



Manchester
Metropolitan
University

A thematic analysis exploring body image and the use of social media amongst
young women

Haiqa Ahmed

A thematic analysis exploring body image and the use of social media amongst young women

ABSTRACT

Frequent exposure to social media leads to individuals having negative perceptions about their bodies. There has been limited qualitative literature observing body image with social media. Thus, this study aimed to explore how young women perceived their bodies in relation to the use of social media. Previous literature on these phenomena have been observed using quantitative methodologies. Six women between the ages 18-25 years were recruited through opportunity sampling. Semi-structured interviews were devised and performed to create numerous rich and detailed individual accounts of different perspectives and experiences. The interview was subjected to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis and four themes were elicited: digital altered images, third person perspective of self-image, positive effects of social media and Kardashian influence. These findings suggested that social media does have an adverse effect on young women's body image and plays a major role in the lives of young women. Limitations of these findings and suggestions for future research are discussed in full.

KEY WORDS:	BODY IMAGE	YOUNG WOMEN	SOCIAL MEDIA	THEMATIC ANALYSIS	SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW
-----------------------	------------	----------------	--------------	----------------------	----------------------------------

Body image is a multifaceted and complex construct due to its rather convoluted psychological definitions (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). Body image relates to one's feelings, perceptions and thoughts about their body (Grogan, 1999; Muth & Cash, 1997). Research by Wiseman et al (1992) revealed the current societal standards set for females are not surprising as Western society emphasises the importance of the thinness ideal. Countless women accept this body ideal although it is virtually impossible to achieve. Negative perceptions of body image have been reported extensively across numerous studies due to several sociocultural factors such as peers and family members (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). This is because individuals have reported extreme fear about unattractiveness and ugliness of their appearance (Philips, Didies & Menrad, 2007).

A small body of psychological research displays a link between body image and utilising social media (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a "set of Internet-based programs building on the technological and ideological foundations of web 2.0 and permit the production and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). Interactive platforms such as Instagram is the most popular amongst 18-29-year olds (Sensis, 2017). On one hand, Bell & Dittmar (2011) argue that individuals have the ability to be selective with the content they view online. Not all women will buy into the unrealistic thin beauty ideals (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). For instance, women who are on a weight loss journey would use Facebook and Twitter to discuss their journey with other women (Schneider et al., 2014). This shows social media having positive effects on body image as individuals are able to create a community that will support them to lose weight and increase levels of body satisfaction (Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012). A rise in body positive accounts have been shown on Instagram which have elicited 2,195,968 posts (Instagram, 2018). However, on the other hand extensive psychological literature has shown frequent exposure to social media has resulted in an aggressive drive for thinness, body surveillance and high levels of weight dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Miller 2010) regardless of race (Howard, Heron, MacIntyre, Myers & Everhart, 2017).

Hogue and Mills (2018) conducted an experimental study using appealing female peers to investigate effects of social media engagement on young women's body image. 188 female undergraduates participated and t-tests emerged displaying an increase in negative body image amongst young women who engaged with a striking peer online, whereas the opposite was found when engaging with a family member. Conclusively, on social media, upward appearance comparisons may endorse body image concerns amongst young women. Hogue and Mills (2018) findings are consistent with Fardouly, Pinkus & Vartanian (2017), Haferkamp & Krämer (2011), Kim & Park (2016) and Tamplin, McLean & Paxton (2018) findings as they found women's body image being negatively affected post viewing images of attractive women on social media. However, limitations arose from the study such as utilising an all-female sample from one university. The results are ungeneralizable and are not representative of the whole population. Participants in the peer condition had more negative baseline scores than those in the family condition despite randomization in terms of BMI and sociodemographic variables.

Body image concerns and body ideals

Quality of life is significantly affected by poor body image as it results in declining self-esteem, unhealthy weight loss practices and mood disturbances (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005; Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel & Stuckless, 1999). Within society, thinness is super emphasised for females (Leit, Pope & Gray, 2001). Due to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders such as bulimia nervosa and anorexia have significantly increased (Polivy & Herman, 2002; Stice, 2002). Furthermore, it's linked to consuming excessive amounts of laxatives, diet pills, excessive exercising (Grogan, 2006) which can lead to unneeded cosmetic surgery (Cash, Sperry, Sarwer, & Thompson, 2009).

Literature on body image across cultures has proven that young women experience body dissatisfaction. For instance, black women being compared to white women would trigger them to engage in harmful eating patterns therefore increasing levels of body dissatisfaction whereas Latina women may be less motivated by the dangerously thin figure that is propagated by the mainstream U.S. culture (Cheney, 2010) because within the Latin culture, the curvy figure is more idealised (Gordon et al., 2010). However, frequent exposure to the traditional ideal body shape may influence changes in body image and eventually lead to the development of eating disorders (Rubin et al., 2003, Viladrich et al., 2009). Within Western society, low body image is prevalent however, the majority of research solely focuses on the importance of thinness within white populations and places abroad in comparison to non-white populations (Hutchinson & Rapee, 2006; van den Berg, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan & Haines, 2007; van den Berg, Paxton et al., 2007).

MacNeill & Best (2015) conducted a study on body satisfaction and the perception of the female body. Within the Western society, the thin ideal is the main contributor to the growing dissatisfaction with the female body. 166 female undergraduates were utilised between the ages of 18-21 years who were required to complete self-report measures pertaining body dissatisfaction (ABS and BIQ) and disordered eating (EAT-26). Perceptions and satisfaction of body image were measured using ratings of females bodies on a weight perception scale (PFRS). Overall, greater body dissatisfaction and ideal lower body size was related to an eating disorder. This supports previous research as the most common ideal body size for females is being smaller. Ahern et al (2011) indicated a BMI of 20 was reported as being the most attractive. However, limitation arose such as using a sample solely consisting of undergraduate females therefore making the results ungeneralizable and unrepresentative of the entire population. Methodological issues were evident such as using the self-reported body mass index due to its inaccuracy as bone and muscle mass are not considered. Participants weight and height were self-reported which may have had inaccuracies concerning their actual body sizes.

Role of the media

Due to the increasingly huge discrepancy between the real body shape and size of women (Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999) and the current beauty ideals portrayed within the media, it is not a shock that individuals have negative perceptions about their bodies. A substantial amount of psychological literature has concluded that frequent media exposure is linked to body image concerns among young adults

(Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008, Tiggemann, 2005) by promoting unrealistic beauty ideals (Ata, Schaefer & Thompson, 2015) therefore leading to having an extremely negative effect on women (Rivadeneyra, Ward & Gordon, 2007).

Mass media influences many aspects of the human life as it continuously conveys unrealistic and unattainable pictures of feminine beauty (Levine & Harrison, 2009; Schemer, 2003). Throughout the years, the depiction of the female body has become thinner whereas the body mass index of women within the Western societies has increased (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson & Kelly, 1986). The media has a long lasting and significant impact on women's drive for thinness (Ahern et al., 2008, Tucci & Peters, 2008)

The process of a woman's body image becoming distorted over time within the media can be understood through psychological theories in terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). Proposals have been put forth regarding women frequently engaging in a social comparison process (Martin & Kennedy, 1993) with media pictures when observing models on television or in tabloids (Schlundt & Johnson, 1990). This is due to body image research utilising quantitative methods such as questionnaires more frequently which completely conceal the complexity of experiences and attitudes. People can simultaneously hold adverse attitudes (Lindsey, Wilson & Schooler, 2000) and therefore be contradictory towards thinness by endorsing both negative and positive attitudes.

In contrast, qualitative data highlights the role that social comparisons and self-discrepancies play in demonstrating effects of media on body image concerns (Botta, 1999; Thompson et al. 1999). This data understands an individual's experiences and how it feeds into their body image and personal experiences of their body. Participants are encouraged to discover ideas and utilise their own words to frame responses based on their opinions. This enables a larger group of ideas to be reviewed than the ones the researcher acknowledges (Powell & Single, 1996). Psychological qualitative research that explores body satisfaction and dissatisfaction in young women (Grogan, 1999; McCabe, Ricciardelli & Ridge, 2006; Mooney, Farley & Strugnell, 2009; Nichter, 2000; Tiggemann, Gardiner & Slater, 2000; Wertheim, Martin, Prior, Sanson & Smart, 2002) attest to a richness and convolution of data if unexplored. Qualitative studies take numerous issues surrounding various parts of body image into consideration (Ahern, Bennett & Kelly, 2011).

Comparisons made with media pictures of ideal female attractiveness by women results in a perceived discrepancy between the media's standard of attractiveness and their actual attractiveness. These discrepancies increase women's levels of dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Thompson, 1990; Posavac et al., 1998). Self-discrepancy theory proposes discrepancies within one's self-concept are factors for depression, body dissatisfaction and anxiety disorders dissatisfaction (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Consistency has led women wanting a thinner ideal body compared to their current body type which is an actual-ideal discrepancy which in turn leads to an increase of negative-related emotions. Several types of emotional distress (Higgins, 1989), low self-esteem (Moretti & Higgins, 1990), feeling shameful (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert & Barlow, 1998), continuing emotional issues such as clinical depression (Strauman, 1989) and disappointment (Strauman

& Higgins, 1988) are found in individuals with high self-discrepancies. Mediating effect of self-discrepancy between body image and social media are due to exposure to media images (Ahadzadeh et al., 2017; Bissell & Rask, 2010; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Dittmar et al., 2009; Posavac et al., 1998). Individuals high in discrepancies are more likely to engaging in social comparisons when viewing thin-ideal images. For instance, Shorter, Brown, Quinton & Hinton (2008) found discrepancies between an individual's view of their size and their perceptions of celebrities sizes were positively correlated with eating disorders.

Usage of social media

Social media has been discovered to be a notable catalyst for concern regarding appearance (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Plentiful idealized images of thin, photoshopped women are presented on social media as being the most enticing and normal body type all woman should strive to achieve. (Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014; Robinson et al., 2017).

Social networking over the past decade has grown and become an extremely favoured form of online communication (Perloff, 2014). Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook can be utilised on multiple forms of technology such as computers and smartphones (Perloff, 2014) and are the most popular form of expression nowadays. Excessive usage of social media may lead to hyper-focusing on physical appearance and excessive engagement in appearance-related photo activities (Cohen, Newton-John & Slater, 2017). This leads to concerns over appearance, low self-esteem and body image (De Vries, Peter, Nikken & de Graaf, 2014, Hanna et al., 2017). Individuals end up comparing their own appearance to relative, friends and strangers (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011). For instance, usage of Facebook has been associated with increased social comparison and self-objectification which ultimately cause mental, physical and psychological issues.

The concept of social comparison within body image is related directly to social media usage. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) argues that humans are driven to compare themselves with others. Individuals evaluate their opinions and abilities especially when objective measures are non-existent, in particular women, who make ill-judged comparisons with attractive and thin models. This therefore leads to unwanted and negative feelings about their bodies and themselves. Social comparison theory may pertain to social networking sites as individuals have easy and quick access to all social networks at any given time (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Individuals who already feel anxious about their body image most likely end up seeking out standards for upward social comparison therefore resulting in further body dissatisfaction (Want, 2009). Peers are found to be the ultimate and most important comparisons than celebrities and models that are featured in mass media (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995). Strahan et al. (2006) suggested women, when confronted with societal cultural norms of thinness, will engage in the comparison process to models and celebrities. This emanates from models and celebrities setting high standards for these norms of thinness therefore causing women to become very aware of being judged against them.

Previous psychological research into body image has shown engagement in appearance-related social comparisons has influenced the relationship between

exposure to women's body dissatisfaction and traditional media (Keery et al., 2004; Van Den Berg et al., 2002; Vartanian & Dey, 2013). However, now due to the availability of social media, women in particular will utilise social media to observe glamorised photos of their peers and others and then compare themselves with these idealised images (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis & Kruck, 2012; Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008). Today's young adults between the ages 18-29 years are the highest users of social networking sites (Perrin, 2015), a demographic for which body dissatisfaction is problematic (Bearman et al., 2006; Ricciardelli & McGabe, 2001). Therefore, a further exploration of body image in young women would help in understanding their perceptions and experiences through using social media.

Present Study

Although qualitative research can be found, more research is needed into how young women from different ethnic minority groups, specifically within the United Kingdom, are implicated in social media and body image expectations. Constant utilisation of quantitative methodologies has led to several studies focusing solely on Facebook or Instagram and utilising samples consisting of adolescent females therefore leaving gaps in the literature.

Given the plethora of research, the present study aimed to:

- 1) Explore young women's experiences of body dissatisfaction through the use of social media
- 2) Examine opinions impacting young women's body image
- 3) Explore attitudes of young women on body image

Research question: How do young women perceive their bodies in relation to the use of social media?

Methodology

Design

Utilising a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate for exploring young women's experiences and perceptions of body image in relation to the use of social media. Qualitative research is a research approach that places importance on words over quantification in data assemblage and analysis (Bryman, 2008a; pp.366). Qualitative research permits researchers to focus on understanding individuals as embodied situated persons which means they are expected to encounter contradictions and the unknown along the way (Finlay & Evans, 2009; Willig, 2001). The study employed six 45-minute semi-structured interviews which were then subjected to thematic analysis to identify and analyse numerous themes.

Participants

The sample consisted of six young women who were recruited from Manchester Metropolitan University. Participants were chosen through opportunity sampling as they met the inclusion criteria: identified as women, aged between 18-25 years and utilised social media. Anonymity was ensured as pseudonyms were utilised for all participants.

Figure 1. Participants Information

Ayesha 24 years old Italian Full time undergraduate student	Sara 20 years old Kurd Full time undergraduate student	Jada 21 years old American Full time undergraduate student
Saffiyah 19 years old Pakistani Full time undergraduate student	Aleza 21 years old Indian Full time undergraduate student	Imani 20 years old Jamaican Full time undergraduate student

The researcher's position is important and must be acknowledged as this study has taken an epistemological stance of realism. Views and experiences of the participants are explored through conversations (Maxwell, 2012). It has been argued that the data considers 'evidence for real processes and phenomena' (p. 103).

Data Collection

Participants were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Conducting a semi-structured interview was the most appropriate as it focuses on participants emotions, thoughts and feelings. It allows for flexibility which enables the researcher to explore complex issues in depth related to body image and social media (Turner, 2010). Furthermore, it allows reciprocity between the participant and interviewer (Galletta, 2012) and the interviewer can ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses (Harden et al., 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2010). The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions based on body image and social media. An example of a question that was asked: "How do you think the media sees the perfect body?" (refer to appendix 6).

Research process

The current study was ethically approved by Manchester Metropolitan University afore data collection (refer to appendix 2). Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling, word of mouth was utilised to spread awareness about the study around university. Interested participants were informed about the inclusion criteria before agreeing to participate. Topics arose from previous quantitative and qualitative literature on social media and body image. The questions enabled participants to engage in lengthy discussions about their personal experiences with their body image and social media. Additional questions were added as the conversation was flowing to further explore the topics. Afore conducting the interviews, participants received participant information sheets (refer to appendix 5) and consent forms (refer to appendix 4) which everyone signed. The interview schedule was created appropriately as each participant was interviewed for 45 minutes (refer to appendix 6). Interviews were conducted in quiet places around the university campus and recorded utilising a mobile device. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed. Upon completion, participants had the chance to contact

the researcher and researcher's supervisor or use all other relevant counselling services if they felt distressed.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised when analysing the data. It is a qualitative method used to identify, analyse and report themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was utilised as it is the best way to answer qualitative research and allows researchers to examine multiple perspectives from a diverse group of people on social media and body image. Furthermore, highlight differences and similarities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Other researchers have used this qualitative design when researching social media and body image such as Burnette, Kwitowski & Mazzeo (2017) and Deighton-Smith & Bell (2016).

Thematic analysis allowed for interpretation of social media and body image in numerous ways which resulted in acquiring in-depth detailed data. The process involved following the steps set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcripts were analysed, codes were generated (e.g. attitudes), finding, reviewing and defining themes (e.g. digital altered images) which resulted in providing answers to the research question and producing additional literature regarding body image and social media.

Aspects of Cochrane and Fereday's (2006) paper were incorporated and demonstrated thematic analysis was done well and rigorously. Furthermore, a realist approach to thematic analysis was taken as meanings, experiences and reality of participants were reported. Braun & Clarke (2006) cover the differences between realist and relativist approaches.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Manchester Metropolitan University psychology ethics department and followed strict guidelines set the by the BPS. Participants received standardised information sheets about the study. Following this, they proceeded to sign the consent forms to acknowledge they had full knowledge about the study and wanted to participate. Interviews were recorded utilising a mobile device, the transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer and the researcher only had access to the database. Participants identity remained anonymous as each utilised a pseudonym. Everyone was reminded that they had the right to withdraw at any point during the interview and did not need to answer questions, which would elicit negative emotions and execrable personal experiences. The information sheet outlined that participants could withdraw from the study up until 25th February 2019. Upon completion of the interview, participants received a debriefing sheet thanking them for their time and explaining the nature of the study in more detail.

Analysis & Discussion

Key themes were explored utilising thematic analysis that were evident in the data set. All four central themes encapsulated a deeper understanding of young women's experiences and perceptions of body image through social media. This section aims to answer the research question: 'How do young women perceive their bodies in

relation to the use of social media?'. Four major themes were identified: digital altered images, third person perspective of self-image, positive effects of social media and Kardashian influence.

Theme 1 - Digital altered images

Digital altered images emerged as an important theme as participants frequently mentioned that the images they viewed online often had a negative impact on their body image. This led to having negative perceptions about oneself therefore sending them into a downward spiral. However, they were fully aware that these body ideals are not attractive nor achievable. Each participant demonstrated knowledge about altered images which are regularly posted on social media and about editing software specifically Photoshop. Filters exist which can be deceiving by distorting one's face in a significant way (e.g. clear skin, no fine lines, no eye bags, smooth make-up application, looking thin). Research has shown with retouching images, digital alteration of media images (Harrison & Hefner, 2014; Krawitz, 2014; Reaves et al., 2004) and popularity rising, comparisons to these unrealistic body ideals may be detrimental for women and this is evident in their responses:

"People use apps that have filters, I would say they influence body image. I think they're just there to you know, make photos look a bit more glamorous or to distort what they might look like face wise. I think it's more to do with, filters like that merely contribute to a person's appearance the, from you know the face rather than the bodily appearance." (Saffiyah, lines 434-439)

"You realise that you're just looking at photos, they're not authentic. People don't actually look like this. Nowadays especially when you have access to tools such as Photoshop around anything can happen." (Jada, lines 163-165)

"They have so many editing software's and tools they utilise such as Photoshop. It is the main software utilised everywhere. It allows individuals to cover all of their imperfections therefore leading to have negative effects especially on women. It ultimately eliminates authenticity as editing tools have so much power." (Aleza, lines 132-134)

Individuals have the ability to enhance and edit images in similar ways to how media professionals enhance images of celebrities for magazines and other media outlets (Marwick, 2015) as Ayesha discussed:

"For instance, Britney Spears she shows her real body in front of the cameras and admits to having cellulite. But in her photos, the editors will hide that." (Ayesha, lines 288-290)

The concept of 'digital modification' is associated with the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). The theory states by viewing idealised media images, it increases discrepancies between the actual and the ought self. This therefore results in harmful behaviours in order to give others the impression that an individual is trying to achieve the appearance society obliges them to have (Hefner, Woodward, Figge, Bevan, Santora & Baloch, 2014).

However, Imani spoke about how digitally altered photos can instead lead to extreme obsession with skin tone and not just specific body parts. This is due to Caucasian

features and light skin tone traditionally being associated with extreme attractiveness and beauty (Hill, 2002; Conrad, Dixon & Zhang, 2009). For instance, psychological literature from Cash (1992) has shown African American women idealising light skin tone as African American men found light skin women more attractive. Imani discussed how black women may utilise a filter to lighten their skin tone to fit in:

“I think it negatively impacts blacks in particular, sometimes it can become extreme. For instance, I’m black, if your dark skinned you may use a specific filter to make yourself look lighter and attractive.” (Imani, lines 444-446)

Theme 2 – Third person perspective of self-image

Opinions from family, friends, peers and partners can affect body image negatively or positively. Participants shared opinions on their appearance from family members specifically their mothers who are influential in the formation of a negative body, increasing expectations and destructive eating behaviours. The majority of opinions were viewed as negative and hurtful as individuals would take comments personally, therefore leading them to perceive their bodies in a negative way as they felt ‘fat’, ‘ugly’ and ‘insecure’. Ayesha and Imani’s mothers would focus a lot on their weight:

“Yes, I’m a person who really cares about what people think. I’m scared about what kind of judgements the person will make like my mum. They could say I’m ugly or too skinny, you just never know.” (Ayesha, lines 236-238)

“Yes, when I was a child I was fat. My mum would point out my weight and say I’d wear loose clothes. So, from then on, it lingered on my mind so I started to lose weight.” (Ayesha lines 241-243).

Yeah definitely like my mum keeps saying to me that I’ve put on weight and I’m left speechless. It makes me feel insecure and it makes me think I need to go to the gym as much as I possibly can. (Imani, lines 318-320)

A justification into this can be explained by the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image. The model proposes that there are three variables that form the basis for later development of body image: parents, media and peers (Thompson et al., 1999). Quality of life can be significantly affected by poor body image as it results in mood disturbances, declining self-esteem and unhealthy weight loss practices (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005; Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel & Stuckless, 1999).

However, Safiyyah revealed she is not significantly affected by remarks made by her family members. This is due to having supportive friends who do not have negative attitudes towards her appearance. She is fully aware of her own body image and is not influenced by the ideal body presented within the mass media and social media. Not all women will follow and buy into the unrealistic thin beauty ideals (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999).

“I don’t really take people’s opinions on board. I look at myself and I know, you know, I’m not what the media would see as the ideal body type. The thin-ideal presented in unrealistic and I don’t buy into it at all. It’s all about working on yourself and improving. That’s why I don’t really take people’s opinions on board. You know, because I know that I can see for myself what I have to do and my friends, I haven’t really come into any issues with them you know. They’re really supportive of the

journey, but there are some people like you know within family who can have a really negative attitudes about these kind of issues. And yeah, it makes you feel down but I haven't." (Safiyyah, lines 186-195)

Theme 3 – Positive effects of social media

Different range of perspectives were discovered about how social media has a positive effect on body image. This concept was prevalent across a few participants as they discussed how social media motivated and inspired them to become physically active and stronger by going to the gym, adopting a cleaner diet and generally living a healthier life.

Yeah, these celebrities wake up early in the morning, they go to the gym, they eat early and get enough sleep. We can do the exact same if we wanted too. (Ayesha, lines 459-460).

Yeah agree, it's mainly negative. The only positive I can think of is women being motivated to go to the gym and drop weight. Also, to live a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle. (Imani, lines 509-511)

This has been discussed by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) as they discovered women who viewed fitspiration images compared to travelling images often inspired other women to increase their fitness. In addition, Boepple and Thompson (2016) and Jong and Drummond (2016) suggested that viewing fitness images on social media sites promotes healthy eating, increases physical activity and enhances well-being and body image amongst young women. Sara revealed feeling much happier and more comfortable in her body now and it was all due to viewing fitness photos on social media:

The only positive is that it helps motivate women to not be obese and super unhealthy. It can lead you to getting a gym membership or having a home gym. It motivated me to lose a lot of weight. I don't go to the gym now but I'm healthy and happy with my body way more now compared to before. Fitness pictures online made me motivated to be honest. (Sara, lines 400-405)

One way of looking at this is in terms of self-objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997) as Prichard and Tiggemann (2012) reported state self-objectification experienced among participants was reduced when they viewed the music videos whilst walking on a treadmill. It was suggested perhaps engaging in exercise may have led individuals to focus more on the movement of their body instead of their appearance therefore decreasing the objectifying nature of the situation and decreasing the negative perceptions they have about their body image (Prichard and Tiggeman, 2012).

However, it appears as though social media can impact body image positively in different ways. Jada told an interesting narrative as she revealed being a vegan improved her lifestyle significantly which reduced body dissatisfaction. Jada spoke about how veganism reshaped her direction as to what constitutes a healthy lifestyle:

"It's positive in a way say for an example there's so much animal cruelty out there and people are stepping out to save animals from being tortured. Also, veganism has become a huge phenomenon for me, so I feel as though these movements are

definitely positive for my lifestyle and others who are vegan. I feel more satisfied with my body now. (Jada, lines 391-394)

Theme 4 – Kardashians Influence

Every participant mentioned the Kardashians frequently throughout their interviews in terms of how they have influenced the ideal body image. It was very apparent how influential the Kardashians are on social media and the impact they have, specifically on body image. This has been backed up by research that has shown a trend in cosmetic surgery as women request for specific celebrity's body parts for example, Kim Kardashian's jawline and eyes (PRNewswire, 2015). Two participants discussed how the Kardashians influenced their perceptions of body image.

“Yes, it comes from celebrities like the Kardashians. I get pressured by them. I get pressured by... (pause) their pictures on Instagram. I end up having negative perceptions about my own body due to the comparisons I make with the Kardashians specifically Kim. I get thoughts like “why can't I look like that?! Looking like this will make me happy and I'll live a happy life.” I would want to have curves as the Kardashians influenced this body ideal. Also face wise, I would want big lips and a small nose (Sara, lines 280-284)

I always wanted to have Kim Kardashian's figure growing up. It just always stood out to me alongside Beyonce's figure. I would view my body in a negative light and be influenced and pressured by the photos I was exposed to on social media” (Imani, lines 465-468)

This can be understood through social comparison theory as young women engage in social comparison processes to models and celebrities (Strahan et al., 2006) when they are confronted with societal cultural norms of thinness. Festinger (1954) argues individuals are driven to compare themselves with others which can lead to detrimental effects on a woman's body. When comparing, women will inevitably feel negative about themselves (Bessenoff, 2006, Tiggemann and McGill, 2004, Tiggemann and Polivy, 2010, Tiggemann et al., 2009). However, participants were fully aware that the Kardashians have had surgery:

“Well you know Kim Kardashian, she got surgery done. Her boobs are fake, her bum is fake, she got surgery done. We all know it, she doesn't admit it unfortunately. But we all know they're fake curves, that's not plus-size. You can't have a disproportionate body such as having skinny thighs and a big bum. For a big bum, you need to have thick thighs.” (Sara, lines 169-173)

“I remember watching this video of Kim Kardashian, she was running in the morning and then started promoting this shake product. It looked so fake and people were questioning her. But she was getting paid for it so she didn't care. She was trying to make it look like she works out every day, but we know she's had surgery done.” (Aleza, lines 230-233)

On another hand, Hancock & Toma (2009) suggest that viewers may actually be sceptical about the extent to which online images of women are accurate reflections of their private life. Research has demonstrated that people only choose to upload

attractive images of themselves (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). This was evident in Sara's response:

"You also have to remember not everyone is happy from just viewing photos. You don't know their lives, you don't know if they're happy. You're saying by achieving that body you'll be happy? I don't think you will be, there is no way. They probably not even happy, they choose to post the most attractive images. It's just a snapshot of 2 seconds of their lives that you've not seen and not been part of." (Sara, lines 283-287)

In relation to the research, the overall themes accumulated in this study uncovered young women's experiences and perceptions of their own body image through using social media. Commonalities were assessed across all participants and findings displayed females predominantly held negative perceptions of their own bodies due to utilising social media. The only positive that was found amongst the majority of the participants was that it motivated them to become more active and eat cleaner. This has been demonstrated by Tiggemann and Miller (2010) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) that when women are regularly exposed to social media, they frequently engage in a comparison process which ultimately results in high levels of weight dissatisfaction as previously discussed. Previous research into this area has been more documented using a younger demographic (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013) using quantitative methodologies. This procedure involved insightful interviews followed by utilising guidelines of thematic analysis developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Conclusions from this research suggests that social media is an influencing element in younger women's body image. The findings indicated that women viewing altered images altered their perceptions of their bodies (theme 1). Opinions from close family and friends negatively impacted their moods and body image (theme 2). Viewing fitness images suggested to alleviate levels of body dissatisfaction (theme 3). Finally, a strong link was shown in women comparing themselves to popular cultural figures (theme 4).

Overall, this present study successfully develops and explores an insight into body image coupled with the utilisation of social media through the experiences of young women. This research contributes to the limited published qualitative literature around body image and social media. Four major themes were identified through the exploration of the research question which were all relevant to previous literature. However, the study did consist of limitations that could be addressed in future research.

A limitation of this study was that the sample size was relatively small as it only consisted of six participants so therefore, the research does not cover a large range of young women's perspectives. The findings cannot be generalised and only apply specifically to the six young women who participated therefore is not representative of the United Kingdom. Additionally, the sample consisted of undergraduates, so differences were discovered between each participant due to having different levels of education in how they perceived body image when engaging with social media. A recommendation for the future would be to use a larger sample to gain a more comprehensive understanding into social media and body image in young women living in the United Kingdom.

Methodological limitations arose from using thematic analysis such as being unable to retain a sense of contradiction and continuity through just one individual account (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These contradictions and consistencies can be revealing across individual accounts. In addition, the method cuts across participants to focus on the themes therefore this results in losing the individuality of participants. For future research, utilising other qualitative methodologies such as interpretative phenomenological analysis would be useful as it would allow for examining and interpreting the lived experiences of each participant individually without any distortions (Smith et al., 2009 & Creswell, 2012).

Suggestions for future research would involve exploring experiences of 18-25-year-old males body image using social media of different backgrounds living in the United Kingdom. By doing this, it would help provide a greater understanding of how social media impacts males body image. Furthermore, future research should examine a more diverse sample of young women who are non-undergraduates in order to examine other potential themes or differences.

Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to reflect on how they influenced the process.

Within the present study, the interviews provided unique insight into the topic of body image and social media. I was inspired to do research due to my levels of interest in this area. As the researcher, I wanted to gain more insight into young women's experiences of their body image in relation to the use of social media. Due to wanting to gain a greater understanding into their experiences, a quantitative study would not have been appropriate to conduct. So therefore, the nature of this present study adopted a qualitative approach. I was able to have face-to-face interactions with the participants. After conducting the interviews, it increased my confidence alongside contributing to the development of interpersonal skills which can be used during employment or when conducting future research. Also, data collection was easy as all six participants agreed to do the interviews on the dates agreed.

Despite this, I feel as though some of my participants could have expanded more on their responses if I had utilised more probes. This was all due to my lack of experience of conducting semi-structured interviews which was reflected in some aspects of the interviews. When participants paused for a long time, I assumed they were not going to discuss more so I would move onto the next question. Therefore, I believed I may have missed out on some key, useful information.

References

1. Ahern, A.L., Bennett, K.M. & Kelly, M. (2011) 'A Qualitative Exploration of Young Women's Attitudes towards the Thin Ideal.' *Journal of Health Psychology*, 16(1), pp. 70-79 [Online] [Accessed on 25th November 2018] DOI: 10.1177/1359105310367690
2. Alase, A. (2017) 'The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A Guide to a Good Qualitative Research Approach.' *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 5(2), pp. 10-17 [Online] [Accessed on 9th March 2019] DOI: 10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9
3. Andrew, R., Tiggemann, M. & Clark, L. (2016) 'Predicting body appreciation in young women: An integrated model of positive body image'. *Body Image*, 18, pp. 34-42 [Online] [Accessed on 23rd March 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.04.003>
4. Arendt, F., Peter, C. & Beck, J. (2017) 'Idealized Female Beauty, Social Comparisons, and Awareness Intervention Material Evidence for Preventive Effects in Young Women.' *Journal of Media Psychology*, 29(4), pp. 188-197 [Online] [Accessed on 15th November 2018] DOI: 10.1027/1864-1105/a000181
5. Berg, P.V.D., Thompson, K., Obremski-Brandon, K. & Covert, M. (2002) 'The Tripartite Influence model of body image and eating disturbance: A covariance structure modeling investigation testing the mediational role of appearance comparison.' *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 53(5), pp. 1007-1020 [Online] [Accessed on 27th February 2019] [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999\(02\)00499-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999(02)00499-3)
6. Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology.' *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101 [Online] [Accessed on 2nd January 2019] DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
7. Breakwell, G.M. (2012) *Research methods in psychology*. 4th edition, Sage Publications
8. Bright, L.F., Kleiser, S.B. & Grau, S.L. (2015) 'Too much Facebook? An exploratory examination of social media fatigue.' *Computers in Human Behavior*, 44, pp. 148-155 [Online] [Accessed on 2nd December 2018] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.048>
9. Brown, Z. & Tiggemann, M. (2016) 'Attractive celebrity and peer images on Instagram: Effect on women's mood and body image.' *Body Image*, 19, pp. 37-43 [Online] [Accessed on 28th November 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.08.007>
10. Cohen, R., Newton-John, T. & Slater, A. (2017) 'The relationship between Facebook and Instagram appearance-focused activities and body image concerns in young women.' *Body Image*, 23, pp. 183-187 [Online] [Accessed on 28th November 2018] DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2017.10.002
11. Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T. & Slater A. (2019) '#bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram'. *Body Image*, 29, pp. 47-57

[Online] [Accessed on 23rd March 2019]

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.02.007>

12. Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P.C., Vartanian, L.R. & Halliwell, E. (2015) 'Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood.' *Body Image*, 13, pp. 38-45 [Online] [Accessed on 1st December 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.12.002>
13. Fardouly, J. & Holland, E. (2018) 'Social media is not real life: The effect of attaching disclaimer-type labels to idealized social media images on women's body image and mood.' *New media & society*, 20(11), pp. 4311-4328 [Online] [Accessed on 20th December 2018] DOI: 10.1177/1461444818771083
14. Fereday, J. & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2018) 'Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development.' *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(1) [Online] [Accessed on 21st January 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>
15. Fernandez, S. & Pritchard, M. (2012) 'Relationships between self-esteem, media influence and drive for thinness.' *Eating Behaviors*, 13(4), pp. 321-325 [Online] [Accessed on 1st March 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2012.05.004>
16. Franko, D.L., Coen, E.J., Roehrig, J.P., Rodgers, R.F., Jenkins, A., Lovering, M.E. & Cruz, S.D. (2012) 'Considering J.Lo and Ugly Betty: A qualitative examination of risk factors and prevention targets for body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and obesity in young Latina women.' *Body Image*, 9(3), pp. 381-387 [Online] [Accessed on 15th November 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2012.04.003>
17. Girard, M., Rodgers, R.F. & Chabrola, H. (2018) 'Prospective predictors of body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and muscularity concerns among young women in France: A sociocultural model.' *Body Image*, 26, pp. 103-110 [Online] [Accessed on 1st March 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.07.001>
18. Grabe, S., Ward, M.L.M. & Hyde, J.S. (2008) 'The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies.' *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(3), pp. 460-470 [Online] [Accessed 1st November 2018] DOI: 10.1037/0033-2909.134.3.460.
19. Groesz, L.M., Levine, M.P. & Murnen, S.K. (2001) 'The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: a meta-analytic review.' *Journal of Eating Disorders*, 31(1), pp. 1-16 [Online] [Accessed on 12th November 2018] DOI: 10.1002/eat.10005
20. Halliwell, E. & Dittmar, H. (2006) 'Associations Between Appearance-Related Self-Discrepancies and Young Women's and Men's Affect, Body Satisfaction, and Emotional Eating: A Comparison of Fixed-Item and Participant-Generated Self-Discrepancies.' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(4), pp. 447-458 [Online] [Accessed on 25th November 2018] DOI: 10.1177/0146167205284005
21. Halliwell, E. (2012) 'Social Comparison Theory and Body Image.' *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, 2 [Online] [Accessed on 22nd November 2018] DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-384925-0.00119-X

22. Halliwell, E. (2013) 'The impact of thin idealized media images on body satisfaction: Does body appreciation protect women from negative effects?'. *Body Image*, 10(4), pp. 509-514 [Online] [Accessed on 23rd March 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.07.004>
23. Hammersley, M. (2013) *What is qualitative research?*. Cornwall: MPG Books Group
24. Hogue, J.V. & Mills, J.S. (2019) 'The effects of active social media engagement with peers on body image in young women.' *Body Image*, pp. 1-5 [Online] [Accessed on 18th December 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.11.002>
25. Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.M., Johnson, M. & Docent, M.K. (2016) 'Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide.' *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), pp. 2954–2965 [Online] [Accessed on 20th December 2018] DOI 10.1111/jan.13031
26. Kim, J.W., Chock, M.T. (2015) 'Body image 2.0: Associations between social grooming on Facebook and body image concerns.' *Computers in Human Behavior*, 48, pp.331-339 [Online] [Accessed 15th October 2018] DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.009
27. MacCallum, F. & Widdows, H. (2018) 'Altered Images: Understanding the Influence of Unrealistic Images and Beauty Aspiration.' *Health Care Analysis*, 26(3), pp. 235-245 [Online] [Accessed on 25th February 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10728-016-0327-1>
28. MacNeill, L.P. & Best, L.A. (2015) 'Perceived current and ideal body size in female undergraduates'. *Eating Behaviours*, 18, pp. 71-75 [Online] [Accessed on 21st March 2019] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.03.004>
29. Madden, D. & Breny, J.M. (2016) "How Should I Be?" A Photovoice Exploration Into Body Image Messaging for Young Women Across Ethnicities and Cultures.' *Social Media & Community-Engaged Practices Health Promotion Practice*, 17(3), pp. 440 –447 [Online] [Accessed 1st December 2018] DOI: 10.1177/1524839915618363
30. Manzano, A. (2016) 'The craft of interviewing in realist evaluation.' *Evaluation*, 22(3), pp. 342-360 [Online] [Accessed on 11th January 2019] DOI: 10.1177/1356389016638615
31. Mills, J.S., Musto, S., Williams, J. & Tiggeman, M. (2018) "'Selfie" harm: Effects on mood and body image in young women.' *Body Image*, 27, pp. 86-92 [Online] [Accessed on 15th October 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.08.007>
32. Mucherah, W. & Frazier, A.D. (2013) 'How deep is skin-deep? The relationship between skin color satisfaction, estimation of body image, and self-esteem among women of African descent.' *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(6), pp. 1177-1184 [Online] [Accessed on 17th March 2019] DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12081
33. Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. & Moules, N.J. (2017) 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria.' *International Journal of Qualitative*

Methods, 16, pp. 1-13 [Online] [Accessed on 28th December 2018] DOI: 10.1177/1609406917733847

34. Perloff, R.M. 'Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research.' *Sex Roles*, 71(11-12), pp. 363-377 [Online] [Accessed on 29th November 2018] DOI 10.1007/s11199-014-0384-6

35. Prichard, I., McLachlan, Lavis, T. & Tiggeman, M. (2018) 'The Impact of Different Forms of #fitspiration Imagery on Body Image, Mood, and Self-Objectification among Young Women.' *Sex Roles*, 78(11-12), pp. 789-798 [Online] [Accessed on 27th February 2019] DOI 10.1007/s11199-017-0830-3

36. Rasooli, S.S., Lavasani, M.G. (2011) 'Relationship between personality and perfectionism with body image.' *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, pp. 1015-1019 [Online] [Accessed on 18th October 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.03.231>

37. Sastre, A. (2014) 'Hottentot in the age of reality TV: sexuality, race and Kim Kardashian's visible body.' *Celebrity Studies*, 5(1-2), pp. 123-157 [Online] [Accessed on 20th March 2019] DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2013.810838

38. Small, J. (2016) 'Holiday bodies: Young women and their appearance.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 58, pp. 18-32 [Online] [Accessed on 20th October 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.01.008>

39. Tiggeman, M. (2004) 'Body image across the adult life span: stability and change.' *Body Image*, 1(1), pp. 29-41 [Online] [Accessed on 14th October] [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1740-1445\(03\)00002-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1740-1445(03)00002-0)

40. Tiggemann, M., Hayden, S., Brown, Z. & Veldhuis (2018) 'Social media: The effect of Instagram "likes" on women's social comparison and body dissatisfaction.' *Body Image*, 26, pp. 90-97 [Online] [Accessed on 1st December 2018] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.07.002>

41. Ui-Jeen, Y. & Jung, J. (2018) 'Effects of Self-Discrepancy and Self-Schema on Young Women's Body Image and Self-Esteem after Media Image Exposure.' *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 47(2), pp. 142-160 [Online] [Accessed on 27th November 2018] DOI: 10.1111/fcsr.12284

42. Vartanian, L.R. (2012) 'Self-Discrepancy Theory and Body Image.' *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, 2 [Online] [Accessed on 22nd November 2018] DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-384925-0.00112-7

43. Vendemia, M.A. & DeAndrea, D.C. (2018) 'The effects of viewing thin, sexualized selfies on Instagram: Investigating the role of image source and awareness of photo editing practices.' *Body Image*, 27, pp. 118-127 [Online] [Accessed on 20th March 2019] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.08.013>

44. Wood-Barcalow, N.L., Tylka, T.L. & Augustus-Horvath, C.L. (2010) "'But I Like My Body": Positive body image characteristics and a holistic model for young-adult

women.' *Body Image*, 7, pp. 106-116 [Online] [Accessed on 25th October 2018]
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2010.01.001>

45. Yamamiyaa, Y., Cash, T.F., Melnyk, S.E., Posavac, H.D. & Posavac, S.S. (2005)
'Women's exposure to thin-and-beautiful media images: body image effects of
media-ideal internalization and impact-reduction interventions.' *Body Image*, 2, pp.
74-80 [Online] [Accessed on 30th November 2018]
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2004.11.001>