

2 likes, 20 likes, 200 likes, how many likes will it take to destroy your self-esteem? with social media apps such as the one this literature review will be based upon which is Instagram becoming more popular, there are now many studies that exploring the effect that it has on young girl's mental health, Instagram is an app which is mainly photo-based with the only writing being the one on the caption of photo's, commenting or following accounts and sometimes private messages. This literature review is going to explore the types of research that is already out there surrounding the effect that Instagram has on young girls mental health and the effect that influencers posting their polished and edited selfies or images of their flawless life has on these young girls mental health and well being, in most recent years these are the ones seen to be blamed for the increase of mental health associated to Instagram from the influencers using editing apps, filters and photo enhancement of their images (Kleemans et al, 2016). As stated at the beginning Instagram is now a very popular app having over 30.57 million users in 2021 with the majority of users aged 18-24 years old (Tankovska, 2021).

From this literature review, the hopes are to inform people of the danger and severity that is increasing from influencers posting the perfect images on Instagram and to explore why do these influencers have such a big effect on these young girls mental health and well being, the ideal outcome would be to have greater knowledge surrounding this topic area and to have a solution for these young girls not to feel the way they do from seeing 'perfect images' from the influencers they follow.

When Instagram was first created the idea was for people to share images of their photography skills such as images of their food, sunsets, beaches and parts of their life, however, that quickly changed when influencers became the hub of Instagram and with that came the polished, edited and filtered images that most young girls now compare themselves too. For these young girl's now

viewing these images posted by influencers or celebrities it tends to create this 'fake' unachievable life that these young girls are in awe of, enabling them to feel more vulnerable to comparing and judging their lives and appearances to these polished, edited, perfect images, which can lead to feelings of distress as it is impossible for them or anyone else to achieve (Lub, Trub & Rosenthal, 2015). With regards to the effects Instagram has on young girl's, the key theories that are consistent are that young girls compare themselves to influencers on Instagram, this then harms their mental health and body image, how Instagram causes more harm than good with causing anxiety and depression in young girls and low life satisfaction these girls are having.

Since Instagram was created in 2010 it is still a fairly new social media app, which means there is not as much research out there, however, the main research which has been found has been by Trub and Rosenthal writing 'Instagram #Instasad?: Exploring Associations Among Instagram Use, Depressive Symptoms, Negative Social Comparison, and Strangers Followed', Lamp et al with creating Picture Perfect: The Relationship between Selfie Behaviors, Self-Objectification, and Depressive Symptoms' and Sherlock and Wagstaff with 'Exploring the Relationship Between Frequency of Instagram Use, Exposure to Idealized Images, and Psychological Well-Being in Women', these 3 main researchers all look into how following certain types of accounts can affect young girls mental health including self-esteem, life satisfaction and compassion, it also looks at how many strangers followed and if this affects these young girls and lastly looking into how these main theories affect how these young girls take their selfies and upload them, this has been seen to affect these young girls causing issues such as low self-esteem, low confidence, comparing themselves to others and low body image.

With researching this topic area it is so important that it is done right and there is a range of information out there surrounding this area as so many young girls are becoming affected by this

app, so much so that even the influencers that are causing these young girls to compare themselves to these accounts have noticed the damages it has. This is where the trend of Instagram vs reality has come in, this is where women post two images of themselves, one with the 'perfect; an Instagram image which is edited, got filters on and is flawless with reality image where the women have no filters on, no edits and with a natural pose. (Tiggemann and Anderberg, 2019). Having more research out there surrounding this topic and making people more aware of the issues that this app causes will be so beneficial for these young girls and for people to know how to help and support people who may be experiencing difficulties from the app and even so just to know how and why this app is damaging these young girls.

This literature review aims to explore and gain more information surrounding the dangers that Instagram is having on adolescent girls well being and their self-esteem for comparing themselves to influencers and celebrities by posting the 'perfect image' on the app. To meet this aim of the review is to consider why are these young girls being so easily influenced by these influencers images, why are these images having such a negative impact on their mental health and self-esteem, to explore does the amount of time spent on the app increase these negative feelings, how does following certain types of account cause any issues or even taking five or ten selfies affect the way the young girls feel about themselves and lastly to review research that is already out there answering these questions and to look into how much information are these studies telling the reader surrounding this topic, is there a need for more research? To contain all these ideas into one question that would be 'How does perfect selfies posted on Instagram by influencers and users followed affect adolescent girl's mental health?'

To begin, following on from the research question "The negative impact Instagram has on young girls mental health from use time and viewing the 'perfect picture' posted by influencers and peers.'

there are a variety of different types of research out there surrounding this research question, to commence the type of research which kept re-circulating was surrounding the impact that Instagram has on adolescent and young girls body image, self-esteem and their general well-being. Focusing on the first research paper titled 'Instagram: Friend or foe? The application's association with psychological well-being' written by Mackson, SB., Brochu, M,P., and Schneider, A, B, in 2019. From the title itself, it gives the reader some curiosity of what the research is surrounding, they have an idea it is addressing the psychological well being of the user however the age of them is unknown from the title, also it explores is Instagram your friend or foe, which gives the reader again some thought surrounding how could it be foe? The study they conducted by collecting participants from social media updates and word of mouth, using participants who did have Instagram and ones who didn't, it was compared to each group their anxiety, depression, loneliness, social comparison, and body image to get an outcome. After calculating the results it was shown that Instagram is linked with having positive psychological outcomes on these highlighted areas and even including higher self-esteem (Mackson, SB., Brochu, M,P., and Schneider, A, B., 2019). As seen from this study there are a few benefits of Instagram that is not always shouted about by people who talk about the app, it is always the negative comments which are heard. Mackson, Brochu and Schneider discovered that Instagram depresses the feeling of loneliness and self-esteem for users who have an account and outweigh the feeling for the users of depression and anxiety (Mackson, SB., Brochu, M,P., and Schneider, A, B., 2019).

However, according to Jiang and Ngien study, it has been shown that more constant use of Instagram has been linked to higher levels of social comparison levels. It was discovered through their study that this is so common to have higher social comparison levels due to the way the app is set up, with young people being able to have open profiles for anyone to see, being able to like, comment share photos of people who are literal strangers including celebrities and influencers and

with a hashtag created for the user to create the hashtag, they desire to gain more users coming across the user's profiles and vice versa (Jiang and Ngien, 2020). However as stated by Mackson et al in their study it was highlighted that Instagram was highlighted as having positive psychological outcomes on their social comparison, self-esteem and general mental health compared to Jiang and Ngien where it was stated the negative impact it has on young peoples social comparisons, this can be made clear to maybe why there was such a big difference between these two researchers results. It has been shown that users who follow influencers and celebrities who post photos of their appearance or fitness post's that are the type of users who will experience a high level of social comparison levels compared to a user who follows travel accounts, quotes or funny video accounts (Cohen, R., John, N.T., and Slater, A., 2017)

As seen from the three types of research that were completed surrounding the impact Instagram has on social comparison for young girls, it is identified how in recent years this is becoming more and more of an issue all depending on the types of accounts these young girls follow, which is seen to be influencers and model's presenting these perfect unrealistic images that they compare with. This is so important that it is addressed and taken seriously as with Instagram improving day by day and with the number of users only growing it is becoming a concern at how many young people are being affected by this and comparing themselves to these influencers look they would never be able to achieve as it is unrealistic, this can cause feelings of distress for the young person. As well as these young girls following a large number of strangers and influencers for them to post an enhanced edited image of themselves on here are likely to trigger feelings about themselves that are negative and can be damaging (Trub and Rosenthal, 2015)

Following on from exploring the effects instagram has on the social comparison of young girls, moving on to how instagram can effect young girls self-esteem even though these two variables can

have the same outcome for the young girls feeling negative about themselves and imaginably they can be linked with young girls comparing themselves with unrealistic images can then lead to low self-esteem, nevertheless it was explored by Trifiro if usage pattern had an effect on their self-esteem which after the research it was identified that this was the not case and it was user intensity or passive use of the app that indeed effects the users self-esteem and leads them to have low levels and of life satisfaction (Trifiro, 2018) But despite that with a lot of articles accumulating the effects that Instagram has on young peoples self-esteem it has been shown to also create the opposite feeling for some people, causing them to have higher narcissism tendencies with some users as stated by Trifiro when spending passive amount of time on Instagram leading to low levels of self-esteem whereas it was explored by moon et al that passive time on instagram can lead to high levels of narcissism in young people, they created a study which focused on the relationships between the users self-promoting behaviours on the app, the amount of time they used instagram and how many times they changed their profile picture. The results then showed that these people who were Grandiose/Exhibitionism and came under narcissistic behaviours were compensating for low self-esteem through using narcissistic behaviours in the study such as posting images of themselves on Instagram frequently. (Moon et. al, 2016)

As explored by both of these researchers it has been shown that young people who are using the app constantly are experiencing low levels of self-esteem from the constant comparison of images viewed, it is also noted that some of these young people are then developing narcissistic behaviour as they are trying to compensate for their low self-esteem they are experiencing by joining in with the influencers and strangers posting enhanced and edited images of themselves and constantly changing the look of their profile. This can be so damaging for these young people as they are constantly trying to keep up with a life and images that are unrealistic and can not be caught up with.

Consequently following on with what moon et al explored with the intensity and amount of images posted by young people to try and keep up with the influencers. As seen up to now that influencers have such an impact on these young girls lives, from posting the 'perfect selfie' or the 'perfect lifestyle' if young people follow these influencers every day to see these perfect images posted constantly rather than following people they know, friends or peers then their comparison group is no longer something they can keep up with instead it is these celebrities or influencers whom have a lot more money than these young girls and have a full team of hair and makeup and the best camera equipment to help them look the way they do for Instagram, and that is before editing and filters (Dion, 2016). From this study it was a qualitative and quantitative study which outlines the difference in Instagram users having only friends and family to follow on the app and then the other group only following celebrities, it highlighted the decreases that these people now had in their life satisfaction, with quantitative showing the big decrease.

However, with this study, it is to be noted it was carried out in 2016 which is five years ago since then Instagram has only magnified with influencers now being the hub of Instagram compared to five years ago when they weren't as big. Although comparing this study to a more recent study of looking at the effects on the user following celebrities lives via SNS on life satisfaction study only two years later, the results are very similar even though both studies were carried out differently with the different hypothesis they were still quite similar and both looking for the same outcome of how influencers or celebrities images on Instagram affect these young girls life satisfaction, the results from the study by Seo and Hyun discovered similar results to Dion but more detailed, with young girls comparing themselves to celebrities or influencers makes them feel angry and resentful of the big gap between the young girl's life and the celebrity/ influencers high lifestyle life (Seo and Hyun, 2018). It can be seen from both these studies even though they are 2 years apart the issues

with influencers effect on these young girls life satisfaction is not improving and only getting worse with researchers such as Seo and Hyun discovering exactly how it is making them feel.

As seen in Dion's study on how influencers affect young girls life satisfaction it has been made clear by other researchers such as Kleeman's that not only does it affect these young girls life satisfaction it also affects their body image from seeing retouched and edited images on Instagram by influencers and celebrities, both of these studies were created in the same year of 2016. During Kleeman's study, used young girls aged between fourteen and eighteen years old and set up two groups one with the user's being exposed to ten manipulated Instagram images and ten reality images. Again from this study their hypothesis was correct and supported as the young girls who viewed the edited and retouched photos did certainly have lower body satisfaction compared to the young girls who did not view these edited images from online peers (Kleeman's, 2016). Regardless as seen from this study even though it is affecting young girls body image there is still a large amount of research and information regarding the effects of young girls being accessible to seeing these enhanced social media photos of peers or celebrity's perfect image unknown surrounding the damages it is having on their view of themselves and body image (Kleemans et al, 2016).

This study was very detailed and from the get-go, it was clear what the reader would be reading and exploring when starting to read this study, also from the title itself it was clear and informed the reader from the brief wording what they would be reading about. However with this research, it explored how young girls felt after seeing these edited and enhanced images on Instagram, nevertheless it did not go into more detail about how it affects these young girls and in what way, in comparison Lamp et al explored the after-effects of these young girls seeing these edited images and the long-lasting effect it has had on them, this is identified to the point where it affects the way they take selfies and upload images to Instagram. Lamp et al's study here explored the relationship

between selfie behaviours, self-objectification and depressive symptoms, they explored a few areas during the study these were photo manipulation, the average number of selfies taken, Body surveillance, Deception on Social Media and depressive symptoms. As seen it has tried to cover all aspects of why young girls are feeling all these different negative feelings from using a photo-based app known as Instagram, and from the outcome, it was shown that young girls are feeling more positive body surveillance related to them taking a larger amount of selfies and more often, however even though this study was looking into how into a few avenues to how Instagram is affecting young girls mental health in different ways, there seemed to be a lot of variations going on throughout and it seemed that so much was going on that it was unclear for the reader and researcher to understand each element to the highest standard. (Lamp et al, 2019).

Following on from Kleeman's and Lamp et al's studies, one of the very first studies exploring how Instagram use is related to depressive symptoms, negative social comparison and strangers followed created by Lub, Trub and Rosenthal in 2015, this is one of the earliest studies that this literature review addresses as it was one of the first ones exploring why these negative patterns for young girls are coming up more frequently related to the app. As previously addressed by Kleeman and Lamp where they both explored the effects of Instagram, social comparison always came down to the main issue, here with Lub, Trub and Rosenthal in 2015 they had an idea that this was the cause of these young girls feeling so negative about themselves. From the title of the research itself 'Instagram #Instasad?: Exploring Associations Among Instagram Use, Depressive Symptoms, Negative Social Comparison, and Strangers Followed.' it is addressed what the study is going to be exploring and tells the reader what they are going to be learning about. This study had one hundred and seventeen participant all aged between 18-29 years old where they completed a questionnaire surrounding the questions in the title. In all the studies so far it has been clear that from young people following influencers or celebrities who post images of their perfect life and their perfect

selfies does affect how the user feels after seeing these images but continue to follow and keep updated with their polished lifestyle, encouraging these users to try and be like the influencers they follow or even search for with sharing their perfect images. It has been identified by Lup et al that these young girls following a considerable amount of profiles of people they don't know when posting their edited and filtered picture can trigger negative feelings about themselves (Lup, k., Trub, L., and Rosenthal L., 2015)

When the reader reads through this study it has clear subtitles throughout giving the reader well-informed information at each stop on the study, the reader will find it difficult to become confused when reading this as it is set up, however with this study the way it was carried out through a questionnaire for the participants could make the results not as reliable compared to Mackson, Brochu and Schneider study where again they did use a questionnaire but also completed a study first then got the participants to complete a questionnaire, this way seems to be more effective and will give more accurate results as anyone can put down on a questionnaire what they would like to say or some may not even read the questions correctly, this could cause false results.

But despite all that most of the studies do involve questionnaires as recording the results, speaking of in the next study which is carried out by Sherlock, M and Wagstaff D,L., in 2018 had two parts to their study with the first one a group of women completing a questionnaire regarding questions about mental health and self-perceptions and part 2 where another group of women were vulnerable to a range of different images on Instagram including beauty, fitness or travel images. From this study it was made aware to the researchers that Instagram could be having a very damaging effect on young girls mental health from what the study has proven, from both parts of their study it was made aware to the reader that with a user spending more time on Instagram linked with negative mental health outcomes with this including social comparison, low self-esteem, feelings of

depression, anxiety and low body confidence (Sherlock, M and Wagstaff, D,L. 2018) However with Sherlock and Wagstaff having these results that more time on Instagram is linked with negative mental health, another study by Rozgonjuk in 2020 the most recent study compared to Sherlock two years later identify that Instagram use is not linked to negative mental health which they stated could be down to the fact that people who are suffering from a mental health issue such as depression would not be engaging in a platform such as Instagram, engaging socially with people (Rozgonjuk et al, 2020). This point was missed with Sherlock and people who are suffering from depression sometimes want to hide from the world which with an app like Instagram the user can not do that when they are on it, instead it opens them up to see the world and to interact with users wether that is liking an image, following or just scrolling through images and stories.

This study is also very similar to their discoveries to Lup et al (2015) where both studies identified the negative mental effect that a user using Instagram more is having on these young people's mental health and self-confidence, which is very sad and identifies how this relatively new app is showing to have negative impacts on young girls mental health instead of giving them boost. Speaking of giving these young girls a confidence boost that is why most of these young girls use Instagram to get likes and comments to boost their self-esteem and view of themselves (Feltman, C,E. and Szymanski D,M., 2018).

Relatively where Instagram users worry about how many likes a selfie or image uploaded will get they are affected by the number of followers a user has as this seems to be very important to most of the users on this app. In 2016 one of the most followed user accounts owned by celebrities had the most followers of the app with 92 million followers and it has been addressed that the more followers a celebrity or influencers has then the more trustworthy and reliable account that these young people look up to (Djafarova, E. and Rushworth, C. 2016). During this study explored by

Djafarova, and Rushworth they explored the impact of celebrities and influencers on Instagram has over young people including the way a user sees them, how influenced they are by what they say and do and how influenced they are in buying items the influencers present, as so much evidence since the app was launched has shown how influencers, influence young people psychologist Thorndike (1920) created a term called the Halo effect this suggests that when meeting a person for the first time the attractiveness of a person affects how we view that person, which links to Instagram when young girls are seeing influencers post their perfect images of themselves and their life influencers these girl first impression to judge them to be a better person due to their fancy lifestyle. (Djafarova, E. and Rushworth, C. 2016) This just goes to show the drastic effect that these influencers posting perfect images of their lives links to the other research that has been addressed during this study so far, with social comparison, low self-esteem and depression from seeing these influencers perfect lives which are unrealistic for anyone to keep up with.

As seen from this literature review so far it is clear that Instagram is an app where people, such as young girls need approval and compare everything and anything to peers, celebrities and influencers, these girls view how many likes their photo may get, how many followers they have or how many likes their friends or celebrities or influencers images are getting, by these young girls being able to see the number of likes it has become aware in recent years that they're like's mean a lot to these girls. It was also highlighted by Pritchard et al in 2020 that these young girls use the number of likes they get on a photo as evidence to how many people like them if people accept them, popularity and become envious of other young girls who may have a higher amount of likes compared to them, this triggers comparison for the young girls, which as seen so far is one of the negative effects Instagram is causing these young girls. (Pritchard et al, 2020). In 2019 Instagram decided to trial removing likes so no user could see how many likes other images got, they could only see their own as they could see how detrimental people being able to see how many likes

people got to themselves was harming peoples mental health and especially young girls. (Nambiar, 2021). This is when Pritchard et al created a study addressing users reaction to Instagram removing people from seeing how many likes each image has. The results from this study showed that almost half of the participants (55.3%) believed that Instagram removing this feature would reduce self-focus and lower the number of people that compare themselves and judgement of others it was also stated that this would help reduce the number of users competing for likes on Instagram (Pritchard et al, 2020).

This study showed that most participants were in favour of Instagram removing the likes with them believing that this would reduce self-focus, unhealthy comparisons, competitiveness for the user to get more likes than their friends or influencers and negative self-evaluations. As addressed in a newspaper article the founder of Instagram Mia Garlick promoted the change of this to help Instagram users feel free from judgement and trying to help their mental health to focus on uploading the images they want like users used to in 2010 when the app first came out instead of focusing on the number of likes and followers. (Scott, 2019).

As seen by the many studies that have been addressed during this literature review the usage of Instagram seems to have more of a negative impact on someones mental health rather than good, during a study created by Hanley, Watt and Coventry in 2019 explored the effects of a user taking a week break from Instagram and Facebook to see how or if it would benefit the user's well- being, it also looked at if it would work well with users who interact with Instagram frequently (Hanley, S,M., Watt, S,E., and Conventry, W, 2019). This study explored with a group of people and invited the participants to answer a questionnaire beforehand to see how they felt before taking a week's break from the app and again after the week's break. however, it is seen that the users who scored higher active use of Instagram seemed to have a decrease in their positive effect when they took a

week's break from the app and the most positive way to engage with the app would be actively using it by liking and commenting on friends posts and talking to them via the inbox section as this is seen to have more of a positive effect on these young people. However from this study, there was not much from the discussion that added to the knowledge and research that is already out there surrounding this area of the topic, it was to be seen that there was a positive result showing the users who engaged in this app such as posting images, liking and commenting on friends images and talking to friends via the app were more positive than passive use (Hanley, S,M., Watt, S,E., and Coventry, W, 2019). So even though this study showed a positive there wasn't much information surrounding it at all and not much benefit would come from a reader reading this study.

To conclude as seen from this literature review has covered a range of different studies relating to the research question which is 'How does the perfect selfies posted on Instagram by influencers and users followed affect adolescent girl's mental health?' throughout this literature review each one has always come back to the research question and made the reader think about how does selfies posted onto an app affect these young girls mental health, as seen from the start of this review it explores Instagrams affect it has on young people's mental health including depression, anxiety, social anxiety, self-esteem and social comparison. Overall just negative impacts the app can have on someones well- being and mental health. The review then moved on to how does it impact these young girls, it has addressed the effect it has on them but how does it cause these effects. That is when it explores how picture-perfect images and posting the perfect image on Instagram is causing this distress, from here it then goes onto explore how many girls compare themselves to influencers, celebrities and even peers, however it can be seen that from the comparison of young girls to influencers is where it causes the most negative part of these young girls mental health as it is almost impossible for them to keep up and portray the same 'perfect image' as these influencers, these influencers have lots of money, a full team of makeup and hair stylists and the people behind

the scene's to help. It also explores is it the amount of time that these young girls use the app that is causing the decrease in mental health and as seen that does have a big impact on the issue, as well as this looks into how the issue of likes can also add to these young girls feeling of insecurity, not worthy and low self-esteem which leads onto looking at does taking a break from Instagram even have a benefit for these young girls.

This literature review shows that so much more research needs to be done surrounding the research question as eleven years on from the app being realised it is getting bigger and bigger, but also causing more mental health problems, the importance that more research is done is paramount as not many people know the full extent to this app and as seen in the studies critically assessed in this literature review they only know the basics of what is happening from research and that is only within the last three to four years, more in detailed research needs to be done to help these young people before it gets too late. Without more research, these young girls are going to continue to compare themselves to these influencers unrealistic lives and images which are unreachable which these young girls have already failed before trying which can only decrease their mental health.

Even though there is quite a lot of research out there surrounding the types of mental health issues that Instagram causes young girls and how it causes these mental health issues such as low self-esteem, comparison, low-confidence and poor mental well being by comparing their photos and likes to these influencers with unrealistic photos. Nearly every research study stated that there wasn't enough information out there surrounding this topic about how Instagram is affecting young girls mental health, it is mentioned that because Instagram was only created in 2010 there isn't much research out there done surrounding this as it is fairly new, however, there is a lot more research with regards to other social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. As imaginable there is a big gap here where research needs to be done to discover why is this photo-sharing app

causing so many young girls to feel depressed, anxious, not worthy, comparing themselves to unrealistic images and lives and editing their images to change the way they look by using tools and filters, it is very worrying and if more research is not done soon then it is going to keep causing so much distress and poor mental health for these young girls and the next generation of them.

Overall this literature review has explored the different ways that the perfect selfie posted on Instagram by influencers and peers affect adolescent girls mental health, from low self-esteem, comparison, low body image and low life satisfaction, which highlights how important more research on this topic is conducted.

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