



Brief research report

The relationship between *Facebook* and *Instagram* appearance-focused activities and body image concerns in young womenRachel Cohen^a, Toby Newton-John^a, Amy Slater^{b,*}^a Graduate School of Health, University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123, Sydney NSW 2007, Australia^b Centre for Appearance Research, University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify the specific social networking sites (SNS) features that relate to body image concerns in young women. A total of 259 women aged 18–29 years completed questionnaire measures of SNS use (*Facebook* and *Instagram*) and body image concerns. It was found that appearance-focused SNS use, rather than overall SNS use, was related to body image concerns in young women. Specifically, greater engagement in photo activities on *Facebook*, but not general *Facebook* use, was associated with greater thin-ideal internalisation and body surveillance. Similarly, following appearance-focused accounts on *Instagram* was associated with thin-ideal internalisation, body surveillance, and drive for thinness, whereas following appearance-neutral accounts was not associated with any body image outcomes. Implications for future SNS research, as well as for body image and disordered eating interventions for young women, are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In line with the sociocultural theory of body image disturbance (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), research has consistently found that exposure to media depictions of the thin-ideal in television and magazine images leads to thin-ideal internalisation and appearance comparisons, resulting in body image concerns and eating disturbances in women (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Similarly, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) suggests that the media's sexual objectification of women socialises women to self-objectify. Body surveillance, the behavioural manifestation of self-objectification, involves continuous self-monitoring of the body's appearance (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) and is a risk factor for eating disorders (Moradi & Huang, 2008). More recently, research has examined the role of social media and social networking sites (SNS) in body image concerns. A unique combination of factors including peer interactions, popularity of photo sharing, and the accessibility of mobile technology compounds the likelihood for SNS users to internalise the thin-ideal, self-objectify, and engage in appearance comparisons with peers. In support, a systematic review of research to date demonstrated a relationship between general SNS use and body image and disordered eating (Holland

& Tiggemann, 2016). However, the studies reviewed by Holland and Tiggemann (2016) used broad measures of SNS use (such as total time spent on SNS and frequency of SNS use) and the majority of studies in this review investigated *Facebook* use only, with no studies investigating *Instagram*.

It has been argued that since SNS use is not homogenous, a more nuanced approach to measurement of SNS use is required (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). For example, *Facebook* use may involve a diverse array of activities including posting photographs, privately messaging friends, reading newsfeeds, and observing and interacting with friends' posts and updates. It is conceivable that time spent on *Facebook* predominantly viewing attractive photographs of friends may lead to greater appearance comparison and thin-ideal internalisation, and thus have a greater impact on body satisfaction compared to time spent on *Facebook* reading the news or current affairs. Similarly, on *Instagram*, users following predominantly appearance-focused accounts (e.g., models and fitness bloggers) may be more preoccupied with their own appearance compared to users following appearance-neutral accounts (e.g., travel).

Previous research found that exposure to appearance-focused traditional media, rather than overall media consumption, predicted body dissatisfaction (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Tiggemann, 2005). Similarly, research into specific components of SNS use related to body image may be more informative than simply measuring total time spent on SNS. In support, Meier and Gray (2014) measured and examined the relationship between specific *Facebook* features and body image outcomes in a sample

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of 103 adolescent females. Participants reported their total Facebook use, specific Facebook feature use, and completed measures of weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, thin-ideal internalisation, appearance comparison, and self-objectification (Meier & Gray, 2014). It was found that engagement in photo-based activities on Facebook (such as posting and viewing photographs), but not overall time on Facebook, was correlated with body image outcomes (Meier & Gray, 2014). Similarly, a correlational study of 101 adolescent girls showed that girls who regularly shared selfies on SNS reported greater thin-ideal internalisation, body dissatisfaction, over-evaluation of shape and weight, and dietary restraint, compared to those who did not regularly post selfies (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015).

Young adults (ages 18–29 years) are the highest users of SNS (Perrin, 2015) and therefore an exploration of appearance-focused activities on SNS would help clarify the relationship between SNS use and body image in this demographic (Perloff, 2014). Moreover, given the increasing popularity of Instagram amongst young women, and that Instagram is purely a photo-based SNS with users sharing more than 80 million photos a day (Instagram, 2016), more research into the relationship between Instagram and body image is warranted. To date, most studies have focused solely on Facebook and, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has explored both Instagram and Facebook use together in their relationship with body image.

Thus, the present study seeks to extend upon Meier and Gray's (2014) preliminary findings by identifying the specific Facebook and Instagram features that relate to body image concerns in a population of young women (age 18–29 years). It was hypothesized that Facebook "appearance exposure" (e.g., viewing friends' photos), but not total time spent on SNS, would correlate positively with body image concerns; conceptualised here as appearance evaluation, thin-ideal internalisation, appearance comparison, body surveillance, and drive for thinness. Similarly, it was hypothesised that following appearance-focused Instagram accounts (e.g., 'health and fitness', and 'celebrities') will positively correlate with body image concerns, whereas following appearance-neutral accounts (e.g., travel) will not be related to body image concerns.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 259 Australian women aged 18–29 years ($M = 22.97$, $SD = 3.25$) with an average reported body mass index (BMI) of 22.45 ($SD = 3.89$), which is within the normal weight range (WHO, 2006). Participants were recruited via various social media outlets promoting the study (e.g., University's Facebook page). Participation was voluntary. Sixty-eight percent of participants were currently students and 61% had completed at least an undergraduate degree. The majority of participants (77.5%) identified as Caucasian, with others reporting to be Asian (15.1%), Middle Eastern (2.7%), African (0.8%), Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (0.8%) and other (3.1%).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographics

Participants reported age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, height, and weight. BMI (kg/m^2) was calculated using height and weight data.

2.2.2. Social networking site use

Preliminary yes/no items asked if participants had a Facebook and/or Instagram account. Participants indicated the amount of times they access/check their respective accounts daily on a 7-point

scale: *hardly ever*, *1 or 2 times*, *3–5 times*, *5–10 times*, *11–15 times*, *15–20 times*, *more times than I can count*. Participants also indicated the average amount of time they spent on SNS (Facebook and Instagram) a day on a 12-point scale: *0–15 min*, *15–30 min*, *1–2 h*, *2–3 h*, *3–4 h*, *4–5 h*, *5–6 h*, *6–7 h*, *7–8 h*, *8–9 h*, *9–10 h*, *10 or more hours*.

The Facebook Questionnaire (FBQ; Meier & Gray, 2014) was used to assess total Facebook use and Facebook appearance exposure. Participants were asked to indicate their frequency of engagement with 23 individual Facebook activities on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never*, 5 = *nearly every time I log on*). Whilst the original questionnaire consisted of 24 items, pilot testing revealed that "write a Facebook note" is no longer available as a Facebook activity, so was deleted. Individual item responses were summed to calculate the total FBQ score. Eight of the activity items that were photo-based activities (e.g., "update your profile photo" and "view friends' photos of themselves") comprised the photo subscale (PS). Frequency scores for these items were summed and divided by the overall FBQ score to comprise the appearance exposure score (AES; range = 0–1.0). For this study alpha was .86 for the total FBQ and .71 for the PS. Participants were also asked how often they follow three categories of Instagram accounts: (1) 'Health and Fitness' (e.g., fitness bloggers, diet plans); (2) Celebrities (e.g., models, the Kardashians); and (3) Travel. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*). Travel accounts were included as an appearance-neutral category to compare with the two aforementioned appearance-focused categories of Instagram accounts.

2.2.3. Thin-ideal internalization

The Internalisation-General subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-Version 3 (SATAQ-3; Thompson, van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004), was used to measure thin-ideal internalisation. Participants rate the extent to which they agree with nine statements (e.g. "I wish I looked like the models in music videos") on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely disagree*, 5 = *definitely agree*). This scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric characteristics amongst nonclinical female college students (Thompson et al., 2004); in the present study alpha was .93.

2.2.4. Appearance comparison

The five-item Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS; Thompson, Heinberg, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1991) was used to measure appearance comparison tendencies. Participants indicate on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) how often they engage in appearance comparisons in social situations (e.g. "In social situations, I sometimes compare my figure to the figures of other people"). The scale has shown satisfactory construct validity and internal consistency in a sample of college women (Thompson et al., 1991); in the present study alpha was .73.

2.2.5. Appearance evaluation

The Appearance Evaluation (AE) subscale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scales (MBSRQ; Cash, 2000) was used to measure appearance satisfaction. Participants rate the extent to which they agree with seven statements (e.g. "Most people would consider me good-looking") on a 5-point scale (1 = *definitely disagree*, 5 = *definitely agree*) with lower scores indicating lower appearance satisfaction. The scale has shown good internal consistency in a female undergraduate sample (Ata, Thompson, & Small, 2013); in the present study alpha was .90.

2.2.6. Body surveillance

The Body Surveillance Subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS; McKinley & Hyde, 1996) was used to

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