

The Analysis of Causes and Effects of Negative Body Image in Adolescent Girls in the U.S

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Social media and particularly blogs have taken the place of radio and newspapers from the past (Chittenden, 2010, p.510). Blogs are a popular platform for social networking and collecting information regarding a variety of topics. According to Statista (2019), by the year 2020 the number of bloggers is estimated to be 31.7 million in the United States (U.S) alone. In a study by Chittenden (2010), it was found that adolescents account to about 50% of the all blogged content, so it can be said that blogs are a popular form of social media among adolescents for sharing their experiences and thoughts via the internet (Chittenden, 2010, p.505).

Social media has a large influence on adolescents, especially in developing their image of self and opinion about their physical appearance (Chittenden, 2010; Davis, 2016). According to Anschutz and Engels (2010) social media is popular with adolescents because they use it as a resource to find information regarding ideal appearance and bodies. It is used to gather information regarding diet plans, beauty, fashion trends, and more (Chittenden, 2010). Due to the popularity of blogs among adolescents, they may have a major effect on body image. Body image is, “the mental construct and perception that an individual holds of his or her body and includes subjective feelings about the body”, (Chattarman & Rudd, 2006, p. 49).

The purpose of this study was to examine the causes and effects of negative body image in adolescent girls in the U.S. During the adolescence stage girls develop an increased significance towards physical appearance, concerns about body image and assessing self-worth (Salomon & Brown, 2019), therefore this study focuses on adolescent girls between the age group of 10-24 years, using qualitative methods of data collection and content analysis.

Adolescent girls seem to develop anxieties related to different aspects of their physical appearance. This is because adolescent girls are constantly under pressure and anxious about what their family, friends or the society will view them as (Piercy, 2018). Their physical appearance, clothes they wear, how they look, form a very important part of their sense of self and identity. Therefore, Dramaturgy theory (Goffman, 1975) was used for the purpose of evaluating the adolescent girls understanding and opinion towards the concepts like self, identity, appearance, and beauty. Dramaturgy explores how individuals act in social situations by likening them to actors on a stage, putting on a performance (Goffman, 1975). Appearance management is part of Dramaturgy and states that cues like dress and grooming can help to create an impression on viewers of a performance (Stone, 1975).

Methods and Procedures

Due to their popularity amongst the adolescents in the U.S, this qualitative research used blogs as one of the important sources of information to study the causes and effects of negative body image in adolescent girls, by using the constant comparison method. A combination of 12 blogs and online articles by bloggers in the U.S were investigated. The blogs and online articles were selected based on their relevancy to the research topic, therefore the blogs and online articles that were related to body image in adolescent girls were analyzed. Some of the topics are

listed included, a) body image concerns, b) fashion trends for adolescents, c) media and adolescent body image, d) beauty standards. Content analysis of these topics were made to understand the influence of fashion industry via celebrities and fashion models. And the contemporary fashion trends for adolescent girls in the U.S. were assessed to evaluate their effect on body image.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicated that excessive exposure to and usage of social media, and the expectation to achieve unrealistic beauty standards set by the society has a negative effect on adolescent girls. Social media causes constant pressures related to appearance for adolescents. The findings of this study also suggest that, *exposure to social media* and *physical/mental/psychological well-being*, emerged as themes of this qualitative study.

The first theme, *exposure to social media*, encompassed the negative effects of social media and how it pressurizes in achieving unrealistic beauty standards. For example, one blog stated, “An issue that is commonly seen in different kinds of media is the lack of reality”, (Davis, 2016). And since media is constantly promoting unrealistic beauty myths and unachievable body standards, adolescents have the tendency to believe that such standards related to beauty and body are normal (Anschutz & Engels, 2010; Chittenden, 2010; Piercy, 2018).

The influence of celebrities, fashion models, fashion magazines and advertisements, television, and other forms of print media adds to the pressure of unrealistic and unachievable beauty standards (Maltby, Giles, Barber and McCutcheon, 2005). Therefore, the first theme *exposure to social media*, also comprised of the causes of negative body image in adolescents. As Betts (2019) mentioned in her blog, “Teens that see this on social media can start to have unrealistic expectations for themselves that can lead to self-esteem issues with an unhealthy ideal body image. The personas that they create that are different from their real selves can also lead to anxiety and self-esteem issues”. And as Davis (2016) expresses, excessive usage of social media causes dissatisfaction with one’s own body and lead to negative body image. It also negatively effects adolescents by further leading to low self-esteem and eating disorders (Davis, 2016).

The second theme *physical/mental/psychological well-being*, comprised of the effect of social media on the physical, mental and psychological well-being of adolescent girls. Through this study it was found that social media not only creates unnecessary pressure due to the unachievable beauty standards but also causes low self-image, low self-esteem, negative body image, depression, eating disorders, and other harmful effects on adolescent girl’s physical, mental and psychological development and well-being (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, 2005; Davis, 2016; Piercy, 2018).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that exposure to social media and its excessive usage, can lead to negative body image for adolescent girls. Piercy (2018) suggests that adolescents are more vulnerable during this stage of life because they are going through many changes related to their physical, mental, emotional, social and psychological development. Research has shown that adolescent girls and women are more prone to being affected by such endorsements related to the physical appearance by the media, and therefore tend to associate their identities with their

physical appearance (Choate, 2007; Anschutz & Engels, 2010; Davis, 2016). Therefore, the findings of this study concurred with Goffman's (1975) theory of dramaturgy in terms of self and identity along with beauty and appearance management (Stone, 1975).

An important limitation of this study was that, this study was limited to the narratives presented on social media and did not focus in-depth on the role of family and peers on adolescent girl's body image. For future research, it would be beneficial to analyze the role played by family and peers on adolescent girl's opinion towards their body image.

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