

Research Prospectus for
Communication Research Methods

**Female Celebrities' Instagram Posts'
Effect on Female College Students**

Wendy French

Jasmine Fajardo

Jordanne Lepre

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Professor Eschenfelder

The University of Tampa

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I. Introduction

Social media has become such a prevalent part in today's society. One of the most popular forms of social media among the younger generations is Instagram. Many college students have Instagram accounts, and it can be safely assumed that almost everyone has at least heard of Instagram. Instagram is just one of many social media platforms where users can engage with other followers by posting pictures of whatever they want. Instagram has become an outlet to connect with friends and other users that share similar interests. Many celebrities also have Instagram accounts that have thousands of followers. The intention of our research is to study the relationship between female college students and the famous female celebrities on Instagram.

Among the thousands of pictures posted on Instagram daily, there is a high percentage of "selfies." A "selfie" can be defined as a picture of the user. Both men and women can be seen participating in this trend on Instagram, particularly on Sunday, which is also known as "Selfie Sunday." Our research focuses on the body images that female college students post on their Instagram accounts compared to the body images that female celebrities post on their Instagram accounts. We would like to analyze if female celebrities who have thousands of followers influence female college students with their Instagram selfies. We would note the similarities between the posts, such as the type of pose, the choice of clothing, and any other resemblances. Our goal is to determine what female college students' connecting motivations might be for posting similar or dissimilar images.

II. Literature Review: Social Media and Its Effects on Women

Social media has become so ingrained in our society. Although social media connects people in ways that weren't possible beforehand, many have observed that social media also has various negative effects, specifically with women. With the vast amount of pictures and "selfies" being dispersed on Instagram and Facebook among other sites, some believe that this is negatively affecting the way women perceive themselves and even leading to more harmful actions, such as eating disorders. Many researchers have concluded that social media has raised issues with body image insecurities among young women, especially when women see other women's photos on Instagram. Not only can Instagram cause drama among female friends, but many also suggest that Facebook leads to body-shaming. Social media's effects on young women's health extend beyond body-shaming and eating disorders to the point where it affects them emotionally as well. Social media also brings the strong desire for "likes," which contribute to these actions. Despite these effects, adults argue that social media is beneficial to find employment and expand their networks. There is no doubt that social media is here to stay, since people in general enjoy its benefits despite the harm that it may cause.

1. Body Image and Self-Perception

Throughout recent years, social media has raised the attention of different issues regarding body image insecurities. Social media websites like Facebook have been associated with the manifestation of body consciousness among adolescent girls and young women around the world. "Body image" can be defined as how people perceive

their bodies visually and how they believe other people view their bodies (“Body Image” n.p.). People’s body images have altered with the more frequent use of social media sites.

One study at Stanford University and the University of Massachusetts concluded that 70% of college women say they feel worse about their own looks after reading women’s magazines (“Body Image” n.p.). Looking at pictures on social media can be compared to reading women’s magazines, because the same celebrities that are in magazines also post pictures of themselves on their social media accounts, which have thousands, if not millions, of followers. Another study in 2014 also concluded that only 63% of women between the ages of 18 and 34, and 57% of women between the ages of 35 and 49 were satisfied with their bodies (Bates n.p.). The discontent among how women feel about their bodies is evident.

One researcher, Deborah Schooler, explains this dissatisfaction as “people see the same images over and over and start to believe it’s a version of reality. If those bodies are real and that’s possible, but you can’t attain it, how can you not feel bad about your own body?” (“Body Image” n.p.). Ulf Aagerup, a professor at Halmstad University, has concluded in his own studies that women are interested in “reward imagery that is attractive enough to provide them with something to which they can aspire, but not so unattractive that the ideal becomes unattainable” (1). The more pictures that people see on social media, the more likely it will alter their body image in a negative way, and the more frustrated people will become with themselves if they can’t achieve the images they’re being bombarded with in the media and on social media.

Social media only enhances this discontent among women. Kendyl Klein, a student from Claremont McKenna College, described in her thesis paper, “the internet

and social media provide a platform for women to seek out images of what they want to look like ... [it's] an outlet through which women can perform outward comparisons with their peers and celebrities" (13). These comparisons promote women to never be fully satisfied with their own body image, and these social media sites encourage them to find pictures to strive toward.

According to a psychological study done by Dr. Manago, three main features of objectified body consciousness are the internalization of culturally dominant ideals of attractiveness, body surveillance, and valuations of the self based appearance (Manago 1). In one of the first studies connecting objectified body consciousness to social media, Tiggemann and Miller found that in 2010, time spend on MySpace and Facebook, but not Google nor YouTube, was associated with endorsement of the thin ideal and appearance comparison among adolescent girls in Australia. A follow-up study with another adolescent Australian sample group found that frequency of general Internet use correlated with thin ideas and body surveillance, but girls using Facebook specifically scored significantly higher on these measures, and the number of Facebook friends was linked to body surveillance management on social media websites (Manago 2). The experiment concluded that for both women and men, Facebook involvement predicted objectified body consciousness, which in turn predicted greater body shame and decreased sexual assertiveness. However, it was in greater magnitude for women, but no gender difference was found in the association between body shame and sexual assertiveness (Manago 10).

While the Internet began sparking negative thoughts in the minds of people around the world, a new sensation began to conquer social media. A new trend called the

“selfie” started a commotion within this medium. People now take pictures of themselves, because some believe it makes them feel empowered with a greater self-esteem. Many disagree with this concept of a “selfie” making a person feel better about him or her self. Some believe it is the sort of self-promotion that results in anything but a young woman reinforcing the socially engrained notion that the most valuable thing she has to offer the world is her looks. That is a topic that can be thoroughly discussed and studied whether or not people take pictures of themselves, because they want to feel a certain way about their appearance, they are influenced by the appearance of others, or just because they want to.

The media is quick to treat teen girls as perennial victims rather than young women with agency. Some young women post pictures of themselves because they love how they look. But, according to Erin Ryan, a blogger on Jezebel, it is absurd to assert that teenagers are doing anything as public as selfie-posting in a fantastical vacuum devoid of social pressure where somehow they are not relying on others to feel good about themselves (Ryan n.p.). If people are happy with themselves, then why involve social media at all? There is no question, however, with all the photos on social media whether people are viewing them or posting them that this is affecting their body image.

2. The Influence of Instagram

One social media site that changes women’s self-perception is Instagram, which is a social media site where users only post photos. Instagram allows users to follow other users, and every user can post photos, which can vary from the infamous “selfie” (photos of the user) to food pictures to photographs of sunsets. Users can also follow celebrities

and businesses in addition to their friends. Since users can see the posts of people they follow, it allows women to compare themselves with other women when they see their posts. Hanna Krasnova from Humboldt University even notes that “a photo can very powerfully provoke immediate social comparison, and that can trigger feelings of inferiority. You don’t envy a news story” (Winter n.p.).

Photos are provoking strong emotions in women that can have detrimental effects. The scary part is that women don’t even look like the photos they post now with filters that can be added to photos along with other editing tools. As a result, studies have shown that “women everywhere are reaching out to plastic surgeons to find out how they can look exactly like their filtered Instagram selfies in real life” (Koman n.p.). The American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery reaffirmed that “image-based apps like Instagram are at least partially responsible for the uptick in plastic surgery, especially among teens” (Kohli n.p.).

Even if they’re not getting surgery, women’s desire to use filters to enhance their physical features leads to a race of sorts to post better looking pictures than the other women they follow. Krasnova explains “if you see beautiful photos of your friend on Instagram, one way to compensate is to self-present with even better photos, and then your friend sees your photos and posts even better photos, and so on” (Woollaston n.p.). This vicious cycle makes many claim that Instagram is the most depressing social network (Woollaston n.p.).

Despite these harmful effects, Instagram still has thousands of users, and a decent portion of these users includes the younger generation. Most middle-school girls agree that Instagram is their favorite form of social media, because Instagram is more to them

than just envying other girls' photos (Rock n.p.). They believe Instagram is form of self-expression of their identities and their interests (Rock n.p.). When asked, about half the girls said "they post to Instagram daily, while others said not every day – but almost" (Rock n.p.). Instagram has become part of their generation and is essential to express themselves.

Instagram users can also use "hashtags" to categorize their photos, which are words or phrases without any spaces with the pound symbol (#) before it. Users can search for certain hashtags and see all the photos that have been posted under that hashtag with the most recent at the top of the list. It serves as a way to discover new users that may share the same interests, or as Caroline Moss, an online writer for *Business Insider*, says it, "for teens, it's a numbers game" (n.p.). Gaining a follower contributes to these positive feelings, because it makes the user feel popular. Therefore, those users would use hashtags, hoping that other users will see their photos and follow them.

Instagram also allows users to like and comment on other users' pictures. These features can foster confidence in girls and assurance that their peers are accepting them, but the opposite can also occur. Girls know that "it feels good when they go and check their page and see lots of likes and comments – but it feels bad when friends overlook their efforts" (Rock n.p.). When a photo receives a lot of likes and comments, this also makes the user feel popular. Although Instagram can create positive feelings in users, it's mainly dependent on the actions of other users. This dependency can quickly become harmful if a post is overlooked. The rapid fluctuation of emotions is most likely unhealthy among adolescents.

3. Facebook vs. Instagram

Facebook and Instagram have many effects on young people today. According to the article, “Hey, Parents. This Is What Girls Really Do on Instagram” by Margaret Rock, excessive use of social media hinders “emotional intelligence” (n.p.). Emotional intelligence embodies the “traits such as identifying, understanding and managing emotions in a way to relieve stress, communicate effectively and empathize with others” (Rock n.p.). Emotional intelligence of girls is developed between the ages of eight and twelve, which is right around the time they begin their exposure to social media, including Instagram. Although these girls enjoy receiving positive feedback on their photos, Instagram enhances the visual aspects of communication and takes away actual communication.

In fact, most communication is done not through actual text but through emojis. Emoji is the Japanese word for picture character. “‘You can say so many things with them,’ Riley said, explaining an inside joke where she’ll insert a winking face. She’ll insert the clapping hands emoji to congratulate” (Rock n.p.). This contributes to hindering actual communication. Instagram is also a source of drama. “The drama with Instagram usually arises when posted pictures exclude someone or an image expresses a controversial opinion. Arguments from school can spill over to the site too” (Rock n.p.). Drama on social media sites can lead to cyberbullying. All of these aspects of social media have effects on the mental health of its users. “Teens on Facebook have narcissistic tendencies, become more prone to depression and anxiety, and suffer in learning compared to those who don’t regularly use social media” (Rock n.p.). Most teens place too much importance on receiving positive affirmations through social media posts.

“Some think relying on ‘likes’ and comments makes girls vulnerable to judgment and criticism,” (Rock n.p.). The desire for these likes and comments can be seen on Facebook as well as Instagram.

However, Facebook also has a hand in forming self-dissatisfaction among users. “Facebook allows users to create public or semi-public personal profiles, and to customize their pages with photos and information about themselves. Like magazine images which are edited and often enhanced before publication, Facebook users are also able to edit images before uploading them to Facebook and are able to closely monitor their self-presentation in order to present an idealized or hoped for possible version of the self” (Fardouly 39). When this presentation of the self is not appreciated by others, portrayed as likes and comments, body-consciousness and self-loathing can occur, also known in this case as “selfie-loathing.” According to an article by Jessica Winter, “Because of the many activities Facebook offers, the three things that correlate most strongly with a self-loathing screen hangover are basically the three things that Instagram is currently for: loitering around others’ photos, perfunctory like-ing, and ‘broadcasting’ to a relatively amorphous group” (n.p). In other words, on both Facebook and Instagram, people can look at other people’s photos and make comparisons with themselves, “like” photos and receive “likes” on their photos, and post their own photos where anyone can see them unless they have a private account.

Posts on Facebook can also lead to the development of body-shaming, and not just among teenage girls. According to the article, “Facebook Involvement, Objectified Body Consciousness, Body Shame, and Sexual Assertiveness in College Women and Men” by Adriana Manago, “On measures of objectified body consciousness, women reported

significantly higher levels of body surveillance and appearance self-worth, but women and men did not differ in enjoyment of sexualization” (n.p). The sexualization of photos on social media are raising huge issues about body image concerns among social media users.

4. Social Media’s Effect on Health

Women are especially susceptible to images seen on social media and, in turn, have many of the body image concerns that result from social media. According to Richard Perloff, “The interesting question for gender role researchers is how individuals who are particularly susceptible to mediated images of unhealthily thin women make sense of, assimilate, and internalize information received from social and mass media” (369). He questions how the youth is absorbing the information they are constantly being bombarded with in the media, including the “unhealthily thin women.” Perloff argues, “Once they are on social media, they will encounter a host of actual and perceived pressures that may aggravate body disturbances” (369). Many agree that by seeing these images in the media, it creates pressure, particularly with women, to achieve the look of these supposedly “ideal” images.

Michael Prieler and Jounghwa Choi take this a step further, critically examining the arguments of Perloff’s article and providing suggestions on how to extend his model. “We suggest that his model could be improved by accounting for cultural factors, such as ethnicity, nationality, or self-construal; by clarifying the aspects of social media use in conjunction with the types of social media use motivation, the types of action (e.g., active engagement vs. passive exposure), and traditional media use. His model could also be

improved by exploring other types of body ideals beyond the thin ideal, such as skin ideals or body/face shape ideals” (Prieler 3). There are so many factors that come into play when analyzing the effect social media has on the health of women. The idea of the ideal body type is passed around on social media and may be correlated with the development of eating disorders.

There have been several studies to find a relationship between media exposure, including social media, and eating disorders. “College women are exceptionally vulnerable to the impact that social media can have on their body image as they develop an outlook on their bodies and accept the developmental changes that occurred during puberty” (Klein 3). One study with female university students concluded that “maladaptive Facebook usage (which included seeking negative social evaluations and making general social comparisons) was associated with increased body dissatisfaction four weeks later, and body dissatisfaction was found to mediate the relationship between maladaptive Facebook usage and increases in overeating” (Fardouly 39). Whether under-eating or overeating, based on these studies, media plays a critical role in the health of young women.

These body image concerns have transcended across the globe. Hye-Ryeon Lee concluded, “As in the United States, a negative body image is common especially among young women in Korea” (1344). He claims that media images reinforce thinness as the ideal and this affects young women’s attitudes regarding their own body. “Messages from others as well as one’s social environment (e.g., the media) convey what is considered beautiful and societal expectations for one’s body. When the overwhelming emphasis on physical appearance in Korea is coupled with its culture that highly values conformity,

the processes and consequences of body image formation in Korea may be much different than in the United States” (1345). However, both women in the United States and Korea feel the pressures caused by social media.

Social media does not always have a negative effect on health though. According to Mitchell Vaterlaus’ article, “#Gettinghealthy: The perceived influence of social media on young adult health behaviors,” social media can be a motivator to exercise. Sometimes Instagram pages, devoted to fit lifestyles, can be a healthy reminder to go to the gym. Photos of fit individuals can motivate hard work at the gym to achieve the same. This can become harmful though if people become frustrated at trying to achieve these “ideal” images, and they may succumb to unhealthy ways to achieve them like eating disorders. Although social media can be a motivator, the opposite can also occur where social media acts as a barrier between the user and their fitness goals. “Young adults use social media to showcase exercise experiences. Findings from this study provide support for the social ecological model—indicating that several factors, including social media, can have an influence on health behaviors within the total diet approach” (152). For instance, an Instagram user may be intimidated or uplifted by another user’s post-gym selfie.

Humans are creatures made to communicate, but living in a visual world is not really doing much communicating. This is going to have detrimental effects. Unfortunately, many social media users are young people who are still growing and trying to figure themselves out. When they are being bombarded constantly with images, some edited so much that they are literally unattainable, they are going to feel pressured to resort to unhealthy acts and their self-esteems will suffer as well. Their enjoyment of social media, however, limits what can be done to prevent this.

5. The Benefits of Social Media

With the negative effects that seem to follow the use of social media, removing social media altogether is always considered. However, social media is more than just scrolling through pictures and envying others. If people weren't getting some type of enjoyment from using social media, they wouldn't be using it at all, which is explained with the uses and gratification theory (Oyesomi 1).

“Social media is mainly for entertainment purposes, but can have a role in employment” (Oyesomi 14). New social media sites, such as LinkedIn, are specifically geared toward the use of social media for professionals. “Women use social media to build networks for professional purposes” (Oyesomi 1). This can be extremely beneficial, not only to find employment, but also to make connections to promote businesses. Anyone, not just women, can take advantage of the networking tools social media offers.

While using social media for employment is mainly concentrated on older generations, such as college students and older, studies have shown the vast amount of young users on social media as well. More and more middle-school aged children to high-school teens are creating accounts on different sites to socialize with their peers. The age for active media consumers continues to get younger and younger (Rock n.p.). These younger users are the ones that “have ample time to engage in the use of the social media... Those who are employed hardly have time for the social media, and try to squeeze out time during their break periods” (Oyesomi 13). Since these older users keep social media use to a professional level with hardly any time to use it for pleasure, the

younger users are the ones that are most susceptible to any negative effects from social media.

Another consideration might be to restrict social media for the professional use. However, this could seriously affect people in the long run, because people who have experience with social media would be more efficient at promoting their businesses or finding employment, since they've used it before. "Women prefer to use social media they are familiar with" (Oyesomi 12). If social media were not being taught at such young ages when they actually have time to learn it, they may not have been able to utilize the full benefits from social media in the professional sphere when they're older.

In general, social media gives people the feeling of "being connected and linked with other sites, resources or people" (Oyesomi 2). Ronnie Scott, a blogger, explains that Instagram "encourages atypical forms of brotherhood – atypical because you're seeing the insides of bedrooms, as physical space and as metaphor. On journeys through the application, you learn people are funnier than you realized, or think dilapidated architecture is prettier than it really is" (n.p.). Social media allows users to learn more about people they know and even people they don't know, creating more connections with others. However, problems can occur when people post "pictures [that] exclude someone or an image [that] expresses a controversial opinion." (Rock n.p.). Researchers often wonder why adolescents don't remove themselves from social media if social media causes some of this drama. By studying this, they can determine if adolescents' use of social media correlates with their self-esteem. Perhaps if the drama escalated to an unmanageable level, those adolescents would remove themselves from social media, but

for the most part, the enjoyment they receive from using social media outweighs any negative drama they may encounter for now.

6. The Power of Likes

Social media has a great impact on society and the minds of the millennials who have been affected by technology the most. It is interesting how there are controlling fictitious factors like the power of a like. A “like” is a way to give positive feedback on different social media sites or to connect with things you care about on Facebook. You can like content that your friends post to give them feedback or like a page that you want to connect with on Facebook. Likes are having an impact because of what people are feeling by the amounts they are receiving from their friends. Larry Rosen, an online author for *Psychology Today*, exemplified what a teenager might say about his feelings when he received a certain amount of likes, “Did you see that I got 129 likes? That’s the most ever! Wow! What a birthday! It feels great!” (n.p.). What is it about having so many people click “like” that has people feeling these emotions? “Like” is an example of what some may call “virtual empathy” (Rosen n.p.). Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share another’s emotional state or context (Rosen n.p.).

In a recent study on the impact of technology and media use on psychological disorders, researchers asked about the use of the “like” button on Facebook (Rosen n.p.). An amazing 52% of the teenage Facebook users of the iGeneration (born in the 90’s) clicked “like” daily or even several times a day (Rosen n.p.). The Next Generation young adults were a close second with 45% followed closely by 32% of Gen Xers and 24% of baby boomers (Rosen n.p.). It appears that Facebook users of all ages enjoy using the

“like” button although it is more popular among younger users. People also say that it is a good way to communicate directly with other individuals by commenting on friends’ posts and so on, it can increase your social capital. In other words, more likes make you feel and appear more popular to others.

The “like” goes even further than the social media network of Facebook. Instagram, another media outlet that is well known in the millennial age, is also a part of the “liking” trend (Rosen n.p.). People post different types of images onto their profile for friends to see and are allowed to comment or “like” it. People are thrilled if they receive large amounts of likes on an image they post. In an effort to get more likes, people also take advantage of hashtags, so other people that are not following them can find their posts.

However, Instagram might be considered different. It’s well established that eyeing social media all day long can be detrimental to your wellbeing (Kohli n.p.). Instagram amplifies the problem of whittling down the elements of social media that are most likely to cultivate feelings of loneliness and self-loathing: photos and likes (Kohli n.p.). On Instagram, “you get more explicit and implicit cues of people being happy, rich, and successful from a photo than from a status update,” Humboldt University Berlin’s Hanna Krasnova explained (Kohli n.p.). Selfie-postings on Instagram are essentially pleas for approval; getting fewer “likes” than you would expect on a post can feel like social rejection. For example, most of what many teen and tween girls post on Instagram are deliberate plays on their social status: tag a friend who isn’t in a photo to share the experience to build up popularity, or intentionally post a photo of a gathering without another girl to reduce hers (Simmons n.p.). This has been occurring for years now. The

cliquish Instagram phenomenon of naming close friends in one's description field used to happen on MySpace where there was a designated area on the website for your "top eight" friends. Before that, girls just chose who to socialize with or ignore in real life (Kholi n.p.). Furthermore, according to the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, in 2013, 58% of plastic surgeons surveyed saw an increase in requests for facial plastic surgery or injectables in people younger than 30 (Kohli n.p.). Apps like Instagram "force patients to hold a microscope up to their own image and often look at it with a more self-critical eye than ever before," the organization said in a press release.

Margaret Rock, an online writer for *2machines*, described in one article how important Instagram was to teenage girls' social lives (n.p.). They have a sleepover, and they document the fun while it's happening (Rock n.p.). And, when they feel bored, they can browse their friends' pages and see what they're doing (Rock n.p.). The drama with Instagram usually arises when posted pictures exclude someone or if drama from school leads to seemingly benign, but loaded, comments (Rock n.p.). Larry Rosen, author of "iDisorder," which explores our obsession with technology and the drawbacks it hold on us, said teens on Facebook can have narcissistic tendencies, become more prone to depression and anxiety, and suffer in learning compared to those who don't regularly use social media (Rosen n.p.). The girls Rock spoke with disagreed; they said they didn't use Instagram to flirt, since boys their age rarely use the site. One girl said, "I don't care if anyone doesn't like my picture, I put them there because I do" (Rock n.p.). The girls had a strong consensus that it's fun to have a popular picture, and they feel good when they see a lot of likes and comments (Rock n.p.). The positive feelings that a lot of "likes"

elicit is undeniable among youth although some question whether it's healthy that others' actions have such a strong influence on their emotional well-being.

7. The Lowdown on Selfies

If anyone is at all familiar with social media, he or she is most likely familiar with the term "selfie." A selfie is a picture that a person takes of him or her self. Many of these pictures are then uploaded to social media. Researchers have recently been studying these selfies, particularly focusing on why they are so popular on social media, why people post them, and the effects that result from posting a selfie.

One study on selfies done in 2014 concluded, "selfies are extremely popular by females and twenty somethings" (Yazdani n.p.). This is helpful to researchers, because when studying this trend, they can focus on a specific group of people, the ones who post selfies the most. A study didn't need to be done to guess the gender of the people who post the most selfies though. When polled to guess the gender of a selfie, over 95% of the people polled guessed female (Yazdani n.p.).

While women are dominant in this selfie trend, men also join in as well. Research on selfies has led to an interesting finding. "As the age of a selfie increases, the odds of the selfie being male increase" (Yazdani n.p.). This suggests that men are more likely to post selfies when they're older. This has a lot of potential for future research, the most obvious being why men are more likely to post selfies when they're older. It would be beneficial, however, to mention other information about the selfie, such as if it's taken with friends or what the person taking the selfie is doing in the picture, since many selfies are taken in interesting locations.

There's a lot of speculation about why the selfie is dominated by the younger female generation. Some of it may stem from the positive comments they could get on their selfie, making them feel good about themselves (Rock n.p.). However, whether even this is healthy for women is questionable. One Internet author explains that "young women take selfies because they don't derive their sense of worth from themselves, they rely on others to bestow their self-worth on them – just as they've been taught" (Ryan n.p.). Many have debated whether it's healthy to allow a post on social media to have so much control over a youth's emotions. The author continues to explain that women are "brought up to think that what really matters is if other people think you're pretty" (Ryan n.p.). When looking at selfies from this perspective, it can seem very worrisome.

Another theory is that the media has created this notion in women that their biggest accomplishment is their beauty. With the media bombarding images of thin women in lingerie like Victoria Secret models, some say that women post selfies, because "they're told that they're at their best when they're at their most decorative" (Ryan n.p.). This suggests that society has taught women "their most important quality is their physical attractiveness," and "selfies are a product of our age of celebrity-obsessed narcissism and could leave women with low self-esteem" (Ryan n.p.). The fact that models and celebrities are actually getting paid for their photos supports this theory (Williams n.p.).

One author explained in 2014 that if researchers are going to analyze selfies, they first need to determine whether posting these selfies are actually people looking for acceptance from others or if they're looking for a way to empower themselves (Nguyen n.p.). In other words, people may be posting selfies, because the comments and likes they

receive on them makes them feel good about themselves, or they could be posting selfies, because they're looking for acceptance from others. The author notes that it is important that this is studied "to understand the motivation behind the usage [of social media] and the relationship to [youth's] self-esteem" (Nguyen n.p.).

The theories behind the selfie are broad, and there is probably no definite answer, because everyone may have different motives. Perhaps a trend can be discovered though. For instance, researchers might find out that many middle school females post selfies, because they're looking for acceptance from their peers. The connection between the motives for posting selfies and their health may be more significant to study. However, even if conclusions are reached, a solution would be difficult to achieve aside from removing social media altogether.

The different aspects of social media, such as getting likes and posting selfies, have shaped society, especially young women. There are different expectations now that social media has allowed people to compare themselves to others. Instagram and Facebook are only two social media sites that already have a tremendous impact on the mental and physical health of young women. Despite social media's negative effects, society is basically at a standstill with how to handle them, because the benefits of social media usually overpower any negative effects. If this weren't the case, people wouldn't be using social media. Because of this, it's not a matter of removing the negative effects, although certain actions can be taken to lessen them, it's a matter of addressing the effects whether this be in the form of further studies or educating society more about these effects.

With the massive amounts of “selfies,” our intention is to study why people post them, specifically female college students. As mentioned above, selfies are most prevalent with young women. We want to see if the female celebrities these women follow on Instagram have an influence on their own body image posts and what their connecting motivations may be for posting similar images or for posting dissimilar images. For instance, if a woman follows a Victoria Secret model who frequently posts pictures of herself in lingerie, is that woman going to then post similar pictures of herself, perhaps in a bikini, and the reason why she would post similar pictures of herself or dissimilar pictures. If she posted similar pictures, one motivation could be that the Victoria Secret model’s photo got a lot of likes, or if she posted dissimilar pictures, she might think that it looks desperate to post those types of pictures. Our intention is to analyze any trends we might uncover, and in general, to just get a better understanding of young women, what they post, and why. This has led us to our research question: are female college students who post body images of themselves on their Instagram pages influenced by female celebrities Instagram posts? We then go a bit deeper and ask our second research question: what connecting motivations do these female college students have for posting these images on their Instagram pages? Whether female college students are posting similar or dissimilar images than the images the female celebrities post, we want to examine what their reasons might be for posting the images that they do.

III. Problem Statement

Our research will analyze the similarities between female college students' Instagram posts and female celebrities' Instagram posts, specifically with the body images that they post. Our research intends to determine if female celebrities' body image posts influence the body images that female college students post. In addition, we would like to examine what female college students' motivations might be for posting similar or dissimilar images from the female celebrities. Therefore, our independent variable would be the female celebrities' Instagram posts, and the dependent variable would be the female college students' Instagram posts.

Research Question 1: Are female college students who post body images of themselves on their Instagram pages influenced by female celebrities' Instagram posts?

We can determine if female college students are influenced by the female celebrities if they have similar Instagram posts.

Research Question 2: What connecting motivations do these female college students have for posting these images on their Instagram pages?

We would like to go deeper and find out why the images female college students post are similar or dissimilar. For instance, they might be similar, because the students want to receive more likes on their posts, or they might be dissimilar, because the students dislike the celebrities who post those types of images.

IV. Methodology

A. Method

We chose to use a survey, because we're interested in why young women post what they post on Instagram and if influential women, such as female celebrities with thousands of followers, have any effect on what these young women post. The best way to do this is to ask them questions about their Instagram habits and just ask them in general why they use Instagram. We cannot directly ask them if female celebrities have an influence on what they post, because it could lead to women saying that they don't influence them, just because they don't want female celebrities to be an influence on them or they feel embarrassed that they influence them. Further studies could include a content analysis of female celebrities' Instagram posts compared to UT female undergraduates' Instagram accounts. Our survey focuses on finding out why young women may use Instagram, and from there, we can become more familiar with the topic, which could lead to more specific research.

B. Instruments

The survey begins by asking general questions about the participant's general Instagram usage, such as how often they check Instagram and how many pictures they post. Then, it leads into the participant's motivations for using Instagram and what types of posts she likes to see and what she likes to post. Finally, it concludes with what her opinion on Instagram is. This will give us a clear picture of how frequently the participant uses Instagram and why the participant uses Instagram, which will give more insight if the participant is influenced by female celebrities' Instagram accounts. For instance, if a participant only uses her Instagram for her landscape photography, then she would not

portray a clear indication if female celebrities are influencing her posts on Instagram. The full survey can be viewed in Appendix I on page 35.

C. Participants and Procedures (Sampling)

The chosen sample group is female undergraduates at the University of Tampa. This allows for a diverse group of females of different races and backgrounds, but this group is still accessible to us. We chose undergraduates, because undergraduates provide a decent age range, usually from ages 17-22. The age range is small enough that the results wouldn't vary extremely due to age, but not too narrow that there wouldn't be a decent sample group size.

The ideal sample size is 94, so we rounded that up to an even 100. To get this number, we first found that there were 7,752 undergraduates at the University of Tampa. Then, we found the male-to-female ratio, which is 45% to 55%. 55% of undergraduates would be 4,263 female undergraduates. To calculate sample size, we used a sample size calculator with a confidence level of 95% and an interval of 10, so the necessary sample size would be 94 females and rounded that would be 100.

The sample method we chose was random sampling, using the random number table, because it would be as random as possible. First, we would list all the dorms and number each room. We would then randomly select a number from the random number table and go down the columns until we had at least 100 rooms selected. We would use the first digits in each box from the random number table, so we had at least 100 different numbers. The number of digits we use would depend on how many dorm room numbers there were. For instance, if there were 4,000 dorm rooms then that is a four-digit number,

so we would use the first four digits. In this example, we would skip digits that are greater than 4,000. We can then match up each number with the corresponding rooms.

D. Protection of Human Subjects

For our survey, we do not require any personal information aside from the participant's interaction with Instagram. The only information we require is that they are female and a University of Tampa undergraduate student. Therefore, it is completely anonymous. The survey is optional as well, so participants can choose to opt out at any time before or during the survey. Finally, each question in the survey is optional, so participants can refrain from providing a response to any question they feel uncomfortable answering. The completed IRB proposal can be found in Appendix II on page 42.

E. Details of Method

After getting approval from Residence Life, we would proceed to visit each room and administer the survey in person. This will allow us to explain our research and give them the option to opt out. It also allows us to ensure that we are specifically surveying our sample group, and we do not accidentally have a male mixed in with a female name or a graduate student. By surveying in person, it enhances the validity of our research.

There are many technicalities with this chosen method. One is if the room is a male dorm room, which we can determine by the door tags. In this case, we would skip over that room and continue down the columns from the random number table to the next number listed. This solution would also apply if the occupants of the room do not want to

participate in the survey. This method is also not completely random, because it only takes into consideration the students who live on-campus. In addition, we would only be surveying the females in the room who are present when we come by to administer the survey. Therefore, we might need more or less numbers from the random number table, depending on if they're in their room at the time and how many are in their room at the time. Furthermore, we would also need to include a verbal pre-question to the survey to ensure that they are in fact undergraduates, since graduates may also live on campus.

Once we have collected our data, we can analyze the multiple-choice questions with percentages and pie charts. With the two open-ended questions, we will have to code our responses, based on the responses we get. For instance, some categories to question #10 might be to share experiences with friends or to get likes; and some categories to question #12 might be they love it, they think it's helpful, it keeps them connected with friends, or any negative feedback. We would group similar responses into categories, depending on the responses we receive, and from there we can then analyze the data like the multiple-choice questions.

V. Anticipated Problems/Benefits

Since this study is focusing on the psychological aspects of the female psyche, one problem might be that some of our responses may not be 100% truthful or accurate. We live in an era where every person is trying to seem "cooler" than the next, so some of the responses might fail to address the real reasons behind why they post certain pictures. We try to address this problem by asking participants to be as truthful as possible and assuring them that their responses will be confidential and anonymous. Also, because this

study has so much to do with self-esteem, we understand that it would take an incredible amount of time to investigate the female participant's previous psychological state before the study. This could create some anomalies with our responses. Since we are surveying 100 UT females, any responses that extremely favor one direction or the other will most likely stand out.

Another problem we may come across would be the vast size of female celebrity Instagram accounts. There are millions of Instagram accounts and each one of the participants is likely to follow different ones. This may be a problem when trying to analyze the effects of specific accounts/posts on our participants. We attempt to minimize this from jeopardizing our research by specifically listing popular female celebrity Instagram accounts and focusing on those rather than trying to look at a plethora of them. One final problem we can anticipate is the fact that UT students may be already more inclined to follow certain accounts in search of fitness motivation, since the University of Tampa is generally sunny all year round and the university pool is common hangout spot. So with that said, climatic factors would need to be considered as well. While this can't be minimized in our research, this survey can be administered at other universities, and the results can be compared.

Studying the way a millennial thinks is ideal for understanding why they take the actions that they do. For this study, it serves the purpose of understanding specifically women today and the women of the future as well as their thought process. With this experiment you could benefit from understanding who or what influences women to do certain things or post certain pictures – not only who they are being influenced by, but if they are being affected by this influence and if this is a positive or negative influence.

This could be beneficial because, depending on its effect, you could learn how to either help better understand young women's thought process, manipulate whatever they believe should be the outcome of this effect, and avoid any harmful actions. There are numerous studies that show women are becoming more self-conscious because of what women see on social media, and this has led to depression and different types of eating disorders. Our study can be a step to help comprehend what these women are feeling and thinking that lead them to take such negative actions.

VI. Results

N/A

VII. Discussion

This study will hopefully contribute to not only Instagram users, but also Instagram itself. The company could use the research in an effective way to help clear out any harmful posts. Through this study, Instagram will be able to see how popular accounts affect young women. With that, they can then revamp their business and change how young women use Instagram. They could even start a new campaign to help point out what the original point of Instagram was and what it should be used for. Instagram could be more about posting beautiful photos of actual places or events than about posting body images and selfies. Instagram could get celebrities in on the campaign and the same celebrities whose images were causing such distress in young users could promote positive Instagram posts. This in turn will allow for Instagram to become more popular and discourage any bad reviews.

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Appendix 1: Survey

Please take 10 minutes to complete this survey to help us understand your experience with Instagram. Please answer as honestly as possible. Your participation in this survey will remain anonymous. You will not be asked to give your name or any other identifying information. Participating in this survey is optional, and participants may opt out at any time. Refusal to participate will not impact you in any way. By participating in this survey, you acknowledge that you are a female currently enrolled in the University of Tampa undergraduate program. This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects of the University of Tampa. If you have any questions, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at (813) 253-3333.

1) Do you have an Instagram account?

Yes, multiple.

Yes, one.

Yes, but I'm inactive now.

I used to.

No, but I've considered getting one.

No, and I don't want one.

2) Do you like Instagram?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No			Somewhat			Yes

(If you do not have an Instagram account, skip to question #12.)

3) How many pictures do you have on your Instagram account?

- 1 – 5
- 6 – 10
- 11 – 20
- 31 – 50
- 51 – 100
- 101 – 200
- 201 – 300
- 301 – 400
- 401 – 500
- 501+

4) How often do you check Instagram?

- Sporadically
- Once a day
- 2 – 5 times
- 6 – 10 times

- 11 – 20 times
- More than 20 times

5) Why do you use Instagram? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Networking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative Inspiration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food | <input type="checkbox"/> Fitness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel | <input type="checkbox"/> Animals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shopping | <input type="checkbox"/> Humor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quotes | <input type="checkbox"/> Scenery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tutorials/DIYs | <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fashion | <input type="checkbox"/> Make-up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weddings | <input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (_____) | |

6) How often do you usually upload pictures?

- Several times a day or more
- Once a day
- Every other day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month

- A few times a year
- I've never uploaded anything
- I'm irregular about uploading pictures

7) What kinds of pictures do you post on your Instagram? (Check all that apply.)

- Selfies
- Your pets
- Your friends
- Nature
- Food
- Alcoholic drinks
- Fashion/Outfit of the day
- Events
- Hobbies
- Quotes/sayings
- Other (_____)

8) Do you follow any of these Instagram accounts? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kim Kardashian | <input type="checkbox"/> Kendall Jenner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kylie Jenner | <input type="checkbox"/> Kourtney Kardashian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Khloe Kardashian | <input type="checkbox"/> Jen Selter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paris Hilton | <input type="checkbox"/> Michelle Lewin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alessandra Ambrosio | <input type="checkbox"/> Adriana Lima |

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ Selena Gomez | ___ Ariana Grande |
| ___ Miley Cyrus | ___ Beyoncé |
| ___ Nicki Minaj | ___ Cassie Ventura |
| ___ Olivia Culpo | ___ Amber Rose |
| ___ Madison Beer | ___ None of the above |

9) How often do you post the following photos on Instagram?

Scale: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Never Rarely Seldom Sometimes Often Usually Always

Animals:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Artwork:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Events:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Food:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fashion:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Friends:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fitness:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Quotes:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Scenery:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Selfies:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10) Why do you post these pictures?

11) How often do you post these kinds of selfies?

Scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Never	Rarely	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always

Head Only:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Shoulder Up:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chest Up:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Waist Up:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Thighs Up:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Knees Up:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Full Body:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

12) What do you think about Instagram?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, you can contact the researchers at the University of Tampa at (813) 123-4567 or the faculty adviser at

beschenfelder@ut.edu.

Appendix 2: IRB Proposal

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

Institutional Review Board Application for Review of an Investigation

Involving Human Subjects (Expedited and Full Risk)

Please check the exemption criteria in the Faculty Handbook (Chapter 6, section VII) to ensure your project does not fall under the Exempt Risk category. Generally speaking such studies involve adult subjects, where the data are collected anonymously and involve no risk. If it meets any of the criteria, then please fill out the Exempt Risk IRB form.

1. Principal Investigator: Wendy French, Jasmine Fajardo, Jordanne Lepre

Co-Investigator(s): _____

Overseeing Faculty Member (if investigators are students): Beth Eschenfelder

Department: Communications

Phone: (727) 403-4110

2. Title of Project: Female Celebrities' Instagram Influence on Female College Students

3. Funding Agency (If any): _____

4. Project Period -- Begins: September 2015

Ends: November 2015

5. Human subjects to be involved:

Number: 100

Age(s): 17-22

Gender: Female

6. Source(s) of subjects, contact processes, selection and exclusion criteria (briefly summarized):

We will list the University of Tampa dorms and assign each room a number. We will then randomly select rooms based on the random number table. The survey will be administered in person. Male occupants can be determined by the door tags and that room will be replaced with the next number on the random number table.

7. Expenses or remuneration paid to or in behalf of subjects, if any: _____

8. Research design, hypotheses to be investigated (briefly summarized):

We will administer a survey to determine if female celebrities' Instagram posts influence what female college students post and what the connecting motivations may be for posting similar or dissimilar images.

9. Procedures involving human subjects, including frequency, duration, and location where procedures are undertaken:

One survey of 12 questions will be administered to 100 UT female undergraduate students. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. The survey is administered in person in the participants' dorm room.

10. Risks involved (physical, psychological, social), if any, and precautions taken to minimize risks:

To avoid any psychological, social, or emotional risk from answering any of the questions, the participants may skip any question they choose or choose to opt out completely. The survey does not require identification information aside from gender and being a University of Tampa undergraduate.

11. Anticipated benefits to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result:

The survey will help understand young women's thought process better, including what influences their social media posts. By determining what influences them, preventative measures can be taken to avoid negative consequences and positive influences can be encouraged. This research will help comprehend what young women think and feel before succumbing to harmful actions.

12. Methods for safeguarding information and for protecting subjects' rights and welfare:

Only the researchers and faculty adviser will have access to the surveys. The surveys will not have any identifying information. The subjects have the right to refuse to participate in any question or the entire survey at any point.

13. The consent process:

By completing the survey, the participants acknowledge that they are voluntarily participating in the survey.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

Application for IRB Review

Once completed, submit the form to **irb@ut.edu**. Be as precise and as detailed as you can be in addressing the above items. Also, include any survey or other instrument you plan to use in your submission.

INFORMED CONSENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

Project Title: Female Celebrities' Instagram Influence on Female College Students

Principal Investigator: Wendy French, Jasmine Fajardo, Jordanne Lepre

Purpose of Project: The purpose of the project is to determine whether female celebrities' Instagram posts have an influence on female college students and to examine the connecting motivations they may have for posting similar or dissimilar images.

Procedures: A group of 100 UT female undergraduates will be chosen randomly. The survey will be administered in person.

Risks/Benefits: The main risk is that the participants will not be completely honest in their responses. We address this by assuring participants their responses will be kept anonymous. Another risk is the psychological history of the participants may vary. This is addressed, because the survey is optional and any question can be skipped if it causes the participant discomfort. A third risk is that UT females may be more inclined to follow certain fitness motivation accounts, since the weather allows them to wear less clothing year-round. This can be addressed if this survey is administered at other colleges if this research is successful at the University of Tampa. The main benefit of this research is understanding what influences young women. This could help remove negative influences and encourage positive ones.

Confidentiality: The survey responses will remain confidential between the principal investigators and the faculty adviser.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Participating in this project is voluntary, and refusal to participate or withdrawing from participation at any time during the project will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. The principal investigator may terminate participation of a subject or the project entirely without regard to the subject's consent. In the event of questions or difficulties of any kind during or following participation, the subject may contact the Principal Investigator as indicated above.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and my questions and concerns, if any, have been responded to satisfactorily by project staff. I believe I understand the purpose, benefits, and risks, if any, of the study, and give my informed and free consent to be a participant.

SIGNATURE

DATE

THIS RESEARCH PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA (Phone: 813-253-3333).