The Effect Instagram has on Body Image

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The iPhone app, Instagram, first launched in 2012, and was intended to share memorable moment through pictures instantly (Ridgeway & Clayton, 2016). Instagram has risen to be one of the most downloaded apps having over 300 million active users and 70 million photos uploaded a day in 2015 (Ridgeway & Clayton, 2016). Users have the opportunity to moderately edit their picture with the app’s built in filters along with the option of custom photo editing. When posting, users can tag their friends, add the location and upload the image to other social media platforms. Another feature of the app is the discovery tab where users can see popular pictures liked by those they follow, as well as, popularly liked pictures from around the world. This allows users to see lavish pictures of celebrities, social influencers and popular friends. When viewing these trending pictures, users can begin feeling self doubt about their own lives. Social media has placed unrealistic body goals in the minds of millennials which has the potential to harm their physical and mental health they longer they indulge in social media’s norm.

Summary One: Relationship Between Instagram Post and Lifestyle Habits

As mass media, social media and public figures post more photoshopped body pictures, millennials strive for body goals to match that of these ideas. Mass media and social media exposure of the idea and desirable body size turn into targets for millennials to attain feature achievements or similar body images.

An evaluation survey was handed out to 381 male and female university students and asked them to compare their bodies with social influences on social media. The results showed a positive relationship between having a negative attitude towards one’s own body, the motivation for engaging in vigorous exercise, and the attempt of starting a healthy diet. Females showed a higher rate of wanting to go on a diet than males did. When it comes to comparing bodies to those
who post flawless images, there is little to no difference between the emotions males and females feel towards these images (Sonmez & Turanci, 2017). The implications of these findings demonstrate the ways in which media content can influence the behaviors of college students regardless of gender.

**Summary Two: Body Issues and Social Media Engagement**

It is no secret that women do not like their body, in fact, 50% of women in the United States indicate having negative feelings towards their body weight (Thompson, Heinberg, Altable, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Women aren't the only ones struggling with this epidemic. This research showed that men have the same feelings. “While the ideal body shape is different for men and women, both ideal body shapes are unrealistic in terms of what average, everyday American men and women look like—67% of adult Americans were overweight or obese in 2005–2006 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2008) and the majority of Americans (53%) try to lose weight (based on a recent representative survey by the International Food Information Council, 2009).” With the uprise of social media and photo editing, it is not startling to find studies that confirm the negative affects social media has on our body image (Burns, 2009). Image retouching was used primarily for political propaganda when it was first introduced to society (King, 1997), but now social media apps, such as Instagram, have built in filters and manual editing features so that users can retouch their own photos (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Image retouching is the new norm for society. In a study on relationships between media exposure and body-related outcomes, Grabe found that there was a higher percentage of body dissatisfaction and eating pathology amongst adolescents who had viewed thin-ideal images rather than neutral images (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).
Millennial users are anxiously waiting for approval in the form of comments and likes. An active user can take a picture and spend an unnecessary amount of time just on editing before it is even posted. Researchers McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, and Masters gave a 6-version media usage questionnaire to 101 girls ranging from seventh graders to seniors. The survey asked them ten questions about photo manipulation. The results showed that, “girls who shared photos of themselves on social media, [had] higher engagement in the manipulation of an investment in these photos” (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, and Masters, 1134). Many men and women will compare themselves to their friends or celebrities and then try to edit their photos to look like the luxurious photo they saw. One study states that these active users “only compare to celebrities on Instagram mediated the relationship between Instagram usage and self-objectification” (Fardouly, Willburger and Vartanian, 11).

**Summary three: Selfies and Hashtags**

Ridgeway & Clayton (2016) find a connection to selfie posting and body image satisfaction. A “Selfie” is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.” Body image satisfaction is strived to be obtained when posting selfies, and according to Ridgeway and Clayton (2016), “narcissism, psychopathy, and insularity [are] associated with increased sharing of images of one’s self to SNS’s.” A sense of empowerment is given to the poster when their image is liked and commented on several times. The positive feedback is associated with looking a certain way that appeals to others as perfection and beauty. To test the hypothesis of Instagram selfie posting and body image satisfaction, Ridgeway and Clayton conducted an experiment involving 420 Instagram users completing a questionnaire about selfies.
The end results showed a connection between posting a selfie and having more body image satisfaction when the selfie was engaged by other users.

Instagram is popular for their hashtag association. Users upload an image and use several hashtags to tie that image into various categories. For example, a picture of one at the beach may have the hash tags “beach, water, summer, sand, vacation, happyplace, mermaid,” and other relevant topics. This will allow the image to be seen by a larger audience who clicks each individual hashtag and sees what other posts are using the same one. Hashtags can be contradicting such as thinspiration, used by the pro-anorexia (pro-ana) community, versus thickspiration, the fat acceptance community (fatosphere) (Marcus 2016). Each hashtag is used numerous times a day so that users can connect with people in their same situation who also feel comfortable in their bodies. Body image movements such as these expose users to extreme forms of self-love. As Instagram continues to connect people worldwide, it simultaneously plants a seed of self-doubt. Self-categorization is the process of associating oneself with a particular group based on one's image of oneself (Marcus 2016). Posting a selfie and correlating it with a body image hashtag allows users to self-categorize and join a community with similar interest. In some cases, such as the pro-ana, users find a community of survivors to connect with. Marcus (2016) sees the common denominator of each group being, “motivated to raise their self-esteem and reach self-enhancement.” Agreeing with Ridgeway and Clayton’s research of postie selfies for body image satisfaction.

**Summary Four: Social Media’s Influence**

Millennials exposed to unrealistic attractive followers on Instagram will likely engage in appearance related comparisons leading to negative evaluations of their own bodies. 185 female
university undergraduates with existing Instagram accounts completed an extensive questionnaire, including relationship status and sexual orientation, measuring appearance-related comparisons between desire for thinness and body dissatisfaction. Instagram’s photo-based activities created appearance related comparison by users and positively predicted both drives for thinness and body dissatisfaction. The comparisons lead to negative evaluations of their own bodies. Other research shows additional negative consequences are lower appearance related self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and development of eating disorders. (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton, and Ridgway 2017). The implications of these findings demonstrate the ways social media photo based comparisons can influence self-esteem and body image acceptance to millennials.

Conclusion

Millennials face the daily challenge of trying to keep up with the Jones’. With trends coming and going, it is almost an impossible feat. Social media highlights the perfectness of the world and suppresses the average. Millennials are able to find hundreds of related post through the use of hashtags causing their obsession with perfect to grow. As a society, we have placed and unrealistic image of how people should look in the minds of our youth. This is dangerous. Social media has the potential to harm and kill millennials as they strive to look like what they see plastered around the internet. The new goal should be to advocate for the body you have. Self love is something that does not come easy, but society should effortlessly try to instill it into millennials minds. The power of positivity can change the direction our society is going, and the first step to that is ending social media’s unrealistic body image.
References


