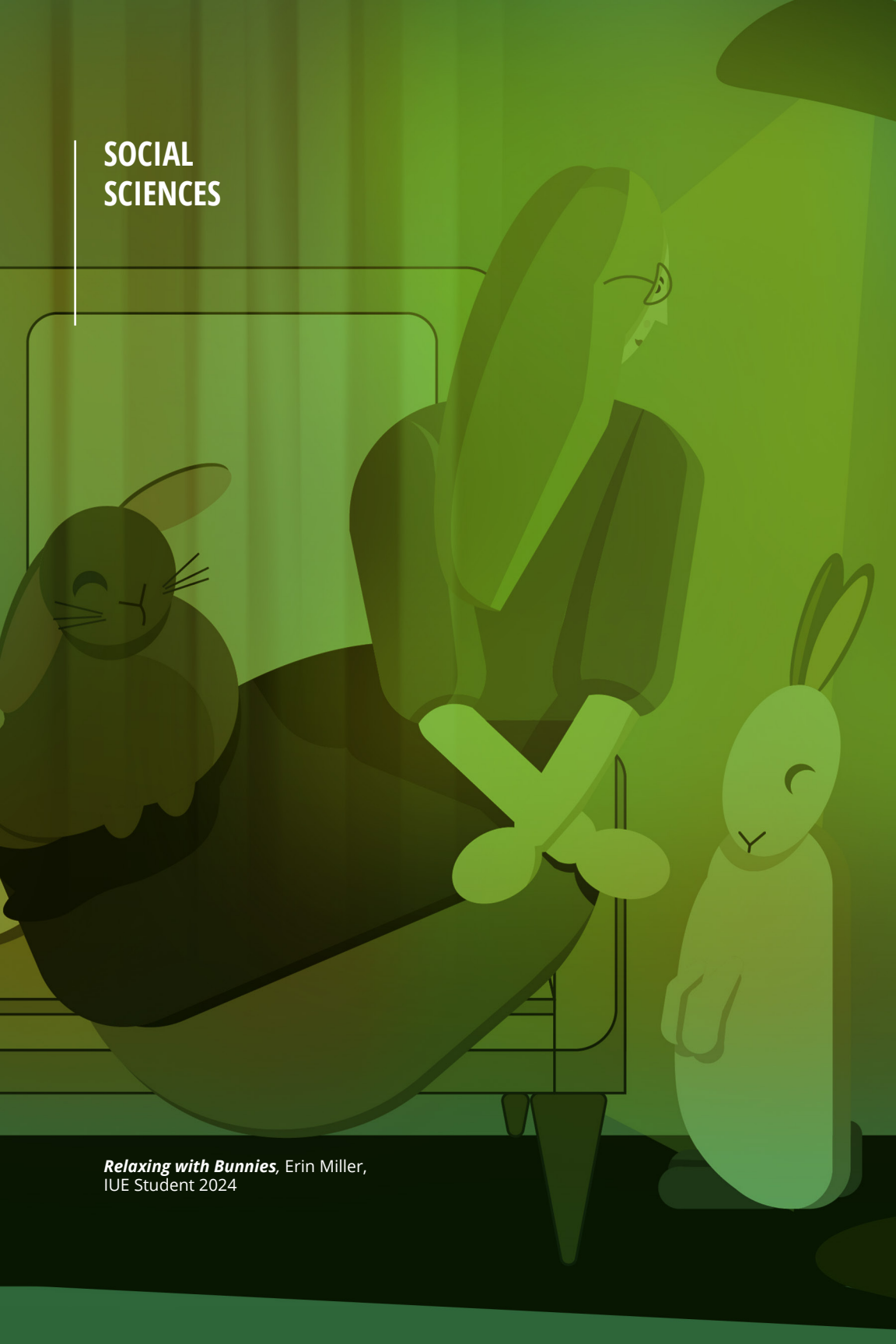


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EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE.

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Abstract

Social media and body image have prompted researchers to investigate the potential effects its use could have on body image. With the rapid expansion of social media use, has increased importance, as researchers have noted that social media is a central socializing agent for adolescents in sociocultural settings (Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Along with this influence, social media is, for many adolescents, their source of news, opinion, and general information (Jarman et al., 2021, p. 2279). Various works established both positive and negative relationships between social media use and body image, which indicates the growing need to pinpoint what aspects of social media serve as a significant factor for potentially negative relationships (Akerman & Borsa, 2021; Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021). There is a need to understand the effects on adolescents' psychological and physical well-being.

Keywords: Body Image, social media, central socializing agent, adolescents, prevention, negative impact, psychological well-being, physical well-being

Recent developments in social media have prompted researchers to investigate the potential effects its use could have on body image. The study of body image in the media is not new, but with the rapid expansion of social media use, this issue has taken on increased

importance, specifically because researchers have noted that social media is a central socializing agent for adolescents in sociocultural settings (Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Along with this influence, social media is, for many adolescents, their source of news, opinion, and general information (Jarman et al., 2021, p. 2279). Various works have established both positive and negative relationships between social media use and body image, which indicates the growing need to pinpoint what aspects of social media serve as a significant factor for potentially negative relationships (Akerman & Borsa, 2021; Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Without understanding what aspects of social media use may contribute to adolescents holding a negative body image, researchers cannot implement preventative tactics to try and limit adverse effects on adolescents' psychological and physical well-being.

Issue

Body image is essential to adolescents' sense of self-esteem, described as respect and love toward oneself (Colak et al., 2023, p. 596). Colak, Bingol, and Dayi (2023) described body image as individuals' feelings and thoughts regarding their physical appearance stemming from others' evaluations (p. 596). Conversely, Akerman and Borsa (2022) described body satisfaction as the degree of appreciation for one's own appearance (p. 1). Colak et al.'s (2023) definition emphasizes the dependence on an external influence (p. 596), while Akerman and Borsa's body satisfaction relates to internal influences and comparisons (p. 1). All the works in this review agree on the necessity of identifying and clearly understanding negative body image and its effects on other aspects of individuals' lives, and on determining if social media use increases adverse body image-related views.

Negative body image is described by Bell, Taylor, and Bates (2021) as an individual's negative thoughts toward their body (p.

281). Negative body image can stem from external influences, such as important socializing agents like social media (Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Jarman, Marques, Slater, and Paxton's (2021) research found that social media use influences body image due to adolescents' frequent use of social media, as they use social media upwards of three hours per day (p. 2280). Mahon and Hevey (2021) agreed with both Bell et al. (2021) and Jarman et al. (2021) that social media use is an important sociocultural factor for adolescents and argued the need for research surrounding the effectiveness of adolescent coping strategies while online (pp. 1-2).

Colak et al. (2023) described social media use as a means of allowing individuals to interact through various forms of technology (p. 296). Examples of social media sites identified by Akerman and Borsa (2022) include Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and allow users to share and create visual and text-based content (p. 2). Social media interactions can include viewing and posting pictures, videos, and personalized comments between individuals online. Social media creates a form of appearance pressure, which is seen to aid the negative relationship between its use and body image (Bell et al., 2021, p. 282; Mahon & Hevey, 2022, p. 2). While all these works suggest that social media affects body image, these works differ in their approaches to establishing and understanding the relationship between the two variables.

Causes

Previous literature has tended to diverge on causal factors in the relationship between social media use and body image. All literature in this review agreed that social media's sociocultural significance on adolescents directly affects body image; however, the authors disagreed on the cause of potentially negative body image. The arguments in this review were categorized into three sections: social media content (Akerman & Borsa, 2022), interactions (Colak et al., 2023;

Jarman et al., 2021), and coping strategies for adolescents (Mahon & Hevey, 2021; Bell et al., 2021).

All the literature in this review identified social media as a sociocultural influence. Social media is a significant socioeconomic factor (Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 1), can reinforce societal ideals (Akerman & Borsa, 2022, p. 2), and can contain harmful appearance-focused messages (Jarman et al., 2021, pp. 2279-2280; Bell et al., 2021, p. 282). These messages containing body-related ideals can alter viewers' body images, especially due to their widely accessible nature (Colak et al., p. 597; Akerman & Borsa, 2022, p. 2). Understanding the significant role social media use plays in the socialization of adolescents helps explain how it can influence body image.

Akerman and Borsa (2022) argued that the relationship between social media use and body satisfaction depended on the type of media pages participants interacted with. Their study found that physical appearance-centered pages cause body dissatisfaction regarding individuals' whole bodies, specifically for women (Akerman & Borsa, 2022, p. 7). Akerman and Borsa's (2022) research found no statistically significant difference in satisfaction between male participants who followed or did not follow appearance-based pages (p. 4). Mahon and Hevey's (2021) research agreed with Ackerman and Borsa's (2022) that there is a lack of research surrounding social media use and men's body image, as well as noting men's lower level of disclosure due to the stigma surrounding males and body image (p. 2). Mahon and Hevey (2021, p.2) also found that boys perceive social media as more positive, which may contribute to the relative lack of body dissatisfaction in men accessing certain social media pages (Akerman & Borsa, 2022, p. 4). Bell et al. (2022) contradicted these findings, stating that both boys and girls are equally affected by social media regarding their body image (p. 289). Mahon and Hevey (2021) also found boys and girls are equally affected and offered that the difference between their perceptions of body image is due to different coping strategies (p. 8).

These contradictions in the literature establish a need for sex-based investigations into the effects of social media use on adolescents' body image.

Literature from Colak et al. (2023) and Jarman et al. (2021) argued that body image is affected by interactions on social media. Research by Colak et al. (2023) showed addictive social media use for adolescents led to lower self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale; $\beta = -0.08$; $t = -5.45$; $p < .001$) and body image (Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire; $\beta = -0.70$; $t = -2.16$; $p < .05$) (pp. 596, 598). While Jarman et al. (2021) agreed that social media is "central in adolescents' daily lives," they argued that it is not the excessive nature of the use of social media that affects body image but rather the motivations and engagement that produced different relationships between the two variables (pp. 2279, 2280, 2287). The results of Jarman et al.'s (2021) investigation indicated that certain social media engagement was not directly related to body satisfaction, as the relationship holds a minuscule negative association, especially regarding intensity of use as well as active and passive use (p. 2288). This contradicts Colak et al. (2023) because it shows that excessive intentional and unintentional use of social media does not significantly affect body image. Jarman et al. (2021) provided evidence that social media motivations such as escapism ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$) and appearance feedback ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$) both had a negative impact on body satisfaction (pp. 2288, 2291), while information sharing had a positive relationship with body satisfaction ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.002$) (p. 2288). These findings suggested that different social media interactions can affect the relationship between social media use and body image.

Bell et al. (2021) argues that improving body image while using or reflecting on social media use depends on adolescents' social media literacy and coping strategies. Social media literacy is described as knowledge individuals use to identify harmful ideals on social media (Bell et al., 2021, p. 282). While Bell et al. (2021) stated their findings

showed no change in positive body image through social media literacy (p. 8), they also argued that social media literacy can be a helpful and effective way of improving adolescent body image. Bell et al. (2021) expanded the idea of social media literacy by suggesting the helpful nature of classroom-based interventions for adolescents. These interventions were described to provide adolescents with the means to identify harmful content on social media and encourage resilience to negative ideals (Bell et al., 2021, p. 280-282).

While Mahon and Hevey (2021) stated that social media literacy is not helpful in improving body image, they argue that specific coping strategies can influence adolescents' perception of media and its internalization (pp. 7- 8). The two major themes they found in adolescents' responses are behavioral and cognitive strategies, both of which have subcategories that provide the most effective solutions (Mahon & Hevey, 2021, pp. 5-6). The effectiveness of coping skills depends on the individual, with gender being a significant factor (Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 8). Mahon and Hevey (2021) stated that while their research has established that boys and girls specifically use different forms of coping skills while using social media; namely, that boys use more active coping while girls seemed to be "less optimistic in their ability to control social media outcomes" (p.9)

Significantly, a majority of the sources (Akerman & Borsa, 2021; Bell et al., 2021; Colak et al., 2023; Jarman et al., 2021; Mahon & Hevey, 2021) showed that social media use and body image hold a negative relationship, while only Jarman et al. (2021) found instances in which social media use can create positive effects on body image. Considering these findings, it is essential to understand the possible consequences that negative relationships between these two variables may hold.

Consequences

All five sources discussed in this literature review thus far has identified that negative body image can negatively affect other aspects

of an individual's overall mental and physical health. Negative body image can result in negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and body dysmorphia (Akerman & Borsa, 2021, p. 2; Colak et al., 2023, p. 599; Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 1). Adolescence is a vulnerable time in many individuals' lives, which is why it is essential to identify the risk factors that adolescents face (Colak et al., 2023, p.595). Investigation into the topic indeed showed that there is a relationship between body image and social media use. While research efforts have attempted to understand the relationship between the two, it may be necessary to understand which variable may be the driving influencer of the other or if the variables work in a feedback cycle. For instance, an example of the first theory is that negative body image can unknowingly contribute to poor psychological well-being in adolescents, especially increased levels of stress (Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 1). As a result, Jarman et al. (2021) stated that adolescents may use social media as a way to deal with stress and escape real life (p. 2290); however, this becomes problematic when adolescents are exposed to negative body-centered ideals and pressured to conform to unrealistic societal standards (Akerman & Borsa, 2022, pp. 2, 7; Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 5; Bell et al., 2021, p. 282). Researchers state that solutions are limited, and more research is needed to understand the best ways to combat negative ideals affecting adolescents' psychological and physical well-being. A fresh starting point may be to establish the directionality of the two variables to understand ways to address future solutions.

Solutions

Although solutions are limited, several researchers have established possible ways to improve body image while individuals, especially adolescents, use social media. Mahon and Hevey (2021) suggest compassion-focused approaches that focus on skills that alter negative body-related messages from social media (p. 8). Skills

can include reframing negative thoughts that focus on appreciating one's body (Mahon & Hevey, 2021, p. 8). Mahon and Hevey (2021) also believe that this solution may reduce body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, common consequences if negative body image from social media use is not improved over time. Compassion-focused approaches were not studied directly by Mahon and Hevey (2021); however, this solution was offered based on previous literature they found during their research process (p.8).

Classroom-based interventions investigated by Bell et al. (2021) seem to offer a more fact-based solution. Classroom-based interventions provide students with educational programs that increase adolescents' awareness of harmful content and practices on social media and create resilience in the face of these influences (Bell et al., 2021, p. 282). Bell et al.'s (2021) research showed the effectiveness of these programs in improving adolescents' body image over short periods of time. Results of their study showed that adolescents' short-term body image improved for those that were part of the intervention-based educational program ($M = 16.45$, $SE = 0.37$) compared with those in the control group ($M=15.22$, $SE= 0.37$, $p = .02$, $d = -0.38$) (Bell et al., 2021, p. 289). Mahon and Hevey (2021) found that social media literacy does not necessarily provide easier ways of internalizing body-related messages online (p.8). This means that while education-based interventions have short-term solutions, it is necessary to conduct further research to truly understand the long-term benefits of these interventions (Bell et al., 2021, p. 289).

All five sources stated that further research is needed to understand the significance of the relationship between social media use and body image. Through an enhanced understanding of the relationship between these variables, researchers may be able to find other solutions to improve body image vis-a-vis social media influences.

Conclusion

Previous literature has established a relationship between social media use and body image. The five works reviewed in this paper all found a relationship between the two variables. While not an exhaustive or authoritative review of all available literature on this topic, this review found no previous works denying a relationship between social media use and body image. While all the articles reviewed found negative relationships between social media use and body image, only Jarman et al. (2021) established a positive correlation between the two. All five of the works identified that negative body image resulting from social media use can lead to negative mental and physical health issues (i.e., depression, anxiety, eating disorders/ disordered eating, body dysmorphia, etc.). The cited works provide two possible solutions to increase body image while using social media: introducing compassion-focused approaches and educational interventions for adolescents. Ultimately, all researchers agree this topic requires additional research to develop more comprehensive and effective solutions. ■

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