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Social media use can contribute to poor body image in young adults with overweight/obesity

SAN DIEGO, CA - Using social media can be harmful for the body image of young adults with overweight/obesity, according to a study conducted by researchers in the Psychology Department at Loma Linda University.

Research suggests that social media use is associated with poor body image. Recent studies have demonstrated that comparing one's physical appearance to that of others seems to play a key role in how social media use influences body image for female adults, regardless of their weight.

However, the impact of social media use on the body image of young adults with overweight/obesity is not known. One aspect of body image is body dissatisfaction which is an established risk factor for dieting and eating disorder symptoms.

Dean Lim, MA, a doctoral student, and Amanda Suplee, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow, examined how social media use affects body dissatisfaction in young adults with overweight/obesity, under the supervision of Associate Professor, Sylvia Herbozo, PhD. They surveyed 385 young adult females and males ages 18 to 29 from Midwestern and Southwestern universities. Participants were overweight or obese based on their body mass index. Questionnaires about social media use (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), appearance comparisons in various settings (e.g., work, party, restaurant), and body dissatisfaction were completed by participants.

Results indicate that approximately 24% of young adults with overweight/obesity use Facebook and 23% use Instagram for one hour per day on average. Social media use is also directly linked to body dissatisfaction in all participants. Additionally, those who spend more time on social media sites feel more dissatisfied with their body if they make more appearance comparisons.

"For young adults with overweight/obesity, the amount of appearance comparisons that are made seems to determine the extent to which social media use affects body dissatisfaction," said Lim.

The next phase of this research will focus on specific activities during social media use, such as comparing one's physical appearance to that of others viewed as more attractive and receiving

comments about one's physical appearance. Additional studies are needed to better understand how social media use can negatively impact body dissatisfaction in young adults with overweight/obesity.

Results of this study will be presented March 31 from 6 to 7 p.m. PST during a poster session at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's 2017 Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions in San Diego, CA. The poster is titled: "Is social media harmful for the body image of young adults with overweight and obesity? Examining the role of appearance comparison." The authors report no financial or other conflicts of interests.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) is a 2,200-member organization of scientific researchers, clinicians and educators. They study interactions among behavior, biology and the environment, and translate findings into interventions that improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities (www.sbm.org).

Loma Linda University is a health sciences university and its Medical Center, one of the main health-care institutions in Southern California, is the flagship of a system of hundreds of Adventist health care institutions around the world.

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