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The Influence of Instagram Selfies on Female Millennials' Appearance Satisfaction

by

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A thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my beloved parents and sister, who have always loved me unconditionally and whose good examples have taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve.

This work is also dedicated to my boyfriend, who has provided me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have proved negative effects of social network sites on women's body image caused by social comparison processes. However, only a few studies have examined the effects of Instagram on women's appearance satisfaction and no selfies were taken into consideration in regard to that issue. The purpose of this research was to examine the social comparison theory through the lens of Instagram selfies and determine the effects of selfies on women's appearance satisfaction. In-depth interviews with 26 female millennials, ages 18 to 32, reveal the re-defined standard of an ideal body image, shifting away from being skinny to becoming fit, affected by the exposure to celebrities and models' selfies on Instagram. Though some of the participants admitted to having a positive body image, none of the interviewees reported a complete satisfaction with their bodies. Results indicated that although female millennials do look up to celebrities to define their ideal body, they experience equally intense negative feelings after the comparison to selfies of attractive friends. Most importantly, interviews have demonstrated that the number of likes and comments are as important to female millennials as the aesthetics of the selfie. Likes and comments on own selfie play a significant role in the construction of her body image, acting as a sign of validation from the society, and, thus, significantly affecting her self-esteem and perception of her own beauty.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

People who were born between the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s are often referred to as being from Generation X. Also known as millennials, this generation is the first to step into the digital era with access to texting, online messaging and social media networks. This greatly affects the way millennials communicate with each other by offering a platform for constant virtual connection (Lundin, 2016).

The early form of social media goes back to 1991 when the World Wide Web was created. Tim Berners-Lee's ability to connect hypertext technology to the Internet resulted in the formation of the Web 1.0 era of networked communication (van Dijck, 2013). Networked media offered mostly generic services that helped users form online communities or support offline groups, however, did not offer people the ability to automatically connect one user to another (van Dijck, 2013). With the new turn of the millennia and the advent of Web 2.0, online services became more enhanced giving the ability to utilize various interactive tools and assisting users in getting involved in two-way communication that eventually formed the modern version of "networked sociality," a.k.a. social media (Manovich, 2009).

The creation of the social media, "a set of online tools open for public membership that supports idea sharing, creating and editing content, building relationships through interaction and collaboration," and social network sites (SNS) gave people the opportunity to show their personalities through customized online profiles while connecting and maintaining relationships with other individuals (Matthew & Martinez, 2014, p. 126; Wilcox & Stephen,

2014). With the social media's ability for users to personalize profiles and millennials' tendency to utilize the Internet for communication, people became progressively devoted to creating an online self so that they could demonstrate their identities to other users of social media (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). According to Goffman's theory of impression management (as cited in Cunningham, 2013), the reason the owner of the SNS profile deliberately depicting an idealized version of the self could be the desire of an individual to make other users respond in favor of that profile owner (p. xvi).

Launching in 2010 as a photo-sharing app, Instagram quickly reached the status of one of the most popular SNS with over 700 million active monthly users who shared over 40 billion photos as of April 2017 (BirdSong Analytics, n.d.). The ability for Insta-users to easily communicate on SNS through visual aids encourages social interaction with such functions as tags, comments, likes, and private messages that could be sent by one user to another (Champion, 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). Instagram images are distinctive from other photographs found on the Internet – square digital images that can be enhanced by preset graphic filters before uploading and sharing, the function designed for easy manipulation and quick sharing (Champion, 2012).

In terms of practice and the use of imagery, Instagram differentiates itself from similar platforms like Facebook and Twitter, for example. While on Facebook users upload images to tell about themselves and, thus, create unique portraits of themselves, and on Twitter users signal identity through shared links, Instagram, on the other hand, is the place in which users communicate through images in order to showcase themselves in a way they want to be seen by others (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield 2007; Silfverberg, Liikkanen, & Lampinen 2011).

Nowadays, Instagram is an inseparable part of 800 million monthly active users, and the half of that user base consists of 18-29-year-old millennials that utilize the power of social

networking more than any other demographic segment (Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Statisa, n.p.). The high social value and popularity of Instagram make it worth analysis because unlike other platform, the communication on this outlet occurs solely via images, which makes the aesthetic part of imagery extremely important, as it is part of an online image that every user carefully controls (Deeb-Swihart, Polack, Gilbert, & Essa, 2017). Probably, due to the aesthetic nature of Instagram, it is especially popular among women, as the statistics show that "female Internet users are more likely to use Instagram than men (38% vs. 26%)" (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016).

The popularity of Instagram has often been connected to the phenomenon of a selfie, a self-portrait that the user takes on his/her camera (Bennett, 2014; Wagner et al., 2016). There has been a drastic increase of selfie-taking and posting recent years (Wagner et al., 2016). Selfies have gained so much popularity that, according to the Oxford Dictionary, it became the word of the year in 2013 (Websta, n.d.). In 2016, more than 255 million photos had a hashtag #selfie, and 288 million photos were hashtagged with #me (Websta, n.d.).

The fame of selfies might be due to its ability for one to demonstrate identity and gain self-affirmation, which could be explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Study (Wagner et al., 2016). Human's need for acceptance is the third most important stage after the basic need for survival and security. Instagram and selfies are significant in a way that they can satisfy an individual's dichotomous psychological need to feel linked to and accepted by a larger social group (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Qualman, 2010).

Selfies are distinctive from other images because they emphasize appearance and body and demonstrate users in a body-centric manner (Wagner et al., 2016). That exemplifies a narcissistic nature of selfies which might affect people who have various self-confidence levels. The ability to present perfect but unrealistic images can result in other users being

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exposed to idealistic photographs of their peers, which, according to Brown and Tiggemann (2016), can lead to body image dissatisfaction and other negative outcomes. Because women are heavier users of Instagram, they are at a higher risk of developing body inadequacies caused by the exposure to selfies than men. Scholars have just recently started considering Instagram as an SNS that might have an impact on women's body image. Lup, Trub, and Rosental (2015) explored associations between Instagram use and depressive symptoms through the application of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which could be described as a natural drive to compare oneself to other to gain accurate self-assessments. The online questionnaire (n=117) of 18-29-year-olds concluded that "more frequent Instagram use would be associated with greater depressive symptoms" (Lup, Trub & Rosental, 2015). The study did not look for a relationship between Instagram use and body image dissatisfaction, but depressive symptoms which could arguably be linked to body image inadequacy. According to Allen and Walter (2016), individuals of certain personalities (a particular way of thinking, feeling, and behaving) are more prone to being vulnerable to sociocultural factors that lead to body dissatisfaction. That is why Instagram could be a threat to people with "vulnerable" personalities to developing depressive symptoms and possibly experiencing body image issues.

The assumption above could be supported by Wagner's et al. (2016) online survey (n=130) of 18-32-year-old females. The study that examined the relationships between actual body size and body dissatisfaction revealed that "actual body size was positively related to body dissatisfaction" (Wagner et al., 2016). Women with larger body sizes were more "vulnerable" to developing body size dissatisfaction than other peers. The study also looked at the process of selfie-taking and the frequency of posting them to Instagram. Though there

was a positive relationship between body dissatisfaction and selfies taken, the study did not find a correlation between body image dissatisfaction and the frequency of selfie-posting (Wagner et al., 2016).

McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, and Masters (2015), deepened the scope of research on selfies by examining the process of selfie-editing in a cross-sectional study of 101 adolescent girls. The study has determined the positive relationship between the frequency of selfie-sharing and overvaluation of physical appearance, body dissatisfaction, and internalization of thinness. This study confirmed the positive relationship between the manipulation level over selfies and negative body image among adolescent girls.

Most of the research studying the relationship between Instagram and women's body image satisfaction have looked into the issue quantitatively. Behan (2015), though, investigated the effects of social media (i.e., Facebook and Instagram) on Irish female body image satisfaction through the application of qualitative methodology. Backed by the social comparison theory, she interviewed six 18-25-year-old Irish females and found out that "the women felt negative body image satisfaction when viewing images online through Facebook and Instagram." "These negative feelings were predominantly as a result of upward social comparison engagement" (Behan, 2015).

Taking the apropos literature, the key components embroiled in young women's utilization of SNS to display photographs of themselves incorporate appearance-related social comparison, a tendency within people to evaluate themselves and their physical attractiveness through the comparison with other individuals alike to gain accurate self-assessments (Festinger, 1954). The literature has also demonstrated how engagement in upward social comparison can summon sentiments of jealousy and unhappiness with one's own appearance. It is also, however, important

not to diminish the role of Instagram that is being studied in this manuscript and through which the social comparison process is going to be analyzed. Given that Instagram and selfies have turned into an important part of female millennials' lives, as women are heavily engaged in social networking and exposed to images depicting unrealistic beauty standards, it is essential to learn more about how this online culture affects and impacts the development of appearance satisfaction.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Comparison

Proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954, the social comparison theory centers on the belief that there is a drive within people to evaluate themselves, their own abilities and opinions through the comparison with other individuals like themselves in order to gain accurate self-assessments. Festinger's (1954) theory underscored the idea that people contrast themselves with others in order to understand the world and their place in it. Based on how one compares him/herself with others, this social comparison likewise incorporates establishing goals on social and personal growth. Therefore, people make self-evaluations based on a wide range of areas, such as physical attractiveness, wealth, intelligence, etc. (Solomon, 2016). What is most significant, "the social comparison tendency is so strong that it manifests effortlessly and spontaneously even without an explicit instruction to engage in comparison" (Chan & Sengupta, 2013, p. 742).

Individuals tend to compare themselves in two ways: upward or downward (Festinger, 1954). Downward comparison is a defensive inclination that is utilized as a method for self-assessment. An individual making a downward social comparison looks to another man he/she considers being less attractive/successful (or any other chosen dimension) keeping in mind the end goal to feel better about him/herself and enhance his/her subjective prosperity. The upward social comparison, on the other hand, occurs in situations when a person compares him/herself to somebody who is more attractive/successful (or any other chosen dimension) than him/her because of the wish to be better than the opponent. This can lower self-regard and result in one's such

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feelings as begrudge, jealousy, and disappointment with his/her own particular appearance (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons, 1986; Tesser, Millar & Moore, 1988).

The comparisons that are based on physical attractiveness are called appearance-related social comparisons (Groesz et al., 2002). Along these lines, social comparison theory would anticipate that women may engage in appearance-related comparisons to societal beauty standards keeping in mind the end goal to evaluate their own particular level of appeal. Women may engage in comparison processes to assess various elements of the physical appearance, such as figure, face, hair, clothing, etc. (Thompson, Heinberg, & Tanleff-Dunn, 1991). For example, Thornton and Moore (1993) found that women's self-evaluations of attractiveness and social confidence decreased after exposure to a physically appealing, same-sex person than after exposure to a physically unattractive person of the same sex. Other studies have also have shown that women encounter a decrease in confidence and an increase in body disappointment and self-consciousness consequent to being presented to photos of models who exemplify the beauty standards (Thornton and Maurice, 1999). Such effect of the physical contrast remains constant regardless of the subject of comparison, whether it is exposure to an attractive peer or a model of the same gender (Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983).

Festinger (1954) also proposed that people would be not able to precisely contrast their own capacities or opinions with other people who were excessively dissimilar from one's self. Subsequently, he stated that individuals would tend not to take part in examinations with very different others and would, rather, probably make comparisons to similar others (Festinger, 1954; Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland,1988; Wood, 1989). Festinger (1954) additionally theorized that people have a unidirectional drive upward. In other words, it's in human nature for one to be compelled to both assess his/her capacities and then work to enhance them. To note, Festinger did

not indicate how this drive to enhance the self may impact the choice of a comparison object (Dakin & Arrowood, 1981). Nonetheless, numerous scholars have proposed that an impulse for the upward comparison should prompt comparisons to other people who are slightly better than one's self, which would then prompt behaviors aimed at narrowing the apparent inconsistency (Wheeler, 1966; Wood, 1989).

Before social media has appeared, social comparison was possible only through face-to-face interaction between individuals. The development of the Internet and SNS has changed and complicated the way people engage in the social comparison process. For instance, an online survey held by an organization devoted to treating eating disorders has found that half (50%) of those users sharing images on SNS have enhanced them prior to posting the photos (Griffin, 2015; Solomon, 2016). Female millennials are under a constant aesthetic pressure caused by the exposure to digitally altered images and the comparison to such kinds of photographs. That constant comparison, which has been worsened through the social media lens, makes women fear the outcomes of the comparison to unrealistic images which forces them to alter their images, too. The ability for users to digitally enhance selfies sets unrealistic and questionable standards which can result in a decrease of self-esteem among people caused by an exposure to such type of content and the occurrence of a subconscious upward social comparison. Numerous researchers have found a strong relationship between the exposure to thin-ideal images with low self-esteem and body disappointment caused by the upward social comparison process (Bessenoff, 2008; Chan and Sengupta 2013, Tiggemann and Slater, 2013).

More recently, researchers in the media studies have turned their attention to appearance-related comparison processes that occur on social media. For example, in Haferkamp and Kramer's (2011) study participants were shown either physically attractive or unattractive online

profiles. As a result of the study, it was found that after the exposure to profiles of attractive same-sex people, participants' level of attractiveness with and mood declined. Another research conducted by Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, and Halliwell (2015) studied the topic of appearance-related comparisons on Facebook. Through a random selection, participants were assigned to either browse own Facebook page, websites of magazines featuring models, or a control website. The results indicated that the group of participants who browsed own Facebook accounts were significantly more concerned over various elements of the physical appearance, such as face, skin, and hair, than the groups of people that browsed magazine website or a control website (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Body Image

In "The Image and Appearance of the Human Body," Schilder (1950) contended that body image is not only a perceptual concept but also a reflection of viewpoints and interactions with others. Defining the body image as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves," he studied feelings of lightness and heaviness, the reasons for variations in perceived body size, and the impact of one's body image on relations with other people (Schilder, 1950, p. 11).

The concept of "body image" has been significantly expanded by scholars since 1950 and moved beyond Schilder's primarily perceptual definition. Various researchers have studied the body image from such perspectives as body, weight and appearance satisfaction, appearance orientation and evaluation, body esteem, body schema and many more (Grogan, 2017). In other words, the modern concept of body image could be defined as the evaluation of the self and his/her general appearance, weight, and beliefs about others' opinions on his/her body and appearance (Mendelson, Mendelson, & White, 2001). In order to incorporate key elements, the definition of

body image that will be used in this thesis research is: "a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about her physical appearance."

As stated by Cash and Pruzinsky (2002), one's attitude toward the physical self is formed through evaluative, cognitive, and behavioral components. The person's assessment of his or her body image and appearance involves making cultural and social comparisons, which is a psychological process of evaluation of self-worth and personal physical attractiveness (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). According to the objectification theory of Frederickson and Roberts (1997), women will probably be more viewed as physical and sexual objects, whose social value can be surmised from physical appearance, than men. Therefore, females are more inclined toward the objectification of the self in order to affirm the link of personal attractiveness with self-worth. Accordingly, the ones conveying a poor feeling of self-perception are more predisposed to experience mental and physical issues, as eating disorder, than the ones who do not (Dittmar, 2009).

Shocking results of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' research revealed that 91% of women in the USA were dissatisfied with their bodies as of 2017 (n.p.). Moreover, numerous researchers found a relationship between body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors with women (Homan et al. 2012; Levine and Harrison 2009; Scharrer 2013). Because of the body-driven nature of selfies and images in Instagram, social media could directly relate to the issue of a body image. For that reason, this problem has been getting increased attention from researchers. Scholars were able to document the existing correlation between SNS and body inadequacy (Tiggemann and Miller, 2010; Tiggemann and Slater, 2013). Body image inadequacy has a significant impact on women's attitudes, behaviors, and self-esteem which can develop severe emotional, mental, and physical problems, and eating

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disorders. Continuous overload of social media depicting the idealized version of women and accentuating on slimness resulted in the rise of eating disorders among women (Faer, Hendricks, Abed & Figeueredo, 2015).

Self-esteem

Defined as "degree of satisfaction with the self," self-esteem is an essential component of the body image (Blyth and Traeger 2001, p. 91). Even though the area is not a focus of the current study, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of self-esteem in the relationship with body image.

Several academic works have established the relationship between body image and self-esteem (Goswami et al., 2012; Fish, 2013). The study by Goswami et al. (2012) that attempted to determine body satisfaction among newly entrant female students in a professional institution have found that individuals who have a perception of a low level of body image satisfaction also have lower self-esteem levels and are more vulnerable to experiencing depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Goswami et al., 2012). This study was supported by another work of Fish (2013). Similar to the results of Goswami et al. (2012), the research by Fish (2013) has found the correlation between body image and self-esteem. However, the latter research was also surprising in a way that it proposed that even though women may feel positive toward their bodies, they still may have low body esteem. This can be, as according to Fish (2013), because of "[women's] a sort of lingering doubt or periods of regression to former feelings about their body" (Fish, 2013, p. 31).

History of Women's Ideal Physical Beauty

There is a general convention that women feel more pressure in the society to conform to the slender ideal than men. The idealization of slimness is frequently seen as the result of a historical development that occurred in the twentieth century, which has not always been considered the norm in Western culture (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999). There have been numerous changes in the understanding of feminine beauty throughout the years within Western culture, including the body shape and size. It is possible to track a cultural change in the perfect body that was considered beautiful and healthy as of that time, from the voluptuous figures favored in the Middle Ages to the thin body types preferred by fashion magazines starting from the beginning of the twentieth century (Grogan, 2017).

A heavier body type was viewed as fashionable and sensual until recent years. The "reproductive figure" was glorified by artists in the Middle Ages, the 1600s to 1800s. Meatiness, a full, rounded stomach, hips, and breasts were stressed as a symbol of fertility, high economic status, and good health (Lavine, Sweeney, & Wagner, 1999; Fraser, 1998; Fallon, 1990). To outline their class and well-being, women in the upper class needed to have more weight on their body, which indicated the sign of success and financial wellbeing of her husband (Fraser, 1998). To get the illusion of a curvy figure, women started wearing tight-laced corsets that showed their waist unnaturally small and emphasized on the hips and buttocks (Lowe, 2003).

In 1890, Cosmopolitan magazine listed the traits of the most admired American woman, which included a healthy, curvaceous body shape and defined features, delicate and smooth olive toned skin, golden hair, brown eyes, and a little color in cheeks (Fraser, 1998). Nevertheless, by the end of 1800s, the idea of slimness became widespread in the Western society, because food was not considered a scarcity, and the plumpness was not an indication of

richness and prestige anymore (Grogan, 2017; Fraser, 1998).

The concepts of calorie counting, calculation of an ideal weight, and the control of food intake emerged during the early 1900s (Austin, 1999). With the idealization of thinness that entered Western culture, women started practicing unhealthy and destructive behaviors to meet those newly set unrealistic standards of beauty (Grogan, 2017; Austin, 1999). The feminine ideal at that time was a tall, slender woman with a tiny waist and elegant features, which was a drastic change from the previous plump beauty ideal (Austin, 1999; Fraser, 1998). Miss America beauty contest winners of that time had average bust-waist-hip measurements of 32-25-35 (Grogan, 2017). To follow the new ideal of a flattened female silhouette and control weight, women of middle- and upper-class started binding their breasts with foundation garments, reducing the consumption of food, and exercising (LaFrance et al., 2000; Fraser, 1998; Silverstein et al., 1986; Caldwell, 1981). Those destructive techniques utilized by women in order to have the fashionable dream body led to the emergence of a new phenomenon of eating disorders, which immediately grabbed the attention of many researchers in a 1920 conference of the New York Academy of Science (Silverstein et al., 1986; LaFrance et al., 2000).

It was argued by various authors that the slim ideal was the result of the fashion industry's successful marketing, which became the standard beauty in wealthy industrialized Western societies of the twentieth century (Grogan, 2017; Fraser, 1998; Gordon, 1990). Latest fashion trends were demonstrated to the society through hand-drawn illustrations until the 1920s when they started being photographed and disseminated through fashion magazines. The magazines conveyed to the public the image of how females should look, which resulted in that new beauty standard of a boyish, flat-chested female figure (Grogan, 2017; Orbach, 1993).

In the 1930s and 1940s standards pushed toward a curvier figure, typified by Jean

Harlow and Mae West in the 1930s and Jane Russell in the 1940s. At the same time, the mean measurements of Miss America also changed: an increase of 2 inches in the bust size from the earlier decade in the 1930s (34-25-35) and one more inch increase in the bust size in the 1940s (35-25-35) (Grogan, 2017). Having larger breasts became fashionable, as well as wearing the clothes that emphasized them. The trend continued in the 1950s with the Hollywood film industry and the fashion industry's efforts to promote even larger breasts along with small waists and slim legs. Marilyn Monroe exemplified this new beauty ideal, and voluptuous and curvy actresses/models started to become the new trend in the Western society (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005). At the same time, winners of Miss America contest also increased in bust and hip measurements of 36-23-36, so that the female figure had an exaggerated hourglass shape.

The slenderness trend came back again in the 1960s when the fashion model Twiggy, who weighed 96 lb and had a flat-chested, boyish figure, became the role model for a generation of women (Grogan, 2017; Zimmerman, 1997; Freedman, 1986). Being slim was associated with freedom, youth, nonconformity and was considered a pass to the lavish lifestyle (Orbach, 1993). Compared to the previous decade, Miss America winners were thinner, 5 lb lighter, and an inch taller (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005; Norton, 1996; Mazur, 1986). This figure trend spread throughout the U.S. and all over Europe. The studies dedicated to the media's portrayal of a female body have discovered models were getting gradually slimmer from the 1960s until the 1980s. For instance, models depicted in Vogue and Playboy magazine were getting thinner, taller, and almost hipless throughout the years with breasts still remained large (Fallon, 1990).

The 1980s saw the continuation of the trend, except now it was also important to be fit (Grogan, 1917). The models were slim and toned at the same time and looked physically fit. Thin and strong was the new beauty ideal. However, the new beauty standards were unrealistic

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for women to attain without severe dieting, excessive working out routines, surgery, and other unhealthy behaviors (Harrison & Cantor, 1997). Consequently, "women began to spend inordinate amounts of time, energy, and money in the pursuit of a lean and muscular body" (Brumberg, 1997, p. 123).

The 1990s were known for the extremely thin beauty ideal with models looking "waif" like. Although the highest paid models, Cindy Crawford, Claudia Schiffer, and Christy Turlington, did not have extremely thin figures, magazine editors and designers often preferred someone like Kate Moss, who was the "waif" type of a model, to advertise their clothes and beauty products (Grogan, 2017). Moreover, the fashion houses chose not only extremely skinny models but also made them look like stereotypical heroin users, with matted hair, blue lips, and black eye makeup, also known as "heroin chic" look. Fashion industry continuously encouraged models to look like exhausted recoverees from heroin addiction, and take stimulants to stay skinny (Grogan, 2017; Frankel, 1998).

Despite the public concern regarding the skinny trend, the Western beauty ideal remained the same in the early 2000s. Although protested by some fashion models in the UK and despite the slow emergence of plus-size models in the U.S. throughout the times, the fashion industry did not only continue promoting the thin figure but also started utilizing digitally modified images that appeared in practically every magazine (Winter, 2014; Calderwood, 2015).

Nowadays women are continuously exposed to images of unrealistically slim ideal bodies in media (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996). Even though the modern beauty ideal does not include particular facial features, it incorporates a specific type of body that is commonly perceived in Western societies as beautiful: slim, feminine physique with a small waist and little body fat (Low et al., 2003). As women have gotten bigger in their body sizes over the last two

decades, the slim ideal that is depicted in media has turned out to be dynamically slender (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). According to Susan Bordo (2013), digital modification of an image shifts society's perception of how a typical woman should look, making people think of their own appearances as imperfect and strive for the perfect, smoothed, polished, but unrealistic beauty ideal. Even though the society fights digital alteration by indicating some of the modified images as "retouched," the method does not seem to prevent the increase of body dissatisfaction among women when they view those modified images (Tiggemann et al., 2014).

Research Gap, Rationale, and Research Questions

The reviewed studies looked at online personality, key characteristics of Instagram and selfies, appearance-related social comparison, self-esteem, and the body image which is constructed through the exposure to digital context. In spite of a wide range of research regarding body image, most studies have analyzed appearance-related comparison and its effects on the body image in a way that they studied the impact of the comparison process only on one of many elements of the physical appearance – figure. Such approach seems to be lacking completeness, because as mentioned before, the issue of the body image has become much more comprehensive since 1950, when it was defined as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Schilder, 1950). Because the approach in this work to the topic of the body image is more comprehensive and encompasses the evaluation of the self and his/her general appearance, weight, and beliefs about others' opinions on his/her physical appearance, current study is going to fill this research gap and explore the effects of appearance-related comparison on both female millennial's face and figure satisfaction through the perspective of Instagram selfies (Mendelson, Mendelson, & White, 2001).

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The research has also highlighted a gap in the literature as there seem to be fewer qualitative studies done on how Instagram selfies affect the body image. This study seeks to gain insights into how selfies affect young women's emotional state through the application of qualitative methodology.

Furthermore, a gap exists for additional research to determine the factors that affect downward and upward appearance-related comparison among women of Western culture when they are exposed to Instagram selfies of other attractive female users. Thus, the current thesis aims to contribute to social comparison theory by further examining the process of Western female millennials' social comparison in Instagram selfies context.

Therefore, by inductively utilizing qualitative methodology, this manuscript aims to contribute to social comparison theory by further examining the process of Western female millennials' social comparison through Instagram selfies and gain insights into how selfies affect female millennials' (aged 18-32) emotional state. The research be will conducted through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that will give the ability to hear more details from participants and learn more about subjects' life experiences, emotions, feelings, values, and perceptions of the phenomena being studied through the analysis of respondents' words and behaviors (Brennen, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Thereby, to reach the objectives mentioned in the manuscript above, the following research questions (RQ) are:

- **RQ1:** When exposed to Instagram selfies representing female users fitting Western standards of beauty, what factors influence women's upward or downward appearance-related comparison?

- **RQ2:** What role do selfies play in female millennials' construction of the body image?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Philosophies

As Quinlan (2011) notes, various philosophical frameworks are utilized by researchers to underpin and guide their projects. There is a wide range of methodology components that could be used in research. Some of those works may contain more than one philosophical framework, which is called the "methodological debate" among academics (Quinlan, 2011). As stated by Venable and Baskerville (2012) there has been a long history of debate regarding the appropriate methodology to utilize, quantitative or qualitative, in social research.

According to Creswell (2012), research philosophies are divided into four categories: epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodology. Although the philosophies are closely related, their characteristics differ. Nonetheless, Creswell (2012) accentuates on the importance of knowing "philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks that inform qualitative research" (p. 13). Acknowledging the belonging to one of those four philosophical assumptions (i.e. ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology) can serve as central guiding feature of all qualitative studies, while understanding own worldviews through interpretive frameworks (i.e. postpositivism, social constructivism, transformative, postmodern perspectives, pragmatism, feminist, critical, queer, and disability theories) would help shape the direction of this manuscript (Creswell, 2012).

The following part of the chapter will incorporate an overview of the philosophical assumption and interpretive framework that shape this research and the methodology that

underpins this thesis work. Distinctive kinds of research instruments will be discussed with the goal in mind to clarify and justify the most proper instrument for use for the exploration of research subject in the thesis work.

Epistemology

Browaeys and Fisser (2012) characterize epistemology as concerning "the thoughts, the intelligence, the knowledge, the consciousness, the imagination, the perceptions, and the sensation" (Browaeys & Fisser, 2012, p. 208). Also known as the "theory of knowledge", epistemology contains an act of a scientist attempting to develop a system that connects thoughts and frames a portrayal of the research object in relation to the outside world (Browaeys & Fisser, 2012).

One conducting qualitative research with the epistemological assumption in mind attempts to get as close as possible to research participant. Knowledge gathered through subjective experiences of participants is the main characteristic of the epistemological qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). For that reason, the researcher felt that epistemology is the framework that fits the aim of the study best: to gain knowledge of how Instagram selfies might affect female millennials through direct responses of the participants. One of the most common interpretive frameworks related to epistemology is social constructivism (also called interpretivism; see Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mertens, 2010) that shapes current research.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism (also called interpretivism) contends that there is no complete truth or one reality that can be revealed in research. In interpretivism, people look for comprehension of the world in which they live and work. They create subjective implications of their experiences

– implications coordinated toward specific objects or things. Those implications are diverse and complex, driving the scientist to search for the unpredictability as opposed to limit the implications into a couple of categories or thoughts (Creswell, 2012). The objective of research, at that point, is to depend however much as could reasonably be expected on the participants' perspectives of the circumstance to reflect the "distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order" (Bryman, 2008, p. 15).

As far as the actual practice goes, the questions for data collection of a qualitative study with interpretivism approach are broad and general, so that participants can develop the meaning of a circumstance, a circumstance ordinarily produced in conversations with others (Creswell, 2012). The social constructivism approach is widely utilized in qualitative studies because it encourages scholars to be inductive as opposed to looking for confirmations or disconfirmations through hypotheses (Johari, 2009).

That is why it was decided to undertake the social constructivism approach. The knowledge of the effects of Instagram selfies on female millennials is gathered solely through the participants' perspectives because the aim of the research is to capture experiences of women rather than try to confirm the hypotheses.

Qualitative Research

Specialists who undertake a social constructivist approach regularly utilize qualitative methodology that could be defined as "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) furthermore take note of that scientists who utilize qualitative methodology study things in their natural settings "attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Other scholars

characterize qualitative research as "data that represents feelings, thoughts, ideas, understanding – non-numeric data" (Quinlan, 2011, p. 105). In practice, social constructivist researchers analyze data in multiple levels to guarantee a thorough approach is take that will procure various viewpoints from participants, unlike a positivist approach that would acknowledge a single reality (Creswell, 2012).

According to Polkinghorne (2005), there has been significant growth in a variety of qualitative research methods in the last 40 years. Because of that, the current range of qualitative methods is "a matrix of mixed methods developed in different disciplines and on the basis of different ideas of science" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 137). Focus groups, in-depth interviews, ethnography, narrative research, and phenomenology are few of many methods for qualitative data collection techniques (Creswell, 2012). Regardless of the method or blend of methods utilized, the common theme that supports qualitative data researchers in their work is that they are looking to clarify gathered information in a way that catches the experience of the general population who delivered the information or content, as opposed to utilizing predefined measures (Creswell, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Quantitative

As defined by Bryman (2008), quantitative research is "deductivist and objectivist [strategy] [that] incorporates a natural science model of the research process" (p. 697). In other words, quantitative data analysis aims to enumerate the phenomena by determining statistical relationships among variables, differences between sets, or change over time (Creswell, 2008). Regardless of the growing popularity of qualitative methodology, quantitative research has been dominant and is still prevailing in social sciences research (Johari, 2009). Academics that utilize

quantitative approach use various methods such as empirical experiments, questionnaires, and data analysis (Behan, 2015).

One such study that successfully utilized quantitative approach was the study by Goswami et al. (2012) that aimed at determining the relationship between self-esteem levels and body image satisfaction. The scholars conducted a cross-sectional study in which they utilized five-item Likert scales to determine body satisfaction among newly entrant female students. As a result of research, it was found that there is a correlation between low levels of self-esteem and low levels of body satisfaction (Goswami et al., 2012).

Method Design

This study qualitatively examined the impact of Instagram selfies on female millennials' body image. Creswell (2012) defined qualitative research as a set of "assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). Thus, the choice of qualitative methodology could be justified because it fit best the ultimate goal of gaining explanation of gathered data in a way that captured personal experiences of participants regarding their exposure to Instagram selfies and their body image rather than utilized predefined measures. Women's body image satisfaction was the main focus of the research, while their perceptions of and experiences with Instagram selfies were major elements of it. That is why in-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. To note, some quantitative influences were also utilized during the process of data collection. A questionnaire was incorporated into the process of data collection to further validate qualitative results. Since the questionnaire was not analyzed in a traditional sense of quantitative methodology but rather was used as a numerical support of

qualitative information, for that reason, the manuscript cannot be considered mixed methods research.

Numerous authors state that the major advantage of qualitative interviews is that they concentrate less on data collection, but rather attempt to explore participants' emotions, experiences, feelings, and values through the analysis of respondents' words and behavior (Brennen, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Given the sensitive nature of research, it was felt that in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate method, as participants could have been hesitant to express their feelings in front of other people, as it would go with focus groups, but rather preferred one-on-one intimate conversation with the researcher.

The study concentrated on exploring interviewees' lived experiences with Instagram selfies. Because of the inductive nature of grounded theory that is letting researchers "provide a conceptual explanation of how people describe actions and processes," it was decided to apply grounded theoretical approach to the codebook design (Creamer, Ghoston, Drape, Ruff, & Mukuni, 2012, p. 415). Women's engagement with Instagram selfies of attractive peers and their personal experiences caused by such action cannot be analyzed in a static, linear process, and explained by predefined categories and codes. Hence, grounded theory was necessary to be utilized in the creation of the codebook, because it developed and evolved while the answers from participants came in.

Methods

The primary method utilized in the research was in-depth interviews. While the interviews adhered to a list of set questions, which were divided into two sections, "Instagram Discussion" and "Body Image Discussion" (see Appendix A), such structure allowed a level of flexibility since the questions did not follow a linear fashion, and additional questions were asked during the

interview. Due to its flexible nature, semi-structured interviews allowed to hear more details from participants that helped to learn more about subjects' life experiences, emotions, feelings, values, and perceptions of the phenomena being studied through the analysis of respondents' words and behavior (Brennen, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

To further ensure that participants could transparently give accounts on their perspectives of the issue being examined, questions were designed following the open-ended approach. Because of the sensitive nature of the research topic, probing questions were utilized to empower elaboration on specific points and get fair answers from participants. Henderson (2007) notes that probing technique is a significant part of any research method of qualitative methodology because it helps the interviewer gain clarity and understanding during the interviewing process when new questions arise.

As mentioned previously, during the process of data collection, it was decided to add some quantitative influences to the research. Specifically, after six interviews, it was decided that a questionnaire would be an effective supplementary source of information confirmation to further validate qualitative results and provide descriptive statistics. The questionnaire that other 20 participants took before interviews contained 19 questions, which were divided into three sections: general information regarding the participant and her Instagram use, and self-esteem and appearance-related comparison scales.

Six items of the appearance-related comparison self-report questions were adapted from the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS; Thompson, Heinberg, & Tanleff-Dunn, 1991). The items of the section assessed comparisons to peers and celebrities separately, as well as various comparison elements of the physical appearance (i.e. face and figure) made exclusively on Instagram and through selfies. The items included: "On Instagram, I compare my facial

attractiveness to facial attractiveness of other peers on their selfies," "On Instagram, I compare my facial attractiveness to facial attractiveness of celebrities, models, or other famous people on their selfies," "On Instagram, I compare my figure to figure of other peers on their selfies," "On Instagram, I compare my figure to figure of celebrities, models, or other famous people on their selfies," and others (see Appendix B). All responses ranged from 1=never to 5=always.

Another section contained nine-item scales that measured participants' appearance self-esteem. Adapted from Rosenberg Self Esteem-Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), the section assessed participants' self-esteem and their feelings toward their physical appearance (i.e., face and body). The items included: "I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now," "I feel satisfied with the way my face looks right now," "I am pleased with my overall appearance right now," and others (see Appendix B). All responses ranged from 1= not at all to 5 = extremely.

It is significant, however, to point out again that questionnaire results were utilized for the sole purpose of serving as descriptive statistics to summarize how responses were distributed in the sample and, thus, further validate qualitative results.

Sample Size

The total sample size consisted of 26 (n=26) 18-32-year-old female millennials who use Instagram. The research utilized a convenience sample of college students attending the University of South Florida who have identified themselves as female millennials (ages 18-32) using Instagram (a social media platform) on a regular basis.

The choice of a convenience sample could be justified by the study population directly fitting into the demographics that are being studied which helped to gain insights into the phenomena of Instagram selfies and women's body image satisfaction. To reach the target

population of female millennials between the ages of 18 to 32, the primary investigator, with a permission of professors, visited some classes and asked female students to participate in the study.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, a relatively small sample was utilized to gain a better understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding their exposure to Instagram selfies and their effects on women's body image caused by the appearance-related comparison process. The final sample size was determined during the process of data collection when the theoretical saturation was reached and "no new properties or dimensions emerge[d]" during the data analysis (Holton,2010, p. 32).

Prior to starting interviews with participants 1-6, the investigator was certified by the Institutional Review Board in October 2017 (Pro00032431). The interviews were held during one week from November 8, 2017, to November 15, 2017, and ranged from 35 to 60 minutes. When it was further decided to add the questionnaire for validation, the researcher received an IRB amendment approval in April 2017 at first and then conducted interviews with participants 7-26 from April 22, 2018, to May 22, 2018, which also ranged from 35 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and each participant had filled out a consent form prior to the start of each interview. Each interviewee was assigned to a participation number for identity protection purposes.

The goal of the manuscript was to develop an understanding of the social comparison process occurring through the lens of Instagram selfies and explore the meaning of the comparison to women and their appearance satisfaction following an interpretivism paradigm. According to Johari (2009), the interpretivist approach is a popular scientific approach to research because it encourages scholars to be inductive as opposed to looking to confirm or disconfirm different hypotheses. Therefore, this approach would give the ability to understand to which kind of

women's selfies on Instagram participants compare themselves, and how does this comparison affect perceptions of their face, bodies, and physical appearance in general. To determine whether the social comparison occurs downward or upward, the manuscript utilized Festinger's (1954) explanation of social comparison processes. An interviewee's comparison of herself with selfies of less attractive peers was defined as downward comparison, while her inclination to compare herself with someone who was more attractive was considered upward comparison.

Data Analysis

As stated before, the process of data analysis is especially significant in inductive qualitative studies because it determines the point of saturation when "no new codes or concepts emerge (van Rijnsoever, 2017, p. 2). To do so, every interview was transcribed verbatim and data was coded through the application of three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective. At the open coding level, all transcripts of interviews were read through several times to detect commonalities and identify major themes that emerged in data. The second level of coding, axial, assembled data in new ways and interconnected categories found in each transcription. Finally, the data analysis process was concluded through the application of selective coding which connected all categories and produced a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Creswell, 2012). The process of data collection and data analysis occurred until the model was fully saturated.

Following that approach, the main themes of each interview were interpreted into categories which were then combined together to form a theoretical proposition explained through the lens of Instagram selfies. Themes were correlated with categories by considering their relevance to finding answers to research questions. Each category and its relevant themes that emerged from the interviews were correlated to research questions. The table below (Table 1) illustrates those categories and themes in line with the research question.

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Table 1: An overview of themes and categories affiliated with all research questions.

Research Question	Theme	Category
RQ1: When exposed to Instagram selfies representing female users fitting Western standards of beauty, what factors influence women's upward or downward appearance-related comparison?	Upward appearance-related comparison to understand one's position in the society in terms of beauty standards	Comparison outcomes depend on external factors (socioeconomic status vs. personal connection)
	Downward appearance-related comparison to feel better about oneself	Positive feelings toward oneself and her body and face satisfaction
RQ2: What role do selfies play in female millennials' construction of the body image?	Selfies set standards of beauty	No complete satisfaction with oneself and her appearance
	Likes and comments on selfies as validation from the society	Feelings vary depending on the number of likes and comments on the selfie

Since questionnaire responses of participants 7-26 were utilized for the sole purpose of providing numerical data to support qualitative results, it was decided that the responses would be analyzed through Qualtrics software in an automated survey report format.

Participant Information

Interviewees 7-26 were also able to participate in a questionnaire. Out of those 20 female millennials about 40% were 21-year-olds, with the youngest participant being as young as 18 years and the oldest 27 years. In terms of women's Instagram use, the investigator saw an even split in the duration of time spent on the platform. There were two groups, in each of which 23% of respondents reported to be spending either 30 minutes to 1 hour or 3-4 hours on Instagram daily. The longest time spent on Instagram reported by one participant was 5 hours per day, while the shortest was 30 minutes. As of participants' selfie-taking and -posting behaviors, even though

almost half of women (45%) take selfies weekly, they (50%) rarely post them online. The biggest

number of selfies taken that was recorded in the study was 10-20 selfies per day, and 3 selfies per

week were the most frequent selfie-posting result.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As discussed in the method section, 26 in-depth interviews with female college students ages 18-32 were conducted November 8, 2017, to November 17, 2017, and April 22, 2018, to May 22, 2018. This section will discuss the findings in line with the themes that occurred during interviews as demonstrated in Table 2 in the methods section.

Participants 7-26 that took part in the study during the second time frame were also able to participate in the questionnaire. Thus, it is crucial to point out again that the numerical data that will be mentioned further in the results and discussion chapters pertains only to those 20 participants that provided the data.

Research Question 1

Table 2: A theme affiliated with Research Question 1.

Research Question	Theme	Category
RQ1: When exposed to Instagram selfies representing female users fitting Western standards of beauty, what factors influence women's upward or downward appearance-related comparison?	Upward appearance-related comparison to understand one's position in the society in terms of beauty standards	Comparison outcomes depend on external factors (socioeconomic status vs. personal connection)
	Downward appearance-related comparison to feel better about oneself	Positive feelings toward oneself and her body and face satisfaction

Upward Comparison:

One theme that immediately emerged from the interviews was that all participants involved in upward appearance-related comparison when exposed to selfies of attractive female users in order to understand their position in the society. Comparing themselves to prettier female users (both friends and celebrities) served as a guideline for women that helped evaluate their progress and standing in terms of physical appearance (including body, face, and general look).

> *"My motivation for the comparison of myself to selfies of other users is to see what I look like and to get reassurance that I fit into the society and societal norms. For me, that would be having an average or above the average face, which is important for being able to participate in social media as a millennial"* (Participant 10).

> *"Right now, I look at a lot of fitness models, their selfies, and compare myself to them. The Victoria's Secret angels are an inspiration on how I can do my hair, color it next, or makeup. I do it because it is interesting and fun, and I can take a picture after that in the way they pose to post"* (Participant 12).

It was important to learn whether there is a difference for the interviewee in comparing herself to friends and to celebrities, models, makeup artists, or other popular Instagram users, as well to learn how do women feel because of the comparison of themselves to those two types. As for the process of appearance-related comparison, all of the participants admitted to comparing themselves to both groups. The process of comparison in their opinion occurs subconsciously, whether they want it or not.

> *"I think why I do that is because when someone posts a selfie, I start picking it apart because this is what I do when I post my photos. I think when you post a selfie, you are putting it out there to be evaluated by other users"* (Participant 26).

"Even if it is not purposefully comparing myself to friends, I think, I just do that subconsciously. If my friends posted a selfie of any kind, and they are all very gorgeous, I subconsciously will compare and think that my selfies are not as good as theirs" (Participant 5).

Even though participants did compare themselves to bother famous users and friends, all interviewees have clearly distinguished the variance in the range of feelings that they experience after the comparison to two groups. Feelings differed depending on the object of comparison (i.e. a friend or a famous person), and the socioeconomic status and personal relationships served as major factors that affected those feelings. Half of the participants reported to be experiencing more negative feelings, such as jealousy and sadness, after the appearance-related comparison to celebrities because of the socioeconomic gap between them and famous users.

"Celebrities probably affect me more than my friends just because I hold them on a totally different scale than my friends. Their job is literally to be themselves. And part of that idea of how they should look like is taking that time during the day to take care of themselves. For instance, if I am out at my job 40 hours a week, and they are just writing a music, they have time to go and work out, have money to pay for personal trainers, chefs or whatever" (Participant 21).

The second group, in turn, reported to be feeling more negatively after the appearance-related comparison to prettier friends. Interviewees' personal connection to objects of comparison is the reason that made the comparison real and caused women's feelings of jealousy and disappointment with themselves and their appearances.

"I have friends. We all are in the same environment and with the same resources. We all have jobs, internships, boyfriends, and are doing the same thing in school. So it's like we

all are working with the same factors, but yet the outcomes are different. Although the genetics factor into it, I am talking about the lifestyle. So seeing my pretty friend's face and body on selfies make me think "damn, I could be doing a lot more." It's disappointment with myself" (Participant 20).

All participants reported a wide range of elements in appearance to which they pay special attention in the comparison process: hair, nails, body, teeth, and face. However, "body" was a reoccurring theme during the discussion throughout all interviews.

"I definitely compare my body to my friends', for sure. Even my parents talk about that, 'oh, look, your friends are skinny, you can do that too'" (Participant 4).

Out of 20 surveyed participants, about 61% reported to be comparing their figures to others' as often, and 28% reported as always, while the majority of responses regarding the comparison of facial attractiveness were often (45%) and sometimes (33%).

Interviewees have also accentuated on certain body parts that they compare when seeing selfies of attractive users. Stomach size and buttocks were mentioned most.

"I'm definitely comparing our stomach sizes because she is very fit in her stomach. I think that would probably about only that thing. She does have a nice butt, so I probably compare to that too" (Participant 3).

"I compare my body to my friend's bodies. I do want to have sometimes same appearance, not like the full appearance but some parts of her body, like her waist and butt. Her waist is slim … and it's very small, but the butt is big, so you can see the nice curve, and it is toned" (Participant 1).

Downward Comparison

None of the first six participants has mentioned herself that she ever compared her appearance to someone who is less attractive than her. However, when interview questions were refined, and the researcher directly asked the question of whether an interviewee compares her face and body to someone worse off than her, every participant admitted to be doing that. The motivator for downward appearance-related comparison was the goal of the woman to feel better about herself.

> *"I do that just to make myself feel better. Let's say I see a photo with a group of friends on Instagram. I'll firstly compare myself to the less pretty girl. It makes me feel a lot better about myself, my confidence boosts up"* (Participant 25).

> *"When I see people who I consider not as pretty as I am, as horrible as it is, I do feel a little bit better about myself"* (Participant13).

Research Question 2

Table 3: Themes affiliated with Research Question 2.

Research Question	Theme	Category
RQ2: What role do selfies play in female millennials' construction of the body image?	Selfies set standards of beauty	No complete satisfaction with oneself and her physical appearance
	Likes and comments on selfies as validation from the society	Feelings vary depending on the number of likes and comments on the selfie

The themes related to this research questions have gradually occurred during the entire interviewing process. The participants were asked about users they view most, purposes for viewing those users' selfies, and their attitudes to likes and comments on selfies.

Selfies Set Standards of Beauty:

When interviewing the participants about users whose selfies they view most and reasons for liking selfies of those users, it was evident that interviewees paid special attention to selfies demonstrating users' bodies.

"I view a lot of models but not the catwalk models but "Sports Illustrated" who are skinny but curvy… Maybe some fitness models. I view them a lot. And people like Kim Kardashian. I look more at celebrities because it's their job to look good. That's why I look at them because I know they always look nice and fit" (Participant 1).

During the first six interviews, Kardashian sisters were mentioned most when interviewees were asked to name a person with a perfect body. Five out of six participants named either Khloe, Kylie, Kim, or Kourtney as an example of a woman with the beautiful body.

"Kylie has a nice body. She has curves. She has ummm … breasts and butt. Her legs seem to be toned" (Participant 1).

However, the more interviews were conducted, the less Kardashians were brought up by participants. Even though some of the interviewees did still mention one of the sisters, every participant reported different ideals, which were noticed to be resembling the celebrity that they follow on Instagram and whose selfies they like.

Even though every participant had her own beauty ideal, all of the women seemed to reject on the notion of being skinny as a beauty standard but rather identified a perfect body as being "fit" with little fat and flat stomach. In terms of facial appearance, answers were varied as well. However, most women brought up the importance of having smooth skin and white teeth.

"Skinny, toned. Skinny meaning no bulge, but a fit, slender body. Probably within the range of 115 pounds to 140 pounds. It's not really about the weight, but rather about slenderness.

Toned, muscular arms, abs. but that's the thing, just the right amount of muscles to tell that

you work out but it's not enough to rub it at your face. Everything is smooth, almost liking

glaciating magazine type. Glowing skin." (Participant 7)

"Body wouldn't be super skinny, but definitely toned and not a lot of body fat. You could

tell she exercises a lot and puts a lot of effort into the image she wants to maintain. Flawless

skin with not blemishes with even skin tone and well-done makeup. Hourglass shape body.

I feel like someone who has a similar body to Kardashians but thinner because their bodies

are too big." (Participant 15)

"A perfect body for me would be to have a nice small waist and flat stomach. Really toned

arms and a bigger breast ... not bigger but fuller. Really lean legs and a bigger butt, too"

(Participant 5).

"To get my perfect body, I need to lose ten pounds, go to the gym and work out to get abs,

toned legs, and butt, so my body well-shaped" (Participant 6).

Those responses from participants demonstrated the shift in understanding beauty standards, giving the new interpretation of an ideal body. It would be fair to make an assumption that the shift has occurred because of the content of selfies promoted on Instagram. All participants noticed the rise in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and fitness. For instance, Participant 6, when asked why she likes selfies of certain celebrities, mentioned that the promotion of a healthy lifestyle inspires her to attain the same type of a fit body:

"It is their job to look that good. It kind of inspires me in a way to stop eating junk food or

hit the gym or something" (Participant 6).

According to participants, those newly set standards of beauty promoted by famous people on Instagram affect their own body image. For example, the Participant 16 told the investigator during the interview that Instagram and selfies pressure her body image.

"When I go to Instagram and see selfies of perfect women, it is kind of a reminder that I have to look like that. I feel the pressure from the society to look in a certain way" (Participant 16).

As mentioned in the analysis of the first research question, most participants automatically attributed own body images to their self-confidence levels. When explaining the researcher their understanding of a negative body image, Participants 1 and 3 directly related this concept to self-confidence.

"I think it's when you don't like the way you look. You don't feel confident about the way you look. So that's you have a negative body image when you don't like the way you look" (Participant 1).

 "Everyone has their own ideal body image and a lot of people are confident in the way who they are, how they look. I think it's because everyone has different perceptions of themselves and their bodies and self-confidence level" (Participant 3).

Interestingly, all of the participants were relatively homogeneous in their responses in terms of not being fully satisfied with their bodies. In the questionnaire conducted among participants 7-26, half of the women (50%) were somewhat satisfied with the way their bodies look, and 28% were a little bit satisfied with their figures. Four interviewees overall reported negative body image, while others, though stated to have a positive body image, did not experience full satisfaction from their current appearance states.

"I would say, probably, mostly negative because I mentioned there are all those things I would change about my body" (Participant 4).

"Generally, I'm OK with my body. I don't have a problem with it except for the fact that I was made fun of for not having big breasts. That's something that kind of haunted me" (Participant 2).

"I feel pretty confident in my body, but there are definitely the things that I would like to change. For example, I would want to have a really flat stomach and longer legs" (Participant 16).

In terms of the facial appearance, the research showed a more positive trend among female participants. According to the results of the questionnaire, there was an even split among respondents for being either somewhat satisfied or satisfied very much (45% each) with their faces.

"*I feel more positive toward my face than my body currently. My face is something I am born with and unlike my body, which can be improved through exercise, it can't be changed"* (Participant 26).

Likes and Comments as Validation

The last theme that has gradually emerged during the interviewing process that relates to the second research question is likes and comments acting as validation from the society. All of the interviewees told that the number of likes and followers is an external approval of one's beauty and attractiveness.

"At the end of the day likes and comments are the measurement of how people see you and perceive you. I don't think people are going to like something that is not pleasing to their eyes" (Participant 19).

"I feel validated when I post a selfie and I get a bunch of comments on it. It's like a sign of approval, and it makes me feel pretty" (Participant 7).

To further understand the issue, probing questioning technique was used to learn whether that desire for approval affects women's behavior online and their overall opinion of themselves. Getting more likes (i.e. approval) from people made every single interviewee feel more attractive, which boosted self-confidence.

"A bunch of likes and comments on my selfie tell me "hey, the society thinks you are beautiful!" I always feel better and more confident about myself after getting many likes, because why would someone like my selfie if I'm not pretty there?" (Participant 25).

As told by interviewees, in some instances likes and comments also reinforce their insecurities, opinion regarding themselves and their look. For example, when participants were asked about how they would feel if their worst selfie would get posted on Instagram and receive many likes and comments, several participants told that they would change their opinion about their selfie and attractiveness in general.

"If I'm taking a mirror selfie and it doesn't look like I expected. I would probably not like it. If that selfie would get posted, I would feel uncomfortable but there is the thing that Instagram affects a lot, likes. So if I see a lot of likes on that selfie, I will feel happier and more confident about the image and myself. If my friends comment it saying I look cute and pretty, I will start feeling more positive toward that selfie" (Participant 8).

However, in cases when the post did not get an expected validation through an expected number of likes, some participants mentioned that to be taking more extreme measures, such as removing the post that lacked validation.

"If I don't get my usual number of likes, I would delete it. It would make me feel that I'm unattractive. That I don't have anybody paying attention to what I'm doing or to what I look like. It's definitely validation. Not a lot of people say in real life: "oh, I have these many likes, these many people," but when you go to their page, you see that they have that many followers and likes, and it's kind of like "wow, what I'm doing wrong? Am I that unattractive?" I feel disappointed" (Participant 10).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This section will associate key themes that were identified during the data analysis to the literature review and research objectives to highlight outstanding points of research's findings. This study attempted to investigate the effects Instagram selfies have on women's body image and aimed at testing the social comparison process through this phenomenon. The procedure involved interviewing 26 college female students aged between 18 and 32, in the 37-day period frame. Unlike previous quantitative studies (McLean et. al, 2015; and Wagner et. al, 2016) that researched about the body image in Instagram following quantitative approach, and Behan (2015) who looked at the problem of Irish female body image in Instagram qualitatively, this procedure involved in-depth interviewing of college women of Western culture following the open-ended questions approach to elicit women to openly discuss themes regarding social comparison, body image, and Instagram selfies. The particular aim of the study was to test the social comparison process through Instagram selfies lens and determine whether women engage in upward or downward appearance-related comparison, what factors affect the comparison, how do they feel because of the comparison, and what implications those selfies have on their perceptions of the body image.

It was discovered from the analysis of findings that all of the female millennials are engaged in both appearance-related comparison processes. Depending on the end goal the woman has in mind, she engages in either upward and downward social comparison through the exposure to selfies of other female users on Instagram. It is clear from the research that upward appearance-related comparison occurs in situations when a woman tries to understand her position in the

Western society in terms of beauty standards, while downward comparison occurs in cases when a woman wants to feel better about herself and her physical beauty.

Thus, the findings from the current study have supported Festinger's (1954) work that explained how subconscious human motive to evaluate real selves spontaneously occurs when women are exposed to images of attractive friends. As predicted, upward appearance-related comparison evokes a wide range of negative feelings among women (i.e. insecurity, jealousy, and sadness), while downward social comparison helps one feel better about herself and enhance her subjective prosperity (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons, 1986; Tesser, Millar & Moore, 1988).

"Well, I think Instagram selfies actually make women, including myself, less confident in themselves because you see, we look at those perfect pictures and then we compare ourselves and then, of course, we want to look that way too. So, it makes us feel less confident, a lot of times insecure, and just feel sad because you might feel like why don't I look like that? (Participant 1).

This social comparison falls in line with Chan and Segupta's (2013) and Behan's (2015) researches that discuss spontaneity and subconsciousness of social comparison among people.

Interestingly, results of the study showed that upward appearance-related comparison outcomes depend on such external factors as socioeconomic status and personal connection of the interviewee to the object of comparison. Twenty-six participants split evenly in a way to which group of comparison they experience more negative emotions (celebrities vs. friends). The first group reported to be experiencing most intense feelings in cases when interviewees compared themselves to celebrities. Such emotions as jealousy and sadness were felt by participants because of the socioeconomic gap between them and celebrities, who have the ability to the financial means to support their physical beauty.

"Celebrities have the worst effect on me ever. They are perfect. They have their makeup done, hair, and everything. They have private trainers, yoga instructors, and chefs, who cook for them. Some of them had even plastic surgeries, so they look amazing" (Participant 25).

When celebrities highlight the distance between the physical appearance of ordinary women and themselves through Instagram selfies and public demonstration of their success and ability to afford resources that support their beauty, female users can experience a decrease in their self-esteem because of not fitting those beauty standards, while the realization of the socioeconomic gap can lead to women becoming excessively concerned about their physical appearance because of not being able to afford same healthy lifestyle, which can result in them exerting behaviors aimed at boosting self-esteem and reducing the gap such as exercising or dieting excessively. The results of such comparison can have severe outcomes on women, their emotional and mental well-being, causing anxiety about physical attractiveness (Marfa & Lopes, 2014).

The second group experiences more negativity and feels envious and disappointed after the appearance-related comparison to attractive friends. Having established relationships with friends is the reason that makes women feel the comparison more realistic:

"Because you know that comparison to my friend is more realistic because she works out at our school gym and she is using same makeup and all that stuff that I use. I guess, it is because we are equal, so this is a more realistic comparison, a real-life expectation compared to comparing myself to someone who has enough money to buy everything" (Participant 3).

"I would say because it is not a real stake for me to compare myself to Ashley Graham or to look like Khloe Kardashian because they have personal trainers and nutritionists who help them look their best" (Participants 5).

Interviewees have also demonstrated having an immense influence of celebrities' selfies in shaping one's own body image. It was noted by the student that a link can be made between celebrities that interviewees viewed most and their understandings of a beautiful body.

"This model Emily Ratajkowski who I really like, she has a naturally perfect body in a sense of society. She's really beautiful and at the same time it makes me feel like "ok, that's not me," so I feel pretty bad because normally I tell myself "you can't have everything," but then I see her selfies and I feel like there are people who look like that, but that's not me. It just kind of a mental comparison which I wouldn't say out loud" (Participant 2).

"Growing up, I used to think that perfect body image is being skinny, but I think now with the emergence of celebrities like Rihanna, Beyoncé, who aren't really skinny. They have curves and don't look like they don't eat for days. I think that that helps my body image a lot because I'm not super skinny, and I have some curves and meat on my bones. I don't have to be skinny anymore, I'd just rather be on the fitter side in maybe a toned definition. Be fit, I guess. Being fit, not skinny, and a little bit more muscular would be an ideal body for me" (Participant 3).

This quote of the Participant 3 signifies that major shift in portraying ideal beauty. Most researchers have related perfect body image to women's understanding of beauty through the lens of being skinny. For example, Behan (2015) and Faer (2015) have talked about the relationship between social media images emphasizing slimness and the idea of a perfect body among young women.

However, although it might sound promising that women do not strive for the skinny body anymore, but rather for a fit look, it is not as simple as it seems. Participants have identified a specific range of requirements in terms of how the body should look like in order to be considered

perfect. Being fit, having the flat stomach, and little to no fat is the attributes for a perfect body, while smooth skin and white teeth are the must elements of a beautiful face.

> *"Body wouldn't be super skinny, but definitely toned and not a lot of body fat. You could tell she exercises a lot and puts a lot of effort into the image she wants to maintain. Flawless skin with not blemishes with even skin tone and well-done makeup. Hourglass shape body. I feel like someone who has a similar body to Kardashians but thinner because their bodies are too big."* (Participant 15)

Though these findings provide new insights into the study of social comparison through selfies, the student found that there is no literature supporting her findings. That signifies a gap in literature highlighting the importance of selfies in the process of social comparison. Many of existing studies (McLean et. al, 2015; Lup et. al, 2015; Wagner et. al, 2016) have concentrated on the social comparison of the body, but not the face, through Instagram overall, but not through selfies.

One of the purposes of this research was to determine whether women are satisfied with their bodies or not, which is why the researcher repeatedly asked interviewees about the perceptions of their bodies and how selfies affect their body image. As a result of the interviews, it was found out that five participants considered themselves having a negative body image.

> *"I think, selfies of other users affect my body image. I kind of pick out what I like and don't like in those images. Trying to get to that perfect body ... and you not necessarily going to get to that perfect body in a selfie in your view ... so that changes my perception of myself. I just want to look the best"* (Participant 4).

Though the other participants said to be having a positive body image, all young women discussed how they experienced feelings of disappointment with their appearance summarizing to

be not fully satisfied with their bodies after viewing selfies of women depicting the ideal beauty in social media that was described earlier.

"Even though there are some things I would like to change about myself, I consider having a pretty positive body image. I think it's OK to want to change yourself to be more fit as long as you want to change something about your body and how you are going to change that as long as it is in a healthy way" (Participant 3).

"I think I'm skinny but not as skinny as I used to be. I think, I'm not completely satisfied with my body. I definitely see areas of work. But I think, I'm in a good shape. I'm not athletic or anything like that … abs or anything … which I honestly would love to have. I just don't have time to go to the gym" (Participant 6).

These findings are closely related to Frederickson and Roberts (1997) theory on objectification briefly mentioned in the literature review. The theory states that women are prone to treating themselves as objects to be evaluated or act as evaluators themselves to link personal attractiveness with self-worth. Interviews have shown the application of the objectification theory that could be seen through interviewee's responses. For example, Participant 5 demonstrated acquiring an observer perspective on her own self when being exposed to images of her friends and getting involved in the social comparison process:

"A lot of my friends are very fit. I wish my body was like theirs" (Participant 5).

As mentioned previously, there is no literature supporting the findings of appearance-based social comparison processes trough Instagram selfies perspective. That is why the last theme that will be discussed in the chapters has not been studied by scholars yet.

The likes and comments a woman gains on her selfie have an immense impact on the construction of her body image because they indicate validation from the society and its approval

of her beauty. That, in turn, makes her feel more beautiful and increases the level of confidence with her appearance. Likes and comments can also reinforce her opinion since they are associated with being trusted sources for providing reliable information on what the society thinks is beautiful.

> *"Likes help me get validation from the society. It's like the numbers game at that point. Everything about our society is numbers – you GPA is a number, your UID is a number, your Instagram followers is a number. The higher you get the number, the better you feel about yourself. Same about Instagram, everyone just talks about likes and wants more likes. Likes help me feel better and make me feel more confident about my body and beauty"* (Participant 12).

Even though there is no research supporting the findings on likes and comments, it is possible to relate them to Goffman's (1969) theory of impression management that states individuals' conscious or subconscious drive to influence perceptions of people of oneself through the presentation of an idealized version of the self (1969). In line with Goffman's theory, people present the best versions of themselves by trying to look happy, successful, and healthy in selfies on Instagram rather than demonstrating the intermediate stages they passed through in order to achieve the appearance and lifestyle they want to have.

In that case, when a female uploads a selfie showcasing her best physical appearance on Instagram, the platform in which she tries to keep a certain appealing identity, she perceives likes and comments as an indicator of her expectations from the society. Thus, getting a lot of likes and comments would mean that the society acknowledges her attractiveness which is a sign for her that she is actually the best version of herself right now.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Limitations

According to Creswell (2012), one of the limitations of qualitative research, is the lack of generalizability of data. Because of the smaller sample size utilized in qualitative studies, the findings cannot be applied to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses can through the application of the statistical significance test. Another limitation of this research is the geographical constraint that occurred because the study was conducted only among women at the University of South Florida. For this reason, it must be acknowledged that a difference may exist between responses of female millennials attending this university and women living in a different geographical location, attending an institution in a different area.

Future directions

Upon the data analysis stage, the current research has highlighted some issues of consideration for future study directions. The future research ought to consider utilizing visuals during the process of interviewing. A triangulation technique, such as photograph elicitation can be useful for in-depth interviews as it can reveal intriguing perspectives from participants, which thus can bring more insights into the phenomenon of selfies and their effects on women's body image.

This study incorporated influences of quantitative methodology through the application of a questionnaire that contained scales measuring appearance-related comparison adapted from the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS; Thompson, Heinberg, & Tanleff-Dunn, 1991)

and participants' appearance self-esteem adapted from Rosenberg Self Esteem-Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965). Since as mentioned previously, the questionnaire was utilized just to numerically support qualitative data, future research could analyze the results of the questionnaire in a traditional sense of quantitative methodology. This could be achieved by conducting reliability analyses of PACS and RSES which would provide statistical support to qualitative data.

This study considered the influence of Instagram selfies on Western female millennials' appearance satisfaction. Thus, the results cannot be generalized and applied to females from other countries, representing other cultures. For example, a future research on the influence of Instagram selfies on women's appearance satisfaction could be directed to the study of this phenomenon on Russian females' appearance satisfaction. Being geographically located in both Europe and Asia, Russian culture is a mix of influences of both continents and their cultures (Cooper, 2017). This, thus, presents an interesting opportunity for further research to determine whether Russian women have a different understanding of female beauty and experiences regarding the exposure to the phenomenon of Instagram selfies on their appearance satisfaction.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine how social comparison theory could be applied to Instagram selfies and investigate how this phenomenon affects female millennials' appearance satisfaction and emotional well-being. The manuscript proposed two main research questions in order to successfully achieve the goal of the study. Upon the completion of research, it was felt that those research questions were adequately answered.

As mentioned in methods, in light of research goals the study conducted 26 in-depth semi-structured interviews. Because of the exploratory nature of qualitative methodology, the research

utilized a smaller sample. Nevertheless, upon the completion of interviews, the sample size was enough to reach theoretical saturation.

Regardless of the limitations mentioned in the chapter before, this research has generated new knowledge on Western female millennials' experiences regarding interaction with Instagram selfies, their effects on body image and appearance satisfaction, and contributed to the social comparison theory through the prism of Instagram selfies.

Through the application of three stages of coding, it was possible to identify four themes that were pertinent to research questions. It was evident from the outset that all interviewees were engaged in both upward and downward appearance-related comparisons, and the results of the research were in line with Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory. Even though none of the participants admitted herself to be involved in downward appearance-related comparison when directly asked every single woman admitted to be comparing herself to a female peer who was perceived as being less attractive than her, which made her feel better about herself and increased self-esteem. The initial motivator was participants' desire to improve subjective well-being and make oneself feel better.

On the other hand, when exposed to selfies of users that fit into Western standards of beauty, upward comparison helped participants understand their position in the society in terms of beauty standards. While women were evenly split in terms of who they compare themselves to (celebrities vs. friends), all of them, as predicted by social comparison theory, experienced such negative emotions as jealousy, envy, disappointment, and sadness afterward. The results also suggested that a woman's exposure to a selfie representing an ideal beauty for her may have a similar negative effect on appearance satisfaction, regardless of the context or whose figure and face is featured. The only difference in one's more negative feelings caused by the comparison

depended on two external factors, the realization of the differences in socioeconomic statuses and personal connection to the object of comparison. While the first group experienced most intense feelings after the comparison to celebrities due to the socioeconomic gap and the inability to afford similar lifestyles to support their physical beauty, the second group admitted having more negative mood after the comparison to friends because of the personal relationship with objects of comparison and realism of the comparison**.** Moreover, research has also demonstrated variability in appearance elements during the comparison process. All interviewees reported to be comparing different physical characteristics such as body, skin, face, teeth, hair, and legs.

The results have also demonstrated a drastic change in women's understanding of feminine beauty. Even though every participant described a beautiful woman in her own way, all of them agreed on the significance of being fit with having little to no body fat, having flat stomach, smooth, glowing skin, and white teeth. Interestingly, it was also noticed that every participant's beauty ideal resembled the celebrity they follow and whose selfies they view most.

Finally, the interviews have revealed that in the Instagram environment where physical appearance plays a significant role, the number of likes and comments one receives for her selfies is equally as important as the aesthetics of the image itself. Gaining a lot of likes and comments on her selfie is a sign of validation from the society for the woman, a key marker of her attractiveness and success, which boosts her self-esteem as well. However, in cases when one does not receive a predicted number of likes and comments, she can doubt her beauty and experience negative emotions, which sometimes can lead to her deleting the selfie that didn't give the approval of her beauty from the society.

This study, albeit cannot be generalized, revealed an extension of a format in which individuals compare themselves to others. Most importantly, Instagram's aesthetic nature with

images being the primary mean of how one can communicate in this platform, immediately drive users of the outlet to compare themselves to people depicted in images. The process of the comparison through Instagram selfies becomes much more comprehensive than compared to the assessment of oneself through other media outlets. Instagram selfies' accentuation on bodies and faces forces users to pay attention not to just general look of the user in the selfie but notice every single element of the appearance, creating a comprehensive, detailed comparative process causing more reasons for increased self-criticism that may potentially elicit one's even more negative reactions in cases when results of the comparison are not in her favor.

As Instagram selfies complicate the comparison process, they also tend to give the society new definitions of feminine beauty. In our celebrity-driven culture, women tend to absorb the understanding of a true feminine beauty through the prism of Instagram selfies of celebrities without realizing that those selfies have been carefully thought out, staged, and polished. Often forming a strong connection with celebrities, women start looking up to those famous people in terms of physical beauty (Maltby et al., 2005). As beauty perceptions become the new reality for women, females face the challenge of meeting those standards that were set unrealistically high by celebrities through idealized images which can potentially create one's excessive concern of her physical appearance. Research has determined the positive relationship between excessive concern and the need for physical and material resources (Marfa & Lopes, 2014). Thus, the emphasis on the socioeconomic gap between women and the celebrities enhances women's negative feeling of being not beautiful enough because of the inability to fit new beauty standards set by celebrities that were achieved through their financial resources causing ordinary women's feelings of envy, jealousy, dissatisfaction with oneself, and doubt of her physical attractiveness. In an online society, in which the number of likes and comments act as a validation from other users

and approval of one's beauty and success, Instagram selfies with their beauty standards and perceived requirements for obtaining attractiveness create a hostile environment for women and their self-esteem and appearance satisfaction. That pursuit of a large number of likes and comments can have devastating effects on women, their appearance satisfaction, increasing concern about their physical beauty, leading to extreme behaviors or activities to boost self-esteem and satisfaction with the physical self, such as excessive dieting or exercising and resorting to surgeries, which can potentially lead to irreparable negative results of one's well-being, including her physical and mental state.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth Interview Questions

Instagram Discussion:

1. How do you define a selfie?

2. What would you say your motivations are for taking selfies?

3. Which Instagram users' selfies you view most?

4. What are your thoughts on digitally altered selfies in Instagram (i.e. Photoshop, Instagram editing tools)?

5. In your experience what kind of effects do you think Instagram selfies have on you in terms of satisfaction with your body and appearance and how you perceive yourself?

     - As a follow-up: what kind of effects do you think Instagram selfies have on women in terms of satisfaction with their bodies and appearance and how they perceive themselves?

Body Image Discussion:

1.What does body image mean to you?

2. Can you tell me a bit about how you view your body and appearance?

3. In what ways do you act toward your body and appearance while taking selfies?

     - Do you use photo-editing tools?

4. Tell me about how selfies of your girlfriends affect your body image and appearance satisfaction.

5. Tell me about how selfies of female celebrities affect your body image and appearance satisfaction.

6. What do you consider to be the ideal appearance (i.e. face and body)?

7. Think about an instance where you've taken a selfie and you don't like it. How would it look like?

- As a follow-up: imagine this selfie gets posted? How would you feel?

9. Have you ever compared yourself with selfies of female users who are "worse off" than you?

     - What were your motivations for the comparison? How did you feel after the

comparison?

10. When comparing yourself to images of other female users, do you pay attention to likes and

comments on that selfie? How does it make you feel?

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

2. How long do you spend on Instagram per day?

3. How often do you take selfies?

Daily   Weekly   Monthly

4. How often do you post selfies?

Never   Rarely   Occasionally   Regularly

People sometimes compare their appearance to the appearance of others. This can be a comparison of weight, body size, body shape, body fat, aesthetic beauty, clothing, make-up, or overall appearance. Thinking about how you generally compare yourself to others, please use the following scale to rate how often you make these kinds of comparisons.

1. On Instagram, I compare my facial attractiveness to the facial attractiveness in the selfies that other women post.

        1   2   3   4   5

    Never   Seldom   Sometimes   Often   Always

2. On Instagram, I compare my figure to the figures in selfies that other women post.

        1   2   3   4   5

    Never   Seldom   Sometimes   Often   Always

3. On Instagram, I compare my facial attractiveness to the facial attractiveness in the selfies that celebrities, models, or other famous people post.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always

4. On Instagram, I compare my figure to the figures in selfies that celebrities, models, or other famous people post.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always

5. The best way for a person to know if they are overweight or underweight is to compare their figure to the figure of others.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always

6. The best way for a person to know if they are beautiful or not is to compare their facial features to the facial features of others.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always

Those questions are designed to measure what you are thinking at this moment. There is of course, no right answer for any statement. The best answer is what you feel is true of yourself at the moment. Be sure to answer all of the items, even if you are not certain of the best answer.

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Again, answer these questions as they are true for you RIGHT NOW.

1. I feel satisfied with the way my body looks right now.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

2. I feel satisfied with the way my face looks right now.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

3. I am dissatisfied with my weight.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

4. I am pleased with my face right now.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

5. I am pleased with my overall appearance right now.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

6. I feel unattractive.

    1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

7. I feel others think I'm attractive.

      1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

8. I feel others think my body looks good right now.

      1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

9. I feel others think my face is beautiful.

      1   2   3   4   5

Not At All   A Little Bit   Somewhat   Very Much   Extremely

Appendix C: Codebook

Code	Description	Example
Upward social comparison	An interviewee's comparison of herself with selfies of **more** attractive/successful/intelligent/famous (or any other chosen dimension) female Instagram users.	"A lot of my friends are very fit. There are some friends who are naturally skinny, there are friends who are normal size, but they are very fit, because they work out all the time. I guess it's easy to compare myself in that way, because I do work out, but I'm not just quite there yet."
Downward social comparison	An interviewee's comparison of herself with selfies of **less** attractive/successful/intelligent/famous	

	(or any other chosen dimension) female Instagram users.	
Comparison elements	Various elements of other users' appearance that a woman pays special attention to when evaluating herself so as to establish her advantages/disadvantages, strengths/weaknesses (e.g. body, face, skin, nails, hair, teeth, etc.).	"I'm mostly comparing the hair, the figure, and maybe if they have more curves. Also, teeth and even nails. Stuff like that."
Objects of comparison	Particular Instagram users' selfies a woman usually compares herself to. Users can be either celebrities (i.e. fitness models, reality show celebrities, catwalk models, singers, and photo models) or friends and peers.	"Even if not purposefully comparing myself to them, I think, I just do that subconsciously. If my friend posted a selfie of any kind, I subconsciously will compare and think my selfies are not as good as theirs. They always have their hair done, wear nice makeup and dress pretty. That's what makes their selfies good looking."
Feelings caused by comparison	Emotional reactions caused by upward comparison to friends' selfies (i.e. sadness, disappointment with her own appearance, jealousy, and other negative intense emotions).	"It makes me feel bad, because I know I don't look like some of my friends. So sometimes it does make feel sad or bad."
Selfies	A self-portrait taken on the camera by the person. The camera can be either front-facing or rear-facing. Selfies can depict not only the face of the person but his/her body as well.	
Body image	A person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about her body and appearance.	"I think it's how she sees herself and how she thinks what other people around think of her. Also, how someone looks in the mirror and perceives oneself. How confident she is with her face, body, proportions, and the size of the body."

Digital alteration attitudes	Attitudes of women to enhanced images (i.e. Instagram editing tools, Photoshop).	"I think it's fine if you want to use a filter if you feel like a filter makes you look better. I just don't understand the reason why you would Photoshop a picture of yourself. I guess, it is fake. That is a certain form of lying."
Standards of beauty	The feminine beauty ideal that resembles the perfect body and appearance. Characteristics of perfect body proportions and the general look of a body and face.	"A perfect body for me is when the waist is slim and very small, but the booty is big, and body is toned overall, so you can see the nice curve."
Positive body image	Satisfaction and happiness of one with her own body and face.	"Even though there are some things I would like to change about myself, I consider having a pretty positive body image. I think it's OK to want to change yourself to be more fit, as long as you want to change something about your body and how you are going to change that along as it is in a healthy way.
Negative body image	Dissatisfaction and unhappiness of one with her own body and face. A strong desire to change the body or facial features, which sometimes can lead to extreme measures, such as unhealthy dieting, experiencing negative emotions, utilizing help of surgeons, and other serious health issues.	"Negative body image would be looking at myself and hating myself and taking desperate measures to change that, such as hurting myself or starving."

Appendix D: IRB Letter of Approval

USF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 ● Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 ● FAX (813) 974-7091

10/12/2017

Diliara Bagautdinova

School of Advertising and Mass Communications

7941 Citrus Garden Dr., apt. 203 Tampa, FL
33625

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00032431
Title: The Influence of Instagram Selfies on Female Millennials' Body Image

Study Approval Period: 10/11/2017 to 10/11/2018

Dear Ms. Bagautdinova:

On 10/11/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):

IRB Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Informed Consent.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

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It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson

USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix E: IRB Letter of Amendment Approval

4/17/2018

Diliara Bagautdinova

School of Advertising and Mass Communications

7941 Citrus Garden Dr, apt. 203 Tampa, FL
33625

RE: **Expedited Approval of Amendment**
IRB#: Ame1_Pro00032431
Title: The Influence of Instagram Selfies on Female Millennials' Body Image

Dear Ms. Bagautdinova:

On 4/17/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** your Amendment. The submitted request and all documents contained within have been approved, including those outlined below, as described by the study team.

Additional Study Measure: There are a self-report measure questions that they want to add to the study measure. Participants will be asked to take a self-report measure in a paper version right after an in-depth interview. Self-report measure questions will not influence participants' time commitment, and whole participation will not take more than an hour. There are 19 questions in a self-report measure that will ask participants questions regarding Instagram use and selfies, appearance-related comparison, and self-esteem. The purpose of the self-report measure is to triangulate the study to determine the credibility of interviewees' in-depth interview responses and validate qualitative results.

Made the change in the Main Application, section 3.1.1 (Checked the Surveys &Questionnaires/ Psychometric Testing box). Edited section 3.1.2 to reflect the exact research procedures to be utilized during data collection with new additional study measure. Edited section 7.2.2 to describe the updated Consent Form. Made the change in the Main Application, section 3.5. Added the file with self-measure questions to be asked. Revised the section 8.1.3 to reflect the addition of a new study procedure. Revised the section 6.1c.4 to reflect the addition of a new study procedure. Revised sections 6.1 c, 10.1.1, 9.1.4, 9.1.5, and 8.1.3 to clarify where, how, and how long all data materials will be stored.

Changes to Protocol Document: to follow consistency in research and study measures, they needed to make changes in my Protocol. Specifically, they needed to edit "Study Design", "Experimental Procedures", and "Human Subjects Considerations" sections to make sure that it is clear that they're adding new study measure to my research that has been explicitly explained in the paragraph above. Specified how long data will be stored and where it will be stored. Uploaded new version of Protocol in the Main Application. Uploaded tracked and clean versions of the Protocol in the Amendment.

All those changes were necessary to make sure that all IRB documents are up-to-date and that it would be clear that they're adding new study measure to validate my qualitative research results. Changes to Consent Forms: revised the Consent Form to reflect the changes being made within the Amendment. Specifically, made changes in "Study Procedures" and "Privacy and

Confidentiality" sections to make sure participants know all details of the study and, thus, make an informed decision about whether to participate in the study or not.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
IRB Protocol - Clean Version 2 4.10.18

Consent Document(s)*:
Informed Consent #4 Clean.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab on the main study's workspace. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are valid until they are amended and approved.

The IRB does not require that subjects be reconsented.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with USF HRPP policies and procedures and as approved by the USF IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson

USF Institutional Review Board