

SCROLLING INTO SELF-PERCEPTION: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Social media has influenced body image, particularly among adolescents and young adults. This review examines how social media exposure contributes to body dissatisfaction, the internalization of thin and muscular ideals, and decreased self-esteem. Research highlights that idealized images, social comparisons, and algorithm-driven content create unrealistic beauty standards, leading to negative self-perceptions and increased mental health concerns like anxiety and depression. Studies emphasize the role of social media influencers in shaping body ideals and encouraging body modification behaviors. The review explores how media literacy, self-regulation strategies, and policy interventions can help mitigate these effects. By promoting awareness and fostering critical engagement with social media, individuals can develop healthier relationships with their body image and mental well-being.

Keywords

Social media, Body image, Self-esteem, Dissatisfaction, Comparison, Idealized beauty standards, Mental health, Media bias, women's self-esteem

Social media has become integral to modern life, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others. While it offers connectivity and entertainment, research consistently highlights its significant role in fostering body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Exposure to idealized images, social comparisons, and the internalization of unrealistic beauty standards contribute to negative self-perception, decreased self-esteem, and potential mental health concerns. This literature review explores the various ways social media influences body image, including the effects of thin and muscular ideal internalization, self-comparison, and psychological impacts. Additionally, it examines the need for media literacy and intervention strategies to mitigate these harmful effects.

Social Media Exposure and Body Dissatisfaction

Social media plays a significant role in shaping body dissatisfaction, particularly among young users. Fardouly and Holland (2018), found that being exposed to images on social media can negatively impact body satisfaction and mood, which can reinforce negative self-perceptions. Likewise, Perloff found that social media encourages young people to want to maintain a certain beauty ideal, which can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and self-objectification at a young age (2014). Lastly, Papageorgiou, Fisher, and Cross (2022) found how young girls report feeling pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards after social media exposure. These findings highlight how social media fosters unrealistic beauty expectations, contributing to widespread body dissatisfaction and unhealthy behaviors. Addressing this issue through media literacy and promoting body representation can help mitigate its harmful effects.

Research has consistently shown that social media engagement plays a significant role in shaping body image perceptions, often contributing to increased body dissatisfaction. Vuong, Jarman, Doley, and McLean, found that engagement with social media correlates with increased body dissatisfaction in adolescents, specifically in people who internalize thin or muscular ideals (2021). Additionally, Dayi, Colak, and Bingol saw that there is a strong relationship between too much social media use and increased body dissatisfaction, specifically in young adults (2023). Finally, Rounsefell, Gibson, McLean, Molenaar, Brennan, and Truby examined how social media impacts people's perceptions of attractiveness, showing that higher interaction with social media correlates with

increased body dissatisfaction (2020). These results highlight the strong correlation between frequent social media use and negative body image, emphasizing the need for greater awareness and intervention strategies.

Social media plays a very powerful role in shaping body image perceptions, often contributing to increased dissatisfaction. Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton highlight how social media exposure distorts body image perceptions, specifically for young women (2019). Jiotsa, Naccache, Duval, Rocher, and Grall-Bronnec also highlight the role of social media in increasing body dissatisfaction and discuss how influencers shape beauty ideals (2021). Additionally, Perloff found a link between high social media engagement with greater body dissatisfaction, and adolescents who follow beauty or fashion accounts experience higher dissatisfaction (2014). These studies emphasize the significant impact of social media exposure on body dissatisfaction, especially how beauty ideals promoted by influencers and fashion accounts set unrealistic standards.

The pervasive presence of idealized images on social media has been shown to negatively affect self-esteem and body image perceptions. Williams and Ricciardelli note that excessive exposure to idealized images lowers self-esteem and increases body image concerns (2014). Bennet, Whisenhunt, Hudson, Wagner, Latner, Stefano, and Beauchamp (2020) explored how increased social media exposure correlates with higher body dissatisfaction and how the role of edited images and influencers shapes unrealistic beauty standards. Andsager examined social media's role in reinforcing unattainable body ideals, leading to dissatisfaction, and discussed the gender differences in perceived body image (2014). These findings highlight the harmful impact of unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by social media, reinforcing body dissatisfaction and shaping gendered perceptions of attractiveness.

The influence of social media algorithms and prolonged exposure to idealized body types has been linked to increasing body dissatisfaction and negative self-perception. Vries, Vossen, and Boom investigate how algorithm-driven content exposure intensifies body dissatisfaction through repeated exposure to idealized body types (2018). Additionally, Pop, Iorga, and Iurcov discuss how frequent engagement with social media exacerbates concerns about physical appearance and promotes disordered eating behaviors (2022). Sonmez and Esiyok (2023) explore how excessive social media use increases body dissatisfaction, specifically among people who tend to compare themselves to idealized images online. Lastly, Mori, Mongillo, and Fahr (2022) demonstrate the connection between prolonged screen time, self-perception, and body dissatisfaction, emphasizing the need for social media awareness. These studies underscore the critical role of social media in shaping body image concerns.

Thin and Muscular Ideal Internalization

Social media plays an important role in shaping beauty standards, often leading individuals to internalize unattainable ideals that impact their body image and self-perception. In a study conducted by Fardouly and Holland, images on social media that are portrayed as unattainable can affect thin-ideal internalization and can lead to lower body dissatisfaction (2018). Additionally, Perloff found that internalization of beauty standards from social media posts can lead to increased body surveillance and disordered eating behaviors (2014). Lastly, Papageorgiou, Fisher, and Cross (2022) it was found that many girls compare themselves to other influencers or models, which reinforces their thoughts on wanting to look like the girls they see on the screen. These findings highlight the danger of unrealistic beauty portrayals on social media, as they contribute to body dissatisfaction, increased self-monitoring, and harmful comparisons among users.

Research suggests that social media exposure influences body image concerns, particularly among individuals who internalize societal beauty standards. Vuong, Jarman, Doley, and McLean found that adolescents who internalize thin or muscular body ideals are more likely to have body dissatisfaction when exposed to social media than those who do not internalize thin or muscular body ideals (2021). Dayi, Colak, and Bingol found that individuals who frequently consume fitness-related content are more likely to internalize the thin and muscular ideal (2023). Likewise, Rounsefell, Gibson, McLean, Molenaar, Brennan, and Truby, highlight how body modification behaviors like dieting and exercise have increased due to exposure to idealized images (2020). These studies emphasize the impact of idealized online imagery in reinforcing body dissatisfaction and encouraging body modification behaviors like dieting and excessive exercise.

The internalization of thin and muscular body ideals, often reinforced by social media, has significant long-term consequences on body image and mental health. Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton (2019) talk about the long-term consequences of internalizing thin and muscular ideals, including eating disorders. Also, Jiotsa et al. explored how fitness influencers contribute to unrealistic body standards and reinforces that media perpetuates thin and muscular ideals (2021). Lastly, Perloff discussed the gender differences in ideal body types portrayed on social media, as social media reinforces male muscularity as an ideal (2014). These findings highlight how media exposure contributes to unrealistic body expectations, influencing both men and women in different ways and increasing the risk of disordered behaviors.

The portrayal of ideal body types in the media and on social media platforms creates significant pressure for individuals, particularly adolescents, to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. Williams and Ricciardelli examine the pressure to conform to body ideals and their psychological effects on adolescents (2014). Likewise,

Bennet, Whisenhunt, Hudson, Wagner, Latner, Stefano, and Beauchamp analyze how the promotion of thinness for women and muscularity for men on social media leads to internalized beauty standards and dissatisfaction with personal body image (2020). Finally, Andsager focuses on how ideal body representations in media reinforce unattainable physique goals, driving individuals to extreme measures to attain them (2014). As research suggests, these unattainable ideals contribute to body dissatisfaction and harmful behaviors, emphasizing the need for greater media literacy and awareness.

The influence of social media and digital alterations has contributed to the normalization of unrealistic body expectations, particularly among young people. A study by Vries, Vossen, and Boom examines how fitness influencers and digitally altered images create unrealistic expectations about body shape and size (2018). Also, Pop, Iorga, and Iurcov discuss how young people absorb and normalize extreme body modification efforts to meet perceived social standards (2022). Additionally, another study highlights the increasing pressure on adolescents to conform to unrealistic body expectations promoted by media and advertising (Sonmez and Esiyok, 2023). Lastly, researchers studied the psychological effects of striving for unrealistic body ideals, linking them to anxiety and low self-esteem (Mori, Mongillo, and Fahr, 2022). As research shows, the pressure to attain these unattainable ideals can have serious psychological consequences, including increased anxiety and low self-esteem.

Comparison and Self-Esteem

Social media exposure has been shown to significantly impact self-perception and mental well-being, particularly when individuals compare themselves to idealized images online. Fardouly and Holland found that attaching these idealized images to one's own identity can lead to increased negative self-perception and depressive symptoms (2018). Likewise, Perloff finds that comparing yourself to someone on social media negatively affects someone's self-esteem and mental well-being, which can contribute to body dissatisfaction (2014). Additionally, a study found that adolescents frequently compare themselves to other people online, which leads to decreased self-esteem and increased feelings of inadequacy (Papageorgiou, Fisher, and Cross, 2022). These findings suggest that frequent social comparisons on social media contribute to negative self-esteem, increased body dissatisfaction, and a higher risk of depressive symptoms.

Social media fosters a culture of comparison that can significantly impact self-esteem and body image. Vuong, Jarman, Doley, and McLean (2021) found that social media creates unhealthy comparisons between us and others, which lowers self-esteem and increases body dissatisfaction, particularly in those who seek validation through their appearance. Also, high levels of comparison on social media negatively impact self-esteem, particularly among adolescents (Dayi, Colak, and Bingol, 2023). Finally, a study examines how comparison through likes, comments, and filters contribute to self-perception issues (Rounsefell et al., 2020). These studies highlight the detrimental effects of social media comparisons, demonstrating how likes, comments, and filters contribute to self-perception issues and increased body dissatisfaction.

Social comparison on social media has been identified as a key factor contributing to self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction. Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton note that people who compare themselves to others are at higher risk of self-esteem issues (2019). Additionally, a study analyzed how social comparisons on social media lead to lower self-esteem (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Perloff also suggests that social comparison is a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction (2014). Finally, Williams and Ricciardelli show how engagement with social media influencers correlates with feelings of inadequacy (2014). These studies collectively emphasize the negative impact of comparing oneself to others online, highlighting its role in lowering self-esteem and fostering feelings of inadequacy.

Social media platforms foster an environment where users frequently engage in social comparisons, often leading to negative self-perceptions and lower self-esteem. Bennet et al. (2020) explored the role of social comparison on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok in decreasing self-esteem and increasing negative self-perceptions. Andsager also investigates the negative impact of upward social comparisons, showing how users tend to feel inferior when exposed to idealized online images (2014). Likewise, Vries, Vossen, and Boom discuss how constant exposure to curated online personas contributes to dissatisfaction and increased self-criticism (2018). The findings from this highlight how exposure to idealized online images and curated personas can contribute to self-criticism and dissatisfaction, ultimately impacting mental well-being.

In regards to self-worth and emotional well-being, social media plays a large role in influencing these areas of a person's life. Pop, Iorga, and Iurcov (2022) examined the psychological effects of comparing oneself to influencers, leading to a decrease in self-worth. Sonmez and Esiyok also explored the connection between self-esteem, validation-seeking behavior, and social media engagement (2023). Lastly, Mori, Mongillo, and Fahr analyze how social media interactions shape self-worth, with a focus on the emotional toll of comparison (2022). Research indicates that frequent comparisons to influencers and engagement in validation-seeking behaviors can negatively impact self-esteem, highlighting the emotional consequences of social media use.

Psychological Impacts and Mental Health

The pervasive presence of idealized images on social media has been shown to negatively impact mental health, particularly concerning body image. One study found that increasing one's exposure to idealized images on social media can correlate with lower mood and increased concerns about body image (Fardouly and Holland, 2018). Additionally, anxiety and depression can be linked to repeated exposure to beauty-ideal content (Perloff, 2014). Papageorgiou, Fisher, and Cross also found that social media makes young girls feel bad about themselves, which contributes to stress, anxiety, depression, and potential eating disorders (2022). Finally, a study found that body dissatisfaction due to being exposed to things on social media contributes to a higher rate of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Vuong et al., 2021). Research consistently demonstrates that repeated exposure to beauty-ideal content on social media contributes to increased anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction.

The relationship between social media use and mental health concerns has been widely examined, with studies highlighting its impact on anxiety, depression, and overall well-being. Dayi, Colak, and Bingol (2023) found a link between excessive social media use and increased anxiety and depression. Additionally, one study found that dissatisfaction with appearance is associated with lower psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction (Rounsefell et al., 2020). Finally, a study by Rodgers, et al., found that poor body image contributes to social withdrawal and psychological distress (2019). Collectively, these findings suggest that excessive social media use and body dissatisfaction can significantly contribute to psychological distress, emphasizing the need for strategies to promote healthier self-perceptions.

Research has consistently demonstrated a connection between negative self-image, unrealistic beauty standards, and mental health challenges such as anxiety, mood disorder, and depression. Researchers discuss the link between negative self-image and increased rates of anxiety and depression (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Likewise, Perloff highlights that prolonged exposure to unrealistic beauty standards correlates with mood disorders (2014). Williams and Ricciardelli link self-esteem decline to symptoms of anxiety and social anxiety disorder (2014). These studies underscore the significant impact of social comparisons and unattainable beauty ideals on specific mental health areas such as self-esteem, anxiety, as well as overall mental well-being.

Need for Media Literacy and Intervention

While social media can negatively impact body image, research suggests that awareness and education might help mitigate these harmful effects. Fardouly and Holland (2018) find that being aware of the unrealistic nature of social media posts can reduce someone's negative impact on body image. Likewise, Perloff called for future research on interventions and policies that can mitigate social media's harmful effects on body image (2021). Additionally, teaching these girls about the nature of these social media images, like Photoshop, can help reduce body dissatisfaction (Papageorgiou, Fisher, and Cross, 2022). These findings highlight the importance of media literacy and intervention strategies in reducing body dissatisfaction and promoting healthier self-perception.

Media literacy and self-regulation strategies can play a crucial role in reducing the negative impact of social media on body image. Jarman, Doley, and McLean found that media literacy can help adolescents evaluate social media images that may be unrealistic (2021). In 2020, another study found that self-regulation strategies like limiting screen time and curating social media feeds help minimize negative effects (Rounsefell et al.). Lastly, Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman, and Paxton call for advocates for policies that regulate unrealistic body portrayals in the media (2019). By promoting critical awareness and advocating for policy changes, these strategies can help individuals navigate social media healthily and sustainably.

Various studies highlight the importance of education and intervention strategies in mitigating the harmful effects of social media on body image and mental well-being. Jiotsa et al. (2021) suggested that education on media literacy could reduce harmful effects. Additionally, Perloff recommends intervention strategies like promoting digital well-being (2014). Likewise, Williams and Ricciardelli support the use of parental guidance and school-based programs to teach responsible social media use (2014). By incorporating media literacy education, digital well-being initiatives, and parental guidance, individuals can develop healthier relationships with social media and its content.

Conclusion

The research review underscores the profound impact of social media on body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Studies consistently show that exposure to idealized beauty standards, frequent social comparisons, and algorithm-driven content contribute to negative self-perceptions and unhealthy behaviors. However, media literacy, self-regulation strategies, and policy interventions can help mitigate these effects. By promoting awareness, encouraging responsible social media use, and fostering positive body representation, individuals can develop healthier relationships with social media, ultimately reducing its adverse impact on body image and mental health.

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