

Introduction & Literature Review

South Carolina Department of Health says that an estimate of “8 million Americans are diagnosed with an eating disorder.”

National Eating Disorder Association states that 1 in 3 men have an eating disorder or exhibit disordered eating (NEDA, 2018).

Perceptions of eating disorders & gender biases were examined with a sample of undergrad. college students. College men were more likely than college women to rate female characters in the vignettes as having eating disorders, showing gender bias within eating disorder pathology (Schoen, Brock, & Hannon, 2019).

This comprehensive literature review sought to evaluate, critique, and synthesize information on research regarding social media’s effect on eating disorders and disordered eating in college-aged men.

Role of Social Media

Blond (2008) reviewed experimental studies in young men's body dissatisfaction in relation to exposure of images of attractive, muscular men who achieved the beauty ideal. Effect sizes indicated that exposure to these images had a small, but statistically significant negative effect on men’s body dissatisfaction.

A systematic review of 20 studies showed that social media positively correlated to eating disorder diagnosis and disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2015).

Sidani et al. (2016) found consistent associations between social media use and negative eating behaviors in a national sample of young adults ($p < .001$).

Gigi, Bachner-Melman, and Lev-Ari (2016) hypothesized gay and bisexual men were susceptible to social messaging via disturbed body image and eating attitudes. Results indicated possible link between sexual orientation and disordered eating in men.

Griffiths, Murray, Krug, and McLean (2018) sought to see if social media’s association with body image dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms were generalizable to minorities. They found that “the associations of social media use with both muscularity dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms were stronger for image-centric social media platforms than non-image platforms” (Griffiths et al., 2018)

Concerned with the relation between sexual orientation, media usage, and eating and body image concerns, Carper, Negy, and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) surveyed a sample of 78 college-aged men. Gay men scored significantly higher on drive for thinness, body dissatisfaction, and body image-related anxiety than their straight counterparts. Perceptions of media influence were higher for gay men and significantly mediated the relation between sexual orientation and eating and body image concerns

Methods

The articles for this literature review were found by searching for a combination of terms regarding social media, eating disorders, and disordered eating among young men. Search terms were restricted by year published and age range. Articles must have been published in the last fifteen years (2004-2019) in order to have current and accurate information within the field.

The types of articles included in this integrative literature review were limited to prior conducted literature reviews (cross-sectional, meta-analytic) and a small amount of experimental research. With the exception of three, they were focused on W.E.I.R.D. (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) societies as there was limited research done in non-western regions.

Search Engines Used: PsycINFO, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, Journal of Eating Disorders, Google Scholar through USF Library systems.

Abstracts were searched for relevant information and entered into a matrix. Following the abstract review, the articles were then reviewed in full. The final number of articles that met the inclusion criteria for this literature review was 36.

Figure #1 Photograph by Sara Kurfess



Discussion & Limitations

The goal of this literature review is to assess current peer-reviewed literature published within the last 15 years on social media’s influence on eating disorder incidence and risk in young men aged 18-27 as well as bring awareness to the literature gap discovered within this area of research.

It can be concluded that social networking sites (i.e., Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) have a negative impact on eating disorder symptoms and behaviors in college-aged men.

Limitations

This literature review faced various limitations. There were a limited amount of studies that achieved the criteria needed. Most studies that surfaced from the search placed a focus on young women or adolescents. This shows that there is a literature gap involved in this section of research, furthering the need for more research and intervention.

Although the review acknowledges the lack of diversity, most of the studies in the literature review are from W.E.I.R.D. countries.

Treatment

Majority of eating disorder assessment tools are developed and validated for women and aren’t specific toward men’s needs. Stanford and Lemberg (2012) developed a preliminary tool, the Eating Disorder Assessment for Men (EDAM) as a male-specific eating disorder assessment tool. Although their sample size was too small to be applicable, a factor analysis of EDAM found four components that were said to be “core diagnostic issues” (Stanford & Lemberg, p. 435): binge eating, muscle dysmorphia, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.

Implications

A variety of clinical and research implications were discovered within the literature review and considered for this discussion. As the literature gap within the field of eating disorder research had been explored, it is imperative that future clinicians and researchers strive to disclose the gap. While there is a good amount of correlational research supporting the maladaptive effects of SNS on body image and disordered eating, there is an increased need for more longitudinal and experimental studies on this issue.

The role of social media on eating disorder risk and incidence in men should be further explored and researched. As society begins to turn to remote forms of access and entertainment, there will be an increase in activity on social media platforms.

Conclusions

The literature review focused to raise awareness of the gap found within eating disorder research and literature on social media’s effect on eating disorder risk and incidence in college-aged men. 36 peer-reviewed articles were submitted to an abstract matrix and analyzed for the review. While the study faced various limitations in terms of breadth and diversity of literature, it was discovered that social media played a significant role in how college-aged men viewed themselves and their disordered eating behaviors. Implications for further research and clinical intervention were discussed as well.

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