amount of time in social media. The use of social media has accelerated and the

effects of it brings harsh realities for woman who use social media on a daily basis. It has

instilled negative thoughts and feelings of oneself as a result of viewing feminine beauty ideals

all over the media. A woman's body image takes a battering when looking for validation for their

selfies on social media and it is not given. Women put in great effort and time in posting their

most attractive selfies, upon attempting to conform to the beauty ideals presented by peers or

models on social media, and become trapped in a vicious cycle in the digital world.

Chapter 3: Self-Esteem and Women

According to Henderson-King & Henderson-King (1997), it has been argued that the media, particularly beauty and fashion advertisements, provide images of an unattainable ideal, and that these images "may have a cumulative effect on women's satisfaction with their appearance. Presumably, the more pervasive is media imagery, the more women feel that they must meet these unattainable standards and the less positive they feel about their bodies" (p. 399). Lowe-Calverley and Grieve (2018) reported that "traditional media (advertisements) found that girls under the age of twenty, exposed to digitally altered photos reported lower self-esteem, social assurance, and an increased desire to change their physical appearance than those exposed to unaltered images" (p. 186). According to Leary (as cited in Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012), "self-esteem is a gauge by which people monitor how others appraise them. If one perceives herself or himself as falling short on traits values by others, self-esteem decreases" (p. 237). Hence, "as a barometer, self-esteem then is reactive to people's perceptions of their attractiveness to others, and for women, physical appearance is often perceived as being important" (Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012, p. 237). According to Craike et al. (2016), "among adolescent females, body dissatisfaction is associated with impaired emotional well-being, low self-esteem, elevated depressive symptoms, low physical activity and disordered eating" (p. 2). "Media exposure to female images that are thin and air-brushed is also associated with depression and lower self-esteem in the women who view them" (Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, & Segrist, 2012, p. 406).

Roles of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an "individual's positive or negative appraisal of the self; that is, the extent to which the individual views the self as worthwhile and competent" (Stapleton, Luiz, & Chatwin, 2017, p. 142). Thin-ideal media exposure results in social comparison with another which ultimately leads to negative psychological outcomes such as weight concerns, depression,

mood, and low self-esteem. Self-esteem incorporates appearance, social, and performance domains. Social self-esteem refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself. Appearance self-esteem can also be referred to as beauty self-esteem. It is the way your body looks and appearance satisfaction associated with it. Furthermore, performance-based self-esteem refers to a self-esteem that depends on fulfilments of certain contingencies, such as having a characteristic, being a member or accomplishing a certain task and is self-esteem primarily built on accomplishments. Bessenoff (2006), investigated the relationship between women's body image and self-esteem. He was interested in whether women's body image self-discrepancy (differences between perceptions of one's own body physique and one's ideal body physique) has a role in how media thin-ideal images affect women. Interestingly, he found that "women with high body image self-discrepancy have lower appearance self-esteem and greater weight-related concerns in general (including possible eating disorder symptomatology) than women with lower levels of this self-discrepancy" (Bessenoff, 2006, p. 248). This finding suggests that women who are satisfied with their bodies, will not be as negatively affected by the media body representations as women who are not. Informing women about what the average female portrays as, and about the alterations made to images in the media, may have a positive effect on women's views about their own bodies. Upward social comparison, comparison to others we perceive to be socially better than ourselves, generally leads to negative mood and can threaten self-evaluation. "A large body of research has found that high self-esteem protects against eating disorder pathology whereas low self-esteem is a risk factor for later disturbances in eating and body image" (Kelly, Vimalakanthan, & Carter, 2014, p. 388). A woman's positive body image is associated with high self-esteem and self-evaluation.

Specific to posting pictures on social media, Tazghini and Siedlecki (as cited in Barry et al., 2017) report that, "individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to remove unflattering

pictures of themselves and are less likely to report sharing photos on Facebook as a positive

feature than those with higher self-esteem" (p. 50). These findings may be more applicable to

Facebook, since it allows users to post, or tag, photos to another person's timeline, thus

"hindering the self-selection process" (p. 50).

Role of Physical Satisfaction in Lives' of Women

Dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance may begin early in adolescence because

"whenever adolescent girls watch their favorite TV shows, read magazines, or buy clothes in

their local shopping center, they are exposed to images of idealized, very thin females. Such

images may impose psychological harm" (Thomaes & Sedikides, 2015, p. 633). "Many girls

adopt virtually unattainable standards for how their bodies should look, feel inadequate or

concerned about their bodies, and engage in excessive dieting or other unhealthy weight-loss

practices" (Thomaes & Sedikides, 2015, p. 633). Encouraging women to enhance their body

satisfaction may be a key to decreasing the rates of eating disorder. Some have suggested that it

would be beneficial to reduce the number of thin models in the media and increase the number of

and exposure to average-sized models as this may positively enhance a women's perception of

herself. As a result, they may experience a rise in the physical satisfaction in their lives. "The

percentage of women in the United States who experience dissatisfaction with their bodies has

more than doubled in 30 years—increasing from 23% to 56% since 1972" (Balcetis, Cole,

Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013, p. 99). Many factors influence young women's dissatisfaction with

their bodies and consequently with themselves more generally. For example, "weight-related

comments or teasing by peers and family members, as well as parental encouragement to diet,

contribute to body dissatisfaction among young women" (p. 99). They stated that "one of the

greatest and most frequent contributors to body dissatisfaction is awareness of what society and

peers believe are the ideal standards for perfection and beauty" (p. 99). Body dissatisfaction is

associated with increased emotional distress and depression and is associated with unhealthy

behaviors. (Cromley et al., 2012). On the other hand, positive body image is associated with healthy behaviors such as exercise and eating nutritiously.

According to Meltzer and McNulty (as cited in Meltzer & McNulty, 2015), "although a positive body image is also associated with greater interpersonal functioning, body dissatisfaction is associated with lower levels of sexual frequency, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction" (p. 391). Understanding the sources of women's body dissatisfaction could thus prove valuable to promoting women's well-being. This is because when women are exposed to thin models in the media, it leads to increased body dissatisfaction because women begin to internalize the societal standard that thinner is more beautiful, and as a result, it forces them to view their own bodies through a lens of being less attractive. Henceforth, "several studies indicate that women who are exposed to images of larger-sized women report higher body satisfaction than women who are exposed to images of thin-ideal women" (Meltzer & McNulty, 2015, p. 392). Accordingly, one reason heterosexual women may internalize the thin-ideal is because thin women in the media tend to be rewarded by men. As stated by Greenberg et al. (as cited in Meltzer & McNilty, 2015) "men in the media are more likely to (a) date, (b) provide physical affection to, and/or (c) engage in sexual relations with thinner women compared to larger women" (p. 392). They conducted a study in which they examined whether telling women that men physically desire women with bodies larger than the thin-ideal may reverse these contingencies and hence, strengthen the effects of exposing women to images of larger-sized women. Specifically, leading women to believe this may make women less likely to internalize the thin-ideal and thus experience increased satisfaction with their own body weight. "Indeed, providing people with explicit information about the beliefs of others is one way to change their attitudes and preferences" (p. 392). This was tested in three independent experiments and it was concluded that, women who were randomly assigned to be told that men found those models with bodies larger than the thin-ideal attractive, experienced increased weight satisfaction

compared to women who were not given any information and women who were told that men preferred ultra-thin women. "The third study found evidence for the theoretical mechanism— internalization of the thin-ideal—and (b) revealed that telling women that other women find larger models attractive does not yield similar benefits" (p. 391). "These findings extend the tripartite influence model by demonstrating that women's beliefs about men's body preferences are an important moderator of the association between media influence and women's body satisfaction" (p. 391).

The study conducted by Bell and Dittmar (2011) highlights the important role that media model identification plays in the media and body image relationship. The correlational study shows that identification with media models, predicts long term body and appearance dissatisfaction. Similarly, the exposure study shows that it is the "mere presence of the body perfect in the media, and not the way in which it is presented, that leads to momentary increases in body and appearance dissatisfaction following exposure, but only for girls who identify with media models" (p. 489).

Disordered Eating

Women may directly model unhealthy eating habits which are presented in the media, which include fasting, purging, etc. Daily exposure to the thin ideal is a risk factor for the development of eating disorder symptoms. With today's current heavy degree of media exposure, it is important to assess the impact that this has on women's thoughts and feelings. "The increasing prevalence of eating disorders makes it imperative that researchers continue to study the aspects that decrease women's body satisfaction and look for ways in which to increase their satisfaction with themselves" (Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, & Segrist, 2012, p. 417). *Will I ever think I'm thin enough*? A moderated mediation study of women's contingent self-esteem, body image discrepancies, and disordered eating was conducted by Zeigler-Hill and Noser (2015). The purpose of the present study was to examine whether appearance-based contingent self-esteem

(i.e., the degree to which individuals base their self-esteem on their physical appearance) and actual–ideal body image discrepancies influence the association between negative attitude towards oneself and disordered eating symptoms. Global self-esteem refers to the extent to which an individual likes oneself. Hence, low levels of global self-esteem have been associated with a range of negative outcomes including poor subjective wellbeing and psychopathology. "In recent decades, low global self-esteem has been associated with symptoms of disordered eating… for example, participants who have been diagnosed with eating disorders generally report lower global self-esteem than control participants" (p. 109). "Individuals with eating disorders also exhibit a variety of characteristics associated with low global self-esteem, including excessive concern about their weight and body shape" (Zeigler-Hill & Noser, 2015, p. 109). A sample of 877 college women completed measures of global self-esteem, body image, appearance-based contingent self-esteem, and eating behaviors. "A moderated mediation analysis showed that actual–ideal body image discrepancies mediated the association between global self-esteem and disordered eating and that this simple mediation was further moderated by appearance-based contingent self-esteem" (Zeigler-Hill and Noser, 2015, p. 109).

Fister and Smith's study (as cited in Bell & Dittmar, 2011) on the effects of exposing women to realistic images, indicated a strong relationship between "high risk toward disordered eating and subsequent thinness expectancy endorsement, which refers to the expectancy that being thin will lead to self-improvement in general" (p. 489). They found that the association between initial risk for disordered eating and subsequent thinness expectancy endorsement was much smaller in an average-size model image-viewing group than in a control or thin model image-viewing group. Therefore, the "high-risk women who were exposed to average-sized model images were less likely to endorse thinness/restricting expectancies than those participants who were exposed to thin model or home décor images." (p. 489).

The results from these studies offer important information to the body image and disordered eating literature. Mass media provides a significantly influential context for people to learn about body ideals and the value placed on being physically attractive. The results of these studies all relate to the topic of disordered eating. What is understood in general from all of these studies cited above is that media influences disordered eating and this is important for discussion. Self-esteem and body image are closely related risk factors in the development of an eating pathology. Self esteem represents a person's perception of their internal and external faculties as a whole. Furthermore, body image, on the other hand, is the perception of a person's physical appearance. Low self-esteem is a central theme in the development of an eating disorder, and it often manifests as a critical voice which creates and feeds perceptions of poor body image. Low self-esteem as well as, endorsing thinness expectancies, naturally leads to negative perceptions of one's physical appearance. Hence, with the research suggests is that a person's distorted body image is reconciled only when internal issues with low self esteem and thinness expectancy endorsement are corrected.

Negative Influence of Media

It begins in early ages because recent numbers show that children's use of media has increased to more than seven hours a day in which, television is the most popular form of media used by children. The effect of exposure to thin ideal media on body dissatisfaction is found not only among adult women but adolescent girls as well. Hence, "the persistent depiction of thin ideal images in the media is also often mentioned as a possible influential factor on young children's – especially girls' – body image and eating behaviours" (Anschutzab, Engels, & Strien, 2012, p. 603). When watching television, their attitudes and behaviours are influenced by what they see on the screen. Perhaps the tendency to compare oneself to another possessing the thin ideal is the main source of the negative effects produced by exposure to thin-ideal media. Thin-ideal media more likely makes women in general feel more insecure about their physical

appearance which destructs one's self-esteem. "Research has shown that media exposure to unattainable physical perfection is detrimental to people, especially women, and that the detrimental effects are currently more the rule than the exception" (Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, & Segrist, 2012, p. 405). "There is clear evidence suggesting that the media's typical portrayal of women in advertisements has a negative effect on the way women feel about themselves" (p. 405). Women experience negative cognitions and feelings when exposed to ultra-thin female images. Women should be informed of the measures that are taken to alter many images in the media in order to clarify that "humans typically do not naturally look like those illustrations, and therefore women should not compare their bodies with the illusions of perfection depicted in the media" (Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, & Segrist, 2012, p. 406). One's self-esteem experiences plummeting effects as an individual views these images on a daily basis. These comparisons are inappropriate because certain techniques are used to create the flawless looks shown in the media.

As "social media inherently involves self-displays to a virtual audience and because narcissism includes preoccupation with favorable regard by others, individuals with narcissistic tendencies may be more apt than others to post selfies on social media" (Barry et al., 2017, p. 48). Interestingly, the work done by Thomaes and Sedikides (2015) focused on narcissism and girls' vulnerability to the thin-ideal.

They suggested that exposure to the thin ideal

> May act as an impetus towards self-aspiration in that it challenges girls high in narcissism to live up to standards of perfection—a strategy that might eventually enable them to impress others with their exceptional physique. It might well be tempting for these girls to identify with thin models; restrict their food intake; and thus, act like 'real models' do (p. 634).

Furthermore, because the format of many social media sites allows individuals to choose, edit, alter, and even delete what they post or who is allowed to access their posts, individuals with low self-esteem may be more inclined to post a selfie on social media as opposed to making overt displays of their appearance. On the other hand, according to Owens (as cited in Barry et al., 2017) "the lack of confidence characterized by low self-esteem and the fragile self-esteem thought to underlie some aspects of narcissism may deter individuals with low self-esteem or high levels of narcissism from posting selfies" (p. 48).

Thin Ideal Internalization

The study conducted by Evans (2003), posits that women associate a thin-ideal female body type with positive life success, and that it may be this psychological link that drives feelings of negativity toward the self after such upward social comparisons. "The results revealed that women reported more self-dissatisfaction and less optimism about their possible future life outcomes after exposure to a thin-ideal female target that ostensibly had a successful life than when the target ostensibly had an unsuccessful life" (p. 209). Women who possess a high body image self-discrepancy are more likely to engage in social comparison processes from exposure to thin-ideal media. In addition, they are also more likely to experience from these comparison processes, self-directed negative consequences such as negative mood, depressive thoughts, and thoughts about diet and exercise practices. A common factor in both body dissatisfaction and thin-ideal internalization is that of social comparison. For example, body dissatisfaction is associated with the tendency to compare one's body to others' bodies. "*I wish I looked like a swimsuit model*" and "*I often read magazines like Cosmopolitan, Vogue, and Glamour and compare my appearance to the models*" (Bessenoff, 2006, p. 239) are statements often made by women who have internalized the thin-ideal. The study conducted by Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, and Segrist (2012), concluded that "high-risk women who were exposed to average-sized model images were less likely to endorse thinness/restricting expectancies than those participants who

were exposed to thin model or home décor images" (p. 406). "Individuals are frequently exposed

to available standards of attractiveness. For most women, one particularly salient available

standard is the thin ideal perpetuated throughout American society" (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, &

Alicke, 2013, p. 99). Awareness of the ideal female shape results in negative domain-specific

self-evaluations. Specifically, awareness of society's conceptualization of the thin ideal

contributes to explicit and implicit dissatisfaction with one's own appearance. "It is not exposure

to perfect body ideals per se that seems detrimental to body image, but rather the lenses through

which individuals view their world in relation to appearance" (Bell & Dittmar, 2011, p. 480).

The meta-analysis by Groesz et al. (as cited in Bell & Dittmar, 2011) shows that women who

already have body image issues are disproportionately more vulnerable to negative effects from

exposure to thin ideal depicted in the media.

Summary

Women walk around with a critical voice judging one's body image. A woman's self-

esteem comes from the inside out. It is a core identity issue which is vital for personal validation

and our ability to experience joy in our lives. A woman's physical appearance and self-esteem

start in the mind, not in the mirror. The way one sees herself can change the way you understand

your value and worth. An individual is believed to have a healthy body image if they like the

way they look by truly accepting themselves and aren't trying to change their body to fit the

beauty ideal depicted in the media. Social media has a negative effect on body image and self-

esteem. Social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are flooded with images

which become the first thing that their eyes see in the morning and the last thing that they see

before bedtime. The images display an ideal of a slender body shape, with a small waist, and little

body fat. Internalization of the thin-ideal is a risk factor for eating disorders among adolescent

girls and women. Self-esteem and body image are closely related risk factors as a cause for an

eating disorder. A woman who is dissatisfied with her body image, which is her perception of her

physical appearance, will have low self-esteem and this may result in the development of an

eating disorder.

Chapter 4: Self-Compassion Mindfulness

Germer and Neff (2013) operationally defined self-compassion as consisting of "three main elements: kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. These components combine and mutually interact to create a self-compassionate frame of mind" (p. 856). Focusing on mindfulness "involves turning toward our painful thoughts and emotions and seeing them as they are–without suppression or avoidance" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 857). It also "requires that we not be overly identified with negative thoughts or feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by our aversive reaction" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 857). Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, and MacLellan (2012) state that self-compassion refers to "being touched by and open to one's own suffering not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness" (p. 236). Self-compassion is negatively associated with depression, self-criticism, and anxiety and those high in self-compassion appear to be accepting of things that cannot be altered and try to change things that they can (Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012).

The authors also state that, "self-compassion might also be linked to women's body concerns. That is, holding a compassionate view of one's self may contribute to positive evaluations of one's body" (p. 237). According to Homan (2016), "self-compassion have been shown to increase positive affect and decrease negative feelings about the self" (p. 111). The link between self-esteem and women's body concerns may be "attributable to the process of comparing oneself to others. In contrast, the process of being self-compassionate may complement that by allowing one to be accepting of one's self when one perceives herself or himself as not being superior (and maybe even inferior)" (Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, & MacLellan, 2012, p. 243). The study done by Homan (2016) concluded that, self-compassion increased with age, self-compassion uniquely predicted six dimensions of psychological well-being in older adults, self-acceptance, positive relationships, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental

mastery, and autonomy. Self-compassion moderated the relationship between subjective ratings

of overall health and depression. In general, these results are consistent with previous work

showing that self-compassion is related to a wide range of desirable outcomes (Homan, 2016).

Self compassion is not self-pity, self-indulgence, nor self-esteem. It's also important to

distinguish self-compassion from self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to the degree to which we

evaluate ourselves positively. It represents how much we like or value ourselves, and is often

comparisons with others. In contrast, self-compassion is not based on positive judgments or

evaluations—it is a way of relating to ourselves.

Neff's Power of Self-Compassion

Compassion involves being touched by the suffering of others, opening one's awareness

to the pain of others, and not avoiding or disconnecting from it, so that feelings of kindness

toward others, and the desire to alleviate their suffering, emerge (Neff, 2003). "Self-compassion

is conceptualized as containing 3 core components: self-kindness versus self judgment, common

humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus overidentification" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p.

856). Self-kindness refers to treating oneself with forgiveness, warmth, sensitivity, and

acceptance, particularly in the face of failures or personal weakness. Common humanity involves

the "recognition that struggles, sorrows, and imperfections are part of the human experience and

that we are not alone in our struggles. It entails perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger

human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating" (Homan, 2016, p. 112).

In addition, mindfulness involves noticing and acknowledging painful thoughts and feelings, but

without becoming consumed by those thoughts

Neff describes self compassion as

  Being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than

  being harshly self-critical; perceiving ones experiences as part of the larger human

  experience rather than seeing hem as isolating; and holding painful thoughts and feelings

in mindful awareness rather than over-identifying with them. Research indicates that self-compassion is significantly associated with positive mental health benefits and adaptive functioning (p. 26).

According to Hollis-Walker and Colosimo (as cited by Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013), "to engage in mindfulness requires living in the present moment while engaging in passive observation of inner experiences, a release of ego, and continual contact with experience" (p. 312). Self-compassion is conceptualized as containing 3 core components: self-kindness versus self judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over identification, when relating to painful experiences. The interaction and combination of these components help create a self-compassionate frame of mind. The phenomena of self compassion is vital when concerning personal inadequacies, mistakes, and failures, as well as when confronting painful life situations that are outside ones control. Research evidence demonstrates that self-compassion is related to "psychological flourishing and reduced psychopathology" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 856).

Self-kindness involves being warm and understanding toward oneself when in a state of suffering, failure, inadequacy, rather than engaging in self-criticism. When engaging in self-kindness, we soothe and nurture our selves when confronting our pain rather than getting angry with oneself when we cannot meet our ideals. "The inner conversation is gentle and encouraging rather than harsh and belittling. We clearly acknowledge our problems and shortcomings, but do so without judgment, so we can do what's necessary to help ourselves" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 857). Common humanity involves recognizing that the human condition is imperfect, and that we are not alone in our suffering. In the realistic world we live in, we can't always get what we want. We can't always be who we want to be, either. No one is alone in their imperfection. Instead, our imperfections are "what make us card-carrying members of the human race… we forget that failure and imperfection actually are normal" (p. 857). Furthermore, mindfulness

entails seeing our painful thoughts and emotions as they are without suppressing and avoiding them. It promotes less maladaptive body and eating-related behavior. Henceforth, it holds protective effects in the realm of eating behaviours and body image (Kellya, Vimalakanthan, & Carter, 2014).

The Ability of Being Kind to Yourself

"Self-compassion refers to being open and understanding toward personal failure and disappointments and responding with self-kindness" (Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Dodos, Chatzisarantis, & Ntoumanis, 2017, p. 243). It has been shown to promote resilience in the face of negative self-evaluations of the self. People who are believed to be high in self-compassion are kind and caring toward themselves, mindful of their own distress, and recognize that being imperfect is part of human experience. High levels of self-compassion may offset certain disorders such as, eating disorders associated with environmental threats such as thinness-related pressures from the society. Self-compassion is linked to eating behavior which is beneficial for women. Tylka, Russell, and Neal (2015) examined self-compassion's associations with threats involving thinness-related pressures, thin-ideal internalization, and disordered eating among a sample involving U.S. women.

As mentioned by Tylka, Russell, & Neal (2015)

>   Self-compassion was inversely related to two central risk factors of eating disorders as well as disordered eating itself, suggesting that self-compassion is inconsistent with perceiving thinness-related pressures, internalizing the socially prescribed 'thin ideal' as a personal standard, and reporting disordered eating attitudes and behaviors (p. 23).

Media thinness-related pressure was not related to thin-ideal internalization and disordered eating for women high in self-compassion. That is when women high in self-compassion, "are confronted with the omnipresent media images of the thin ideal, they are less likely to interpret these images as thinness-related pressure, adopt the thin ideal as a personal

standard, and engage in disordered eating" (p. 26). It helps women interpret situations as less of a

personal threat and therefore judge themselves less harshly when they deviate from societal

expectations. All in all, the findings above indicated that higher-self-compassion was directly

associated with fewer perceived thinness-related pressures, lower thin-ideal internalization, and

lower disordered eating.

Substantial evidence indicates that self-compassion is related to many desirable

psychological outcomes. According to Leary et al., Macbeth and Gumley, and Neff and Vonk (as

cited in Homan, 2016) "self compassionate people tend to report more happiness, greater life

satisfaction, lower negative affect, and fewer symptoms of psychological distress (such as

anxiety and depression) than less self-compassionate individuals" (p. 112). It is also related to

psychological constructs, including optimism, wisdom, curiosity, and personal initiative.

According to Wasylkiw, MacKinnon, and MacLellan (2012), their research examined the

relationships between self-compassion and women's body image. In study 1, female

undergraduates (N=142) completed 3 measures of body image and measures of self-esteem and

self-compassion. "Results showed that high self-compassion predicted fewer body concerns

independently of self-esteem. Moreover, when both self-compassion and self-esteem were

included as predictors, self-compassion accounted for unique variance In both preoccupation and

weight concerns whereas self-esteem did not" (p. 236). In their second study, this finding was

particularly in undergrad women (N=187). High scores on self-compassion also predicted less

eating guilt independent of self-esteem. Additionally, self-compassion was shown to partially

mediate the relationship between body preoccupation and depressive symptoms. The findings

highlight the possibility that consideration of self-compassion for body image may contribute to

identifying who is most at risk for body/shape concerns. Self-compassion is associated with less

harsh judgments of the self, it appears that, regardless of body size, shape, or discrepancy from

societal ideals, individuals who are self compassionate are more accepting of their physical selves.

As stated by Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, and Chen (as cited by Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013), "a key aspect of self-compassion is a healthy self-acceptance, in light of a realistic understanding of one's inadequacies, represented as an 'active approach-oriented view of emotional regulation'" (p. 312). It involves having a more realistic understanding of one's strengths as well as, weaknesses.

The Science of Self-Compassion and Mindfulness

According to Neff, recent research has displayed a link between self-compassion and psychological health, including "happiness, conscientiousness, optimism and decreased anxiety, depressive symptomatology, and rumination" (Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013, p. 313). The study conducted by Hall et al. (2013) examined Neff's three components of self-compassion, self-judgment versus self-kindness (SJ–SK), a sense of isolation versus common humanity (I–CH), and over-identification versus mindfulness (OI–M). The results indicated that all three composites were significantly correlated with perceived stress. They stated that "it may be that increased self-judgment in relation to self-compassion lowers an individual's ability to cognitively engage in positive coping strategies in order to effectively deal with stress" (p. 311).

Their findings support the association between self-compassion and psychological and physical well-being, but the composites demonstrate different influences. "SJ–SK and I–CH were predictive of both depressive symptomatology and physical well-being, and SJ–SK and OI–M were predictive of managing life stressors. The results of this study support and expand prior research on self-compassion" (p. 311). According to Neff and Vonk (as cited in Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013) "individuals with higher levels of self-compassion were better able to deal with negative life events and were more likely to be able to use more adaptive responses in response to these unpleasant events" (p. 311). The I–CH composite indicated that as isolation

increased in response to common humanity, the ability to cope effectively with stressors diminished. The results found OI–M was a significant predictor of dealing with stress and support prior research on the role of mindfulness in effective coping with stress.

Self-compassion taps into the biological mammalian care-giving system. When we soothe our own pain, we are tapping into the mammalian care-giving system. All mammals have a care-giving attachment system that allows for strong emotional bonds and helps us feel content, safe, and connected (Yap, 2018). "This care-giving system works on the hormone and neurotransmitter oxytocin. Increased levels of the hormone, oxytocin, increases feelings of trust, calm, safety, generosity, and connectedness, and facilitates the ability to feel warmth and compassion for ourselves" (Yap, 2018, para. 6). Gilbert and Irons (as cited in Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013) proposed that ones "body's activation of certain hormonal response systems could play a major role in physical well-being… that engaging in self-compassionate behavior could exert an influence on physical well-being by activating the oxytocin–opiate system and reducing the body's threat system" (p. 318). By contrast, self-criticism activates another biological system – the threat system, which produces a fight-or-flight response in the body. When an individual engages in self-compassion, there was a reduction in the levels of the stress hormone cortisol. The amygdala starts a cascade of responses that increase blood pressure, adrenaline, cortisol, to prepare our body for a threat (Yap, 2018, para. 6). Over time, repeated and long-term activation of this system has a negative impact on our mental and physical health. It has been proven that self-compassion provides emotional resilience because it deactivates the threat system (associated with feelings of insecure attachment, defensiveness, and autonomic arousal) and activates the caregiving system (associated with feelings of secure attachment, safety, and the oxytocin-opiate system) (Germer & Neff, 2013).

According to Barnett and Sharp (2016), by creating a view of oneself which encompasses patience and understanding of the self, self-compassion can activate the self-soothing system to

help instill feelings of safety and self-confidence within oneself. It supports Neff's view that self-compassion has the ability to transform negative self-affect such as, anxiety, depression, stress, rumination, thought suppression, perfectionism, and shame, into positive self-affect such as, life satisfaction, happiness, connectedness, self-confidence, optimism, and gratitude. This view is consistent with the idea that increasing self-kindness, while reducing the level of self-judgment, can be helpful for the individuals' overall well-being as well (Neff. 2003). Adopting a more self-compassionate view of the self may help to "lessen the impact of the constant media exposure to images of idealized female bodies. Utilizing self-compassion based interventions may be particularly helpful for individual with high levels of self-judgment and maladaptive perfectionism" (Barnett & Sharp, 2016, p. 232).

        As stated by Neff (as cited in Neff, 2012), self-compassion is associated with greater wisdom and emotional intelligence and hence, it aids in dealing wisely with difficult emotions and individuals who exercise self-compassion engage in less instances of rumination and thought suppression compared to individuals with low levels of self-compassion. Its association with positive states of being results in feelings of social connectedness and life satisfaction. It is also associated with feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Neff, 2003), suggesting that self-compassion helps meet the basic psychological needs which are fundamental to an individuals well-being. "By wrapping one's pain in the warm embrace of self-compassion, positive feelings are generated that help balance the negative ones" (Neff, 2012, p. 87). Research supports the idea that self-compassion enhances motivation rather than self indulgence and is associated with greater personal initiative. Gilbert and Irons (2005) suggest that, self-compassion deactivates the threat system which is associated with feelings of insecure attachment, defensiveness, and autonomic arousal and activates the individuals self-soothing system which is linked to feelings of secure attachment, safety, and the oxytocin-opiate system.

They also argue that this is an evolved capacity that emerges from behavioral systems involving attachment and affiliation.

How to be Mindful and Self-Compassionate in the Digital Age

When women are exposed to thin ideal media models, they might feel unable to live up to the unrealistic thinness standards provided by the media and consequently feel dissatisfied with their own bodies. Hence, self-compassion is an emotionally positive self attitude which protects women against self-judgement. "As thinness is often carried out by the media as a prevailing cultural norm, women might consider media models relevant to compare themselves with" (Anschutz, Engels, & Strien, 2012, p. 604). Television watching in general, and experiencing pressure to be thin from the media, "was found to be related to increased awareness of weight loss strategies and disturbed eating behaviour later on in young children" (p. 609). The "ubiquitous media image of the ultra–thin, remarkably perfect female model is currently the subject of much concern and debate" (Engeln-Maddox, 2005, p. 1115). Ongoing exposure to these specific images "reinforces Western culture's emphasis on the link between a thin physique and physical attractiveness, as well as the myriad social rewards associated with attractiveness" (p. 1115). Greater internalization of the media's appearance–based standards has been linked to body image disturbance, disordered eating, and negative mood and this appears to be primarily mediated by body dissatisfaction. This relationship has been supported both in studies of college women and young girls.

"Self-compassion refers to a kind and nurturing attitude toward oneself during situations that threaten one's adequacy, while recognizing that being imperfect is part of being human" (Homan, 2016, p. 111). It acts as a protective factor in the development of poor body image and eating pathology in the face of the digital era. First, self-compassion may directly and negatively predict eating disorder outcomes regardless of risk factors. It can lead to the likelihood of eating disorder outcomes not only among individuals who are at risk of developing eating disorders but

also among individuals who are not at risk of developing eating disorders. It can also prevent the

initial occurrence of risk factors for unfavorable body image outcomes. "This is analogous to an

indirect effect and entails that self-compassion reduces the likelihood of eating disorder

outcomes because self compassionate individuals are less likely to be at risk of developing eating

disorders compared to less self-compassionate individuals" (Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Dodos,

Chatzisarantis, & Ntoumanis, 2017, p. 243).

  Self-compassion works to protect individuals experiencing poor body image and

associated maladaptive outcomes. The study conducted by Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al. (2017)

was used to examine the roles of appearance-related upward comparisons and self-compassion in

the prediction of body image concerns The first hypothesis by Thøgersen-Ntoumani et al. (2017)

was supported in which, "appearance-related upward comparisons and self-compassion were

independent predictors of state social physique anxiety, drive for thinness, and body

dissatisfaction" (p. 253). Upward appearance comparisons appeared to serve as a pertinent threat

to participants' body image (except for drive for thinness), as they positively predicted social

physique anxiety and body dissatisfaction. Specifically, when participants engaged in upward

appearance comparisons they were more likely to report high state levels of social physique

anxiety and body dissatisfaction than when they did not engage in this type of comparison. The

purpose of their study was to examine within-person associations (whilst controlling for

between-person differences) between appearance-related self-compassion, appearance-related

threats (operationalised as upward appearance comparisons), and body image-related variables,

namely, social physique anxiety, drive for thinness, and body dissatisfaction. It involved a diary

methodology in which young women (n = 126; M age = 21.26) responded to brief online surveys

three times per day (11am, 3pm, and 7pm) every second day for one week (i.e. a total of 12

measurement points). The results of their work concluded that appearance-based self-compassion

was important, not just when there was a potential threat to body image via upward appearance comparisons. The findings highlight the importance of fostering self-compassion on a daily level.

Self-compassion involves being touched by, and open to, one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it (Neff. 2003). Restrictive dieting, which includes dieting, fasting, or limiting food intake to a certain number of calories or certain foods or food groups – stems in part from a cultural context in the United States that promotes thinness and stigmatises overweight. Recent research among college women has been reported by Kelly and Stephen (as cited in Beekman, Stock &, Howe 2017) and has found that daily fluctuations in self-compassion predicted fluctuations in eating behaviours such that "days when women reported greater self-compassion, they also reported more intuitive eating – a measure of a healthy relationship with food marked by the propensity to follow hunger and satiety cues when deciding how much, when and what to eat" (p. 1353). As stated by Albertson, Neff, and Dill-Shackleford (2014), "rather than attacking and berating oneself for personal shortcomings, the self is offered warmth, comfort, and unconditional acceptance" (p. 444). Bringing self-compassion into ones life brings less rumination, perfectionism, and fear of failure. Self-compassion is likely to lessen body dissatisfaction for reasons such as, being kind, gentle, and understanding towards oneself rather than harshly judging oneself, directly counters the tendency to criticize one's body rather than accept it as it is. Similarly, "the sense of common humanity entailed by self-compassion should help women consider their physical appearance from a broad, inclusive perspective that mitigates body dissatisfaction and associated feelings of body shame" (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2014, p. 445). The element of mindfulness helps "women relate to their painful thoughts (e.g., my body is unattractive) and emotions (e.g., I feel too fat to be worthy of love) in a balanced way that avoids fixating on or overidentifying with disliked body characteristics" (p. 445). Self-compassion entails positive states of mind such as optimism, life satisfaction, and gratitude, and it may also enhance a sense of appreciation and respect for one's body the way it

is. Self-compassion offers women an alternative way of valuing themselves. Women living in Western culture are taught that physical beauty is one of their most important features. In fact, women's self-esteem is largely contingent upon meeting societal standards of ideal beauty and if they do not meet these standards, their sense of self-worth suffers. "Self-compassion is a significant source of positive self-regard…self-compassion involves treating oneself kindly in times of failure" (p. 445). Neff and Vonk (as cited in Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackelford, 2014) "found that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of social comparison than global self-esteem and is less contingent on perceived appearance" (p. 445).

Mindful Social Networking

In todays cyber world, women of all ages experience serious cognitive, affective, and behavioral symptoms triggered by body dissatisfaction, which persist across the lifespan such that, "adopting a more accepting and positive view of the self may help to battle the heavy media exposure of idealized and unrealistic female images that women are continuously exposed to" (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2014, p. 445). Having a more "self-compassionate view of these may help to lessen the impact of the constant media exposure to images of idealized female bodies. Utilizing self-compassion based interventions may be particularly helpful for individual with high levels of self-judgment and maladaptive perfectionism" (p. 232). Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford (2014) operationalized maladaptive perfectionism as the discrepancy between one's high standards and their actual performance because it most closely resembles the discrepancy between ideal body image and an individual's actual body image satisfaction. It is found to be associated with high levels of perceived stress and neuroticism. The study conducted by Barnett and Sharp (2016) found that maladaptive perfectionism is linked with body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors. They found that self-compassion mediates the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and disordered eating such that the self-judgment component was the most consistent mediator, suggesting that maladaptive

perfectionism impacts body image satisfaction and disordered eating through negative evaluations of the self.

How many of us, when we look in a mirror, don't like the person we see? This is a moment of suffering worthy of a compassionate response. Similarly, "when life goes awry, we often go into problem-solving mode immediately without even knowing we're in pain or recognizing the need to comfort ourselves for the difficulties we're facing" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 857). Mindfulness also requires that we not over-identify with negative thoughts or feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by our aversive reactions. Rumination on our negative feelings narrows our focus and creates a negative self-concept. According to Baer (as cited in Germer & Neff, 2013), "the mental space provided by taking a mindful approach to our difficult feelings, however, allows for greater clarity, perspective, and equanimity" (p. 857).

Self compassion involves not replacing negative thoughts and feelings with positive ones, but these positive thoughts and emotions are born by embracing the negative ones. Self-compassion facilitates resilience by moderating people's reactions to negative events. It entails transitioning the focus from the ideal to the real. According to Jopling (as cited in Neff, 2003), the nonjudgmental, detached stance of mindfulness reduces self-criticism and heightens self-understanding hence, enhancing self-kindness. Also, this counters the egocentrism that causes feelings of isolation and separateness from the rest of humanity, thereby increasing feelings of interconnectedness. Furthermore, if women stop judging and berating themselves long enough to experience self-acceptance, the negative impact of the emotional experience will be lessened, making it easier to maintain balanced awareness of one's thoughts and emotions by neither running away from, or running away with, the feelings. Similarly, "remembering that suffering and personal failure happen to all people helps put one's experience into perspective, also enhancing the ability to be mindful of one's thoughts and emotions and to not over-identify with them" (Neff, 2003, p. 89).

To Live Your Truth

It is crucial to hold painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identify with them. "Self-compassion, therefore, involves being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness" (Neff. 2003, p. 87). Self-compassion entails seeing one's own experience in light of the common human experience, and acknowledging that suffering, failure, and inadequacies are part of the human condition, and that all people are worthy of compassion. Hence, feeling compassion for oneself is similar to feeling forgiveness for oneself. It involves not harshly criticizing the self for failing to meet ideal standards, however, it does not mean that one's failings go unnoticed or unrectified. Rather, "it means that the actions needed for optimal functioning and health (and having compassion for oneself means that one desires well-being for oneself) are encouraged with gentleness and patience" (Neff. 2003, p. 87). "When individuals are not being mindful of their painful thoughts and feelings, they are not accepting their experience for what it is, and this non-acceptance may manifest as the refusal to bring it into conscious awareness" (Neff, 2003, p. 89). Mindfulness training can help individuals prevent depression by encouraging them to accept and tolerate their painful thoughts and emotions rather than trying to alter them, while "simultaneously placing these thoughts and emotions in a larger context so that their significance is seen with greater perspective" (Neff, 2003, p. 90). Mindfulness also involves a non-judging, non-identifying attitude. One's thoughts, feelings, and sensations are observed as they follow a natural course in experience. It means to connect with, and live from, a deeper sense of peace and purpose. It is also associated with personal responsibility which entails being more conscientiousness, taking greater responsibility for past mistakes, and holding the disposition to apologize.

Summary

Self-compassion consists of three main elements: kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. These components work together to create a self-compassionate frame of mind. Self-compassion is negatively associated with depression, self-criticism, and anxiety. Self-compassion mindfulness coists of turning toward our painful thoughts and emotions and seeing them as they are without suppressing or avoiding them. Mindfulness training can help individuals prevent depression by encouraging them to accept and tolerate these painful thoughts and emotions rather than trying to alter them. It allows individuals to hold painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them. When an individual exercises self-compassion, there is a deactivation of the threat system and activation of the individual's self-soothing system which highly entails the ability to be kind to oneself. It acts as a protective factor in the development of poor body image and eating pathology in the face of the digital world. Self-compassion can help reduce the impact on women who are negatively impacted by constant media exposure to ideal body images. It aids in the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, mediates the relationship between the ideal and the real, and aids in body image satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Discussion

By conducting a review of the literature examining the relationship between social media and the negative impact on body image, it is inevitable that social media, specifically social networking, can break down one's body image. The purpose of this work was to inspire an effective practice of self-compassion and mindfulness in therapy with women suffering from low self-esteem as a result from body image concerns. Underlying this thesis was an objectification theoretical framework which posits that women often adopt an observer's perspective on their physical selves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). It states that when a person exists in a culture that objectifies them, they will internalize this treatment leading to self-objectification and other negative consequences. The culture of western society sets forth a rigid ideal for appearance which holds that women should appear slender and thin. The pressure to conform to these ideals is thought to be a major contributing factor to the prevalence of body image concerns and eating disturbance within western culture. In this concluding chapter, the clinical implications and recommendations are reviewed, the limitations of this thesis and proposals for future research are discussed, and the author's personal reflections on the research process will be discussed.

Clinical Implications

This manuscript thesis does not conduct original empirical research and therefore, includes no research participants and this is the primary limitation of this thesis. As a result, the conclusions for this thesis remain debatable and theoretical. Clinicians should promote more awareness around this topic and build it into their work with clients. I spoke about my own biases hence why, clinicians must be aware of their own thoughts and feelings when working to encourage self-compassion and mindfulness into the lives of the clients. They need to be mindful of one's own inner workings with body image and how this may impact the clients with whom they would work with. Since this thesis did not discuss other theoretical models, it would be

useful for clinicians to look into person-centered therapy, narrative therapy, existential therapy, strength-based therapy, as well as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

When an individual becomes so consumed by their thoughts, feelings, past histories, and behaviors they tend to lose their ability to view themselves outside these contexts hence, ACT shows clients they are not defined by these but there are alternate ways they can view themselves and their content (Batten & Ciarrochi, 2015). Furthermore, Batten and Ciarrochi (2015) state that individuals can experience the ways in which it is like to "see themselves through the eyes of a kind friend and thereby develop self-compassion and improved ability to rebound from setbacks…learn to view things from other people's perspectives and develop the capacity for empathy and genuine love" (p. 4). Clients can learn to view themselves as being separate from their thoughts and feelings and as the one who holds these thoughts and feelings and therefore, they have no ability to hold onto it or fight it. In ACT, an individual learns to "develop a sense of self as context, where the self is the place of awareness or perspective taking that allows internal and external events to be experienced from 'I/here/now' without being defined by those events" (Twohig, 2012, p. 503). Awareness simply allows an individual to stay nonjudgmental and just simply let the products of the mind be present (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012). This approach "helps identify and weaken the social contingencies that lead to self- deception in the service of preserving a conceptualized version of self" (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012, p. 223).

Limitations and Professional Recommendations for Future Research

As discussed in this thesis, there are several limitations which exist. As discussed in chapter one, the most common one is that social media may act as a source of empowerment and positive impact on women. Thousands of campaigns circle the web which spread positive messages. Examples of a few are the Dove Campaign, Procter and Gamble's #likeagirl, Under Armour I will want what I want, Nike better for it, etc. However, the entirety of this paper focuses on the negative impact of social media on women. These campaigns and ads ensure that

women grow up enjoying a positive relationship with oneself. They help raise their self-esteem and encourage them to realize their full potential. To increase awareness around this topic, I believe it is important to make men and women both aware of this.

Furthermore, there are many theoretical models for therapeutic work with women who suffer from poor body image, and this thesis does not review them all. Hence, those models and authors which have been omitted from this thesis should be considered as well. Since there is a lot of research focusing primarily on females and not males, I believe it is just as important to raise awareness around that as well. According to Hobza, Walker, Yakushko, and Peugh (2007), these ideally attractive men and women whom are featured together in the media, are potentially sending the message that men and women may obtain ideal partners if they are willing to work toward society's expectations. "Indeed, men have reported wanting to build bigger chests and leaner abs in order to impress women, and men with muscular upper bodies, and lean stomachs have been considered by women to be more attractive" (Hobza et al., 2007, p. 161). It has also been examined that the impact of ideal media images may also be seen in the increasing prevalence of eating disorder symptomatology, body dysmorphia, excessive exercise, and steroid use among men. Since there is not much research surrounding men, it would be important to look into this. There is growing awareness around the ways in which *media* messages *negatively impact* the body image and self-esteem of women and girls. However, on the other hand, men are told they must be physically appealing as well and this can look like having an unrealistically toned physique, along with that mentality. The media illustrates this image to be of muscular, alpha males, who display strength and display no emotion.

Personal Reflections

I chose to write about this topic since it is deeply rooted in my personal life because of the ways in which I feel when surfing through social media. The process of writing this thesis was challenging and put me face-to-face with my own inner workings with body image. Since

this topic holds personal significance in my life, sharing my own beliefs put me in a vulnerable

state. The importance of this topic was something I wanted to share with others. Parts of me

wanted to switch topics as I would come to a standstill. I was fearful that others would not be

interested in reading my work on this topic. This topic only focuses on women and I was worried

it would not hold interest to many who do not relate to this. Furthermore, since this thesis does

not consist of human subjects, I felt my work was not meaningful in this field of work compared

to others. I also felt that my thesis would lack depth and insight.

Once I was able to recognize my own thoughts and feelings and became aware of what

was residing inside me, it helped me continue writing with more insight. I was able to share deep

personal ideas related to the repercussions of social media on my own body image. I became

face-to-face with my own thoughts and feelings which helped me worked through them without

pushing them away. I began to use kindness towards myself and hence, began exercising self-

compassion in my day-to-day life. I have heard about many women as well as, in my practice,

and I commonly hear of female clients in conflict with the gap between the real and the ideal

which places the client in a very vulnerable position.

Being a young female in her mid-twenties, I would say I carry a slim bodily figure as per

the definition depicted by the media. As a result, I believe many would think I would not

understand what they are experiencing. However, that is not the case. I am aware of biases and

judgments that would exist in this type of work between counsellor and client. I believe it is my

job as a counsellor to allow others to understand that just because it may appear that I am happy

with the way I look, many of us all are working through something. I would want to engage in

some self-disclosure with clients to help them understand they are not alone and that is how my

therapeutic work would begin with them. This is consistent with my own worldview which holds

that we all have a story and we all carry insecurities which may or not be a result of the society

we will live in. Being a young female, I also believe that females are treated as a mere object of

sexual desire by males and are continuously under the gaze of others. As a result, sexual

objectification occurs when a woman's entire being is identified with her body and she is treated

as a body or a collection of body parts. Heightened self-objectification often behaviorally

manifests in body surveillance, or the habitual monitoring of how one's body appears. This is the

repercussions of social media and their portrayal of what beauty is in today's world.

I believe that being self-compassionate, exercising mindfulness, and encouraging clients

to do the same will enhance their well-being. It will encourage them to be more kind to oneself

rather than constantly evaluating and criticizing oneself. This is something I still do today and I

know has helped me. I believe it could present opportunity for rich and illuminating conversation

between the client and counsellor. I believe with my own experience with this topic, I will have

more meaningful conversations with my clients. I believe the conversations would be

transformative, for not only my clients, but, for myself as well.

A lot of the work I have done encompasses a variety of therapeutic modalities such as

person-centered, acceptance and mindfulness therapy, narrative therapy, solution-focused

therapy, as well as, motivational interviewing. I enjoy using a combination of therapies because I

believe a collaborative approach to choosing therapeutic modalities is more efficient. I do not

choose one therapy when working with a client, I use a combination of therapies and tailor the

therapies I enjoy using to fit the needs of the client and their individuality. As a client, I would

want to be treated with respect and kindness. I would want to be validated and would want to be

heard and accepted by my counsellor. I would want to do the same for my clients. Many seek out

counselling to be heard because there may not be any person in their lives whom they can count

on to be there for them. It is important to ensure the client feels safe and secure. It is important to

assure the client that they are safe within the relationship and are free to discuss what is present

with them without the fear of having to hide and not be open. By building this trust and creating

this space, the client will be more open to sharing what they are truly feeling and thinking. It is

why I spend lots of my time in the beginning to create this space for the client and our

relationship. I have begun doing a lot of work with myself by looking for meaning and purpose

in my life and what I stand for. This is something I have taken with me from my sessions. I am a

therapist who is currently working on herself and wants to do what she can to be there for her

clients but that means I must be there for myself as well. I am working to help clients develop a

strong sense of self and it is what I find myself doing as well. I am engaging in self-reflection

and working to build towards a healthier sense of self and reflect on what it is in my life I get

meaning and purpose from. As I gain self-awareness within myself, I am becoming more aware

of the needs of my clients and their situations. I am working on understanding my feelings and

thoughts and becoming more aware of my physical sensations when experiencing different

moods and when in stressful situations. The awareness I am gaining with myself is allowing me

to be more aware of my clients. I am allowing them to become more aware of themselves in

return specifically, their physical sensations.

Conclusion

Body image is a multifaceted construct comprised of evaluative self-perceptions about

one's appearance. The foundation of this thesis is built on the objectification theory for

understanding how the impact of social media can wreck havoc on a woman's perception of

herself. The western world portrays women as objects of perfection and provokes feelings of

inadequacy and results in social comparison with others and this causes women to feel bodily

shame due to the dissatisfaction experienced with their bodies. It provides an understanding of

the ways in which constant evaluation of the female body in our society often leads to women

feeling the need to keep constant surveillance on their own bodies. Exercising the use of self-

compassion allows an individual to relate to oneself with mindfulness and kindness while

honoring one's common humanity. Hence, it allows a self-compassionate individual to

experience enhanced well-being and improved body image.

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