

Final Manuscript: The Impact of Instagram on Females' Self Image

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Abstract

With the advancements of technology and smartphones, social media has become a prevalent part of many individuals' lives. Instagram is a popular social media site that allows users to generate and interact with images and other individuals. The primary guiding conceptual framework used in this paper is social comparison theory. Like traditional media, social media delivers messages to women and girls about beauty ideals. There is mixed evidence in the literature as to how these types of images impact females. However, it appears that exposure to idealized images on Instagram is associated with female body dissatisfaction in some women. Additionally, individual differences also seem to affect how Instagram impacts female body image and satisfaction. Social media can have positive and negative effects on individuals and is dependent on individual factors such as the content interacted with and how the individual uses social media platforms. The effects of social media on individuals have multiple counselling implications to practitioners and several counselling interventions are highlighted. Lastly, clinicians should work with clients on ways to promote healthier social media use. Additional research should be conducted regarding the effects of Instagram to further develop the field.

Keywords: Instagram, females, body image, body dissatisfaction, social comparison, counselling psychology, social media

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Social media has become an inevitable presence in the lives of many individuals. There is a higher prevalence of social media use amongst the younger generation (Wood et al., 2016). As technology advances, social media has become even more readily accessible through the use of smartphones. Social media allows for quick, easy, and convenient interactions all at one's fingertips. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have rapidly transformed how individuals communicate and interact (Liu & Ma, 2018).

For this research project, I am specifically focusing on Instagram. I chose Instagram because I was inspired by my own lived experiences as a female Instagram user, and I am interested to see how the platform impacts other girls and women. Instagram is unique compared to other social media platforms because users connect through pictures and videos. Users can also control if they wish to share their profile publicly or privately to just their followers (Tiggemann et al., 2018). It is also common amongst Instagram users to edit and enhance photos they post to create a curated online presentation (Dumas et al., 2017). Furthermore, Instagram's focus is to enable its users to stand out and express themselves by creating content that is compelling and that builds influence through connecting with other users (Instagram, n.d.-a). Instagram users also receive feedback from the posts they make from other Instagram users through "liking" or "commenting" on their photos or videos. This feedback is also noted to contribute to user pressure to stand out and be worthy of "likes" (Baker et al., 2019).

At this point, it is quite established in the literature that adolescent and young adult women are often negatively impacted by images of other women in the media that reflect socially created and artificially enhanced female beauty standards (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al., 2018; Tiggemann et al., 2018). However, there is some evidence that indicates

that women can have positive outcomes using social media such as gaining inspiration when viewing images of other women whom they idolize on social media (Meier & Schafer, 2018). The literature also indicates that these images are most impactful when women internalize images of beauty ideals and make comparisons to them (Baker et al., 2019). Exposure to images of "perfect" women is linked to various negative effects such as body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Body dissatisfaction is a prevalent issue among young adult women (Baker et al., 2019; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015) as well as young men, but as body dissatisfaction is a more frequent issue women face, I believe it is an important topic to further investigate through this research project.

Understanding the effects of the exposure of body-objectifying images on the internet and social media sites is a relatively newer topic in the academic literature (Baker et al., 2019; Kleemans et al., 2018). There appears to be a parallel between traditional media and social media in the sense that both platforms perpetuate socially constructed beauty standards and expectations about how women should look. However, social media differs from traditional media, such as television, magazines, advertisements, etc., as it presents peer-generated content and is accessible 24/7. Although both traditional and social media offer an opportunity for social comparison, social media heightens social comparison due to peer comparison targets (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). Since human beings are naturally inclined to compare themselves to others (Dijkstra et al., 2010; Gilbert et al., 1995), if individuals perceive themselves to be inferior to their comparison, feelings of envy and jealousy are evoked (Festinger, 1954) as well as sadness and shame (Gilbert, 2003). Additionally, Gilbert (2003) suggests that it is part of innate human nature to manipulate self-presentations to become more desirable to others. Social media platforms such as Instagram, for example, provide readily

available information about their follower's lives making it an easy outlet for social comparison. It is effortless for Instagram users to compare themselves to their peers (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019).

Despite some of the potential negative effects of Instagram, there must be something vastly appealing about the platform as there are more than 1 billion users worldwide (Tankovska, 2021). Furthermore, consistent with Tankovska (2021), over two-thirds of Instagram users are under the age of 34, and there is evidence that social media can play a role in positive mental health outcomes such as social communication (Glaser et al., 2018), improving quality of life (Liu & Ma, 2018), and relaxation (Liu & Ma, 2019).

Due to the mixed findings in research, I am curious to explore what effects Instagram has on its users. More specifically, I have a particular interest in how Instagram impacts female users. Through this research project, I hope to contribute to the growing body of literature by conducting a comprehensive literature review that seeks to further our understanding of how Instagram impacts female self-image.

Self-Positioning Statement

Throughout my life, I have held a curiosity about how the media impacts its viewers. It is fascinating to me why women were always held to high media standards and why there is so much shame around not meeting those expectations. I grew up idolizing various celebrities and wishing I could look or be like them. As I approached adolescence, my view changed from wishing to be like celebrities to wondering why I do not look like them or other magazine models. As I looked at the women in my life, I assumed that looking "perfect" was reserved for models and celebrities. However, little did I know how social media would change that perception. With the rise of popularity of social media, it allowed the average person to portray

themselves in a way that was comparable to the “perfect” models and celebrities in magazines. With the use of filters and learning what angles are the most flattering in photos, peers became as idolized and looked as perfect as celebrities. I found my adolescent self not only comparing myself to pictures of women I saw in magazines but to my peers on social media as well.

Another curiosity of mine that developed over the years was getting a better understanding of social media. I actively became a part of social media when I signed up for Facebook in 2009 during my adolescent years. Social media was a whole new dynamic for me because it introduced another way to measure myself against my peers. When I first joined Instagram in 2013 during my early adulthood, I found the platform refreshing because it was picture-based, and I liked how I was not constantly bombarded with wordy status updates such as on Facebook or Twitter. I also liked how I could follow accounts based on my interests. When I first joined Instagram, the platform was in its infancy and consisted of various pictures with bad filters on them. As the years progressed, I noticed a shift in the content on Instagram. Gone were the pictures with the bad filters on them. Suddenly it mattered what was posted, and there was pressure to post "worthy" content such as doing something “cool” like travelling or hanging out with friends or wearing a nice outfit to go out. I remember always feeling pressured to look “good” in pictures and only wanted to post ones that I felt looked good enough by this newly created standard.

Becoming a young adult coincided with the rise of popularity of Instagram. I felt additional pressure to look “perfect” in photos I posted, and I even got several apps on my phone to edit my pictures. From my experience, the standard for what was good enough to post on Instagram was ever increasing as the years went by and has made it increasingly harder to judge what is “post-worthy” content. The mentality shifted to what content gets the most amount of

"likes," which equates to recognition from others. Some users became extremely popular on Instagram and set the standard of expectations. These users are known as "influencers."

Instagram also became a way for individuals to make money through advertisements. I noticed a movement where the standards of what was posted increased to be more at par with the influencers.

A fitness trend emerged on Instagram, which was followed by unwritten expectations to lead a lifestyle focused on exercise and clean eating to achieve that perfectly toned body depicted on the social media site. Being "fit" became a social media norm, yet somehow even with dieting and exercise I found that it was seemly impossible to achieve that "fit" Instagram body and that I still did not quite measure up. Instagram became stressful for me between taking good enough photos to how many people would like my photos. On top of these social stressors, I felt pressured into working out to achieve a certain look. No longer did I find myself comparing myself to celebrities as I did when I was younger but to peers or the "average" everyday person on Instagram. Somehow it felt more attainable to be like the "average" everyday person compared to a celebrity. Eventually, I reached a point where I took a step back and asked myself: how was it possible that I got so caught up in a social media platform?

My own experience with Instagram made me curious to find out more about this social media platform. Sometime in my undergraduate studies, I became interested in how Instagram can negatively impact women. From my time being an Instagram user myself, I started to gather observations about the multiple issues, such as photo enhancement, hypersexuality, and portraying a perfect life with Instagram, that seem to be unique to the platform.

Firstly, since Instagram's content consists of pictures, Instagram can provide a distorted view of reality through photo enhancement and manipulation. Secondly, Instagram normalizes

hypersexuality and delivers multiple messages through photos about how one should look and what they should have in order to be considered sexually desirable. The messages I received on Instagram impacted me immensely throughout the years as it negatively impacted my self-esteem and self-image. I wondered why I could not get as many likes as some of my peers or why I could not achieve the same results as the women on the fitness accounts. It was easy for me to feel like something was wrong with me when I internalized these messages. Instagram also made me feel dissatisfied with my life regarding milestones when I compared myself to my peers and that left me feeling frustrated.

Despite knowing these images on Instagram may be enhanced, modified, or only reflect the best pictures or moments of someone else's life, it remained difficult not to make comparisons. I believe that there is some effect to getting bombarded by these images on a daily and hourly basis. It can be testing for one's self-esteem, and sometimes I still feel jealous when browsing through Instagram; it makes me wonder how many other girls and women feel the same.

Since social media can be a daily influence in many young women's lives, it is crucial to understand its consequences. Scrolling through Instagram is a part of their daily routine. Simply through the touch of their fingertips, Instagram conveys multiple messages to users through the power of pictures and videos. The literature also indicates that women seem to be more affected by Instagram use than men (Fioravanti et al., 2020). In this study, Fioravanti et al. (2020) explored the effects of quitting Instagram for a week on both men and women in comparison to a control group that continued to use Instagram. Women who stopped using Instagram for a week reported increased positive affect and life satisfaction whereas men reported no significant effects. The findings may be explained by the observation that men tend to place less emphasis

on their body appearance in comparison to women. Additionally, the findings can also be used to explain why refraining from Instagram use may be more beneficial for women as restricting use minimizes the opportunity for online appearance comparisons (Fioravanti et al., 2020). Hence, it is critical to delve deeper into understanding how exactly this social media platform impacts women.

My long-standing interest in this topic, combined with my lived experiences of being a female Instagram user, created personal biases. The biases that I hold about Instagram are that it can be a negative experience for women and potentially harmful to their self-image. Biases are part of human nature and can even affect perceptions and actions subconsciously (Kathawa & Arora, 2020). I must be transparent with my personal bias as I engage in writing this comprehensive literature review. Being mindful and aware of my preferences can be potentially helpful to break out of a one-track mindset. However, having a personal bias in academic research can be harmful to the outcome and quality of the project. As much as it would be satisfying to write a literature review that solely strengthens my biases and supports my lived experiences, I value producing an in-depth, objective, and high-quality comprehensive literature review. To achieve an objective literature review, I will also find literature contrary to my personal biases to learn more about other individuals' lived experiences with Instagram in order to balance positive and negative experiences.

Literature Review

Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory is a guiding conceptual framework present in literature. Outlining the basics of this theory will aid the reader to have a clear understanding of the terminology used in this literature review. Social comparison is "the process of thinking about

one or more other people in the relationship to the self" (Wood, 1996, p. 520). Festinger (1954) posits that it is part of human nature to be driven to appraise personal abilities and opinions. In combination with their capabilities in a situation, an individual's views and beliefs will affect behaviour. Furthermore, individuals compare their personal opinions and abilities to the views and skills of others around them. Those who are perceived to be most similar to the individual become a comparison target. In contrast, those who are most divergent for the individual are not used as a comparison target (Festinger, 1954). There are some similarities between Festinger's work of social comparison theory and Bandura's (1971) work of social learning theory. Both theories indicate the importance of peers, or another individual, in how one functions and behaves as a social being. It is indicated that observing the behaviour of others in combination with an individual's personal direct experience is one explanation of how individuals socially learn (Bandura, 1971). According to Bandura, identificatory learning also plays an imperative role in the socialization process. *Identification* is defined as "a process in which a person patterns his thoughts, feelings, or actions after another person who serves as a model" (Bandura, 1969, p. 214).

Throughout the years, social comparison theory has further grown and developed from Festinger's original work (Goethals, 1986). Two particular areas relevant to understanding how social comparison theory is related to Instagram use are through upwards and downwards comparisons (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007) and assimilation versus contrast (Mussweiler et al., 2004). Upwards comparisons are when individuals compare themselves to someone they perceive to be superior to them, and this comparison is usually associated with adverse outcomes for self-esteem. Conversely, downward comparisons are when individuals compare themselves to someone they perceive as inferior, which is generally associated with positive outcomes for

self-esteem (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Wills, 1991). Individual personality traits also appear to affect the likelihood of certain individuals engaging in social comparison behaviours as well. Individuals who are more self-conscious, have a negative self-view, and care about others' opinions tend to compare themselves more to others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007).

Assimilation is a way for individuals to seek similarities between themselves and their comparison target. In comparison, contrast is a way for individuals to seek variances between themselves and their comparison target (Mussweiler et al., 2004). Therefore, assimilation can account for the shift in individual perception in upwards comparisons to become more similar to their comparison target, leading to more positive outcomes. However, assimilation with downwards comparisons can account for more negative outcomes. Contrast can account for positive or negative outcomes with comparison targets but in the opposite way of assimilation. Contrast with downwards comparison targets can lead to more positive outcomes, whereas contrast with upwards comparison targets can lead to more negative outcomes (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Meier & Schafer, 2018).

Comparisons can be made in many different contexts such as through traditional media, social media, and in-person. According to Fardouly et al. (2017), upwards appearance comparisons are the most common type of social comparison women make when examining social media, traditional media, and everyday contexts. However, these authors found that comparisons made from social media yielded more negative outcomes in mood and appearance satisfaction than in-person comparisons (Fardouly et al., 2017). Since social media sites include peer-generated content, peer content on social media sites tends to be viewed as the comparison targets of users. Meier and Schafer's (2018) article is an example of how social comparison

theory can be applied to social media use by using assimilation and contrast as well as upwards and downwards comparisons.

Historical Context

Despite the popularity of the social media site Instagram, studying the effects of Instagram on female self-image is a newer, less established topic in the literature (Baker et al., 2019; Kleemans et al., 2018). A comparison is often drawn between social media and traditional media due to the similarities in female beauty ideals (Baker et al., 2019). The effects of traditional media platforms (e.g., magazines, television, etc.) on women and girls is a more established topic in the literature than the impact of social media. The media often portrays women being skinny and sets it as the ideal beauty standard even though these images are often edited and altered. These thin models and celebrities set an unrealistic beauty standard for women known as the thin-ideal (Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019).

This topic has been of interest to researchers across decades, and more historical research can be used as a comparison to newer literature. A meta-analysis of 77 studies revealed that the media's portrayal of thin-deal women harms women's body image (Grabe et al., 2008). The effects found in this meta-analysis appear to be robust as media exposure seems to impact women's body image regardless of media type, age, and individual difference variables. Furthermore, both correlational and experimental studies appear to yield similar effects. There is also evidence in the literature that exposure to images representing the thin-ideal in the media is linked to disordered eating in women (Grabe et al., 2008; Stice, 2002). Furthermore, women who were exposed to the thin-ideal also tended to score higher on assessment measures for bulimia, purging, and anorexic attitudes. In addition, this sort of imagery in the media also seems to impact their beliefs surrounding dieting and eating (Grabe et al., 2008). These findings in the

literature can be attributable to social comparison, specifically due to upwards contrast comparisons made with thin-ideal models and celebrities (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Conversely, another meta-analysis that reviewed 204 studies suggested that the media has no overall effect on women's body dissatisfaction (Ferguson, 2013). Ferguson (2013) aimed to address the debate on how thin-ideal images in the media impact viewers. The outcomes measured in this meta-analysis included body dissatisfaction, restrictive eating, and eating disorder symptoms. Results of the study indicated media has negligible effects on male body image and minimal effects for females. It was also suggested that there is no relationship between eating disorder symptoms and media use (Ferguson, 2013). However, a more recent meta-analysis in this area that reviewed six studies reveals that there is a positive relationship between social media use and the internalization of the thin-ideal in females (Mingoia et al., 2017). This positive relationship indicates that increased exposure of social media leads to higher internalization of the thin-ideal in women. Additionally, appearance related features of social media sites, such as posting and viewing pictures, also seemed to be related to body image concerns. This finding suggests that participating and interacting with appearance-related features on social media may contribute to body image concerns in women (Mingoia et al., 2017). Findings from Mingoia et al. (2017) are consistent with previous literature regarding the relationship between the exposure of traditional media and internalization of the thin-ideal in women. Another study indicates that approximately one-third of women self-report immediate negative effects on their body image after exposure to idealized women in the media (Frederick et al., 2017). In this study women were shown bikini model, fashion model, and control pictures. After viewing these images, the women were asked to report on certain categories of their body image such as weight, waist, stomach, thighs, hips, buttock, legs, muscle tone, and overall

appearance. Many women reported having negative thoughts about these specific areas of their body after viewing the bikini and fashion model pictures whereas few women reported feeling negatively about their bodies after viewing the control images. Frederick et al. (2017) conclude that the portrayal of women in the media has a large and systematic effect on how some females perceive their bodies immediately after exposure to media.

However, there continue to be discrepancies in the literature. Other findings suggest that individual factors can influence how exposure to the thin-ideal affects women (Halliwell, 2013; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997). When exposed to images of women that represented the thin-ideal, thinner women more positively rated their levels of attractiveness, whereas heavier women exposed to images of the thin-ideal reported more negative ratings of their self-image. Additionally, the same study revealed that low and high self-monitors reported different results when exposed to thin-ideal images. In this study, high self-monitors were conceptualized as those who placed greater emphasis on self-presentation and make behavioural shifts in social situations according to the situation. Low self-monitors were individuals who placed emphasis on the congruency between their behaviours and inner beliefs and values and were argued to value their personal beliefs more than conforming to social situations. Women who were high self-monitors reported positive body image outcomes after being exposed to images of the thin-ideal than low self-monitors. These findings demonstrate that exposure to thin-ideal images does not seem to have the same effect on all women viewing them (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 1997).

Body appreciation also seems to appear to be a protective factor from thin-ideal images of women in the media. Women who appreciated their own bodies tended to not report negative effects from media exposure whereas women who had less body appreciation reported more

negative media exposure effects (Halliwell, 2013). More recent literature focuses on social media depictions of women and indicates that body image is impacted by the perceived attractiveness of women in pictures in comparison to oneself (Hogue & Mills, 2019). It appears that individual characteristics of women can impact how thin-ideal images affect them. Overall, it appears fairly consistent throughout time that the portrayal of thin-ideal women in media can be potentially harmful to women's body image. The purpose of my literature review is to further explore if the impact of social media, more specifically Instagram, has similar outcomes on women's body image as traditional media sources.

Celebrity Versus Peer Images

One of the most apparent differences between traditional media and social media is the role of peers (Kleemans et al., 2018). Instagram provides an opportunity for its users to view both peer and celebrity images. Both peer and celebrity images are often unrealistic in the sense that the pictures are enhanced and edited. As well, peer images can be expanded beyond the individual's social circle as Instagram users can view and follow unknown peers (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Younger women who use Instagram report spending long periods viewing both celebrity and peer images (Baker et al., 2019). This notion is in line with social comparison theory, as individuals tend to compare themselves to those most similar to them (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, it would make sense if individuals would use their peers more than celebrities as comparison targets. Both men and women, regardless of age, are more inclined to compare their social and physical attributes to their peers than celebrities or models (Kleemans et al., 2018).

However, findings from another study suggest that viewing attractive peer and celebrity images on Instagram both had an acute negative effect on women's mood and body image

(Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). In this study, there was no significant difference between celebrity and unknown peer images. For example, the attractive individual's celebrity status did not seem to impact the user as both types of images led to negative effects in comparison to the control images. However, an additional measure of *celebrity worship*, defined in this study as an imagined special relationship and strong connection with a celebrity, appeared to moderate the impact of celebrity images on body image. Women high in celebrity worship experienced more detrimental effects to their body image from being exposed to attractive celebrity images than those who rated low on celebrity worship. These results appear to be contrary to social comparison theory as both celebrity and peer images led to negative body image consequences. Perhaps this contradiction can be explained by how Instagram puts celebrities on par with peers as users can view photos they post about their private lives (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

Another difference between peer and celebrity images on Instagram is that peer (known and unknown) material accounts for a large portion of the content (Tiggemann et al., 2018). As well, reciprocal interactions through "likes" and "comments" on images are more likely to occur through peer-to-peer interactions. Often young women and girls use peer validation through receiving "likes" and "comments" on their pictures as a way to measure their attractiveness and popularity (Butkowski et al., 2019). Additionally, adolescents are more likely to "like" another peer's image that already has many likes from peers, which emphasizes the idea that the quantity of likes is related to perceived popularity (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Also, drawing comparisons with peers and comparing feedback from peers on Instagram can lead to feelings of inadequacy amongst female Instagram users (Baker et al., 2019).

Influencers

Influencers typically rank in status somewhere between peers and traditional celebrities (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). There are several different terms to define or describe the role of social media influencers in the literature. Generally, these types of individuals are a form of social media celebrity but can also be described as a micro-celebrity (Jin et al., 2019). These types of celebrities differ from traditional celebrities because they get their fame from their social media presence, whereas traditional celebrities usually come to fame through TV, music, or film (Khamis et al., 2017). *Influencers* are defined as:

any popular Instagram character with a high number of followers, who has a high taste in fashion and lifestyle, which enables them to monetize their appearance. These influencers can be considered micro-celebrities because they have relatively high recognizability, and they use it for social influence and monetization. (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569)

Influencers or micro-celebrities differ from traditional celebrities because they are perceived to be more relatable or “real” compared to traditional celebrities (Cotter, 2019).

Another noteworthy characteristic of influencer identity is that they can be both famous and an ordinary person at the same time (Jin et al., 2019). Influencers also use their relatability to be closer to their fans and followers than traditional celebrities (Cotter, 2019). Influencers’ followers are able to see aspects of their personal lives via Instagram, and influencers often lead luxurious lifestyles. Some of the content that displays their luxurious lifestyles includes dinners at expensive restaurants, extravagant vacations, and various designer fashion items far above and beyond the lifestyle of an ordinary person (Chae, 2017).

The type of relationship that is formed between influencers and their followers creates a marketing opportunity. Jin et al. (2019) conducted a study to test the effects of Instagram celebrities and traditional celebrities on consumer attitudes and behaviours. The results indicated

that consumers perceived Instagram celebrities' brand posts to be more trustworthy, felt a stronger social presence, felt more envious of the source, and had a more positive attitude about the brand that the influencer was promoting when compared to traditional celebrities' brand posts. Additionally, these authors found that even if the influencers and the traditional celebrities posted about the same brand, consumers preferred influencer endorsement. Jin et al. suggest that perceived sociability played a role in these findings.

Influencers also contribute to ideas of health and wellness through their online portrayals focusing on body-shape (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Additionally, influencers enforce these ideas through promoting dietary supplements and athletic sportswear brands to their followers as the key to happiness and a way to achieve a "perfect" body through self-optimization. This indirect communication to followers may suggest that only those who use control and discipline and purchase those products and brands can create their "perfect" bodies and be happy, healthy, and beautiful (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) also found that often times the audience of influencers tend to be minors. These minors identify with the ideals depicted by influencers, and influencers can satisfy these minors' needs on multiple levels. Influencers can meet the needs of individuals because influencers promote a way of living and provide a strategy to meet physical, social, and cognitive needs and goals (Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). For a more detailed description of this communicative process please refer to the Appendix.

Since influencers depict living a beyond ordinary lifestyle, there is some research interest in how viewing influencers' posts can affect an individual's mood. Chae (2017) suggests that some individuals may experience vicarious satisfaction from viewing influencers' posts. However, it also appears that viewing influencers' posts on Instagram can lead to negative

emotions such as envy through social comparisons. This study in particular examined influencers who posted images of their luxurious private life on Instagram and how it impacted females. In another study that focused on males, men experienced significantly lower body satisfaction when viewing influencer images of bare-chested and muscular men on Instagram when compared to fashion and scenery images posted by the same influencer (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Interestingly, the effects seen in Tiggemann and Anderberg (2020) are not mediated by social comparisons. Thus, indicating that social comparison does not seem to play a role in explaining a decrease in body satisfaction in men nor does internalization of the muscular-ideal. These findings demonstrate that there seems to be a gender difference between men and women regarding the impact of media images on body image. It appears that men only may experience increases in body dissatisfaction from salient images of idealized men (i.e., bare-chested, muscular images; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

Body Image and Body Dissatisfaction

The biggest theme in my literature search was how Instagram use could lead to body image and body dissatisfaction concerns amongst girls and women through being exposed to images of women who represent beauty ideals (Kleemans et al., 2018; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018). This notion is consistent with the literature indicating the effects of traditional media on female body image (Grabe et al., 2008; Stice, 2002). *Body image dissatisfaction* can be defined as the incongruity between an individual's desired self-image and the individual's actual self-image (Yurdagül et al., 2019). When women are exposed to images of thin-ideal women, especially images that have been altered or enhanced on Instagram, there appears to be a direct consequence of lower ratings of body image on adolescent girls (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Additionally, it appears that body dissatisfaction and facial dissatisfaction also increase in women after being exposed to thin-ideal images of women on Instagram (Tiggemann et al., 2018). However, these negative body image outcomes in women are not present when viewing regular images of women on Instagram (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019).

Furthermore, viewing images of the thin-ideal can also impact women's mood. Exposure to images of thin models increased body dissatisfaction as well as anxiety among women compared to images of overweight female models (Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019). Moreno-Domínguez et al. (2019) found that exposure to overweight models showed an increase in body satisfaction and improvements in self-image for women but did not have an effect on anxiety. Additionally, these authors also tested whether pre-existing body image concerns influenced these results, but they found no association to post-exposure effects. Similarly, Yurdagül et al. (2019) suggest that general anxiety and social anxiety are indirectly associated with problematic Instagram use in female adolescents via body image dissatisfaction. Problematic use in this study is outlined by the authors as using the social media site as a coping mechanism or means to escape reality. In this study, female body image dissatisfaction seemed to be a mediator in these negative mental health outcomes (Yurdagül et al., 2019). Negative mood and body dissatisfaction also immediately increased when women viewed images of attractive women on Instagram when compared to viewing a control group of travel images (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Furthermore, it appears that direct exposure to feedback received on Instagram, whether it was appearance-related or opinion related, also seems to decrease global satisfaction levels and emotional affect of women (Fioravanti et al., 2020). Fioravanti et al. (2020) specifically indicated that women's ratings of life satisfaction and positive affect increased after quitting Instagram use for a week when compared to women who continued to use Instagram regularly.

My literature search results strongly suggest that viewing images that represent the thin-ideal female beauty standard can have negative consequences for women (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al., 2018; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018).

Alternatively, a qualitative study analysis revealed multiple different body types identified by women as desirable beyond the thin-ideal beauty standard (Baker et al., 2019). Female study participants identified both fit body types as well as curvaceous body types to be attractive (Baker et al., 2019). The commonality between these Instagram beauty ideals was that they all are seemingly unattainable, leaving participants feeling discouraged when comparing themselves to these images and feeling pressure to conform to these standards. This study indicates that when women are engaging in appearance comparisons on Instagram, they are more susceptible to dissatisfaction in their appearance and body (Baker et al., 2019). Additionally, when women engage in more appearance-based comparisons to other women's pictures on Instagram, they not only experience greater body dissatisfaction but also have a stronger desire to be thinner as well (Hendrickse et al., 2017). The desire to be thinner and body dissatisfaction is also related to higher personal investment in peer feedback and responses. Women who reported valuing audience feedback on their posted pictures on Instagram tended to be more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and notions of wanting to be thinner (Butkowski et al., 2019).

Fitspiration

Related to the findings of Baker et al. (2019), the beauty ideals on Instagram are expanding beyond the thin-ideal. This new beauty ideal is associated with health and fitness as women having a visibly toned body are deemed attractive (Robinson et al., 2017). *Fitspiration* is an online and social media trend of fitness inspiration and a way for like-minded individuals to share and view content related to health and fitness (Carrotte et al., 2017). There are two primary

types of fitspiration imagery: functional images, which depict a person performing an exercise, and non-functional, where the person in the images is posed (Prichard et al., 2017). The purpose of the online fitspiration movement is to promote a healthier style of living through exercise and healthy eating (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Through a content analysis of 600 images collected from the fitspiration hashtag, the majority of the images of women were of one body type. This body type was one that was thin and toned. Although these women were not as thin as traditional thin-ideal type models, it is hypothesized that this thin and toned ideal maybe even more unachievable for most women to attain (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018).

There is also evidence suggesting that both beauty and fitness related images on Instagram can have a negative impact on how women rate their own attractiveness (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Additionally, findings from another study suggests that fitspiration can be just as or even more harmful than thinspiration images on Instagram (Dignard & Jarry, 2021). Dignard and Jarry (2021) found that female body satisfaction decreased when viewing both fitspiration and thinspiration images when compared to viewing travel images. However, possessing higher positive body image seemed to be a protective factor for thinspiration images, but this effect was not the same for fitspiration images.

Although the intention of these images is to inspire and promote health and some Instagram users may find these images inspiring, there is a possibility that viewing this type of imagery could unintentionally lead to negative body image as a result (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, 2018). One study indicated that when female participants were exposed to fitspiration images compared to travel images, they had a decrease in mood and self-esteem and an increase in body dissatisfaction. Appearance comparison mediated the difference in image effects (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Similarly, another study suggested that exposure to fitspiration

images when compared to travel images led to increases in negative mood and body dissatisfaction in women (Prichard et al., 2020). Additionally, frequently viewing fitspiration images on Instagram leads to increased body image concerns in women (Fardouly et al., 2018). Similarly, another study indicated that being acutely exposed to both athletic-ideal and thin-ideal images impacted body dissatisfaction in women, whereas exposure to muscular-ideal had no effect (Robinson et al., 2017). Prichard et al. (2017) found that young women exposed to various types of fitspiration images led to decreases in state body satisfaction and mood over time after exposure. It did not seem to matter whether the fitspiration imagery depicted exercise or posing or if it was paired with appearance-focused captions (Prichard et al., 2017). However, findings from another study suggest that women exposed to a combination of fitspiration images with self-compassion quotes experience more positive effects than just solely viewing fitspiration images (Slater et al., 2017).

Contrary to the literature on fitspiration, there is some evidence that fitspiration content on Instagram can be beneficial as it increases access to health information and promotes increased social support (Raggatt et al., 2018). However, Raggatt et al. (2018) also found that fitspiration images could also negatively impact female well-being and perceptions of health goals. Some evidence in the literature suggests that fitspiration style images have no effect on increasing motivation for higher levels of exercise (Robinson et al., 2017). Fitspiration images do not seem to make a difference in actual exercise behaviour when compared to other images (Prichard et al., 2020). Interestingly, Prichard et al. (2020) found that women who exercised after being exposed to fitspiration images reported higher exertion ratings.

There is also some evidence that suggests that those who engage with fitspiration content on Instagram are more likely to self-report or be at risk of developing an eating disorder

(Carrotte et al., 2015; Raggatt et al., 2018). As well, young females who tend to place a higher emphasis of value on audience feedback on their “selfies” are more likely to display eating disorder attitudes and intentions (Butkowski et al., 2019). Additional evidence in the literature points to Instagram users who focus on health and fitness-related content are particularly more at risk of developing eating disorders, specifically orthorexia nervosa and anorexia nervosa (Turner & Lefevre, 2017). *Orthorexia nervosa* is an eating disorder defined as an unhealthy obsession with eating healthy foods and is often comorbid with anorexia nervosa (Bratman, 2000). Research indicates that high Instagram use is associated with orthorexia nervosa with this effect specifically exclusive to this social media platform (Turner & Lefevre, 2017). Interestingly, Raggatt et al. (2018) found that searching fitspiration images related to “clean eating” was common amongst their participants. These authors also noted that 17.7% of their sample was at risk of developing an eating disorder and an estimated 10% were at risk of developing exercise addiction.

Instagram Likes and Comments

It also appears that comments on Instagram photos can also impact women's body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018). Tiggemann and Barbato (2018) found that peer comments based on appearance led to significantly greater body dissatisfaction in women even if the comments were positive compared to control comments. This particular finding is noteworthy as the intentions behind positive appearance-based comments on Instagram pictures is to be helpful and supportive of peers. Instead, these comments may unintentionally increase the issue of body dissatisfaction on the platform (Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018). Conversely, Tiggemann and Velissaris (2020) found that there was no difference between viewing images with positive appearance comments or images with no comments on women's body

dissatisfaction ratings. Furthermore, another study indicated similar results as positive appearance-related comments did not have an effect on women's body image as well (Politte-Corn & Fardouly, 2020). This discrepancy in the literature I found needs more attention in future research to better understand the relationship between comments on Instagram photos and female body image.

Receiving "likes" on Instagram is a way that users gain validation of what they are posting and seems to be a way to measure their perceived physical attractiveness. It appears that female Instagram users put a great deal of effort into what they are posting as they meticulously select what photos they believe will yield the most amount of "likes" (Baker et al., 2019). Some participants from this qualitative study admitted that they have an app on their phone that tells them when to post their photos to receive the most "likes." One participant from the study stated that "if I don't get enough likes in the first minute or two minutes, I delete it" (Baker et al., 2019, p. 3). Observing Instagram "likes" was another way users in this study measured themselves against others. Participants shared that conforming to beauty ideals is a way to receive more "likes." It appears that Instagram "likes" are a way that women evaluate their attractiveness. Some participants shared that they felt ugly when they did not get enough likes but mentioned that they felt happy with their body image when they received what they considered a lot of "likes" (Baker et al., 2019).

However, results from a quantitative study reveal that the quantity of Instagram "likes" only had a positive effect on facial dissatisfaction in women (Tiggemann et al., 2018). More "likes" led to less facial dissatisfaction. The number of "likes" did not have any significant effects on body dissatisfaction or appearance comparison. Interestingly, it was also indicated that

there was a connection between women who valued and devoted more time in acquiring “likes” and higher appearance comparison and facial dissatisfaction (Tiggemann et al., 2018).

Role of Social Comparison and Appearance Comparisons

Social comparison theory can explain this theme of body dissatisfaction mostly through the use of upwards comparisons (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Therefore, it appears that when women make downwards comparisons to images, it seems to increase their self-image and ratings of body satisfaction (Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019). Whereas when women make upwards comparisons, it seems to increase body dissatisfaction and affect (de Vries et al., 2018; Fardouly et al., 2017, 2018; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). This effect appears to be heightened with increased time on social media and when upwards comparison targets are peers (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Interacting with attractive peers on social media and making upwards appearance comparisons tends to promote more body image concerns in young adult women (Hogue & Mills, 2019).

Alternatively, to address a gap in the literature, Meier and Schafer (2018) investigated positive social comparison outcomes on Instagram. These authors found that intense social comparisons made on Instagram were positively related to the concept of inspiration. These results can be explained through the concept of assimilation and contrast (Mussweiler et al., 2004). When Instagram users made upward, assimilative comparisons, benign envy was an emotional and motivational outcome that mediated the relationship between social comparisons and inspiration (Meier & Schafer, 2018). These findings are a reminder that social comparisons do not always lead to negative body image outcomes but can lead to positive emotional outcomes depending on the situation.

Body Positivity Movement

As a response to the fairly well-established link between Instagram use and negative female body image outcomes, a body positivity movement is trending on Instagram to combat some of this negativity. Interestingly, Instagram publicly recognizes that social comparison and body image concerns may be an issue amongst its users. Under the "Community" section on Instagram's website (Instagram, n.d.-a), there are various program resources including one titled *Pressure to be Perfect* (Instagram, n.d.-b). This resource offers users tools on how to move from a mindset of comparison of others and conforming to a certain set of standards to one that promotes individuality and ways to achieve a more rewarding Instagram experience (Instagram, n.d.-b). However, through my literature search, it appears unknown how many users are aware of this resource or its effectiveness. As a future directive, it would be interesting to test the effectiveness of this resource. In fact, multiple authors call for psychoeducational literacy programs regarding body image and dissatisfaction from Instagram (Baker et al., 2019; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Politte-Corn & Fardouly, 2020; Tiggemann & Velissaris, 2020; Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019).

One trend on Instagram is the "Instagram vs reality." In this trend, two or more images are placed side by side to one another of the same woman. One image represents the ideal portrayal, whereas the other picture is a natural, non-edited or posed image to demonstrate the difference (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). This study indicates that exposure to the real images led to an increase in body satisfaction relative to the ideal images. Therefore, there is some evidence that supports this trend to increase body positivity and satisfaction among women. Another study yielded similar results when studying the effects of enhancement-free images on women's body image (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). Enhancement-free images promoted higher facial satisfaction in women compared to images that included filters, editing,

and makeup. There was no effect on body satisfaction. Interestingly, the use of hashtags (e.g., #nomakeup) in this condition of enhancement-free images significantly increased facial dissatisfaction compared to the same images without hashtags (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). Findings from Politte-Corn and Fardouly (2020) further strengthen the idea that viewing images of women wearing no makeup reduces the negative effects on female body image. However, viewing images of attractive women wearing no makeup still reduced participants' ratings of their own facial satisfaction, but it did not affect their ratings of body appearance satisfaction (Politte-Corn & Fardouly, 2020). However, the effects of body positivity may not have the same impact on all women. Some women suggest that many of the photos still seem edited or enhanced in some way, unrealistic, or irrelevant to them (Baker et al., 2019).

Additionally, another apparent trend on Instagram is adding a “reality check” comment on photos conforming to beauty ideals and standards (Tiggemann & Velissaris, 2020). For example, a "reality check" comment would be stating "this is too thin" or "this isn't realistic" to photos on Instagram of thin-ideal women. This study suggests that viewing images with "reality check" comments appear to reduce body dissatisfaction in women. Additionally, these findings suggest that making and seeing "reality check" comments may be a way for women to actively lessen the impact of negative body image from idealized imagery on Instagram (Tiggemann & Velissaris, 2020). Additionally, it may be helpful for advertisements to increase the use of more natural-looking models to promote healthier female beauty ideals and increase female body satisfaction (Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019).

These actions and trends on Instagram demonstrate that Instagram consumers have some power to create or shape the direction of the content. However, how much power and control Instagram users have over the content appearing on their feeds is still in question. There is some

evidence that social media users attempt to manipulate visible content through their understandings of algorithms in attempt to gain more control (van der Nagel, 2018). However, algorithms are becoming increasingly more complex. Algorithms also play a role in shaping social realities commonly in hidden ways by making predictions about online activities of users (Cotter, 2019). In 2016, Instagram stated that posts and content will be “ordered to show the moments we believe you will care about the most” (Hunt, 2016, para. 5). However, Instagram did not disclose exactly the algorithmic structure of the platform and did not explicitly refer to the use of algorithms in the 2016 release (Cotter, 2019).

Self-Objectification and Self-Promotion

Another theme in my literature search is how self-objectification behaviours on Instagram can affect women. Objectification theory states that an individual becomes objectified when their body characteristics are viewed separately from the individual themselves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women commonly fall victim to self-objectification because the female body is often viewed and as an object. Self-objectification can be reinforced by routinely examining one's body, which is known as body surveillance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Increased self-objectification behaviours appear to be associated with greater overall Instagram use in women (Fardouly et al., 2018). When female Instagram users internalize beauty ideals displayed on the site, they are more likely to engage in self-objectification and body surveillance behaviours. Additionally, upwards appearance comparisons seemed to mediate Instagram use and self-objectification and body surveillance in women (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). Similarly, internalization and appearance comparisons to celebrities mediated the relationship between Instagram use and self-objectification in females (Fardouly et al., 2018).

Additionally, it appears that body surveillance can be a mediator in female body image concerns such as body dissatisfaction and the desire to be thin (Butkowski et al., 2019).

Related to self-objectification is self-promotion on Instagram. Women on Instagram desire to present the best versions of themselves by posting the most flattering pictures. This behaviour is perpetuated by gaining validation through "likes" on flattering and attractive photos conforming to beauty ideals (Baker et al., 2019). One way of achieving self-promotion is through posting selfies. *Selfies* are "appearance-orientated self-representations, and the feedback they earn can be interpreted as affirmations of attractiveness and social success" (Butkowski et al., 2019, p. 387). One individual stated that she tends to post selfies when she is feeling down and receiving "likes" helps her feel better about herself. Other participants admitted to spending a great deal of time trying to get the perfect picture of themselves to receive recognition through lots of "likes" (Baker et al., 2019).

Additionally, there are a variety of ways for Instagram users to receive "likes" and engage in self-promoting behaviours. These behaviours can be categorized into deceptive and normative behaviours (Dumas et al., 2017). Normative behaviours include using filters and hashtags on photos, whereas deceptive include buying "likes" or followers on Instagram or manipulating their images using computer software. Those individuals who engaged in deceptive behaviours were higher in narcissism with the motivation to appear more popular (Dumas et al., 2017). Additionally, those higher on narcissism engaged in more self-promoting activities, such as posting selfies, and used Instagram more frequently (Moon et al., 2016). These findings are notable contributions to the literature on Instagram as they can help create a better understanding of self-promoting behaviours on Instagram.

Individual Differences

In my literature search, it appears that the differences in female experiences while using Instagram can be accounted for by individual personality differences and characteristics. In particular, competitiveness can influence females' experiences on Instagram. One study evaluated females' intrasexual competitive tendencies for mates to see what the effect was on appearance-related comparisons on Instagram. Findings suggest that a significant positive relationship exists between female's intrasexual competitiveness and participation in appearance-related comparisons (Hendrickse et al., 2017). As well, girls who are naturally more inclined to make comparisons to others tend to be more negatively impacted by manipulated photos on Instagram (Kleemans et al., 2018). However, those who did not engage or who are not naturally inclined to make comparisons had an increase in positive affect when viewing positive Instagram posts, whereas those who made more comparisons had a decrease in positive affect when viewing positive Instagram posts (de Vries et al., 2018). Furthermore, it seems that females who have poor self-image and low self-esteem tend to make more social comparisons on Instagram, especially to influencers (Chae, 2017). However, women who possess a higher positive body image seem to make less appearance comparisons to thin-ideal images than women with lower positive body image (Dignard & Jarry, 2021). It is also suggested that women who are negatively impacted by thin-ideal portrayals on social media tend to have pre-existing body dissatisfaction or are more susceptible to it (Ferguson, 2013).

Also, it appears that women who manipulate their own pictures that they post on Instagram are more prone to experiencing facial dissatisfaction when viewing other enhanced images on Instagram (Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). Interestingly, individual feminist beliefs also impact females' experiences using Instagram (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). Feminist beliefs are conceptualized in Feltman and Szymanski (2018) as a belief system that aligns with

feminism, which includes challenging systems of oppression, promoting equality, and rejecting cultural and societal female beauty standards. This study suggests that firmer feminist beliefs acted as a protective factor from body surveillance effects through Instagram use. Additionally, viewing female influencers' posts on Instagram through a more critical feminist view may be helpful in reducing envy and social comparison behaviours (Chae, 2017). Therefore, it seems that a lot of the variances in the literature of how Instagram impacts an individual's self-image can be attributed to individual differences.

Adolescents and Instagram

Another theme that emerged in my literature search was how Instagram can uniquely impact adolescents. It is noteworthy that adolescent girls seem to be more impacted by Instagram use than adolescent boys. When compared to boys, girls appeared to exhibit more body dissatisfaction, social anxiety, general anxiety, and depression associated with Instagram use. Additionally, girls self-reported that they engage in more problematic Instagram use than boys (Yurdagül et al., 2019). *Problematic Instagram use* occurs when individuals use the social media site as an escape from reality as a coping mechanism. In turn, these behaviours can lead to an increase in negative outcomes in various levels of their life including increases in anxiety and depression, and impairments in social relationships, physical health, sleep, and eating patterns. Additionally, problematic Instagram use can impact educational performance (Yurdagül et al., 2019). Interestingly, when adolescent girls are assigned to rate various Instagram photos, they seem to rate enhanced photos higher than natural or regular photos. More concerningly, some adolescent girls seem to struggle with identifying when female bodies are edited in pictures through reshaping (Kleemans et al., 2018). Implications from both of these studies stress how potentially harmful the effects of Instagram can be on adolescent mental health. Adolescent girls

are already more susceptible to body image concerns based on their developmental stage (Mahmoud et al., 2018). It appears that Instagram can additionally heighten and distort female body ideals and self-image. Therefore, additional research is needed to understand better how to reduce the harmful effects of Instagram (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Implications for Counselling Psychology

There are several implications when looking at Instagram and other social media platforms through a counselling psychology lens. Although this paper's focus is on Instagram specifically, counsellors need to consider how social media platforms in general can affect clients. Looking at social media as a whole can give professionals a broader view on the topic and how the effects of social media can manifest in sessions. From my own experiences working with clients, the subject of social media comes up frequently. Interestingly, these clients vary both in age and in gender. However, social media tends to be used to a greater extent amongst the younger generations (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Generally, social media carries a negative connotation from my client's experiences. However, the literature suggests that social media can foster positive experiences (Glaser et al., 2018; Liu & Ma, 2018, 2019). I believe it is crucial that clinicians are aware of how powerful social media is and how it can potentially impact clients both in positive and negative ways. Continuing the conversation of the effects of social media amongst professionals is a way to further competencies in working more effectively with clients and developing specific interventions.

Role of Social Media in Mental Health Outcomes

With the increased use of smartphones, social media is easy to access. Young adults look at their smartphones upwards of 80 times or more a day on average (Bratu, 2018). Social media unquestionably plays a role in the mental health outcomes of individuals. However, according to

the literature, the effects of social media use are incongruous. Evidence suggests that social media use can lead to negative and positive mental health outcomes (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). The literature suggests that some of the discrepancies in mental health outcomes related to social media use may be attributed to how the individual uses social media in the context of online and offline relationships (Glaser et al., 2018). For example, if an individual uses social media to foster and expand pre-existing offline social relationships, there is a tendency for increased mental health outcomes. However, if an individual uses social media to build online-only social connections that are unrelated to their offline social group, there seems to be an association with poorer mental health outcomes such as internet addiction (Glaser et al., 2018). Social media itself is not innately destructive, but its outcomes depend on individual users' behaviours (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021).

Negative Mental Health Outcomes

As the evidence suggests in the literature review section of this paper, social media, especially Instagram, can harm women's body image and body dissatisfaction (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al., 2018; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018). This link between Instagram usage and body image dissatisfaction in women can be explained by social comparison theory. However, the extent of adverse mental health outcomes extends beyond body image concerns and body image dissatisfaction. Some of these adverse mental health outcomes include: declines in academic performance, and increases in anxiety, and depression (Liu & Ma, 2018); addictive internet and social media behaviours (Manwong et al., 2018); a higher risk of suicide behaviours and self-harm behaviours (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021); and overall declines in psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2018). It is essential for counsellors

and mental health professionals to be aware of some of the potentially detrimental outcomes of social media use.

Aside from body image concerns, social comparison theory also plays a role in other mental health outcomes regarding social media use. Making these comparisons enables social media users to measure their worth compared to other users (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). It is suggested that when individuals compare themselves to other users on social media, they can experience general life dissatisfaction and the phenomenon called “fear of missing out” (FOMO; Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). FOMO is the intense distress or anxiety about missing out on social experiences, and most often occurs from viewing social media posts (Hunt et al., 2018).

There is also evidence in the literature suggesting detrimental outcomes of social media use, such as poorer sleep quality, lower subjective happiness, a decline in academic performance, and emotional consequences such as anxiety and depression (Liu & Ma, 2018). There is a notion that depression and anxiety are significantly associated with increased time online. Even passive social media use, such as scrolling through the newsfeed, can lead to adverse effects over time (Wood et al., 2016). One study specifically examined how the amount of time spent on Instagram can influence users' mental health outcomes (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Sherlock and Wagstaff (2019) found a positive correlation between time spent on Instagram and depressive symptoms, trait anxiety, social comparison, physical appearance anxiety, and body image concerns. Additionally, it seems that there is a relationship between increased time online and a higher risk of self-harm behaviours, suicidal thoughts, and cyberbullying and harassment (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021).

Overall, excessive social media use has many negative consequences for individuals across multiple domains of their lives. Spending too much time on social media platforms can

also lead to addictive social media behaviours (Manwong et al., 2018). Social media addiction differs from the excessive use of social media.

In the literature, social media addiction is defined several different ways. Notably, social media addiction affects only a small minority of the population (Cerniglia et al., 2019). Liu and Ma (2019) define *social media addiction* as a lack of impulse control to use social media platforms despite being aware of the negative consequences of use. Another conceptualization of the definition is having disproportionate concern about social media and a pervasive desire to log into social media accounts (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2018). Since some individuals spend much time and energy being preoccupied with social media, other aspects of their life start to suffer, such as academic/work performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological well-being. Although these definitions are similar, there is not one single universal definition currently for this disorder. These differences are likely due to how social media addiction does not have status in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013, as cited in Cerniglia et al., 2019). However, it appears that the common distinguishing factor that helps differentiate excessive social media use and addiction is the lack of control despite unfavourable consequences of social media use (Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2018).

Positive Mental Health Outcomes

With keeping counselling implications in mind, it is equally essential for practitioners to be mindful of the positive outcomes associated with social media use. As indicated in this paper's literature review, there are positive outcomes associated with social comparison made to images on Instagram through increased inspiration (Meier & Schafer, 2018). Additionally, there is evidence in the literature that supports the notion that social media use can improve the

psychological well-being of the user through improving their quality of life and self-esteem (Liu & Ma, 2018). Social media use also has other benefits as it can provide users with learning relaxation, broadening relationships, and overcoming physical limitations (Liu & Ma, 2019).

Glaser et al. (2018) found that social media can also create positive outcomes for users if used for communication and general social involvement. Generally, those who are extroverted tend to have more positive experiences with social media use. Additionally, the authors noted people who follow fewer strangers on social media platforms and those who receive positive feedback from others through comments and likes will tend to be more positively affected by social media.

Furthermore, social media can create a sense of community and can be used to strengthen offline relationships with others and maintain relationships (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). This concept is in line with the augmentation hypothesis. The augmentation hypothesis states that social media may improve feelings of giving and receiving social support and that social media enhances existing face-to-face relationships, thereby improving the user's mental health (Glaser et al., 2018).

Social media also provides a means of connection and support to those who have mental health struggles with similar experiences (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). There is an apparent trend surfacing of people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness turning to various social media sites to share their experiences and connect with others with similar experiences (Naslund et al., 2016). Not only do these individuals use social media as a platform to voice their own unique experiences but also as a way to seek advice from peers and offer support. This sense of community in online platforms is consistent with positive mental health outcomes from social media usage (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Results from Naslund et al. (2016) strengthen

the importance of peer-support on social media as individuals report an increase in social connectedness, learning new coping strategies, and a sense of belonging to a group. Furthermore, these authors suggest that the formation of online communities could be vital in challenging mental health stigmas through empowerment and hope.

Similarly, social media can be a psychoeducation source for those who have mental health challenges (Lam et al., 2017; Lam & Woo, 2020). Psychoeducational YouTube videos appear to be especially useful in helping individuals with severe mental health issues and can help break mental health stigma. Additionally, using social media as a platform for psychoeducation can help to provide mental health care to racial minorities. Although psychoeducational materials on social media sites appear to help individuals with mental health challenges, it is crucial to ensure that these psychoeducational sources are credible and from trusted sources. Misinformation or incomplete information spreading on the internet and social media sites can pose damaging consequences to an individual's mental health and well-being and has the potential to further harm individuals (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021).

Social media can also be a platform for social activism. Brown et al. (2017) contributed to the literature in the area by conducting a content analysis on Twitter with the #SayHerName hashtag. #SayHerName was intended to raise awareness of Black women who are victims of police violence such as Breona Taylor. The results of this content analysis indicate that the hashtag, #SayHerName, brought voice to messages about injustice and raised consciousness about the deaths of Black women. Brown et al. also found that #SayHerName provided a space for Black transgendered women to be heard. Facebook and Twitter are popular social media sites for promoting social activist movements and broadening their impact (Mundt et al., 2018). Mundt et al. (2018) conducted a case study of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Results

indicate that social media plays a key role in expanding the impact of movements through resource mobilization and meaning making. Social media also fosters connections between group members and develops a sense of collective identity (Mundt et al., 2018).

Impact of Social Media on Adolescents

Literature has established that social media can negatively affect adolescent mental health (Mahmoud et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018). As the literature review section of this paper indicates, adolescent girls are particularly prone to body image concerns through the use of social media sites such as Instagram (Mahmoud et al., 2018). Additionally, girls tend to engage more in behaviours that lead to more negative mental health outcomes than boys do (Yurdagül et al., 2019). However, it is still important for practitioners to understand social media's effects on adolescents in general since young people tend to use social media platforms often.

There has been an increase in youth engagement on social media sites over the past few years as the variety of social media platforms has increased (Manwong et al., 2018). As a result, social media has become a major role in adolescent social and emotional development (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Adolescence is a complicated developmental stage that brings upon multiple changes (Erikson, 1968). One particular topic of interest is the connection between sleep and mental health outcomes (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Increased time spent online on social media accounts can be detrimental for adolescents as it can decrease the hours of sleep at night. Getting enough sleep is crucial in adolescent brain development; therefore, a lack of sleep can lead to mental and physical health consequences (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). However, there are some positive aspects to social media use in adolescents. Social media has become a fundamental part of life for adolescents and has become a means for education, culture, and social experiences (O'Reilly et al., 2018). However, social media sites, specifically Instagram,

can provoke anxiety and FOMO, especially amongst adolescents (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Some research indicates that these unfavourable mental health outcomes from social media tend to affect adolescents who are less popular than their peers (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Counselling Strategies

Counselling Interventions for Social Media Use

With increasing evidence in the literature about the harmful effects of social media use, awareness, prevention, and treatment methods are necessary and relevant to the counselling profession (Manwong et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018). Social media use is inevitable in contemporary society, so the focus of treatment should be to increase awareness and decrease social media activity duration rather than altogether avoiding it. There is some evidence that supports this notion, as reducing social media use to 30 minutes or less per day shows significant improvements in well-being (Hunt et al., 2018). In this study, undergraduate students were randomly assigned to either the limited social media group, which included spending 10 minutes a day per site (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) for a total of 30 minutes, or to continue using social media as they would regularly. Results of the study found that the group that limited social media saw a decrease in loneliness and depression when compared to the control group over a three-week period. Thus, it appears that limiting social media usage can lead to more positive outcomes (Hunt et al., 2018).

There is some evidence of success using motivational enhancement therapy (MET) and motivational interviewing as an approach to treating and preventing social media addictions and maladaptive social media behaviours (Manwong et al., 2018). MET is a collaborative, non-confrontational approach that focuses on setting attainable goals and developing a collaborative treatment plan (Chou et al., 2005). MET also uses motivational interviewing techniques such as

open questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summarizing (Manwong et al., 2018).

Manwong et al. (2018) conducted a group MET program on social media addiction. This group included junior high-aged children (12–15 years of age) in Northeast Thailand. The intervention was 12 weeks and had three phases: phase one entailed education and feedback, phase two entailed commitment and strengthening, and phase three included a follow through. Each stage was designed to bring awareness and motivate participants to change their social media addictive behaviours through organized group activities. This intervention found that a group activity-based MET program effectively reduced the average duration of social media use, emotional behaviours, and depression scores. This particular intervention was also useful as a preventative measure in both the non-addicted and almost-addicted subgroups. The authors encourage using and implementing this program in schools as a treatment method and preventive action for social media addictions (Manwong et al., 2018).

There is also evidence that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a useful treatment for internet addictions and problematic social media use (Chou et al., 2005; Zhou et al., 2020). The foundational notion of CBT interventions is that thoughts determine feelings. Therefore, if clients can be taught to identify their thoughts, they can also identify triggers for internet use behaviours (Chou et al., 2005). CBT also helps to increase mental health outcomes by reconstructing thoughts and feelings (Breckler, 1984). Zhou et al. (2020) used a CBT-informed short-term abstinence intervention program on individuals with problematic social media use. *Problematic social media use* in this context was defined as a maladaptive behaviour ranging from preoccupation with social media to addictive social media use behaviours. These behaviours are also continued regardless of any negative consequences to the individual (Zhou et al., 2020). Participants were required to take a two-and-a-half-hour break from social media each

day, referred to as the abstinence period. Except from the abstinence periods, participants could use social media freely. Participants were also required to keep a daily journal to record behaviours, feelings, and thoughts over the two-week intervention. The control group also kept daily journals but was able to use social media freely. The results of Zhou et al.'s (2020) study indicate that the abstinence intervention was effective on life satisfaction. The implications of these findings suggest that intervening to develop more rational social media usage behaviours and habits are more feasible than to discourage social media use entirely (Zhou et al., 2020).

Counselling Interventions for Body Image Concerns

Body image concerns can be linked to social media use, specifically among adolescent girls and young women (Fardouly et al., 2018; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Yurdagül et al., 2019). It is vital that specific interventions for body image concerns are utilized as these body image concerns can lead to more severe pathologies, such as body image disorders and eating disorders (Cerea et al., 2021). According to the literature, several known interventions seem beneficial in treating clients with body image concerns. It appears that a self-compassion meditation intervention is effective in reducing body dissatisfaction and body shame and improving self-worth in women of various ages (Albertson et al., 2015). This intervention consisted of a three-week meditation program with different topics each week. The first week's topic was the compassionate body scan, the second week's topic was affectionate breathing, and the third week's topic was a variation of a loving-kindness meditation. The intervention appears to have some lasting effects as the participants maintained positive results at a follow up three months later (Albertson et al., 2015).

Other notable interventions for body image concerns are technology-based interventions. *BodiMojo* is a mobile app that promotes a positive body-image through self-compassion

(Rodgers et al., 2018). After using the app for a six-week period, adolescent participants reported an increase in appearance esteem and self-compassion compared to the control group. Another way technology-based interventions can target body image concerns is through mobile apps that use CBT techniques. Cerea et al. (2021) found that using a CBT-based mobile app seemed to help reduce some body dissatisfaction ratings in female university students at high risk of developing body image disorders. The app asked participants to challenge maladaptive thoughts regarding their body image. The app presented training exercises to reframe maladaptive thoughts and beliefs of their body image and dissatisfaction with more functional and adaptive thoughts (Cerea et al., 2021).

CBT interventions also seem to be useful in treating body image concerns outside of technology-based interventions as well. CBT tends to be the most distinguished intervention to treat and improve body image concerns (Alleva et al., 2015; Farrell et al., 2006). Several techniques help improve dysfunctional thoughts, such as self-monitoring, cognitive restructuring, and exposure exercises (Alleva et al., 2015). There is also a movement in mindfulness and acceptance-oriented interventions as treatment for body image disorders, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and dialectic behaviour therapy (DBT; Altman et al., 2020). These counselling approaches work by increasing awareness and acceptance of thoughts instead of attempting to manipulate thoughts. ACT can be used in both individual and group settings and help clients to learn how to accept difficult emotions, increase mindfulness of their thoughts, and link behaviours with chosen values (Pearson et al., 2012). Pearson et al. (2012) also suggest that ACT as a brief one-day workshop intervention appears to be an effective intervention in reducing body related anxiety in women compared to the control condition. DBT interventions work by enhancing emotional regulation capabilities through teaching adaptive emotional skills (Telch et

al., 2001). DBT was originally developed to help individuals with borderline personality disorder but DBT has been shown to be an effective intervention for various other disorders and problems (Linehan, 2014). In Telch et al.'s (2001) study, DBT practices were adapted to work with clients with binge eating disorder, and this study strengthened the efficacy of DBT as a treatment intervention for binge eating disorder. In this study, adaptive emotional skills were presented in three modules including mindfulness skills, emotion regulation skills, and distress tolerance skills. It was also revealed in a meta-analysis that DBT interventions had the largest effects in reducing disordered eating (Linardon et al., 2019). Additionally, according to the literature, there are other successful interventions for individuals struggling with body image issues. These other commonly used interventions are fitness training, media literacy, self-esteem enhancement, and psychoeducation (Alleva et al., 2015).

Fundamental Next Steps for Research

Limitations

As clinicians, it is essential to acknowledge the current literature's limitations that could be further expanded upon in future research. Since my research topic is a newer topic in the literature, I am highlighting some limitations I noticed through my literature search. Firstly, multiple articles seem to draw their participants from undergraduate universities (Baker et al., 2019; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; de Vries et al., 2018; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Hendrickse et al., 2017; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). According to Instagram usage statistics, this age demographic may seem fitting as many individuals up to age 34 engage in frequent Instagram use (Tankovska, 2021). However, I question if this specific demographic represents all women in this age group regarding their lived experiences with Instagram. Exclusively using undergraduate

university students excludes the voices of individuals from different educational backgrounds. Kleemans et al. (2018), in particular, noted the importance of including girls of various education levels in their study. They found a moderate positive correlation between education level and body image. However, some studies used other methods to acquire participants, such as recruiting through Facebook and Instagram posts (Meier & Schafer, 2018; Turner & Lefevre, 2017), crowdsourcing (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019), and snowball sampling (Kleemans et al., 2018).

Another apparent limitation within the literature is simulating more of a "natural" experience in a research setting that would more closely mimic real-life experiences. There is some evidence that suggests that the way information is presented to participants can influence the outcomes (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). For example, Sherlock and Wagstaff (2019) explain that the images used in their study were Instagram images presented through a data collection app rather than the actual Instagram app. Removing images from Instagram and showing them in isolation may not accurately reflect the authentic experience of using social media and therefore affect the results (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Although this may be a drawback in some quantitative studies, qualitative studies can help develop a deeper understanding of an individual's lived experiences. A study conducted by Baker et al. (2019) is instrumental in gaining insights into women's lived experiences with Instagram usage. However, qualitative studies also have limitations. These limitations can include a small sample size that may not be representative of a diverse population. Additionally, mental health factors were not accounted for in this study, and the authors were not able to draw causal inferences (Baker et al., 2019). Overall, it is important as a reader to be mindful and considerate of both the strengths and limitations in the literature. Some of the findings may not

reflect real-life phenomena as some research platforms and designs may not accurately capture behaviours and interpretations (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Additionally, results could also not be generalizable depending on small sample sizes and may not reflect diverse opinions on beauty ideals (Baker et al., 2019).

Another apparent limitation of my literature search is that these findings are acute, short-term effects (Hendrickse et al., 2017; Kleemans et al., 2018; Yurdagül et al., 2019). Based on the literature included in this review, it appears that there is limited, if any, literature on the long-term effects of Instagram use on body image. It would be interesting to see if these effects remain the same or how they would change in the long-term. Consistent with this consideration, Baker et al. (2019) recommends that future research should be longitudinal in design.

Future Directives

Now that some of the most prevalent limitations have been addressed, it is essential to consider the next steps in developing this topic in the research. Instagram specifically should be furthered researched as an individual platform. Although it is often compared to Facebook, Instagram has unique features that set it apart from Facebook and can provide the social media consumer with a different experience (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). For example, Instagram is highly influenced by social trends such as "fitspiration" (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015) and "Instagram vs. reality" (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). These trends can be quickly evolving, which could pose a challenge to researchers to keep up with the most current trends and the effects in a timely manner.

Another critical area in the literature is further researching the effects of social media on adolescent mental health and well-being. Typically, adolescents spend more time on social media sites, and they also tend to engage in more social comparison behaviours while being on

Instagram specifically (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Furthermore, there is even more of a focus on how females are influenced by making social comparisons on Instagram. However, there is evidence that men can also have body dissatisfaction after being exposed to idealized images (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004). Additionally, men can also have negative mental health outcomes from Instagram, such as orthorexia nervosa (Turner & Lefevre, 2017).

Another area worth additional exploration is social media behaviours that promote well-being and mental health outcomes. One area specifically would be peer-to-peer support through social media sites. Online peer-to-peer support seems beneficial as it creates a safe space for individuals to connect and share their mental health experiences (Naslund et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the specific behavioural mechanisms involved in peer support and the possible risks should be further investigated (Naslund et al., 2016). However, Naslund et al. (2016) indicate that at this stage in the literature the potential benefits of online peer support for mental health concerns seem to outweigh the potential risks. Another area to further explore is how social comparisons made on Instagram can lead to positive outcomes such as inspiration (Meier & Schafer, 2018). Since social media use has become a part of day-to-day life, research should focus on developing guidelines on the potentially detrimental effects of excessive social media use (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Additionally, research efforts should include further exploration of how social media can promote wellness (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Practice

There are several practice recommendations and suggestions as to how to further the counselling psychology field in this area. One of the biggest takeaways regarding working with clients who use social media sites and have adverse mental health outcomes is to limit rather than discourage usage (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). Since social media

is becoming an ingrained part of many individuals' lives, clinicians should help clients develop healthier social media usage habits rather than discourage social media use (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). It is unreasonable to expect clients to completely stop using social media sites such as Instagram despite the potentially harmful effects on mental health and well-being (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).

Another useful piece of knowledge that would help clinicians working with clients struggling with social media use would be becoming familiar with specific counselling techniques that appear to be overall effective. There are several effective interventions, such as those highlighted earlier in this paper, that counsellors can use when working with clients in sessions. Although the literature on these interventions is not specifically used for individuals struggling with body image concerns from social media use, they could still help clients. In particular, CBT interventions could reduce negative body image (Alleva et al., 2015). DBT and other mindfulness-based interventions could also help clients who have mental health issues from social media use (Altman et al., 2020). Both of these interventions could be modified or tailored in a way that would meet the needs of various clients.

Additionally, there seems to be a recent shift in intervention strategies from thought-altering interventions to interventions that increase awareness and acceptance of those thoughts (Altman et al., 2020). This movement speaks to the role of ACT interventions. ACT interventions are seen in self-help formats and can be utilized in face-to-face counselling. According to a meta-analysis, ACT appears to be an effective intervention especially under clinician guidance (French et al., 2017). Another meta-analysis on third-wave behavioural interventions that included ACT interventions seemed efficacious in treating body image

concerns and disordered eating, and these changes were sustained after active treatment (Linardon et al., 2019).

Mental health professionals can also utilize various tools and psychoeducation to help clients and the general population. This notion is in line with the resources that Instagram suggests to promote positive experiences and healthier Instagram use (Instagram, n.d.-b, “Community” section). This particular tool works by helping users explore and get more in touch with their emotions while spending time on the app. Another suggestion would be to recommend developing an in-app warning system to limit social media use to shorter periods (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). The literature indicates that spending a maximum of 30 minutes a day on social media significantly improves mental health outcomes (Hunt et al., 2018). Therefore, it may be useful to trigger a usage warning once the individual reaches 30 minutes (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Another way counsellors could help their clients limit their social media consumption is to encourage self-monitoring (Hunt et al., 2018). Self-monitoring strategies work by increasing awareness and bringing attention to certain behaviours. Self-monitoring strategies are commonly used in CBT interventions in the form of keeping a journal to track behaviours, thoughts, and feelings (Zhou et al., 2020). In Hunt et al.’s (2018) study, several participants reported that self-monitoring their social media behaviours raised consciousness of their social media consumption. Some other participants from the control group indicated that knowing that they were being monitored resulted in them wanting to use social media less. Additionally, some participants indicated that limiting time on social media made them realize they do not miss it (Hunt et al., 2018).

Additionally, the research calls for other training methods to help individuals, especially adolescents (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Clinicians can develop specific training programs that

could be implemented in schools to help adolescents assess and validate information on social media and promote safe social media use. Particular topics of this training could include areas of social media addiction, cyberbullying, body image concerns related to social media, and potential detrimental mental health outcomes (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Providing training to adolescents may be crucial as some research indicates that adolescent girls tend to struggle identifying images on Instagram that have been enhanced or not, which can perpetuate the problem of having unrealistically high expectations and lead to issues (Kleemans et al., 2018). Furthermore, adolescence is a stage of development where it is natural to struggle with forming and solidifying a sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, clinicians should increase preventative measures in this age demographic surrounding social media usage education (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021).

From a critical literacy perspective on social media, new media presents some challenges for educators (Burnett & Merchant, 2011). Social media is not used universally in the same way by all individuals, yet it plays an undeniable role in the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults. Educators are faced with finding ways to work with the fact that individuals participate in social media in different ways and that social media provides a possibility for individuals to find new kinds of agency. At the same time, educators are aware that social media also provides an online social life for individuals that should not be denied either. Therefore, Burnett and Merchant (2011) recommend that educators should move towards a model based on advantageous practice. This model would take a prospective approach and shift the view of social media users from what they do on social media to what they might do on social media. This approach would be helpful as it would involve setting both personal and social goals and

ambitions alongside developing skills and competencies of new literacies (Burnett & Merchant, 2011).

Gordon et al. (2020) propose a cluster randomized controlled trial of the SoMe program; a social media literacy program for body image and well-being. The program would be for adolescent boys and girls and would include four lessons:

1. Critique of social media advertising.
2. Social media-is it real?
3. Interacting with friends on social media.
4. Creating positive social media. (Gordon et al., 2020, p. 32)

The purpose of this proposed study is to determine the efficacy of school-based social media literacy interventions in adolescent boys and girls (Gordon et al., 2020). These findings should be an interesting and helpful contribution to the literature on social media literacy interventions.

Counsellors and other mental health professionals play a large role in providing psychoeducation. Since the concept of offering psychoeducation through various social media sites is new and emerging, more efforts should be directed in the development of that area (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Using online sources to disseminate information increases access to mental health services and can provide education and support for clients and caregivers (Lam et al., 2017). Not only do technology-based interventions or psychoeducation improve access but also are more cost-effective (Altman et al., 2017). However, anyone can post information online, so clinicians should be working on creating reliable and valid social media sites that can provide individuals with standardized, accurate information (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Additionally, clinicians could help other professionals develop this area by taking on a consulting role.

Another recommendation for practice would be to further the development of assessment tools. There are already some assessment tools that could be potentially useful when working with clients who struggle with body image concerns. Although they are not specifically designed for individuals who have these experiences that are correlated to social media usage, they still could be relevant for certain clients. For example, the Body Image Assessment Scale-Body Dimensions (BIAS-BD) is a body-image assessment tool that can assess body image disturbance (Gardner et al., 2009). This assessment tool uses 17 male and 17 female contour-line drawings or silhouettes of different body shapes varying from 60% below average body weight to 140% above average weight. This tool can be used to test for body-image disturbance by asking individuals to select the silhouette that represents their perceived body shape and their ideal body shape. The variance between the two figures is referred to as the discrepancy index that denotes body dissatisfaction (Gardner et al., 2009). The Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) is an additional way to measure attitudes of one's body image that considers cognitive, behavioural, and affective components (Cash, 1990). The MBSRQ is a well-established assessment and is popular due to how comprehensive it is (Altman et al., 2020).

Another assessment tool that may be useful to practitioners is the Body Compassion Scale (BCS; Altman et al., 2020). Self-compassion appears to be an important construct in improving negative thoughts about one's body (Albertson et al., 2015). The self-compassion construct also seems to be a way to understand how individuals relate to their bodies and can guide therapeutic interventions (Altman et al., 2020). The BCS is designed to connect two separate constructs, body-image and self-compassion, to measure inherent mindfulness and acceptance-based constructs in individuals (Altman et al., 2020). According to Altman et al. (2020), the BCS appears to be a reliable and valid measure as there was a positive correlation

between BCS scores and self-compassion. Due to the hopefulness of these results, clinicians should consider self-compassion interventions as well as using the BCS as an assessment tool depending on the needs of their clients.

Lastly, there appears to be a lack of assessment tools designed specifically for social media users. Alkis et al. (2017) developed the Social Anxiety Scale for Social Media Users in an attempt to address this gap. Although this scale is not directly related to the impact of Instagram on females' self-image, this scale could still be potentially useful depending on other issues with which the client presents. Additionally, it would be helpful as a future directive for clinicians to develop a scale that could assess body-image concerns for Instagram or social media users.

Reflexive Self-Statement

Overall, completing this research paper has been a challenging but educational experience. With it being the biggest project that I have ever written, I was unsure what to expect with the writing and research process. Going into this project, I was excited and had multiple ideas of what direction I wanted to take. I started with a vague idea of exploring the effects of social media on individuals' mental health and well-being. From there, the most challenging part was narrowing down my topic to something specific but not too specific. I chose to focus on Instagram specifically because it is one of the most popular social media sites and is an area of the literature still being built upon. I also chose to focus on women's experiences specifically. I have my own lived experiences with being a social media user myself and noticed my tendencies to compare myself to what is presented online, primarily through Instagram. I also noticed that tendency amongst other women in my social circle. Body image issues are something I think many women struggle with, especially with the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards.

After solidifying my research topic, I was able to start my literature search. Researching this topic was difficult for me because with a project of this size, it seemed like a daunting task to figure out which articles should be included or not. There is a lot of information, so compiling it into this paper was a back-and-forth process of figuring out what flowed the best. I also found myself getting annoyed with some of the research findings because it was contrary to my own lived experiences. However, after processing and reading multiple articles, I found the results to be quite interesting and expanded my perspective on the topic. I found the research interesting because the variations in individuals' experiences using Instagram seemed to be explained by individual differences, such as personality. It was also helpful for me because I think I learned something about myself. I tend to be a competitive person, so I am more naturally inclined to compare myself to others in various aspects. I also hold high expectations for myself and have some perfectionist tendencies, so social media can be a negative experience when I am comparing myself to others. Now that I am more aware of this, I can come to a better understanding of why I engage in certain behaviours and catch myself and alter my thought patterns.

As a student and counselling intern, I find social media's implications in counselling to be fascinating. Social media can affect the lives of many clients both positively and negatively. I think as clinicians, it is essential to understand how social media can show up in sessions because it has become a significant presence in modern-day society. It is especially vital for mental health professionals who work with adolescents and young adults as these demographics use social media more often. Using the knowledge gained in the literature can be potentially beneficial for my future practice.

Writing this paper has broadened my perspectives and challenged my personal biases I hold on this subject. I still hold some bias that Instagram can negatively impact women's self-image based on the amount of ingenuine or altered images on the platform. However, I believe that there are some positives to Instagram as it is a way to view topics of specific interest and an easy way to connect with and support small businesses. It is also becoming easier to be selective in what content on Instagram is visible to the users. Writing this paper has helped me shift my perspective from seeing the negatives and everything wrong with the social media site to seeing some potential benefits. Speaking from my experience, a lot of an individual's experience with Instagram has to do with how they use the app and consciously choosing to avoid content that can be potentially harmful to mental health.

Conclusion

My own lived experiences as a woman on Instagram inspired me to research this topic. Instagram is a popular social media site that is easy and convenient to access through smartphones (Liu & Ma, 2018). Instagram is unique among other social media sites as the emphasis is on sharing photos and short videos (Tiggemann et al., 2018). Sharing photos pose a risk of being exposed to images that perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards and reflect the ideal female beauty standard. This notion can become harmful to females' mental health when they internalize messages received from these images (Baker et al., 2019).

Overall, there seems to be strong evidence that Instagram use can negatively impact women and girls' self-image (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al., 2018; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018). There are various beauty ideals of women (e.g., thin, fit, curvy) represented on this social media platform (Baker et al., 2019). It is also relevant to note that Instagram provides a platform for individuals to showcase the highlights of

their life and the best versions of themselves through self-promotion (Dumas et al., 2017). However, it also appears that individual differences, such as competitive drive and natural inclination to compare oneself, can impact a female's Instagram experience. Some women report feeling inspired by Instagram (Meier & Schafer, 2018), whereas others are negatively affected through body image concerns to self-objectification (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2018; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). There are some limitations in the literature. Most of these studies only included university student populations (Baker et al., 2019; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; de Vries et al., 2018; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Hendrickse et al., 2017; Moreno-Domínguez et al., 2019; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Tiggemann & Zinoviev, 2019). Another limitation is that the literature only observed the short-term effects of Instagram use (Kleemans et al., 2018). Future research is recommended to take a longitudinal approach.

Instagram and social media have implications for the counselling psychology field. Individuals probably use more than just one social media site, so it would be unrealistic to expect that a client would only be using Instagram. Therefore, it is vital as clinicians to be aware of both the positive and negative outcomes of social media use on mental health in general. Some of the positive effects of social media include a sense of community (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021), strengthened pre-existing relationships and social connections (Glaser et al., 2018), and a source of online peer-to-peer support for those struggling with mental health issues (Naslund et al., 2016). In addition to body image concerns, some of the negative effects of social media use include social media addictive behaviours (Manwong et al., 2018), higher risk for self-harm behaviours and suicidal thoughts (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021), anxiety and depression (Liu & Ma, 2018), FOMO (Hunt et al., 2018), and social comparison behaviours (Sherlock & Wagstaff,

2019). In particular, adolescents tend to be at higher risk of experiencing adverse outcomes from social media use (Mahmoud et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018).

I was unable to locate much literature on interventions specifically for social media-related mental health outcomes. Still, there are some effective interventions to help promote healthier social media use and body image concerns. Both CBT (Alleva et al., 2015) and DBT or other mindfulness interventions appear to help individuals with body image concerns (Altman et al., 2020). The consensus around recommendations for clinicians is to promote healthier social media use to clients rather than eliminate social media use (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2021). Another area that affects clinician practice is implementing assessment tools and developing social media-specific assessments (Alkis et al., 2017).

Completing this research project was informative for me, both personally and professionally. Instagram can be impactful for women and can foster positive and negative outcomes for their body image. I am curious to observe where this research field will go as it grows and expands over time. As a future practicing mental health professional, I am interested in learning how social media can affect clients and how to help them overcome their mental health challenges better.

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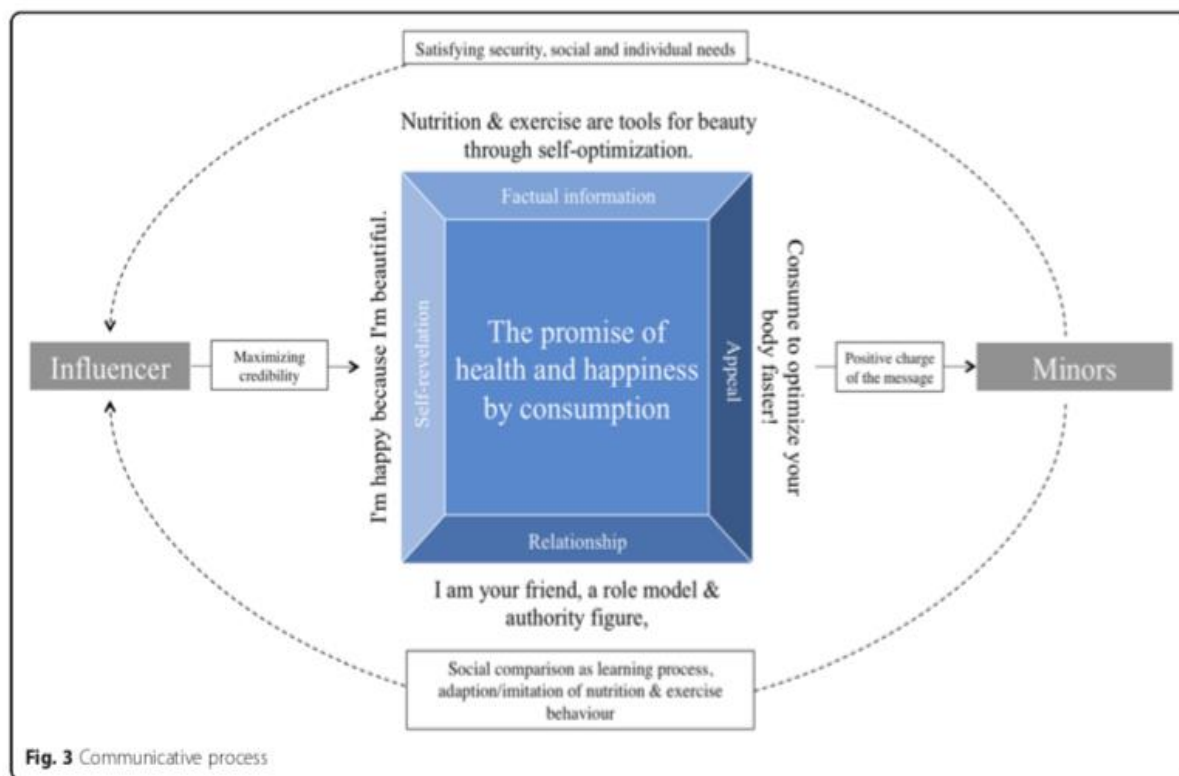
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Appendix

Communicative Process - Influencers and Minors



Note. The Communication Process Model is from Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019).