Body Image: The Impact of Social Media and Social Comparison on Young Women and Ethnic Differences

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March 2021

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: BA (Hons) Psychology

Title of Thesis: Body Image: The Impact of Social Media and Social Comparison on Young Women and Ethnic Differences

Date: 15/03/2021

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank everyone who has helped me not only through the completion of my thesis but in my three years of studying at NCI. First and foremost, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr April Hargreaves, who has been so patient and accommodating in answering the many questions I've had over the last few months and has given me great guidance. I sincerely thank every participant who has partaken in this study, as without them it would have not been possible. And to my parents, who encouraged me to work hard and attend college because without that, I would not have had the great experience and education I've had the luck of acquiring throughout the last three years. I would also like to thank the staff of NCI. My lecturers, Learning and Teaching, Student Services and even the security guards and caretakers who have always been a friendly face to see, who have all made NCI such a warm and welcoming college to walk into every day. Finally, I'd like to share a special thanks to my partner, Cian, who has encouraged and supported me to work hard on my thesis even when it was difficult, and to my close friend, Laura, who has made my years in NCI that bit more special, being there through the good times and the bad.

Abstract

Aims: Social media is growing exponentially and shares strong ideals about how a person should look and be. As this newer form of media grows, so do questions around how it affects body image and unhealthy behaviours. The current study aimed to understand the impact that the use of social media and social comparison have on young women's body image. Because the mainstream ideals shared among this form of media largely consists of white, euro-centric features, this study also looks at the differences of these impacts according to ethnicity. **Method:** A survey consisting of demographic questions, the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ), the Social Comparison Scale (SCS) and the Body Image State Scale (BISS) was shared among multiple social media platforms to recruit 159 female participants between the ages of 18 – 29 years old. **Results:** Results of a standard multiple regression analysis showed that both social media engagement and social comparison have statistically significant effects on body image state. A one-way between-groups ANOVA showed that body image scores significantly differed between white, black and other ethnic participants. This showed that white participants had the least favourable body image, other ethnic participants had the second least favourable body image and black participants had the most favourable body image. **Conclusion:** Findings further expand evidence that the use of social media is a cause for body image concerns. Additionally, this study challenges previous studies findings that suggest black women are not impacted by social media and that other ethnic women score more alike white women, whereas in the current study it was found they scored more alike black women. The findings of this study further bring awareness to practical implications that need to be taken concerning social media engagement.

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Introduction

The internet was created between the 1960s-1990s, becoming popular to the public in the 90s (Abbate, 2000). Following this, came the creation of social media, otherwise known as web 2.0 (Gikas & Grant, 2013) which then became widely popular in the 2000s (Dewing, 2000).

Social media is defined as a group of websites and internet-based applications used for socialising and sharing content among other people (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Other kinds of media include print media, which is content such as magazines and newspapers, and broadcast media, which includes content such as television and radio (Speck & Elliott, 1997). These older forms of media were more popular before the internet and social media grew. Social media has been growing exponentially in recent years. A study on social media usage in 2015 on Americans show a high percentage of 65% of adults use social media, which had grown by 7% from when research had begun 10 years prior in 2005 (Perrin, 2015). It is growing in popularity particularly in teens (Rodgers et al., 2020) and young adults (Perrin, 2015).

While the usage of social media has been growing, it has also been associated with increased body image concerns and unhealthy body behaviours (Rodgers et al., 2020), but this is not new and has been the case in all forms of media. Wiseman, Sunday & Becker (2005) discussed body image within the media and how mainstream media tends to promote thinner bodies as the ideal body. These ideals were strongly circulated through television advertisements where consumers are easily convinced they need to have the particular product, for example, a weight-loss product, to help them be a certain way in order to be accepted. In the decades following, a major change in ‘goal bodies’ had occurred because of it. In the 1950s, the average woman and a model’s body size were within 5% of each other. This percentage has since increased and the average model is now 15-20% under what is

considered a healthy weight for their height (Wiseman et al., 2005). These changes of desired body shapes have gone from wanting a curvy and healthy look to a slim and tall look (Wiseman et al., 2005). There are suggestions that magazine media has played a big part within the changed ideal, with Playboy magazine having an increase of thinner women in their magazine centrefolds (Garner et al., 1980) and Vogue magazine seeing a trend of changing body shape between 1901 to 1993 from curvier to thinner (Barber, 1998).

There's an ongoing find that Active Social Media Engagement (ASME) has a positive correlation to body image concerns and a drive for thinness (Hogue & Mills, 2018; Kim & Chock, 2015). While this is a frequent finding, many studies have also done extensive research on whether there is a difference between general social media use and engaging in appearance-based applications on social media. When looking to identify if specific Social-Networking Sites (SNS) played part in body image concerns in young women, Cohen, Newton-John & Slater (2017) found that the interaction with general social networks and neutral, non-appearance focused accounts (e.g travel pages) did not correlate with body image concerns, but the interaction with photo and appearance-based accounts (Fitness pages/celebrities) had high levels of thin idealization and body surveillance. Kim & Chock (2015) looked at ASME and body image concerns in both women and men and the presence of social grooming behaviour (liking, commenting, checking other's profiles, etc.) on Facebook. This study found that there was a positive correlation between social grooming behaviours and concerns about body image and thinness. Similar to Cohen et al. (2017), there was no correlation when it was just looking at general Facebook use. These findings so far show that social media use may not have an impact on body image concerns but participating in an appearance-based activity does. Another study that found a similar conclusion is by Hogue & Mills (2018) who looked directly at the impact of photo-based ASME with peers and photo-based ASME with family when it came to body image in young women. Results

showed that when interacting with attractive peers' photos, there was an increase of worsened body image, but when interacting with family member's photos, there was no significant effect. All these studies have a similarity among them, which is the presence of the social comparison theory. This is when a person bases their self-worth when comparing themselves to another person (Festinger, 1954). Upward social comparison is the comparison with someone whom a person believes is 'better' than them, whereas downward social comparison is the comparison with someone whom a person believes is 'lower' than them (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). In the case of Hogue & Mills' study, a presence of upward social comparison can be seen when viewing photos of those classified as attractive peers while downward comparison wasn't present at all, as there was no effect on body image state after viewing photos of family rather than greater body image.

In contrast with these, Rodgers et al. (2020) found that there was a connection between body image concerns and social media use in general. Participants, both male and female, completed a questionnaire made of multiple scales and it was found that social media use was associated with social media ideal internalization. This in turn had an effect on appearance upward comparison, muscle building/dietary restricting behaviours and dissatisfaction with the body. Results showed that social media use impacted males more when it came to muscularity ideals. Although Rodgers et al. looked at social media use in general, it can be said that the implications of body dissatisfaction and appearance upward comparison could have mainly been affected by appearance-related content online. This supports the idea that social media use has a large impact on body image concerns.

Similar to the previous studies, DeBraganza and Hausenblas (2008) researched the effects of media exposure ideals on women's body dissatisfaction and mood, but what differs is that this study looks at the effects of ethnicity on these results. A selection of white women and black women were shown two sets of slides that included pictures of mainstream ideals

and control pictures. Results indicated that black women were not impacted by either set, with no significant changes from their pre-test scores to their post-test scores. But this was different for white women. Results showed that white women had higher body dissatisfaction from the mainstream pictures and lower body dissatisfaction from the control pictures. DeBraganza and Hausenblas concluded that these results were an indication of the social comparison theory, which was previously mentioned, due to 73% of black participants having acknowledged that the model pictures were of thin, white women, while only 23% of white participants had noticed this.

It is almost undeniable that mainstream media is very white orientated (Makkar & Strube, 1995; Perkins, 1996). While there are large amounts of studies looking at the impact of the media and social media on body image, there is a lack of focus on ethnic identity and racial differences in results. Some studies on body image concerns show that when asked on their overview of body image and weight, black women aren't impacted negatively by being overweight and have fewer negative views of overweight people (Evans & McConnell 2003; Hebl & Heatherton, 1998). This can correlate strongly with the results of the previously mentioned study by DeBraganza and Hausenblaus (2008).

It's said that black women tend to have fewer issues with body image, such as body dissatisfaction and self-esteem, but a study by David, Morrison, Johnson & Ross (2002) looked at differences between white and black women when exposed to advertisements of black and white models. It was found that while black women weren't as impacted by white models, there was no significant difference in impact between white and black women when they were exposed to models of the same race as them. In contrast to this, Schooler, Ward, Merriweather & Caruthers (2004) looked at the impact among black and white women when exposed to black-oriented television and mainstream television. Results found that while white women had poorer body image after viewing mainstream television, black women did

not, which correlates with the previous study. But when exposed to black-oriented television, there was no effect on white women's body image state while black women had more positive body image. This contradicts the findings of David et al. (2002) which found that black women's body image was negatively affected when exposed to black media. Interestingly, in the study by DeBraganza and Hausenblas (2008), a participant had stated that because all the models were white, they did not represent what the ideal beauty standards are for black women. This indicates that exposure to black models would more likely affect black women, so the contradicting studies leave the question of what impact does black media exposure have on black women. Both studies are similar though, in indicating the effects of mainstream media on both black and white women.

Although many studies suggest that mainstream media doesn't tend to have negative effects on black women, one study that disputes these is that by Tracey Owens Patton (2006). In this article, Patton discussed the struggles African American women face upon beauty standards and their body image based on what is portrayed in the media. Patton stated that many media stereotypes can negatively impact black women, specifically the portrayals of skin tone and hair type. On the occasion that a black woman is featured in the media, they always tend to have lighter skin and wavey/straight hair, feeding into the Euro-American feature ideals. The use of these rather euro-centric black women plays into the lack of portrayal of true black women's characteristics and creates a negative perception of their ethnic traits such as their hair types and skin tones (Tracey Owens Patton, 2006).

Evans & McConnell (2003) included Asian women within their research, focusing on the differences between Asian women, Black women and White women when they interact with mainstream standards of beauty. Results, like the previous studies, concluded that mainstream standards were irrelevant to black women. Although, the impact on Asian women was similar to that of White women, where the likeliness in the exposure of mainstream

standards and body dissatisfaction was very much present. Kaw (1993) conducted research that also included Asian women and found that 40% of Asian cosmetic patients ask for eyelid and nasal surgery. This shows a severely negative impact by mainstream media especially on Asian women, as they feel the need to change racial qualities.

Looking at more ethnicities, Nagar and Virk (2017) researched the impact of acute media exposure of Indian women and the effect it has on their body image. The study was conducted on two groups: a group that was exposed to media images of thin ideals and a group that was exposed to control images. Results found that those exposed to the images of thin ideals experienced body image disturbances. This linked body dissatisfaction, self-esteem and thin-ideal internalization with these thin-ideal endorsements by the media on Indian women. The study concluded that the unrealistic ideals of mainstream, western media is damaging for Indian women.

While many studies have discussed the issues amongst media, social media and social comparison on body image concerns in women, there is a lack of research on these concerns among women of different ethnicities. There is a need for further research in order to create the ability to battle the dangers of social media use overall and to increase diversity within the mainstream media.

Because social media use is increasing (Perrin, 2015) and therefore is the main forum for sharing these mainstream ideals, it is important to look at the direct impacts that it has on people. There are high levels of findings that suggest that media/social media use and social comparison negatively impact body image and so research is needed to identify, prevent and/or control these issues. The lack of research done on racial differences is also a downfall in this area and is needed for a larger understanding of how social media engagement can impact a broader spectrum of people. This study aims to find the impact that social media engagement and social comparison has on body image in young women, while also looking

at the ethnic and racial differences within the results. To look at this, I plan to gather participants all between the ages of 18 - 29 as this is the age range who use social media the most (Perrin, 2015) and to gather an as large as possible ethnic pool of participants to get a clear understanding of differences between ethnicities.

Taking into account the literature discussed, the aim of the current study is to investigate the relationship between social media use and body image amongst women of different ethnicities. To this end, my primary research question asks whether social media engagement and the social comparison that ensues, have an impact on body image in young women. As a follow-up question, I wish to explore whether the relationship between social media use and body image differs according to ethnicity. Studies such as Evans & Allen's (2003), Kaw's (1991) and Nagar & Virk (2017) suggest that ethnicity will indeed play a role in whether social media impacts the body image of its users, largely because media is still predominantly white in ethnicity (Makkar & Strube, 1995; Perkins, 1996). David et al. (2002) demonstrate that we tend to identify with people who are similar to us and when compared, white women and black women are impacted differently by mainstream media and as such white social media users are likely to more closely identify with the images they encounter online. This in turn may increase their likelihood to compare themselves to these images. As such, I hypothesise that the impact social media use and social comparison have on body image will differ according to ethnicity.

Methods

Participants

The current study consisted of 159 (white: $n = 55$, black: $n = 51$, other ethnicity: $n = 53$) female participants. The sample size for the study was calculated using the G*Power statistical power analyses calculator (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007) and a sample size of $n = 289$ was calculated. A larger number of white participants was collected in comparison to black and other ethnic participants, and therefore random selection among this group was conducted using a block randomisation method. This was done by assigning a block to every four participants, for example, AABB, ABAB, ABBA, etc. Every participant allocated 'A' was kept in the study and every participant allocated 'B' was discarded. This was repeated until 55 white participants were left in the study. Participants ranged from the ages of 18 - 29 years old ($M = 22.03$, $SD = 2.84$). This study used non-probability, convenience sampling to recruit participants through the internet, on social media applications. Inclusion criteria for the current study were women of any ethnicity between the ages of 18-29, with the exclusion of men due to the nature of the study.

Design and Analyses

This study used a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional design, as data was collected through a survey from a sample of women at one-time frame. The study had two predictor variables (PV) which were social media engagement and social comparison, and one criterion variable (CV) which was body image state. For the first hypothesis, a standard multiple regression was conducted to analyse the impact of the PV's, social media engagement and social comparison on the CV, body image state. A one-way between-groups ANOVA was then conducted for the second hypothesis in order to look at the difference between body image scores and ethnicity.

Materials

The questionnaire of this study was created in a survey format on google forms. The survey consisted of multiple demographic questions and 3 questionnaire scales. Demographic questions were included at the beginning to create participant profiles. These questions asked that of age, gender, ethnicity and the country in which they are from. Gender was included to ensure all participants are female. A copy of all questionnaires and demographic questions can be found in the appendices.

The Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ) (α = .82 to .89) created by Pryzbylski, Murayama, DeHann & Gladwell (2013) was the first scale implemented into the study's questionnaire to measure participants use of social media. This is made up of 5 questions that include 7 answer options from 'not one day (0) - every day (7)'. The score of this scale is summed by adding all answers to the five questions. The higher the score means the more social media is used.

The Social Comparison Scale (α = .88 and .96) designed by Allan & Gilbert (1995) was the following scale of the questionnaire. This was used to measure levels of social comparison concerning that of how one perceives themselves ranked socially and their level of attractiveness compared to others. This scale is made of 11 questions of bipolar constructs. With each question, is a 1-10 scale with two opposite words, such as 'inferior' which sits at 1 and 'superior' which sits at 10. The participant was asked to pick a number on the scale closest to how they feel when compared to others. This means choosing 1-4 would be closer to inferior, 5 being average and 6-10 being closer to superior. The scoring of the social comparison scale is done so by adding together all items. Higher scores lean towards feelings of superiority and lower scores lean towards feelings of inferiority.

The Body Image State Scale (BISS) (α = .77 for women and .72 for men) designed by Cash, Fleming, Alindogan, Steadman & Whitehead (2002) was the final scale included in

the study's questionnaire, to measure participants body image state scores. This scale includes 6 questions based on the participants' feelings about their appearance, weight, body shape and attractiveness. Participants were asked to answer based on their feelings in the current moment. Each question had 9 possible answers which ranged from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied. The scoring of this scale is done so by reverse scoring the 3 positive and 3 negative items and finding the overall average. The higher the scores on the 9-point scale means for a more favourable body image.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through multiple social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Reddit). A link to the google forms survey was shared among posts on these platforms to reach as many women of different ethnicities as possible, and also being shared through friends and family.

The link contained a survey that began with an information sheet (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix B). This described the nature of the study, the length of the study (5-10 minutes) and included contact information in the case that any questions or problems arose. It also explained the participants right to withdraw from the study at any moment before submission, that their participation was voluntary and that their identity was 100% anonymous and unidentifiable throughout the whole study. At the end of this page was a box that the participant needed to tick before continuing onto the questionnaire, confirming that they are over the age of 18 and give consent to participate in the study.

After consent was received, the participant was directed to the first page of the questionnaire. On this page was demographic questions (Appendix C), which asked the participants age, gender, race and the country/county in which they were from. Then followed page 2 which contained the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (Appendix D), page 3 containing the Social Comparison Scale (Appendix E) and page 4 containing the Body Image

State Scale (Appendix F). Once the participants completed these 4 pages, they were directed to a page that contained a debriefing (Appendix G). Here, participants were thanked for their participation and given the contact details of the researcher and the study supervisor if there was a problem they wanted to address. Contact details to multiple helplines and support services were also provided on this page in the case of any distress being caused by the study. The participant was then asked at the bottom of the debrief sheet to submit their questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

While collecting data, the NCI ethical guidelines were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of this. Any possibilities of the publication of this study were explained and anonymity throughout the whole study was ensured. Anonymity was achieved by using a survey format in which identity was untraceable unless directly asked for. Data obtained throughout the study was also stored on a password secured laptop. Participation could not continue until informed consent was given. Contact details of support services were provided to participants after they participated in case of any negative impacts caused by the questionnaire.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The current study consisted of 159 randomly selected female participants (*n* = 159) between the ages of 18-29 years old, from a sample of 479 participants that were gathered during data collection. A larger number of white participants (*n* = 375) was gathered compared to black participants (*n* = 51) and other participants (*n = 53).* Therefore, a random selection was done among the pool of white participants to create an even ratio in the three groups in order to achieve valid results. 34.6% of participants were white (*n* = 55), 32.1% were black (*n* = 51) and 33.3% were that of another ethnicity, which in the case of this study were classified as 'other' (*n*= 53). Countries in which participants were from ranged widely including countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, South America and Australia. As there was a rather large number of countries, each was categorised into its specified continent.

The study involves four continuous variables which are social media engagement, social comparison, body image state and age, and two categorical variables being ethnicity and continent. The means and standard deviations for the continuous data and the frequencies for the categorical data are shown below in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for continuous variables

Variable	*N*	*M*[95%CI]	*SD*	Range
1. Body Image State	159	4.63 [4.43, 4.84]	1.31	1 - 8
2. Social Media Engagement	159	21.66 [20.26, 23.06]	8.96	0 – 35
3. Social Comparison	159	59.11 [56.40, 61.82]	17.30	15 – 97
4. Age	159	22.03 [21.59, 22.48]	2.84	18 - 29

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for categorical variables

Variable	Frequency	Valid %
Ethnicity		
White	55	34.6 %
Black	51	32.1 %
Other	53	33.3 %
Continent		
Europe	103	64.8 %
Africa	113	8.2 %
Asia	18	11.3 %
North America	19	11.9 %
South America	3	1.9 %
Australia	2	1.3 %
Unknown	1	.6 %

Inferential Statistics

Standard multiple regression analysis was performed to determine how well body image state could be explained by variables including social media engagement and social comparison.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. The correlations between the predictor variables (social media engagement and social comparison) and the criterion variable (body image state) included in the study were examined (see Table 3). The two predictor variables were significantly correlated with the criterion variable, and these significant effects ranged from r

= .16 (social media engagement) to r = .46 (social comparison). The correlations between the predictor variables were also assessed with r values ranging from .004 to .46. Tests for multicollinearity also indicated that all Tolerance and VIF values were in an acceptable range. These results indicate that there was no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity and that the data was suitable for examination through multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 3

Correlation of continuous variables

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**
1.Body Image State	-		
2.Social Media Engagement	-.16*	-	
3.Social Comparison	.46*	.004	-

Note: *p < .05

Since no a priori hypotheses had been made to determine the order of entry of the predictor variables, a direct method was used for the analysis. The two predictor variables explained 23.7% of variance in body image state levels ($F(2, 156) = 24.174$, $p < .001$). The two variables were found to uniquely predict body image levels to a statistically significantly level: social media engagement ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .022$) and social comparison ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$) (see Table 4).

Table 4

Coefficients for standard multiple regression table

Variable	R^2	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Model	**.24**					
Social Media Engagement		-0.02	0.01	-.16	-2.32	.022
Social Comparison		0.04	0.01	.46	6.56	< .00

A reliability analysis was conducted to check the internal consistency of the three scales used in this study. The Social Media Engagement Scale indicated a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$) within the current study's sample. The Social Comparison Scale also indicated high levels of internal consistency within the sample ($\alpha = .91$). The Body Image State Scale, however, showed a low level of internal consistency within the study's sample ($\alpha = .51$)

In addition, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences in body image state scores according to ethnicity. Participants were divided into three groups according to their race (White, Black and Other). There was a statistically significant difference in body image state scores for the three ethnic groups, $F(2, 156) = 9.32$, $p < .001$. The effect size indicated a medium difference in body image scores (eta squared = .11).

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for white participants ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.29$) were significantly lower ($p < .001$) than black participants ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.22$) and other participants ($p = .029$; $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.23$) (See table 2). There was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between black participants and other participants ($p = .203$).

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the impact of social media engagement and social comparison on body image amongst women of different ethnicities. Previous studies have found that the active use of social media did have an effect on body image concerns and a drive for thinness (Hogue & Mills, 2018; Kim & Chock, 2015). Specifically, most found that the majority of the time, interaction with appearance-based social media and participation in social grooming behaviours were the cause for these concerns (Cohen et al., 2017; Kim & Chock, 2015). While many studies found evidence of only photo-based content playing a role in negative body image states, some studies contradicted this and discovered that general social media use also played a part (Rodgers et al., 2020). Even so, one thing that was common throughout, was the presence of the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which theorises that people self-evaluate themselves and their self-worth by comparing themselves to others. While looking at the impacts of social media, an important note is that the mainstream media is extremely white-oriented (Makkar & Strube, 1995; Perkins, 1996) and very focused on euro-centric ideals. And thus, previous research has also looked at the impact social media can have on women of ethnicities other than white. A majority of these studies found that black women were not impacted negatively by these mainstream ideals (David et al., 2002; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2008; Schooler et al., 2004), but studies on Asian and Indian women found that the mainstream media does have negative impacts on them, similar to adverse effects seen in white participants (Evans & McConnell, 2003; Nagar and Virk, 2017). From this research, the current study formed two hypotheses.

The first hypothesis of this study was that social media engagement and social comparison would have an impact on the body image of young women. This hypothesis was supported by the findings. Using standard multiple regression analysis, the results found that

social media engagement and social comparison both significantly correlated and impacted body image state scores.

The second hypothesis of the study speculated that the impact of social media engagement and social comparison on body image would differ according to ethnicity. Findings could also support this hypothesis. Using a one-way between-groups ANOVA, results found a statistically significant difference in body image state scores for each group with a medium effect size. Because of this significance, a post hoc comparisons test was conducted, and it was found that the mean score for white participants was significantly lower than that of black participants and other ethnic participants. In line with the scoring of the Body Image State Scale (Cash et al., 2002), this means that white participants had the lowest scores and therefore the most negative body image of the three groups. The second most negative body image was within other ethnic participants and the least negative body image was within black participants. There was no significant difference in mean scores between black participants and other ethnic participants.

Findings have been mainly consistent with previous studies, with some partial differences. The current study's results have been consistent with past findings that suggest that social media use plays a role in impacting negative body image. The common theme of the social comparison theory in previous research has also been consistent, with social comparison being a significant factor in participant's negative body image. These findings are important acknowledgements, especially as social media continues to be easy access for social comparison to take place (Vogel, Rose, Roberts & Eckles, 2014). It also continues to grow among young adults (Perrin, 2015) and even becoming a marketing tactic and career path for many (Glucksman, 2017), which also means a greater pool of 'influencers' on the scene for people to further compare their lives and selves to.

The findings of this study concerning body image scores and ethnicity have been partially consistent with past research. While previous studies have found that mainstream media is irrelevant to black women and has no impact on them (David et al., 2002; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2008; Schooler et al., 2004), the current findings do not agree with this. The results of this study found that black women's body image is significantly impacted by social media engagement and social comparison. This contradicts a lot of research conducted on black women and body image, and this may be due to a lack of body image variables, as suggested by Christina Capodilupo (2015). Capodilupo conducted a study on black women and body image, but rather than solely measuring body image based on a 'thin ideal', other variables such as facial features, hair type and skin-tone were included. Upon this research, it was found that black participant's body esteem and appearance satisfaction were impacted negatively when images shown to participants included black women with euro-centric features, for example, lighter skin, straighter hair and more euro-centric facial features. This suggests that while standards for body appearance may differ for black women compared to white women, it's possible that past research only focused on body appearance, without thought for the possible impacts that other body image variables, or in this case the lack of, could have. Therefore, black women can still be affected by the changing or absence of representation of their natural black characteristics such as darker skin tones, hair type and textures, facial features, etc. This is a plausible explanation for the results of the present study.

The current findings differed from past research concerning social media impacting the body image of black women in general, but similarly, it found that they still had the least negative body image of all ethnicities. As discussed previously in this paper, when black women were asked about their overview of body image and weight, they had fewer negative views of others or themselves being overweight (Evans & McConnell 2003; Hebl &

Heatherton, 1998). Similarly, a study by Greenwood & Dal Cin (2012) asked black women to pick favourite character choices, which linked to body surveillance and wishful identification. Black women picked average/heavy, non-white women, while white women picked white and thin women. This suggests that the ideals of black women differ from those of white women, and in turn, the push of thin, euro-centric ideals on women through social media, have less meaning to black women. Another suggestion as to why black women did not experience as many harmful effects is the presence of institutional racism. Grabe and Hyde (2006) discussed that the presence of institutional racism may have resulted in risk when relying on their male counterparts for economic support. As a result of this, women were frequently raised to be stronger and more independent due to the risks this reliance would have caused. In turn, this development of independence could play a role in why black women are less likely to be negatively impacted by these unrealistic ideals and messages of 'how you should look'. This suggestion also expands an understanding of the susceptibility of white participants being the most negatively impacted body image group, as traditionally, white women were raised to be more submissive and dependent, and therefore are more likely to be persuaded that they must change to fit an ideal.

Following this, past research has suggested that other ethnic women's (Asian, Indian, Hispanic, etc.) body image is negatively impacted by social media. The current study supports this, as the 'other' groups body image was significantly impacted by social media engagement and social comparison. Although, a difference in the current study and previous research was identified. Many previous studies have suggested that ethnic groups other than black are greatly affected by the harmful side of social media, which echoes that of white participants. However, this study cannot support that argument, as it was found that other ethnic participants were impacted at a level more similar to the black participants, with no significant difference between the two groups mean scores. This was an interesting finding,

as not many studies before had discovered this. As this result has not often been concluded, it's hard to understand why this occurred in the present study. One such reason as to why this result could have occurred may be explained, and possibly understood, by a study done by Madeline Altabe (1996). Altabe analysed and compared body image results of Caucasian Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, with a similar age range of this study, with a mean age of 21 years old while the current study's mean age was 22 years old. The results of Altabe's study showed that Hispanic and White participants had more weight-related body image concerns than Black and Asian participants. While Asian participants did not differ from White participants on all levels of body image, such as 'general body image', they differed in some areas. This is an interesting finding, as most previous studies tend to determine that Asian and White participants are rather similar in body image scores. In the current study, it is possible that the results of the 'other' group could have been affected as a result of a mix of ethnicities being placed into one category. The larger ethnicity put into the 'other' group was Asian, with 32 out of 53 participants being Asian. If scores occurred in a similar way to Altabe's study, this could be an explanation as to why the other ethnic participants scored more similar to the black participants, rather than the white participants. If all ethnicities put into the 'other' group were individually compared, some may have scored more and some less negatively impacted by social media use and social comparison, and therefore some more and some less similar to white participant's scores. Due to a lack of participants of each ethnic group that was added to the 'other' group, there was no way to compare them individually in a valid way. The findings of the current study compared to previous studies make reason for future researchers to approach similar research using larger groups of multiple ethnicities and comparing each individually.

Practical Implications

There has been a lot of evidence within past research and within the current findings that social media engagement and social comparison impact people's body image state negatively. As social media grows, an approach is needed to help prevent these negative impacts, such as public health and legal interventions by those in leading roles and governments. Public health interventions, such as adverts, that bring awareness to the impact that social media can have on how people look and compare themselves to others, and how damaging this can be, are required.

A large problem among social media is not only how often people compare themselves to others, but how often they compare themselves to edited photos. A survey was conducted in 2014 among 1710 American adults found that 50% of those who took part edited their photos (Renfrew Center Foundation, 2014). A legal intervention that would be beneficial if implemented should be similar to that of a bill passed in France in 2017, where it became illegal to post commercial photos that are altered unless they have a warning on them (Bromberg, Hay, Fitzgerald & de Freitas, 2019). Furthermore, MP Dr Luke Evans in the UK parliament currently aims to pass a bill in which influencers online must post a warning highlighting their photos are edited. Governments in all social media engaging countries around the world need to take steps like this to bring awareness to people and emphasise that what they come across online is not always realistic.

As social comparison tends to be a prevalent online behaviour, campaigns to promote a diversity of bodies would be extremely beneficial. Upward social comparison, in which people compare themselves to those they believe are better than them, is usually the cause of these negative impacts (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). The ideals pushed on women through social media are unrealistic for most, and a boost of 'normal', non-edited photos that show natural human features could help decrease peoples negative body image caused by social

media. Natural features that are often edited from online content tend to be cellulite, which up to 85% of women over 20 years old have (Tokarsk, Tokarski, Wozniacka, Sysa-Jedreejowska & Bogaczewicz, 2018), stretch marks, which occur in 90% of women who have gone through puberty and pregnancy (Schuck, De Carvalho & Sousa, 2019), acne, which has a mean prevalence of 70-87% in teenagers, and a mean age of 24 years old for treatment (Ebede, Arch & Berson, 2009) and many more naturally occurring features. A normalisation of these features on social media could drastically decrease how negatively people think of themselves when comparing their bodies to others online.

Finally, an important step to promoting healthy social media use for those who are non-white women is the promotion of ethnic diversity in the media. The media is extremely white-oriented and gives little space for women of other ethnicities to relate to women who look like them. Campaigns to promote women with less euro-centric features are a crucial step to create a positive online space for all.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

There was a variety of limitations identified throughout the current study. Firstly, was the concept of conducting a self-report measured data collection. While it's found that self-report measures are adequate (Sandvik, Diener & Seidlitz, 2009), this method of data collection can come with many flaws, as it can be hard to rely on a participant to answer every question accurately and honestly. Some factors that could play into the interference of answers include boredom during participation, denial or repression of certain emotions or feelings, lack of concentration or cultural difference in expressing and labelling emotions (Sandvik et al., 2009). This could be a possible factor in another limitation of the study. During the analysis, a low Cronbach's alpha (.51) was found for the Body Image State Scale (Cash et al., 2002). A Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of a scale, which shows the degree to which items of the scale measure the same concept (Tavakol & Dennick,

2011). Cash et al. suggested that the Body Image State Scale has a Cronbach's Alpha of .77 for women, which is exceptionally higher than the current findings. This means that the current sample was not as reliable, and the scale may not have measured what it was supposed to exactly. The results of this study should be interpreted with caution. This may have happened due to participants not having concentrated fully and/or randomly pressing answers without reading them properly. This could have possibly occurred due to the study using a self-report measure. Future research could attempt to avoid this by offering an incentive to the participants as a reward for taking part, or future studies could conduct an experiment similar to this in a controlled, laboratory setting as many lack this experimental method.

Secondly, there was a major lack of non-white participants recruited. While a sample size of 289 was calculated for this study, 479 participants were gathered and only 159 were used. This is because of the 479 participants that took part, 375 of these were white, 51 were black and 53 were that of another ethnicity. Because the ratio of the 'white' group, compared to the other two groups, was so large, a randomized selection was done within the 'white' group to be able to have valid results, and therefore the calculated sample size was not reached. Further limitations due to the lack of excess to non-white participants included that very few participants were gathered in each ethnic group that was not black or white, and therefore it was needed for the participants of these ethnicities to be put into one group classified as 'other'. This was discussed previously to be a possible cause for results to differ largely from the majority of previous studies. This also caused a lack of generalisability of other ethnicity's results, as these results may be inaccurate in the case of some and not others, for example, Hispanic women vs Asian women. It is recommended for future studies to obtain participants from a wider range of places around the world, or to target an area that has

a greater mix of ethnicities among its population, which was not possible in the case of the current study.

A final limitation of this study was the use of particular social media platforms not being recorded. There is a possibility that the use of certain social media platforms could affect an individual's scores more so than others, for example, an appearance-based platform such as Instagram versus a general platform such as Twitter. But this information was not collected. Previous research has suggested that appearance-based content is the cause for body image concerns (Cohen, et al., 2017; Kim & Chock, 2015), but without this information in the current study, it is hard to pinpoint whether appearance-based content was the cause for the results or not. The current study didn't specify or reach out to users of only appearance-based platforms and therefore, there is a possibility that general social media use causes lower body image scores. It's suggested for future research to note the social media platforms used by participants to furthermore have the ability to compare and analyse this. A future scale that includes not only how often someone engages in social media, but what types of social media they use, and how it makes them feel could be a useful creation to understand how exactly particular platforms can affect people.

Along with limitations, this study had strengths too. One strength included the focused age range. This study recruited participants between the ages of 18-29 years old based on research carried out on social media users by Perrin (2015), which found that 18-29 year olds were those who used social media more often. 90% of people within this age range used these online platforms, compared to other ages such as 65 years and over, to which 35% are users. Another strength was that the current study looked at a more varied group of ethnicities. A lot of previous research tends to look solely at black versus white women, with a large lack of research on other ethnicities. This study aimed to find, analyse and compare these differences.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study found a significant impact of social media engagement and social comparison on body image state among young women of all ethnicities. There has been a large number of studies that have found social media engagement to cause body image concerns and this study adds to this evidence. Although the current study supports previous research that suggests different ethnicities are not impacted the same, this study's findings differ from a majority of studies on how these ethnicities are impacted. While the current findings conclude that black women are least negatively impacted by social media use, it cannot support previous research that suggests black women are not impacted at all. The current findings also determined that other ethnic women are the second most negatively impacted, but score more similar to black women than white women, which contradicts previous discoveries. It is important for more research to be conducted on how a range of ethnicities are impacted by mainstream media ideals found on social media, and this study has furthered this approach. Future research is recommended to study and compare larger samples of ethnicities individually.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Information Sheet

Before taking part in this study, I encourage you to read this Information sheet provided to assure a complete understanding as to why this study is being conducted and what will be involved.

My name is Rachel Gorry and I am a 3rd year student studying Psychology in National College of Ireland. I am conducting this study as my final year project, which will be supervised by Dr April Hargreaves.

You are being asked to take part in a research study on the impact of social media engagement and social comparison on body image in young women. I will also be researching whether this impact differs according to ethnicity.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the National College of Ireland Research Ethics Board. Results to this study will be submitted to National College of Ireland as my final year project.

In this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which will ask questions in relation to your social media engagement, your social comparison participation and your current body image state.

The study will take around 10 minutes to complete.

All data provided by participants in this study will be 100% anonymous and confidential. No personal or identifiable information is asked to be provided, therefore neither I, nor anyone else will be able to identify you.

It is your right to stop taking part in this study at any time without explanation. Although, due to the lack of traceability of the data you will provide, once you submit your survey, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study.

You have the right to have any questions you may ask answered, unless questions interfere with the results of the study. If you have any questions before or after the study, please do contact me at rachelgorryNCI@gmail.com.

While it is preferred that all questions are answered, you have the right to refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. Your well-being throughout this study is the main priority.

Risks to this study are minimal, although it is possible that the topic of body image may cause some psychological distress to some participants. Please proceed only if you wish to do so.

Appendix B

Consent Form

In agreeing to participate in this research I understand the following:

This research is being conducted by Rachel Gorry, an undergraduate student at the School of Business, National College of Ireland.

The method proposed for this research project has been approved in principle by the Departmental Ethics Committee, which means that the committee does not have concerns about the procedure itself as detailed by the student. It is, however, the above-named student's responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.

If I have any concerns about participation, I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage before submission, but I have a full understanding that after submission, withdrawal will not be possible due to my anonymity.

I have been informed of the general nature of the study and agree voluntarily to participate.

All data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analysed, and submitted in a report to the Psychology Department in the School of

Business. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report.

At the conclusion of my participation, any questions or concerns I have will be fully addressed.

Therefore, I give full consent for my data to be used as part of this psychology research study: Yes □

Appendix C

Demographic Questions

1. Are you between the ages of 18-29?

   Yes □

   No □

2. If so, what age are you?

   _____

3. Are you female?

   Yes □

4. What is your race?

   White □

   Black □

   Asian □

   Hispanic □

   Indian □

Other □

5. What county/country are you from?

   _____

Appendix D

Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ)

Participant Instructions

Please reflect on how you used social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) in the last week and respond to the following items.

Response Anchors

- Not one day - 0
- One day - 1
- Two days - 2
- Three days - 3
- Four days - 4
- Five days - 5
- Six days - 6
- Every day - 7

Items

1. How often did you use social media in the 15 minutes before you go to sleep?
2. How often did you use social media in the 15 minutes after you wake up?

3. How often did you use social media when eating breakfast?
4. How often did you use social media when eating lunch?
5. How often did you use social media when eating supper?

Appendix E

Social Comparison State Scale

Please circle a number at a point which best describes the way in which you see yourself in comparison to others.

For example:

Short 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Tall

If you put a mark at 3 this means you see yourself as shorter than others; if you put a mark at 5 (middle) about average; and a mark at 7 somewhat taller.

If you understand the above instructions, please proceed. Circle one number on each line according to how you see yourself in relationship to others.

In relationship to others I feel:

Inferior	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Superior
Incompetent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More competent
Unlikeable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More likeable
Left out	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Accepted
Different	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Same

Untalented	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More talented
Weaker	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Stronger
Unconfident	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More confident
Undesirable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More desirable
Unattractive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	More attractive
An outsider	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	An insider

Appendix F

Body Image State Scale

For each of the items below, check the box beside the one statement that best describes how you feel RIGHT NOW AT THIS VERY MOMENT. Read the items carefully to be sure the statement you choose accurately and honestly describes how you feel right now.

1. Right now I feel…

Extremely dissatisfied with my physical appearance

Mostly dissatisfied with my physical appearance

Moderately dissatisfied with my physical appearance

Slightly dissatisfied with my physical appearance

Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my physical appearance

Slightly satisfied with my physical appearance

Moderately satisfied with my physical appearance

Mostly satisfied with my physical appearance

Extremely satisfied with my physical appearance

2. Right now I feel…

Extremely satisfied with my body size and shape

Mostly satisfied with my body size and shape

Moderately satisfied with my body size and shape

Slightly satisfied with my body size and shape

Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my body size and shape

Slightly dissatisfied with my body size and shape

Moderately dissatisfied with my body size and shape

Mostly dissatisfied with my body size and shape

Extremely dissatisfied with my body size and shape

3. Right now I feel…

Extremely dissatisfied with my weight

Mostly dissatisfied with my weight

Moderately dissatisfied with my weight

Slightly dissatisfied with my weight

Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with my weight

Slightly satisfied with my weight

Moderately satisfied with my weight

Mostly satisfied with my weight

Extremely satisfied with my weight

4. Right now I feel…

Extremely physically attractive

Mostly physically attractive

Moderately physically attractive

Slightly physically attractive

Neither attractive nor unattractive

Slightly unattractive

Moderately unattractive

Mostly unattractive

Extremely unattractive

5. Right now I feel…

A great deal worse about my looks than I usually feel

Much worse about my looks than I usually feel

Somewhat worse about my looks than I usually feel

Just slightly worse about my looks than I usually feel

About the same about my looks as usual

Just slightly better about my looks than I usually feel

Somewhat better about my looks than I usually feel

Much better about my looks than I usually feel

A great deal better about my looks than I usually feel

6. Right now I feel…

A great deal better than the average person looks

Much better than the average person looks

Somewhat better than the average person looks

Just slightly better than the average person looks

About the same as the average person looks

Just slightly worse than the average person looks

Somewhat worse than the average person looks

Much worse than the average person looks

A great deal worse than the average person looks

Appendix G

Debrief Sheet

Thank you for participating in this study!

As assured previous to your participation in this questionnaire, your identity is and will be completely anonymous throughout the whole study. I would like to emphasise that if you have any additional queries or concerns to please contact me by email at: rachelgorryNCI@gmail.com and I will reply as soon as possible.

If you have a problem that you would like to inform the college about, please contact my supervisor at: april.hargreaves@ncirl.ie

If this study has caused distress or impacted you negatively, please contact any of the following support services:

Bodywhys:

Telephone: 01 2107906

Pieta House:

Telephone: 1800 247 247

Text 'Help': 51444

Website: www.Pieta.ie/contact/

Jigsaw:

Telephone: 01 472 7010

Email: info@jigsaw.ie

Niteline:

Telephone (9pm-2:30am): 1800 793 793

Samaritans:

Telephone: 116 123

Website: Samaritans.org

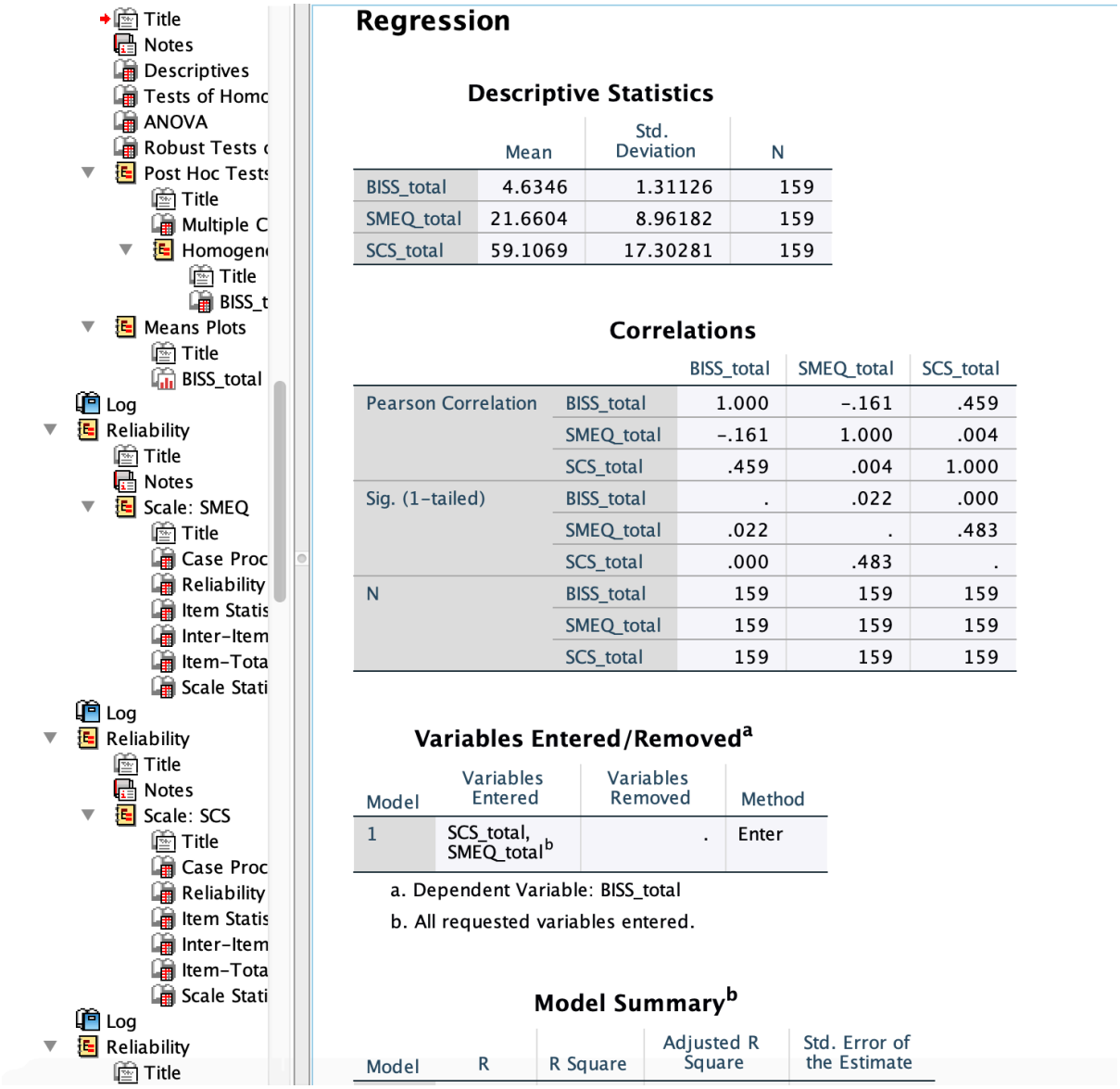
Spunout.ie:

Website: www.spunout.ie

Appendix H

Evidence of SPSS Data File and Output

	Name	Type	Width	Decimals	Label	Values	Missing
1	Age	Numeric	3	0	Age	None	None
2	Gender	Numeric	2	0	Gender	{1, Female}...	None
3	Ethnicity	Numeric	2	0	Ethnicity	{1, White}...	None
4	Country	Numeric	27	0	Country	{1, Europe}...	None
5	SMEQ1	Numeric	15	0	How often did y...	{0, Not one ...	None
6	SMEQ2	Numeric	15	0	How often did y...	{0, Not one ...	None
7	SMEQ3	Numeric	15	0	How often did y...	{0, Not one ...	None
8	SMEQ4	Numeric	15	0	How often did y...	{0, Not one ...	None
9	SMEQ5	Numeric	15	0	How often did y...	{0, Not one ...	None
10	SMEQ_total	Numeric	8	2		None	None
11	SCSQ1	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Inferior}...	None
12	SCSQ2	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Imcompe...	None
13	SCSQ3	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Unlikable...	None
14	SCSQ4	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Left out}...	None
15	SCSQ5	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Different...	None
16	SCSQ6	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Untalent...	None
17	SCSQ7	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Weaker}...	None
18	SCSQ8	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Unconfid...	None
19	SCSQ9	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Undesira...	None
20	SCSQ10	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Unattrac...	-99
21	SCSQ11	Numeric	3	0	In relationship t...	{1, Outsider...	None
22	SCS_total	Numeric	8	2		None	None
23	BISSQ1	Numeric	15	0	Right now I feel...	{1, Extremel...	None
24	BISSQ2	Numeric	15	0	Right now I feel...	{1, Extremel...	None
25	BISSQ3	Numeric	40	0	Right now I feel...	{1, Extremel...	None
26	BISSQ4	Numeric	35	0	Right now I feel...	{1, Extremel...	None
27	BISSQ5	Numeric	40	0	Right now I feel...	{1, A great d...	None
28	BISSQ6	Numeric	15	0	Right now I feel...	{1, A great d...	-99
29	BISS_total	Numeric	8	2		None	None



Regression

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
BISS_total	4.6346	1.31126	159
SMEQ_total	21.6604	8.96182	159
SCS_total	59.1069	17.30281	159

Correlations

		BISS_total	SMEQ_total	SCS_total
Pearson Correlation	BISS_total	1.000	-.161	.459
	SMEQ_total	-.161	1.000	.004
	SCS_total	.459	.004	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	BISS_total	.	.022	.000
	SMEQ_total	.022	.	.483
	SCS_total	.000	.483	.
N	BISS_total	159	159	159
	SMEQ_total	159	159	159
	SCS_total	159	159	159

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SCS_total, SMEQ_total[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: BISS_total

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate