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## **Social Media and Body Image with African American College Students Moderation of Social Comparison**

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Khalil R. Coleman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Social Media and Body Image with African American College Students

Moderation of Social Comparison

By

Khalil R. Coleman

MA, Walden University, 2016

BS, Virginia State University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

August 2024

## Abstract

Social media is a popular activity for emerging adults. Recent research shows that a negative relationship exists between social media use and mental health, particularly related to body image. Social media can adversely affect body image by falsely providing an idealistic or fake perspective, leading to body dysmorphia or mental health issues. However, this research has not been explored with African American college students. It is also not clear how social media plays a role in social media use and body image. Social comparison theory posits that more time comparing with others, which is easily done on social media, can negatively affect individuals' attitudes toward themselves. The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the relationship between social media use and body image and whether social comparison moderated that relationship among African American college students using a quantitative predictive-correlational design. One hundred fifteen participants were recruited from social media pages based on the Eastern U.S. to complete an online survey. Using regression analyses, this study found that social comparison did not moderate the relationship between social media use and body image distress, but social media use was related to body image distress. This study promotes positive social change by bringing awareness and perspective to a population that has not been researched specifically and provides support for the growth and progression of African American college students.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to all who have played an intricate part throughout this very difficult journey. To my mother and my brothers thank you for your support and for providing me with the motivation and confidence needed to accomplish this amazing goal. To my beautiful lady thank you for dealing with me during my most difficult times, you were my voice of reason and the driving force to pushing me through the hard times and for that I am grateful for you always. Lastly, to my amazing committee Dr. Mickey Langlais, Dr. Amanda Rose, and Dr. Matthew Hertenstein. Words cannot express my appreciation and gratitude for what you have done for me; without all of you, I will not be here. I value you and thank you for being on my committee and making me into the amazing person I am today.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Body image is an important factor as it relates to establishing a healthy level of self-esteem. If someone has low body image, not only could it reduce their self-esteem, but it may also hinder other domains of life. One variable that may contribute to body image perceptions is individuals experience with social media. The constant expectations and strive for perfection be perceived in a optimistic light from a body image perspective has led to severe mental and physical issues, including suicidal ideations, eating disorders, and body enhancements, which have negative long-term effects (Kling et al., 2019). Studies regarding African American college students discussing body image are vastly underrepresented in the literature. Given these issues, I focused on the potential influence of how body image is perceived through social media outlets and whether or not social comparison moderates that relationship with African American college students.

This quantitative study has some key advantages. First, I examined an understudied demographic: African American students enrolled in college. Furthermore, the results of this study can potentially support African American individuals regarding how often they are using social media and their interpretation of body image. In this study, I explored whether or not social comparison moderates the relationship between social media and body image, which needs to be studied more in the literature.

This chapter includes an overview of key facets of this dissertation. In this chapter, I focus on the statement of the issue which has been identified as the problem,

the background of the study, the trends in the problem, the foundation of the study, nature of the study, research questions, study design, and definition of variables of the study.

Next, I will discuss the assumptions of the study and the scope. Subsequently, the significance of the study and its limits will be discussed as well.

### **Problem Statement**

The study is significant because it will fill a gap in understanding how social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for African-American college students. In this dissertation, I addressed the need for more research on African Americans concerning the dangers of social media use for body image. My goal was to provide novel insights into the issue from the perspective of African-American college students. The absence of statistical data and research that accurately represents this demographic has been a persistent challenge that obstructs the consideration of their unique experiences in addressing the effects of social media use. Therefore, conducting studies that specifically investigate the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of social media use on African-American college students is crucial. This knowledge is essential for effectively addressing and mitigating the negative consequences of social media use on this population.

The issue of poor body image is a significant problem in today's society, with a profound impact on individual mental health and overall well-being. The belief of being overweight or not muscular enough is only part of the problem, with the more significant issue being the resulting negative impact on an individual's self-worth. Negative thoughts about one's body image can create many problems, including financial strain, negative

self-talk, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem (Brunet et al., 2021). The impact of these issues can be severe, causing psychological., spiritual., emotional., and physical problems if left untreated. Therefore, it is essential to address poor body image and promote positive self-image through various interventions, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, self-compassion, and mindfulness-based interventions. By doing so, individuals can achieve better mental health, improved well-being, and a more positive outlook.

While social connection offers people many positive opportunities, the more one spends online, the more opportunities there are for social comparison (Gattario et al., 2019). Social comparison impacts mental health because the pressure of consistently comparing oneself to others can contribute to an unforeseen expectation or belief that to be respected, one has to be perceived a certain way, which stems from unrealistic statuses in cultural communities. For example, one may not like how they look physically, which may prompt them to take a positive approach about how they are not good enough or attractive enough. Body image is described as individuals' subjective experience or picture of their bodies, regardless of what their bodies actually look like (Kling et al., 2019). Body image encompasses evaluate, perceive, and assess their bodies as well as the behaviors people take regarding their body image (Gattario et al., 2019). Body image distortion is a common component in multiple mental health disorders, including anorexia, body dysmorphic disorder, and bulimia nervosa (Brunet et al., 2021; Gattario et al., 2019; Kling et al., 2019). Distortion related to body image has been noted in the clinical literature since the 19th century, first with reference to anorexia and later with

reference to other disorders (Fuchs, 2022). One component of body distortion frequently noted in the literature is that of social comparison (Brunet et al., 2021; Fuchs, 2022; Gattario et al., 2019; Kling et al., 2019). Social comparison illustrates how an individual determines their value and self-worth by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954).

Through social learning, people learn that society prizes certain bodily traits, and it is common for people to feel dissatisfied with their body when comparing to others. Social comparison of body image has become more important during this social media driven era and because of that, it has been used to showcase one's appearance (Tiggemann et al., 2019). In particular, people often showcase extremely muscular, fit, or lean bodies on different media outlets (Brunet et al., 2021). The nature of social media increases risks of disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia, muscular dysmorphia, and other forms of body dysmorphic disorder (Brunet et al., 2021). Social media provides an easily accessible, large, and ubiquitous venue in which ordinary people can look up, and compare themselves to people with extraordinary body types. The problem arising from social media is the rise of body image disorders experienced by people who crave, but cannot achieve, the extraordinary body types showcased on social media. Additionally, there is not enough information that shows this problem across all ethnic dynamics (Tiggemann et al., 2019). Therefore, my objective was to focus on how social media use may impact body image and whether or not social comparison moderates that relationship.

Another issue is that African Americans are often underrepresented in research, which has resulted in distrust of the scientific community by African Americans (JiWon et al., 2015). The inability of researchers to recruit participants from this demographic knowing that the statistical data is not the same as other demographics, contributes to the severe mistrust in the community. According to Scharff et al. (2010), mistrust is the primary barrier to research participation by African Americans. Mistrust may develop over time due to a deficiency of representation of African Americans in studies or a willingness to focus on this population in previous studies. In addition, African Americans are underrepresented in the statistics about body image differences because of the perception that they are satisfied with their bodies and body images (JiWon et al., 2015).

Expanding this research by increasing awareness will result in increased representation of African Americans in social science research, particularly in the context of body image. Mistrust combined with underrepresentation in research does not do the research topic any justice, and it is not easy to understand any potential effects of body image and social media use on the development of African American men and women, especially college students. Thus, more is needed regarding social media use and body image, particularly social comparison's role when researching African American college students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for

African American college students. I identified potential risks to body image that African American college students may be dealing with. Additionally, I addressed underrepresented participants, namely African American college students. The potential outcome of this research study may result in positive social change due to information that can be used to increase body image confidence and awareness among African American college students. Furthermore, this study may be used by African American college students to navigate through any body image concerns they may have.

My goal for this study was to bring awareness to the barriers African American college students face regarding the effects caused by the media. Social comparison, body image, and the impact of social networking sites will be discussed to further bring understanding and awareness to a topic that needs to be discussed more. With more information, this topic of discussion may lead to benefits for this community.

### **Research Question and Hypothesis**

In this quantitative study I answered the research question through analysis of the associated hypothesis in null form.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent does social comparison moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students?

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): Social comparison will not moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students.

Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): Social comparison will moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students.



In this study, I used a predictive-correlational design to address the research question.. Participants completed a self-administered online survey to determine the effect of social media (independent variable) use on body image (dependent variable). Participants were African American college students. They answered questions about social comparison, which was tested as a moderator, and questions about body image and social media use. I used multiple linear regression and moderation analysis to answer my research question.

For my approach, I recruited participants using social media groups, after receiving IRB approval from Walden University. Once I received approval, I shared the online survey with many different social media groups. The online survey included the following scales: Social Comparison Orientation Scale (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), Body Image States Scale (Cash et al., 2002), and Social Media Intensity Scale (Orosz et al., 2016). Through a power analysis, I needed 100 participants. I collected data for 1 month, and the online survey took about 15 minutes to complete.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation of this study comes from Leon Festinger's introduction of social comparison and its effects since its inception. Festinger first proposed social comparison theory in 1954. Social comparison theory consists of nine hypotheses, not all of which are relevant to the association of the variables discussed; however, the following hypotheses are particularly relevant:

- Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): People have an intrinsic need to evaluate themselves. (Festinger, 1954).
- Hypothesis 2 ( $H_2$ ): People evaluate themselves on the basis of social comparisons when no objective and non-social methods of self-evaluation are available. (Festinger, 1954).
- Hypothesis 3 ( $H_3$ ): People have a need to try to be better, however they define this concept (Festinger, 1954).
- Corollary VII: When a group is especially attractive to someone, they will be more likely to make that group a comparison group for themselves.

One key implication for Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory during the timeframe of social media is being able to leave a group. Festinger's initial study presupposed a situation in which people join and leave groups on a physical basis. For example, in Festinger's theory, someone could leave a classroom, gym, or other place where social comparisons generate stress. Social media can be challenging to leave and easy to join. The network effect suggests that social media's value scales upwards depending on how many people are already on it (Tiggemann et al., 2019).

This theoretical framework by Leon Festinger (1954) was suitable for this study because it illustrates how social media is used for social comparison particularly regarding African American men and women in college with body image concerns. Whether or not someone is satisfied with their body image depends on their experiences with social comparison on social media. The more an individual dedicates their time spent on social media, the more comparisons one may experience (Ramos et al., 2019). If

someone believes they appear better than those they see online, they will likely feel satisfied with their bodies (downward comparison). Still, if individuals think they are less attractive than they see online, they will likely experience body dissatisfaction due to upward comparison (Schmidt et al., 2019).

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the research question in this quantitative study, I used a predictive-correlational design. Participants completed a self-administered online survey to determine the effect of social media (independent variable) use on body image (dependent variable). They also answered questions about social comparison so that I could test this variable as a moderator. I administered an online survey that I used to measure their body image and social media use, using established scales in the literature. I used multiple linear regression and moderation analysis to answer my research question.

### **Definitions**

*Body image* is defined as how people feel and think about themselves physically and how they believe other people perceive them (Ramos et al., 2019). For example, a person who is a social media content creator may feel as if they are appealing physically, that they will attract more people to look at their content. Conversely, someone may compare themselves to an unrealistic model, which could decrease one's body image.

*Social media* is a potent tool that has reformed engagement and interaction with one another (Engeln, 2017). An example is social media apps such as Instagram and X, formerly known as Twitter, which have become very popular over the years because of everyone's ability to access one another, often through mobile technology.

*Social media intensity* is the degree to which an individual actively engages in social networking activities. An example of this is TikTok and Snapchat. The level of engagement expected for those two social networking sites is high. It often can contribute to severe issues that may affect the user's psychological, emotional, or physical state of mind.

*Social comparison* signifies people's innate drive to evaluate themselves with others (Festinger, 1954). An example of this is upward comparison, which is one of the contributing factors. Upward comparison is when people compare themselves to someone they perceive to be superior.

### **Assumptions**

To determine the purpose and overall positive outcome of this study, it is essential to investigate to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image in African American students. One assumption I made in this study was that social media is widespread among African Americans of various demographic characteristics and socioeconomic levels. Being able to learn about the self through social comparison can be difficult for some and more accessible for others. I also assumed that African Americans engage in social comparison. The tendency to engage in social comparison is higher among young people but this data do not rely on large samples of African Americans (Schmidt et al., 2019). I also assumed that everyone experiences social comparison which in some instances is contingent on social media use, media's effect on the body development (body image), and socioeconomic status. The increased impact of social media in today's society can have many different effects on

body image that can contribute to unhealthy eating habits that can affect psychological health and confidence within the individual. Where a person may live, and their demographics can contribute to what an individual may consider rewarding based on socioeconomic status in their neighborhoods. Social media use, if not used effectively, can become damaging and can impact the perceptual body image aspect of an individual., which, in turn, contributes to how a person begins to feel about how people around them perceive them (Howard et al., 2017). To minimize the impact of my assumptions, I used a large sample size with unbiased in language throughout the study.

### **Scope, Population, and Delimitations**

In this study, I explored to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image of African American college students between the ages of 18 and 29. I gauged this on their academic year, whether they were undergraduate or graduate college students, and their socioeconomic background. Additionally, each variable was measured using a research question geared toward bringing awareness to how much social comparison has impacted the African American community, specifically college students. The population for this study was African American college students between 18 and 29 in Virginia. The minimum number of participants needed for this study was 99, and 115 provided data for this study. This study will not be gender-specific or delimited in any other way. Expressing a fair and open dialogue and identifying that there will not be any strict binary categories will allow for variables such as social media and body image to be measured effectively. My goal for this study was to bring awareness to the effect of social comparison on social media

and body image. Examining the effects of social media will result in different avenues so that individuals who experience these things can develop healthy coping techniques.

### **Population**

The chosen population for this research study was African American college students because these individuals are severely understudied in the literature. African American students make up 2.1 million students of the undergraduate population, which is about 12.7% (College of Education, 2022). Researchers have noted that this population is understudied (Lakens, 2022). The determination of the sample is a process that requires one to consider diverse factors, including relevance, age, gender, and ethnic origin, among other issues (Lakens, 2022). My goal in this study was to provide more awareness to this population due to the consistent barriers that have been identified and the need for more research with this population. Providing information and statistical data on this topic will help promote understanding a demographic that needs more research attention in the literature.

### **Limitations**

A potential barrier when collecting primary data can be from recruiting participants. There may be a conflict of interest due to being an alumnus of one of the sites of recruitment, as I may know some of the potential participants. Another potential barrier is gaining permission from previous researchers to use their measures. Third, there is also concern about confidentiality and anonymity, which is common with online surveys. Another limitation to consider is how truthful participants will be. Lastly, another limitation is obtaining a representative sample to increase the likelihood of

generalizability. Each limitation was addressed by having complete transparency by communicating effectively through email on what approach will be used regarding each data collection method. Communication is critical with each of my limitations because full transparency and clear instructions from the beginning should allow all participants and researchers to understand my approach, which in turn can help alleviate some of the issues early. Persistence is another method to use regarding each Limitation because each barrier will require multiple attempts, which will require patience and understanding.

### **Summary**

This study was necessary because I have brought awareness to how social media use has contributed to the recent changes regarding body image. Furthermore, the specific research problem that I addressed was the use of social media, body image, and how social comparison moderates the relationship between the two variables. Limitations such as having participants and being aware of the emotional reaction due to the topic's sensitive nature was some of the barriers identified in this study. This chapter also included discussion about the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Depression is identified as one of the most severe and common health concerns facing college students (Schmidt et al., 2019). Two factors contributing to declining mental health among college students are their experiences with social media and body image. Social media continues to portray a misconceived and misguided perception of what a beautiful woman or man should look like (Talbot et al., 2019). Even though this occurs quite frequently with emerging adults, few researchers have looked at how influential social media can be to how we are physically perceived from the perspective of African American college students (Murray et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2021). The relationship between social media use and body image, specifically among African American individuals, is significantly underrepresented in the literature, as most studies focus on White individuals. African American students may be impacted by what they see on social media, which can cause different symptoms of depression and body image concerns. Nevertheless, without more research on African American students, it is unclear how body image and social media are related for this population.

Over time, research regarding body image has slowly emerged. However, experts in the field of body image have failed to recognize how these capitalistic notions of beauty impact non-white populations, particularly African American individuals. Most research studies focus exclusively on the perspectives and experiences of White men and women, assuming that their behaviors and attitudes are universal and accepted by all men and women regardless of ethnicity. Compared to White individuals, African American



men and women historically view themselves as overweight in contrast to Caucasians and other ethnic groups (Brown et al., 2014). One variable that could explain the relationship between social media use and body ideals for African American individuals is social comparison, which has not been fully explored in the literature, particularly for non-White populations.

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for African American college students. This study is significant in that it fills a gap in understanding how body image and social media are perceived from the perspective of African American college students. Most research has focused on body image among White men and women, and few have looked explicitly into the African American population during their college tenure. Furthermore, it is essential to help researchers identify how social media sites contribute to the development of body image and to understand how social comparison moderates that relationship.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the research gaps, which includes the lack of information on the affiliation between African American individuals' body image in general, the lack of literature on African American college students' the effects of social media and the development of body image, the lack of understanding the effect of social comparison between social media and body image for African American individuals. Next, I will review the theory that is the foundation for this study, which is the social comparison theory by Leon Festinger (1954). Last, I will summarize this chapter.

### **Research Gaps**

In this study, I explored to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for African American college students. This study is substantial because it I addressed the gap in the literature related to understanding African American individuals' interpretation of body image, the lack of literature on African American college students regarding social media usage, physical development of the body as it pertains to body image, and the moderation of social comparison between social media and body image (Christian et al., 2021). These gaps are significant because the research on body image, social media, and social comparison are biased toward White populations, as most studies specifically target this population (e.g, Howard et al., 2017). Not having fair representation must be addressed, as White individuals are not the only ones who use or are impacted by social media. Focusing specifically on African American college students would address a deficit in the literature and help better understand a common problem that African American individuals experience.

It is important to review the gaps in understanding African American individuals' body image. For example, (Biber et al., 2004) exclusively concentrated on the familiarities of White men and women as it pertained to body image and social media. Although this was reference as one the earliest studies on social media and body image, this pattern of focusing primarily on White participants continues to persist. White men and women have been overrepresented in body image analysis in many other studies on body image, including clinical settings (e.g, Lease et al., 2019). The exploration of body

image continues to focus on White participants, with minimal inclusion of African American men and women; this trend is increasingly becoming a part of the research agenda (e.g, Lease et al., 2019). Rodgers (2016) stated this was a problem, yet this call to change the lack of diversity in studies was not answered. There is a need to bring awareness to this issue for all populations, particularly African American individuals, as there is a risk that can have negative effects on African American men and women physically and psychologically (Hoffman et al., 2019).

Furthermore, many studies have focused predominantly on White individuals when examining body image. For example, Hoffman et al. (2019) examined social media engagement activities on body image satisfaction among women, which contained an alarming .05% of African American women (Tiggermann et al., 2020). Another example study was about the influence of body ideals as far as thinness and muscularity are presented with men and women in their social media use (JiWon et al., 2015). Out of 186 participants, 36% were males and the majority identified themselves as Caucasian (74.1%); only 4.9% of participants were African American men. This study presents yet another example of how African American men and women are underrepresented in this line of research. These studies are not idiosyncratic studies. Many studies, particularly those on social media and body image, greatly underrepresent African American populations.

African Americans are often underrepresented in all research and statistics for several reasons. Some of these reasons include distrust of the scientific community by African Americans, failure of researchers and statisticians to recruit research participants

from the African American population, and cultural and language barriers (Anixiadis et al., 2019). According to Scharff et al. (2010), mistrust is the primary barrier to research participation by African Americans. Mistrust may develop over time due to very limited representation of African Americans in studies or a willingness to focus on this population in previous studies. In addition, African Americans are underrepresented in the statistics about body image differences because of the perception that they are satisfied with their bodies and body images (JiWon et al., 2015). Being able to further this research by increasing awareness will allow for increased representation in African Americans in social science research, particularly in body image.

Even with recent studies, the underrepresentation of African American men and women in the reviewed articles and many others does not do the research topic justice. It is not easy to understand the effects these variables—body image and social media use—can have on the development of African American men and women, especially that of college students. Not surprisingly, there is a lack of studies on African American college students with body image, social media, and social comparison. For instance, particularly in Westernized societies, researchers have examined content on social media potentially contributing to developing appearance comparison propensities (Anixiadis et al., 2019). Overall, the gaps that were reviewed illustrate the lack of literature regarding African American students in college regarding the development of body image, the association between the use of social media, and the moderation of social comparison between social media and body image.

The trend of underrepresentation and the lack of literature regarding the point of view of African American college students is clear and pronounced, even with recently published studies. I addressed these gaps by studying body image and social media through the lenses of African American individuals in college students. I focused only on African American college students and used a quantitative approach to examine three variables which have been discussed very rarely in relation to African American college students: social media use, body image, and social comparison.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The original theory of social comparison stressed that social comparison is often done between the self and others and is believed to be a fundamental mechanism geared toward influencing an individual's judgment, experience, and behavior (Festinger, 1954). Psychological research supports the notion that people constantly engage in social comparison. Individuals arguably engage in social comparison whenever they receive information about how others are, what others can and cannot do, and/or what others have achieved and have failed to achieve.

Once they encounter this information, they are inclined to relate this information to themselves, usually through upward, downward, and lateral comparison. Upward comparison is comparing oneself with someone with a high social standing or better financial or physical situation (Festinger, 1954). For example, some basketball players may experience upward comparison by comparing themselves to the likes of LeBron James or Kevin Durant. This is an excellent example because, from a competitive standpoint, aspiring to improve athletically and financially compared to peers is an

excellent example of a favorable upward comparison. Second, downward comparison is comparing yourself to someone who is not on the same financial or physical situation as oneself (Festinger, 1954). An example of this is Kevin Durant comparing his expectations as a veteran to that of rookie who just entered the league. This example of downward comparison only serves to belittle one side of this comparison to make the superior side feel more accomplished. Third, lateral comparison is comparing yourself to someone who is considered to be on the same level as you, financially and physically (Festinger, 1954). Kyrie Irving expressing his desire to compete with Stephen Curry when their teams play each other is an example of a lateral comparison. This is a fair comparison because both are well respected veterans in the NBA, and both are NBA champions. These three comparisons provide a perspective on the effects of social comparison and how it contributes to the psychological, emotional, and physical development that takes places among individuals.

Furthermore, past theories indicate that social comparison is motivated by three drives: social evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The original concept was expanded to include more abstract concepts affecting overall life accomplishment. Social evaluations are not all equal., and when making a social evaluation, it is not often that a comparison is being made. However, an example of this is social evaluation is choosing someone who may be similar in age, have a similar career field, and looking at productivity as a sign of evaluation and not comparing. This type of evaluation yields more valuable and reliable assessments of self. An example of self-improvement and self-enhancement also follows these guidelines. Instead of relying

specifically on opinions and abilities, set a benchmark of what to achieve, which is referenced in recent studies as the level of aspiration (DeVries et al., 2015).

A unique indicator of the robustness of social comparison is that people may sometimes even engage in comparisons with others who do not yield relevant information concerning them. For instance, downward comparison is an emotional coping technique for short-term satisfaction when dealing with a threat. This threat may only be a threat to the “superior” person’s ego, but it is technique that people use to feel better (Festinger, 1954). Another example of this is a boss looking down at their employees who may not be as successful as the boss, which in turn makes the boss feel better about themselves. The struggle of others makes the boss feel more superior or worthy. Another sign indicator of social comparison is their power to elicit universal human emotions. For instance, individuals may feel pride when they succeed in outperforming competitors and marvel in admiration about the excellence of others. However, they may also feel the pain of envying them (Festinger, 1954). As discussed, individuals often need to maintain a stable, accurate self-view; therefore, they may seek informative feedback about their character and abilities. This perspective is contingent on some individual’s willingness to accomplish goals set for themselves to achieve self-improvement, self-enhancement, and self-evaluation.

This theory relates to the current study because it supported the argument of understanding the moderation of social comparison for the relationship between social media and body image for African American college students. In this study, I examined how individuals receive and translate information via social media to internalize body

image. This theory was a rationale for why African Americans, when they are on social media, are likely to compare themselves, potentially through upward, downward, or lateral comparison, a shared experience on social media. Social comparison has contributed to physical and psychological issues that continue to be issues for many individuals. It was beneficial to pinpoint these barriers by investigating how social comparison moderates the relationship between social media and body image with African Americans.

### **Literature Review**

My goal for this study was to investigate to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for African American college students. To better understand what is needed to accomplish this goal, it is essential to review the literature, the keywords, and the databases to find supporting literature. First, Google Scholar and PubMed were the two databases that I used to find articles for this study. Second, the included search terms were *African American, college students, body image, social media, and social comparison*. Through this search, I found 503 studies to support this dissertation.

I organized the literature review in the following way. First, I will discuss statistics and trends in social media use, particularly with African American individuals. Next, I will talk about body image, particularly with African Americans. Last, I will discuss social comparison, ending with studies that discuss social comparison with African Americans.



## Social Media

Before addressing the goal of this study, it is crucial to first overview the effects of social media. *Social media* is a computer-based technology that utilizes electronic forms of communication while also letting people exchange and share information quickly and easily (Chen et al., 2021). Social media users can share thoughts, ideas, images, videos, and other types of messages with people worldwide, letting them connect (Chen et al., 2021). Another way to think of social media is as a collective term referring to various media websites focusing on content-sharing, collaboration, communication, community-based input, and interaction (Lutkevich, 2021). Individuals employ social media for various reasons, such as staying in touch with family and friends. However, there are also professional uses, as businesses use many social applications to market and promote their products (Lutkevich, 2021). Images on Social networking websites have also contributed to the development of both positive and negative components regarding social media. As previously stated, Social media users can share thoughts, ideas, images, and videos; however, images that have been uploaded to social media platforms have also contributed to many psychological barriers including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and lastly, eating disorders (Kepios, 2022).

There are many examples on various media outlets, where people can share messages and photos; there are also media sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr, which predominantly have users post videos (Lua, 2022; Lutkevich, 2021). Blogger and Tumbler are some other content production sites, where people can post blogs and other messages (Lua, 2022). The most recent statistics on social media use show that there are

about 4.5 billion social media users, which is about 59% of the total global population. These statistics represent a 7.8% increase from just last year; when considering the total number of social media users in 2017, there are 1.9 billion more users than just five years ago (an increase of 68.1%) (Oberlo, 2022). Predictions show that there will continue to be a rise in the number of social media users, although the growth rate will eventually plateau, with the average from 2023 to 2027 to be about 5% (Oberlo, 2022). During July in 2022, there were 2.9 billion Facebook users, 2.4 billion YouTube users, 2.0 billion WhatsApp users, 1.4 billion Instagram users, 1.2 billion WeChat users, and 1.0 billion TikTok users (Kepios, 2022). Additionally, Facebook Messenger has 1.0 billion users, Snapchat has 617 million users, and Twitter has 486 million users (Kepios, 2022).

Researchers have also reported data on time spent on social media platforms and websites. For example, the average social media user either visits or actively uses about 7.4 social platforms per month, spending an average of two-and-a-half hours each day utilizing these platforms (Kepios, 2022). This means that, on average, people spend about 15% of their awake time using social media; in global terms, that amount equates to about 10 billion hours each day, or 1.2 million years of human existence (Kepios, 2022). Furthermore, Kepios, (2022) examined which social media platforms are favored, as the total number of users in each platform or application does not necessarily equate to being preferred. While Facebook has the most users, it is only the third favorite social media platform, with 14.5% of active social media users between the ages of 16 and 64 reporting it as their favorite (Kepios, 2022). Instead, Facebook has been replaced by both WhatsApp (16.4% of people stating it as their favorite) and Instagram (15.0%); after

Facebook is TikTok, with 5.4% of social media users claiming it as their favorite, while only 3.3% of users reported Twitter (Kepios, 2022).

Other studies have examined social media prevalence. In an article by Brown (2018), it was estimated that roughly 40% of people in the world – or three billion people – utilize these social media platforms. A few years ago, Facebook was the most used social media platform that was identified back in a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, with about 75% of adolescents reportedly using social media at least once a day (Lenhart et al., 2016). In 2018, a Pew Research Center report showed that this rate had dropped to only 50% of teenagers using Facebook daily; instead, both Instagram and Snapchat had begun to dominate as a common social networking platform for teenagers and young adults (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In fact, roughly 50% of adolescents and emerging adults reported using Instagram each day, with Snapchat used daily by an estimated 40% of adolescents and emerging adults (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In a 2021 report on social media use last year, it was determined that most Americans still used both YouTube and Facebook; however, platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok were employed to a much greater degree within younger people (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). For those between the ages of 19 and 29, about 70% still used Instagram, while 65% used Snapchat (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Looking at data, particularly the recent report on social media use in 2022, TikTok had overtook the place of Facebook, becoming the most used social media platform for teenagers and emerging adults (Vogel et al., 2022). Data showed that 67% of adolescents reported using TikTok, with 16% admitting to daily use; however, only 32%

of these same teenagers stated that they used Facebook (Vogel et al., 2022). Therefore, from 2015, the use of Facebook has decreased from 71% to 32% (Vogel et al., 2022). Additionally, 95% of teenagers reported using YouTube, which has continued to remain in the top platforms; in fact, 19% of those surveyed said they used YouTube almost constantly (Vogel et al., 2022). Other popular platforms include Instagram and Snapchat. The report showed that 62% of teenagers used Instagram, with 10% using it at least daily, while for Snapchat, 59% of them used it, with 15% on it at least once a day (Vogel et al., 2022).

Pew Research Center also surveyed adolescents and emerging adults regarding the extent of time they consumed social media. An estimated 55% of these populations reported spending the right amount of time on these websites and applications, while 36% admitted to using the websites and applications way more than they should have (Vogel et al., 2022). Only 8% of adolescents and emerging adults felt they needed more time using social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

When asked about giving up social media, 54% of those surveyed stated it would be somewhat hard to do, but 46% indicated that it would be something that they would easily consider (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). When considering gender, 58% of females reported that given up social media would be challenging compared to 49% of males; in fact, only 15% of the females surveyed reported it would be easy to give up social media in comparison to 25% of the males (Vogel et al., 2022).

There were also age differences, as older emerging adults admitted that giving up social media would be a difficult thing for them to do; specifically, 58% of those between the

ages of 15 and 17 reported it would be difficult to stop using these platforms and websites, while only 48% of those between the ages of 13 and 14 felt the same way (Vogel et al., 2022). Social media has continued to be an influential development component regardless of demographics. However, there is still not much known regarding social media and African American individuals specifically.

### **Body Image**

Next, I will discuss body image by providing a background of what body image is, statistical data surrounding body image, and how body image can be psychologically and physically influential. Body image comprises what a person believes about their appearance, how they feel about their weight, height, and shape, and how they physically feel or experience their body (Bredella, 2017). According to Ramos et al., (2019), body image is the complex mental experience of embodiment that involves a person's body-associated beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings.

These beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings make up the four facets as it relates to body image and they are known as: perceptual, cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The perceptual aspect is defined as a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body (Frederick et al., 2007). For instance a person may see themselves as fat when in reality they are underweight. The cognitive body image aspect is your own interpretation of what you think of your own body, which can lead to preoccupation with body shape and weight (Frederick et al., 2007).

For example, you may be an individual who believes "if I build muscle in my chest and arms, I will feel better about myself." This mindset is an example of the effects

of cognitive body image. The affective body image aspect involves how you feel about your body, which includes feelings such as self-esteem, self-acceptance, satisfaction or dissatisfaction feelings toward your shape, weight and individual body parts (Frederick et al., 2007). An example of this concept is the idea of plastic surgery and having the misconception that you must change how you look to be accepted and valued. Subsequently, the behavioral body image aspect involves how people's body image influences their behavior (Frederick et al., 2007). For example, if a person is worried about gaining excess weight, they might engage in intense physical exercise or skip meals to avoid gaining weight. Body image and its contributions to individuals' mental and physical health is something that is identified in the literature.

Some consequences exist for individuals who do not like how their body may look. For example, if people dislike their body image and shape, they tend to wear baggy clothes or avoid situations that could direct attention toward them (Eating Disorders, 2022). People's feelings about their body image reflect their dissatisfaction or satisfaction with different body parts and their shape and weight. According to (Ramos et al., 2019), the physical adjustments that occur during the onset of adolescence demand an endless restructuring of a teenager's obsession with their body image to the extent that, in most cases, it results in a decline in self-esteem. The tendency of teenagers to be unhappy with or dislike their body image can threaten their well-being and health. According to the Mental Health Foundation (2022), among adolescents, 37% feel upset about their body image, 31% are ashamed about their body image, and 19% of adults feel disgusted by their body image. The desire to be perceived a certain way can lead to not appreciating

what you have or who you are, which can have lasting adverse effects physically, emotionally, and mentally.

According to Bredella, (2017), body composition in women and men significantly varies because women have less lean mass than men, and men have less fat mass than women. In addition, men are more likely to accumulate adipose tissue around the abdomen and trunk (Bredella, 2017). In contrast, women are more likely to accumulate fatty tissue around the thighs and hips (Bredella, 2017). Furthermore, women are generally less muscular than men. Women are just over fifty percent as strong as males in their upper/superior body parts and about sixty-seven percent as strong in their inferior body parts (Ramos et al., 2019). Female and male bodies are appropriately designed for their specific gender's societal role. The female body is built for birthing and carrying children, and they have broader hips and accumulate extra fat to be used during pregnancy (Grabe et al., 2006).

Evolutionarily speaking, Men cannot give birth and therefore benefit from their lithe and robust bodies, assisting them in searching for food and when competing with other men (Ramos et al., 2019). As a result, males are more satisfied with their bodies and regard themselves as less overweight and better-looking than females, as men gain muscle during and after puberty. In contrast, it is more common for women to gain fat (Vogel et al., 2019). Men's ability to self-enhance their bodies to their desired physique helps improve their body satisfaction and self-worth.

Generally, different races and ethnicities have distinct body types marked by unique body composition and body fat distribution patterns. This difference in body type

is associated more with the environment people from a given race or ethnicity are exposed to or live in and less with the genetic composition of people from a given race (Vogel et al., 2019). For instance, in some communities, minorities may not have resources, such as access to a gym or healthier food options, due to their financial position. In suburban communities with fewer minorities, there may be more gyms and more nutritious food options because the community may be more prosperous economically (Javier et al., 2016). Given access to resources, these two types of communities may have different beliefs of what is determined to be a healthy distinct body type and an unhealthy distinct body type. From a psychological and emotional standpoint, being healthy may not be a priority in the minority community because survival is more prominent. In contrast, the community that does not have as many minorities can identify a healthier distinct body type because their environments allow them to do so.

On the other hand, having negative feelings about one's body or body dissatisfaction is a typical experience across distinct ethnic and racial groups. According to Mental Health Foundation (2022), body image is a multidimensional concept; however, in most cases, the resources used to evaluate body image in research concentrate on body shape or body weight. This approach can be limiting when attempting to understand ethnicity and body image since individuals from different racial groups have different body ideals (Swami et al., 2010). For example, body image concerns may not always fall into body shape and weight categories and some concerns can be around the shape of facial characteristics, skin tone, hair size or texture Frederick



et al., 2007). Generally, variations between persons with different racial backgrounds in body dissatisfaction levels are slight, and there seems to be more similarities between individuals from different ethnic groups than differences (Toselli et al., 2016).

Furthermore, ethnicity and race might influence body image less than factors such as weight, age, or gender (Wilkosz et al., 2011). How ethnic minority populations experience body image and the elements that impact their body image could be slightly dissimilar.

Although the differences across racial and ethnic groups might be trivial, where such disparities have been noticed, they tend to illustrate that African American females are more satisfied with their body image than Caucasian females (Toselli et al., 2016). For instance, (Hughes, 2021) identifies how African American females are overcoming the “cultural buffers” encouraging African American women to embrace their thickness and not continue to fall victim to the thin ideal distinct body type. In addition, body dissatisfaction is more evident in affluent nations where people in such countries lead lifestyles marked by higher consumption and individualism (Toselli et al., 2016). For example, places such as Canada, which is predominantly individualistic, there is more focus on body image as a result of this culture promoting individual thinking, personal choices, and self-expression. People tend to display their idealistic self-concepts in individualistic culture, which may not reflect one’s real body image (Javier et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in individualistic cultures, people can experience more significant pressures to imitate the "perfect body" due to the increased access to body-centered images and content in the media, especially social networking sites. Social media's

influence on body image can also differ across different ethnicities. According to Toselli et al., (2016), the most significant thinness pressure sources for White women in America are their families, peers, and social media.

In contrast, the thinness pressure sources for African American women are peer attitudes and family pressures (Javier et al., 2016). For instance, media representations from film, television shows, and music videos comfortably characterize African American women as exceptionally curvaceous and skinny; therefore the misconception that is being conveyed is that in order to be honored and valued, women must look a certain way. This effect further shows the perceived expectations influenced by the media to be “thin” in order to be recognized for all groups of individuals, especially women.

African American men have also dealt with the unfortunate misrepresentation of body image, which has been identified in social media. The consistent reference to muscularity as a central facet of men’s body image concerns is why no research is geared explicitly toward African American men (Osa et al., 2021). This masculinity hypothesis is that to be deemed a strong African American man, a man must display a strong level of aggression and masculinity to be accepted in this culture, which is a misperception (Griffith et al., 2018). This hostile rhetoric often depicts African American men being aggressive toward one another or others on social media, which is an inaccurate depiction of African American men (Osa et al., 2021). From a physical standpoint, African American men are often not in the best physical shape or are only accepted if they are muscular (Lowry et al., 2021).

This body type may impact men's confidence in their body image or pressure to adhere to these stereotypes. Also, another negative rhetoric in U.S culture is the devaluation of features resembling an African centric esthetic such as dark skin, kinky and curly hair, and wide nose, and considers bodily features like fair skin, straight hair, and light eyes more desirable and attractive (Osa et al., 2021). It is imperative that we look at the effects of body image from a broader perspective that does not bring awareness only to African American women but the effects it has physically and psychologically for African American men as well. Regardless of these differences among men of different ethnicities, there are some common experiences that men have independent of ethnic differences.

Research has identified that through cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, men care as much about how they are perceived on social networking sites as women (e.g, Quittkat et al., 2018). For instance, research has shown that body dissatisfaction occurs between 10 to 30% of men and 69% of male adolescents (Lowry et al., 2021). This observation proves that despite your race, body image is important to many men; however, additional actions would be beneficial to understand better the factors that contribute to men's body image, especially African American men.

What is known about body image and African Americans is that African American men and women is at greater risk for increased body ideals and body dissatisfaction, which is already understudied in the literature. Essentially, body image has not been consistently addressed throughout the African American community.

The approach of many studies is predominantly from the perspective of White European men and women, with little to no representation of African men and women. It is imperative to not only discuss the effects of body image of those underrepresented, but it is also essential to examine the perspective of this issue, specifically with African American individuals. One place to start is to research further the role of social media and body image, a topic that has received extensive investigation throughout different studies.

### **Social Media and Body Image**

The majority of studies on body image show a negative relationship with psychological well-being, and some of this relationship can be explained by social media. For example, according to (Lowry et al., 2021), a correlation exists between disordered eating, time spent on social networking websites and poor body image. The objective is to determine the association between disordered eating behaviors among university students and sociocultural factors. The data were obtained using surveys and the findings demonstrated that disordered eating attitudes was linked to increased use on media platforms.

Additionally, Fardouly et al. (2018) established that women between 18 and 25 who are heavy Instagram users have more body image concerns and experience self-objectification, particularly those who regularly view posts related to “fit-inspired hashtags” (which were identified by different commercial advertisements intended to inspire a person to get physically fit). In addition, other social media users tend to praise men with muscular bodies and women with curvy bodies and bully those without such bodies (Fisher, 2022). Therefore, people without such bodies might end up disliking their

body shapes due to dedicating so much time to social networking apps. Furthermore, these different perspectives regarding one's body image can adversely impact some people who might decide to starve themselves to achieve a particular physique to match the "perfect body shape" based on what they see on social media platforms. In worst-case scenarios, social media increases a person's risk of developing mental illnesses and eating disorders like anorexia (Vogel et al., 2022). Social media and its effects on body image vary; however, it has been identified that social media continues to be the catalyst for how people determine what appropriate body image looks like.

Many other studies have shown social media use's adverse effects on body image. For instance, corresponding research has demonstrated that different media sites such as X, formerly known as Twitter, and other social networking sites are related to various body image concerns, including body dissatisfaction and self-objectification. One emerging social media trend that has contributed to the adverse effects of media's interpretation of body ideals is the constant reference on social networking sites of what is accepted vs. reality posts. A Reality post in the social networking world is a post that has no filter and displays every blemish and imperfection of that picture or video. In Contrast, an example of this is the Instagram vs. reality posts, which have contributed negatively to both men and women from a psychological and physical perspective (Tiggemann et al., 2020).

For instance, comparing pictures to others and hoping to be perceived as someone inspirational to others based on how you look often prompted depression and anxiety. In other words, wanting to be like someone else, which is often overly idealistic, can hinder

someone's psychological well-being. Furthermore, Instagram vs. reality posts physically contributed to severe eating disorders and increased surgery to meet the expectations caused by wanting to be recognized on Instagram and in real life (Tiggemann et al., 2020).

Another example of this is the impact Facebook has as one of the most popular social media apps in this day and age. Like Instagram, young adults can create their own page, create statuses, and post pictures to engage with others worldwide. One study focused on the connection between Facebook use between young women and men Facebook use, specifically highlighting only thinness and muscularity (Kim, 2015). TikTok users also demonstrated the negative impacts caused by different media outlets on body image by contributing to the theme of unattainable body standards. A study by (Hülsing, 2021) conveyed through an online survey that TikTok users would experience less satisfied body images because they may be exposed to too much content on fitness and not content that was more considerate for those who may not be interested in fitness. The study only comprised 16 people, so the results were not generalizable. Regardless, the research identified results which have been consistent regardless of platform – more time and exposure to idealistic and unrealistic body standards may negatively impact someone's body image.

Historically, social media revolutionized communication by allowing people to connect and converse whenever and however they want in an unfiltered and potentially anonymous way. However, the media's impact on the development of the body has been proven to impact women more than men. For instance, women are often more expressive

regarding how displeased they may look compared to men (Engeln, 2017), particularly with societal presentations of women. Consequently, social media regarding women often contributes to them comparing themselves with their peers or idealized images (Manago et al., 2008). This pressure is less present for men, who may not dedicate as much time to social media and post more content regarding their possessions, like cars (Atanasova, 2016). Therefore, there is some evidence for different impacts of social media based on gender, which is likely to have slight gender differences with body image.

Besides its negative impacts, social media can also positively influence body image. According to King University, (2019), social media accounts that post fitness, wellness, and health information can be inspirational for some social media users because these accounts provide a framework through which a person can maintain a positive and healthy perception of their body images. In addition, positive body ideal advocacy on social media can significantly and positively impact people struggling with self-esteem issues due to their body image and eating disorders (King University, 2019).

Social networking sites and different platforms, can help users navigate the severely stigmatized body image topic with several support groups and programs available on different social media platforms. Furthermore, positive body image content can show social media users that their bodies do not define who they are and do not have to worry about struggling to achieve the most petite waist or the firmest muscles. According to The Learning Network, (2022), such content encourages people to engage in healthy eating habits and lead healthy lifestyles. Body-positive content in social media shows acceptance and appreciation for all body types. After viewing body-positive

information, most people tend to feel better about their body image and reduce their risk of being depressed or developing any mental illnesses. Although body-positive material on various social media platforms impacts a small number of people, this content is insufficient to offset the unhealthy contribution of the various media platforms and social networking posts on the supposed attraction of strenuous physical exercise, dieting, and modeling.

Body positivity aims to challenge dominant appearance ideals, foster acceptance and respect for all bodies regardless of shape, size, and features, and focus on appreciating the functionality and health of the body rather than solely focusing on appearance (Sastre, 2014). However, while many social media users have celebrated the increase in awareness regarding positive physical and psychological development, others have expressed concern over its potential drawbacks (Cohen et al., 2021). Over the last decade, the body-positive movement (or body positivity) has developed due to the consistent barrage of media images promoting unrealistic and unattainable appearance ideals. Additionally, an article by (Swami et al., 2018) revealed that body positivity had been referenced with emotional well-being and more significant psychological development and is protective against health-promoting behaviors. What remains identified about the body's positive trend is that the core features include appreciating the unique features of one's body by accepting aspects of the body no matter the size. However, there needs to be more research that shows the content and impact. Overall, what is still unknown is how media and different media platforms use may impact African American's physical development.



### **Social Media use and Body Image in African American College Students**

The upsurge in the use of social media in today's society can have many different effects on body image, which may also promote eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem. Studies have shown that media exposure contributes to depression and body dissatisfaction, and social media is, unfortunately, shaping our concept of beauty (i.e., Fardouly et al., 2018). Continuous exposure to online images shows the constant comparison between individuals and their perception of their bodies. There are an estimated 3.6 billion users worldwide on social media, meaning that many individuals are likely impacted by the content they see, including African American college students (Fox et al., 2016).

Although studies may show a negative effect regarding body image and social media use, some consider social media to vary depending on culture. For instance, (Olayinka et al., 2021) examined social media's impact on African American college students. They discovered that understanding representation and cultural influences on the perception of beauty can affect African American college students. Another study on social media use identified that the images of African American women in the media are limited, as they are not nearly as frequently featured in primary roles compared to European Americans (Awad et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the media that reflects African American individuals tends to occur in rap music videos; unfortunately, discovery related to images containing explicit content in rap music videos harms African American body image (Awad et al., 2015). Similarly, this population is also commonly represented in American culture as sexually

promiscuous, with advertisements depicting African American women in animal prints or other stereotypes that dehumanize them (Awad et al., 2015). This hypersexualization within American culture can significantly impact women's development of sexual self, triggering concerns regarding self-presentation (Awad et al., 2015). Furthermore, hypersexualization pertains to African American women, and African American men have also fallen victim to this. Social media reflects that a strong and attractive African American man must be fit and have a big beard, lovely eyes, and hair, which is the typical appearance of African American men portrayed in music videos (Awad et al., 2015). This study introduces how society's norms and attitudes impact the body image of African Americans. Despite these studies and this information, the relationship between social media use and body image among this population is significantly underrepresented in the literature.

While the perpetuation of these stereotypes in media can be detrimental to African American individuals' body image, there are positive contributions for African Americans. For example, (Olayinka et al., 2021) explored the response to the hashtag movement, #BlackGirlMagic, which was tweeted after a Psychology Today article declared that African American women were objectively less physically attractive compared to other women. The hashtag was the catalyst for a nationwide empowerment movement, which celebrated the achievements of African American women while affirming their beauty (Olayinka et al., 2021). The study used a survey to question African American women on the perceived impact of the hashtag on their self-esteem,

with 82% reporting that they had suffered from discrimination due to their race (Olayinka et al., 2021).

Furthermore, many wished they did not have some specific feature, with 78% mentioning their hair texture, 64% mentioning their skin complexion, and 60% mentioning their facial features (Olayinka et al., 2021). Although this study helped convey the positive impact of social media for African American individuals' body image, this topic still has not received a lot of attention from researchers. Social media impacts body ideal development in both a negative and body manner. However, it is imperative to continue to provide multiple perspectives to be understand body image and social media as it pertains to the African Americans.

More information shows how social media could possibly benefit body image. For example, in the last discussed study, 82% of women surveyed stated the effects of the #BlackGirlMagic social media movement had a positive impact on their self-esteem (Fisher, 2022). Another example of the effects media and body ideals in African American college students comes from another study that pinpoints social media racial discrimination, body dissatisfaction, and it effects it has on adolescents.

An evaluation through research pinpointed the association between social media use and vicarious social media discrimination (Fisher, 2022). This study consisted of 407 participants, where 27.52 % were Southeast Asian, 28.6% were African American, 19.41% were Indigenous, and 24.82% were Latino. Out of the 115 African American individuals that participated in this study, African American men were underrepresented compared to other ethnicities with a percentage of 7.8%. The results from this study

showed that African American men were the least represented, and based on that observation, it is evident that the study was not reasonably able to assess social media use compared to social media discrimination among African American men (Fisher, 2022). The following variable to consider, then, is social comparison, which may help understand African American's body image regarding their social media behaviors.

### **Social Comparison**

Social comparison signifies people's innate drive to evaluate themselves with others (Festinger, 1954). It is the progression of thinking about information about one or more people concerning the self and serving people's needs for overall self-improvement (Wood, 1989). The social comparison concept was first defined and developed by Festinger. He hypothesized that people could not self-judge their abilities and opinions accurately; instead, they relied on comparing themselves to others to form evaluations. Upward comparison is one of the contributing factors and occurs when people compare themselves to someone they perceive to be superior. In contrast, *downward comparison* is defined as comparing with someone perceived to be inferior (Wheeler, 1966). According to (Festinger, 1954), individuals are compelled to gauge their sentiments and talents to define whether they are correct (opinions) or good enough (abilities) as well as set benchmarks of what they plan to reach (level of aspiration) (Festinger, 1954). Initially, social comparison comprised assessments of abilities and sentiments, but later, the theory expanded and included other aspects, like emotions (Gibbons et al., 1999). People frequently use social comparison, for example, by comparing their physical appearance, job performance, and relationships to others.

Learning about the self through social comparison can be difficult for some and more accessible for others, evident by differences in demographics (Suls et al., 1982) suggested that engagement in social comparison weakened across adulthood, peaking during young adulthood and declining from middle age to older age. The scholars claimed that older-aged adults engaged in social comparison less frequently than younger adults due to losses of and changes in interpersonal contacts, general disengagement from society, social isolation, and declines in the cognitive capacities necessary for social comparison like perspective taking (Suls et al., 1982). Other studies have shown that the tendency for social comparison engagement is higher among young people (Buunk et al., 2020). It is crucial to understand that young adolescents tend to compare themselves strongly with their peers and conform to their ways as they progress toward independence and self-reliance. It is essential to remember that social comparison is a common phenomenon across all communities, and we must recognize and examine how it affects these communities (Gommans et al., 2017).

In the realm of gender studies, it is widely acknowledged that women exhibit a higher propensity toward social comparison than men. This phenomenon has been substantiated by (Pulford et al., 2018) who reported that females in the age group of 18-45 exhibit a greater proclivity toward upward social comparison in academic settings as compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, women have been observed to engage in social comparison more frequently than men on popular social media platforms like Facebook, as pointed out by (Bergagna et al., 2018). Notably, on these platforms, the number of likes and followers one has is often correlated with their level of success, with

women perceiving these metrics to be indicative of their financial compensation. In contrast, for men, such metrics are not associated with success, as suggested by (Pulford et al., 2018).

Cultural background is a salient factor that can have significant implications for social comparison processes. Differences in how the self is construed as interconnected with or distinct from others across Western and Eastern cultural contexts have been highlighted in the literature. The Western self is typically characterized as individualistic, independent, and autonomous, whereas the Eastern self is often described as interdependent, collectivistic, and communal (Pulford et al., 2018). As a result, more interdependent individuals tend to engage in social comparison more frequently than independent individuals, such as those with Western cultural backgrounds (White et al., 2005). The role of social comparison in regulating social interactions and its contribution to cross-cultural differences warrants further investigation.

The phenomenon of social comparison and its impact on an individual's well-being has been the subject of extensive research over the past few decades. While engaging in social comparison may initially offer comfort and validation, recent studies have suggested that this effect is short-lived and that frequent social comparison can lead to a decline in one's well-being (Kleinke et al., 1998). Furthermore, social comparison has been found to have significant implications for an individual's psychological well-being. For example, people can feel motivated to enhance their performance (Collins, 1996). Social comparison can also bring adverse effects. Particularly, frequent social comparisons are often associated with low confidence and negative affect (Vogel et al.,

2015), and such negative emotions as sadness, fear, shame, and anger (Fujita, 2008). Since people prefer dedicating their time to social media, they tend to engage in social comparisons online that can also bring different consequences, such as developing mental health issues, including anxiety, inconsistencies in building intimate relationships, and depression (Cohen et al., 2021). (Primak et al., 2017) identified the link between the increased depression and anxiety symptoms in young people aged 19-32 because of the multiple use of social media platforms. The present observation draws attention to the detrimental influence of social comparison on an individual's psychological well-being while engaging with social media platforms. It sheds light on the fact that the persistent use of social media to create a fictitious and more appealing self-image to gain peers' approval can lead to unhappiness and anxiety. The evaluation of one's self-worth depends upon the disparity between different self-representations; thus, social comparison can harm an individual's mental health.

### **Social Comparison and Social Media**

Currently, there are many studies on social comparison and social media. Social networking sites like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, deliver ample opportunities for social comparison. Social comparison can occur at any point of the day due to people's ability to positively present themselves, selectively allowing content on their profiles and what video or photos to upload; having the flexibility as presenting yourself through videos and photos on a customizable page, reinforces a critical and accurate judgment of an individual's way of life or personality. Under social media influence, social comparison can influence an individual's psychological well-being.

Specifically, using social networking platforms like Facebook can result in unfavorable social comparisons and cause negative self-perceptions de (Vries et al., 2015). For example, individuals may shift their position and their pose when taking pictures to share online to make them appear better than they already do. As a result, people are often comparing themselves to an idealistic version of others.

Different studies conclude that women exposed to idealized media images (specifically on Instagram) focus more on the body ideals of others, which results in lack of confidence and self-satisfaction (Kleemans et al., 2016). Another study concluded that actively participating in social networking sites like Instagram could lead to low body satisfaction and eating disorders among male users (Griffith et al., 2018). However, when under social media influence, social comparison can bring positive results that can be beneficial to an individual's psychological well-being and development.

According to Meier et al., (2018), social comparison through social networking platforms can cause the feeling of envy as a positive reaction toward other people and motivate individuals. More precisely, this study demonstrated a positive correlation between inspiration on Instagram and active comparison between social networking participants, which was mediated by the feeling of envy. People are more motivated to become more like their superior targets when envy affects them (Meier et al., 2018). Accordingly, there may be varied effects regarding comparisons and effects depending on the social media platform, particularly Instagram.



## **Social Comparison and Instagram**

The growing popularity and increasingly frequent usage of social networking sites has prompted researchers to begin examining how these sites impact user psychological well-being. However, the research to this point has yielded mixed results. Since its debut in October 2010, Instagram, a mobile based photo sharing application, has quickly become a leading social networking site. On an average day, more than 60% of Instagram users log on to the site and users around the world update 95 million photos and videos regularly Meier et al., (2018). Instagram has influenced a significant amount of people. It has been stated that Influenced has about 800 Million active users on a month-to-month base (Lup et al., 2015).

Research has expounded on why individuals use Instagram, with the primary belief being that Instagram exists to enable personal self-promotion (Lewallen et al., 2016). Selfies, which are photographs that individuals take of themselves with webcams or smartphones, are among the most popular types of posts (Gonzales et al., 2011). Scholars have argued that the image driven nature of Instagram encourages presentation of only the most positive and polished characterizations of one's life. The resulting prominence of positive images may trigger assumptions that these photos are indicative of how the people in them actually live and thus make people more vulnerable to judging themselves in relation to others (Lup et al., 2015). Essentially, given the specific motivations for using Instagram, which is primarily for self-promotion, body image comparison is more common compared to when individuals use other social media platforms.

### **Social Comparison and other Social Media Platform**

As online interaction has increased, social media users commonly engage in social comparison, using the personal information contained in photos and posts as basis for upward or downward comparisons. Recent studies have supported this view. Facebook, Instagram and TikTok use has been shown to affect both users' impressions of others and self-perceptions (i.e, Lup et al., 2015). For instance, people who have used Facebook longer easily remember positive messages and happy pictures that other people post on Facebook and such available examples give users the impression that other people are happier than them.

Studies have found that comparing oneself to others on social media platforms other Instagram significantly impacts social media users' well-being. For example, one study found that the active use of Facebook (e.g, writing a status update or commenting on a friend's post) influences user depression levels, showing, specifically, that Facebook envy mediates such negative feelings (Vogel et al., 2015). This study implies that Facebook use can lead to depression when experiencing envy through social comparison. Other studies such as (Vogel et al., 2015) and (Lewallen et al., 2016) have also found that feelings of jealousy are often triggered by following information of others on TikTok. Despite the possibility that social media users make social comparison regularly, a systematic understanding of how social comparison affects users' well-being remains elusive, particularly for African Americans. Indeed, (Vogel et al., 2015) stated that "even if we acknowledge that social comparison is occurring, we know very little about what specific content people are evaluating and how this impacts well-being" (Lewallen et al., 2016)

### **Social Comparison, Social Media, and African American Individuals**

When investigating social comparison on social media, scholars examine different groups of people, such as women and men, young and older, academic students, and people who have graduated, but less research is dedicated to African American individuals. In recent studies, (Vogel et al., 2015) identified the effects of social media use and how the constant comparison approach among participants impacts it. In their study, over 140 college students participated, including African American, White, American Indian, and mixed-race students.

Their study concluded that students with a high probability to utilize social networking sites, particularly Facebook, more frequently due to the possibility of comparison between participants having a low orientation possibility. Yang et al. (2018) examined the comparison among participants and identity distress on social media during the college transition for male, female, White, and African American first-year college students. After conducting research, the scholars concluded that social media use continued to contribute to social comparison. However, it needed to be clarified if there were differences based on ethnicity.

Thus, examining social comparison on social media among African American college students is crucial. First, although African American college students comprise a large number of individuals in American society, they are significantly understudied in the literature on college students (Vogel et al., 2022). 18%-20% of universities with the exception of Historical Black College Universities, consist of African American college students, and these rates are not seen in studies of college students (Vogel et al.,

(2022). According to different studies, many African American college students have a negative experience in White colleges and universities; thus, they do not have high academic performance than White students (Vogel et al., 2022). Secondly, many African American students face racism in White educational establishments, thus experiencing inequality and providing a social comparison with other races (predominantly White) that affect their psychological well-being (Lewallen et al., 2016). Since many countries, including the United States, fight with gender and racial inequality, it is crucial to study social comparison of African Americans, particularly college students on social media, to learn the problems they face in order to support the healthy development of African American body language.

Scholars have thoroughly examined the problem of body image during the last several decades. Although many scholars and psychologists have paid much attention to it, they have only recently started examining body image in a new media environment – social media (Lewallen et al., 2016). Looking through such social sites can make the user, particularly female users, view "thin inspiration" images, which could result in developing eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and even some examples comparison among participants being conducted (Ghaznavi et al., 2015) & (Taylor et al., 2015). Nevertheless, not enough information discusses the issues African American individuals deal with regarding social comparison and social media; understanding these relationships would not only address a deficit in the literature, but it would be beneficial to bring more awareness to African American communities.

### **Problem Statement**

Today, the relationship between social media use and body image, and social comparison as a moderator of the relationship with African American individuals has not been investigated among scholars and psychologists; however, the fact that the effects of media use can induce negative body esteem and other problems is not new. The contemporary literature contains much research on social comparison, particularly the role with social media use and body image (Ghaznavi et al., 2015; Kleemans et al., 2016; Lewallen et al., 2016), where representatives of different races and gender participate; however, there is not much research concerning the moderation of social comparison between social media use and body image for African American college students. More than 90% of college-aged American students utilize social media, and African American college students also comprise this number.

It is possible that African American students look through “perfect” body images on social media and are adversely impacted, as other studies have suggested. This activity makes them compare to those they see on Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, or other social media platforms. Many scholars have proved and defined an association between using social media, social comparison, and unhealthy outcomes for an individual's psychological well-being, particularly body image perception (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Particularly, (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016) compared the effects of social comparison between social media, appearance-neutral websites, and magazine sites and concluded that those participants spending more time on social media had more negative moods than those

who visited magazine websites (Fardouly et al., 2015). As it pertains to gender, body image perception is a problem for all genders and ages (Hobza et al., 2007; Kilpela et al., 2015), but how it impacts different ethnicities, particularly African American individuals remains unanswered.

Therefore, the moderation of social comparison between social media use and body image for African American college students constitutes an apparent deficit, and it is crucial to investigate it. African American college students, compared to White students, do not differ in using social media and providing the social comparison between themselves and "ideal" images. The main problem is that African American students are paid less attention than White students. Thus, it is essential to deal with this gap and conduct research to moderate social comparison between social media use and body image for African American college students and address the effects of this comparison.

### **Summary**

Social media and social comparison can negatively impact body image. However, what needs to be clarified is how these variables relate to African Americans. This study investigates to what extent social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image for African American college students. The study is critical because it will fill a gap in understanding how body image and social media are perceived from the perspective of African American college students by pinpointing how underrepresented they are and the effects they can have from a psychological, emotional, and physical perspective. For Chapter 3, the goal and importance of my study will be discussed and the gaps will be addressed. I will address the research design

followed by my research questions and hypothesis, and lastly, I will identify the methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In this study, I investigated the extent to which social comparison moderates the relationship between social media and body image for African American college students. I provided a progressive understanding of the relationship between social media and African American college students' body image. This study is critical because most researchers have focused on body image among other ethnicities, but only some looked explicitly into the African American population. It is also crucial because body image could impact individuals' psychological well-being. It is essential for researchers to recognize the contribution of social comparison on social media and its contributions to body image development. In this study, I examined how African Americans experience their body image via social media, and specifically investigated how social media use impacts African American college students' body image.

### **Research Question and Research Design**

In this study, I answered the following research question.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): To what extent does social comparison moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students?

Alternate Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): Social comparison will moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students.

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): Social comparison will not moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American college students.



The design for this research will be quantitative, with a specific research design of a predictive-correlational design. Participants will complete a self-administered online survey to determine the relationship between social media use and body image. For the planned research design, it is imperative to obtain access to three local universities by contacting the Director of Student Activities to gain initial access. By securing a meeting with each of the Directors of student activities, I was able to provide an overview of my study, explain why I am conducting this research, how long the research will take, and if I can speak with graduate and undergraduate students on Zoom or Microsoft teams or get student email addresses to recruit participants. This recruitment process, once approved by the directors of student activities, will take about 3-5 days. I will send correspondence to each student's email once received and explain to each student the purpose of my study, why it is being conducted, and how it relates to me as the researcher. I will inform the students of the purpose of the survey, which is to determine the relationship between social media use and body image. Furthermore, I will also use Facebook groups and LinkedIn for recruitment and advertisement. Lastly, I will reinforce in the email that their identity and answers will be secured and not shared with anyone outside the research team, emphasizing the confidentiality of their information to build trust and encourage participation. If I receive emails from the director(s), I will email the survey to the participants directly with this same message.

The online survey for this dissertation included the following scales: Social Comparison Orientation Scale (see Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), which measured the tendency to engage in social comparison; the Body Image States Scale BISS; (Cash et al.,

2002), which measures and evaluates an individual's affective body image state at any given moment; and the Social Media Intensity scale (Orosz et al., 2016), which explored the basic dimensions of everyday social media use through the four essential contributing factors: (a) persistence, which refers to users who check social media prior to resting for the night and, emphasizing that for them social media is considered one of the most important things to do during their day; (b) boredom, which refers to individuals justifying their intensive use of social media due to boredom or passing the time; (c) overuse, which is when an individual uses social media despite noticing that their habits are excessive; for example, an individual is aware of their poor ability to limit social media use but is comfortable overlooking this faulty behavior, and (d) self-expression, which is when users identify their own liking and style to others while using social media as the primary source of this emotion. This survey will be administered through SurveyMonkey and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The association between the independent variable (social media) and the dependent variable (body image) was analyzed by linear regression using SPSS. A linear regression was used to assess the influence of the moderator variable (social comparison) on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Wagner III, 2019). Testing moderation happened in three steps: standardizing the variables, calculating the interaction terms, and conducting a linear regression with the independent variable, the moderator, and the interaction term on the dependent variable (see Cucos, 2022). The quantitative research method best supports this study. First, this study is deductive (rather than subjective) and best addressed by quantitative research.

## **Methodology**

Quantitative research is a process involving the analysis and collection of information. Quantitative research was the best approach for the research questions because qualitative approaches cannot be used to address moderation queries.

### **Moderation Analysis**

With the assistance and approach of moderation analysis, this approach addressed the hypothesis in this study. Through this approach, the researcher tested for the impact of Z (the third variable) on the relations between the Y and X variables. Instead of testing causal links, the focus is determining the relations among the X, Y, and Z variables. This study utilized linear regression to address the hypotheses of this study, including moderation. Linear regression analyzed the association between the dependent variable (body image) and the independent variable (social media). Moderation analysis determined the effectiveness of the moderator variable (social comparison) in the relationship between the independent variable (social media use) and the dependent variable (body image). SPSS was used to complete his moderation analysis. Moderation involves three steps: standardizing the variables, calculating the interaction terms, and conducting a linear regression with both the dependent and independent variables, the interaction term, and the moderator (Cucos, 2022). For instance, in the case of this research, I suspect that social comparison will moderate the relationship between social media and body image among African American college students. This approach makes it possible to predict a variable's value relative to another (James et al., 2021).

My focus in this study was to establish whether and how social media and body image relationships are moderated because of social comparison. I acquired information to understand the contributing factors to social comparison among students and the impact of social networking sites on young African American individuals' body image.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

In this dissertation, the sample was African American college students from three different universities within the state of Virginia. Individuals, regardless of their mental and physical health or ability to speak English and other languages, will not be excluded from participating in this study. I did not restrict participation based on gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. The only requirements were that participants were between the ages of 18 and 29, African American, enrolled in college or university, and have experience with social media, like Instagram and Facebook. These delimitations are required in order to address the research question associated with this study. In order to determine sample size, G\*power was used. I set the effect size to .15, which would reflect a small effect and then the alpha level was set to .05 to ensure that significant findings did not occur at random. Next, I set the power level to .8. Through the a priori power analysis, the output revealed that I needed 99 participants to achieve sufficient power. I utilized online surveys via SurveyMonkey to collect the necessary data for this study.

I used convenience sampling whereby research data were collected from a pool of participants who could be conveniently accessed. This approach is commonly used and is preferred because of its simple nature and low financial burden. As explained by Burke et

al. (2020), in convenience sampling, the researcher does not require additional input to improve the sample. This sample was convenient because I had direct access as an alumnus and through university connections. Through this sampling approach, I collected information from possible participants to understand their specific needs and address them appropriately. I focused on enhancing awareness of how social comparison moderates the relationship between social media use and body image.

### **Recruitment Measures**

Advertisements for this study were posted on Facebook Groups, as well as utilizing emails in conjunction with professional and fraternal relationships with the universities. The advertisement discussed the focus of the study and the criterion of the participants, which includes reiterating the key points on why establishing how social comparison is expected to moderate the relationship between social media and body image among African American college students who are underrepresented in literature.

This advertisement included the following information (pending IRB approval): “How are you? My name is Khalil Coleman. I am conducting a research project as part of the Walden University Developmental Psychology Ph.D. Program. We are seeking participants to take a brief online survey that is geared toward conveying more explicitly that young African American students are understudied in research, and participating in studies like this helps to increase understanding of the factors that influence well-being among African American students. Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. It takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. I would appreciate your participation if you can spare a few

minutes.” I plan to use Survey Monkey to collect data. The data collected will not include any personal identifying information. All responses will be completely anonymous.

### **Instrumentation**

#### ***Social Comparison***

Participants responded to the orientation scale (social comparison) (see Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). This Likert scale, which allows some items to have higher scores than others in some cases, was implemented to measure distinct differences in social comparison orientation. Furthermore, this instrument can pinpoint the trend to interact in social comparison and capture the central aspects of the self, the other, and the psychological interaction between the two. The core instrument of the social comparison orientation scale (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) contains 11 items and, in each item, people are given statements about their self-comparison with others, to which they can respond on a 5-point scale ranging from A, *strongly disagree*, to E, *strongly agree*. The instrument's validity has been tested in 22 studies using questionnaires in the United States and the Netherlands. It has been demonstrated to be valid, and validity was established because the questionnaire used and tested in 22 studies has shown to display comprehensible results that show its effectiveness on various experimental tests (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The reliability of the 11 items used was low, with a reliability of only 25 percent. In detail, the 11 items asked about (a) making comparisons with loved ones, (b) paying attention to one's own and other's accomplishments, (c) evaluating accomplishments through comparison, (d) comparing sociability, (e) denying any comparison with others (reverse coding), (f) comparing life accomplishments, (g)

exchanging opinions and experiences with others, (h) interest in similar others thoughts, (i) interest in similar others coping strategies, (j) gaining knowledge through others thoughts, (k) making no comparisons of personal life situation. The variables were determined by taking the mean of all 11 items, as no items are reversed (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

### ***Body Image***

I assessed body image with the body image states scale BISS; (Cash et al., 2002). The BISS is a 6-item measure of the individual's evaluation and effect on their physical appearance at a particular moment. These six items focus on the following domains (a) dissatisfaction-satisfaction with one's overall physical appearance, (b) dissatisfaction-satisfaction with one's body size and shape, (c) dissatisfaction-satisfaction with one's weight, (d) feelings of physical attractiveness-unattractiveness, (e) current feelings about one's looks relative to how one usually feels, and (f) evaluation of one's appearance relative to how average person looks. Participants respond to each item on a nine-point, Likert-type scale. The labels for this 9-point Likert Scale include 1= *Strongly Disagree*, 2= *Disagree*, 3= *Slightly Disagree*, 4= *Undecided*, 5= *Slightly Agree*, *Moderately Agree*, 6= *Strongly Agree*, 7= *Very Strongly Agree*, 8= *Completely Agree*, 9= *Fully Met expectations*. The directions stated see below,

For each of the items below, check the box beside the one statement that best describes how you feel right now at this very moment, Read the items carefully to be sure the statement you choose accurately and honestly describes how you feel right now.

The scale has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77 for women and .74 for men Cash et al., (2002). Construct validity was confirmed through an experiment geared toward an individual's ability to reach appearance related information (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

The individual's level of dysfunctional body image investment showed that different appearances caused a reaction with every participant involved. This information was obtained through feedback which affected their scores on the measure. Cronbach's alphas were computed to evaluate and in each instance the scores were the means of the six items. The higher the scores on the 9 point dimension indicated more favorable body image states.

### ***Social Media***

This study utilized the social media intensity scale to assess social media usage more comprehensively than the frequency or duration indices utilized in previous research (Ellison et al., 2007). The scale, which demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .83), was designed to capture the level of active engagement of participants in social media activities by encompassing two self-reported evaluations: the number of "friends" on social media platforms and the duration of social media usage on a typical day. Additionally, the measure includes a set of Likert-scale attitudinal questions intended to capture the extent to which participants were emotionally connected to social media and how social media was integrated into their daily routines. Participants were requested to specify essential categories, such as relationship status, high school, and mobile phone number when creating their profiles on respective social



media sites. Finally, the respondents were asked to identify the types of visitors to their profiles, such as high school friends, classmates, or family members, using the instrument administered in the study. The scale's reliability and the measure's comprehensiveness make it a valuable tool for assessing social media usage in research studies.

These items offer insight into how respondents used social media toward sustaining connections or meeting new people. These examples include "In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes per day have you spent on Facebook?" with options ranging from no time spent on face (0= less than 10), to frequently visiting Facebook (5= more than 3 hours). Although the scale labels differ, they will still be averaged per instrument instructions. There will be a total of 100 score participants for this scale. Each item will be scored based on a response related to the 5-item Likert scale. As stated previously, the scores will be computed by average per instrument instruction. Five items will be in the scale, and the mean will be calculated while ensuring the items stay the same and consistent. Another example item is "I am proud to tell people I'm on social media" which was measured utilizing tool known as the likert scale. The Likert scale anchored by strongly disagree being one and strongly agree being a 5. (Ellison et al., 2007) reported that the scale had appropriate internal consistency, as Cronbach's alpha was .83.

### **Threats to Validity**

There may be potential threats to the study that are both external and internal. External threats to validity can be the researcher's generalization of results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An example of an external threat is when a researcher may be

considered wrong by making a generalization from findings of a particular variable in a study. The population intended for this study are African American students in college and identifying how social comparison moderates the relationship between social media and body images. Internal threats to validity consist of treatments, procedures, or experiences that may prevent the researcher from drawing the correct conclusion from the data collected. Another example of an internal threat to validity is Sample attrition, when research participants pull out part-way through, which can be detrimental to a research study. A potential internal threat is selection bias. Selection bias was utilized to help identify the sampling methods, the population of interest, and the recruitment participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another factor of internal threats is social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is when the participant responds to the survey in a way they feel is a desired response (Fisher, 1993).

I took some steps to minimize threats to validity. First, using the consent form, I made sure that all participants involved were aware that this study is voluntary. The use of personal information was not permitted. Furthermore, participants could skip over any questions that made them feel uncomfortable, which was also stated in the informed consent form. Threats to validity were also addressed by including quality control items. For example, two control items said, "Select 2 as your response to this question." Any participants who did not select "2" to these questions were removed from the final sample.

### **Data Storage**

According to the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct American Psychological Association, (2010), as well as the Walden University Institutional Review Board and federal guidelines, all research data and information was securely stored on password-protected file storage systems to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Furthermore, personal identifying information was not collected to protect participant anonymity. After five years, all data collected will be systematically deleted following established procedures.

### **Ethical Procedures**

When the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study, participant recruitment and data collection started. A consent form was readily available for participants to read before they begin the survey. Participants had the option of stopping the survey at any time and could skip any question that made them feel uncomfortable. The consent form stated that participants could skip questions that made them feel uncomfortable. It also stated that if they are too uncomfortable to continue the study, they can stop without any penalty.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study that should be considered. First, the degree to which the findings can be generalized may be a limitation. Although I plan to recruit college students from three colleges in Virginia, I cannot necessarily generalize these results to all African American college students. Secondly, the use of self-reports may increase the probability of social desirability bias. This bias occurs when a

participant tends to respond to questions showing themselves in a favorable perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Summary**

The present study investigates how social comparison moderates the relationship between social media and body image for African American college students. The primary objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive perspective on how the relationship between body image and social media use can impact African American college students. To achieve this goal., participants will be asked to complete a self-administered online survey to gauge the relationship between social media use and body image. The survey will include the Social Comparison Orientation Scale (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), which will measure social comparison tendencies; the Body Image States Scale (BISS; Cash et al., 2002), which will evaluate an individual's affective body image state; and the Social Media Intensity scale (Orosz et al., 2016), which will explore the fundamental dimensions of everyday social media use through four contributing factors.

The relationship between the independent variable (social media) and the dependent variable (body image) will be analyzed through linear regression using SPSS. Furthermore, the effect of the moderator variable (social comparison) on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables will also be tested through regression analysis (Wagner III, 2019). The quantitative research method best supports this study, given the numerical data and hypotheses testing. Finally, this chapter highlights the potential threats and limitations of the study. Overall, this research addresses critical gaps

in the literature and contributes to understanding the relationship between social media use and body image in African American college students.

## Chapter 4: Results

The psychological, emotional, and physical effects of social media use and body image are unknown. Studies have shown that the impact of social media use on body image often occurs through social comparison (Naslund et al., 2020). Social comparison is an issue that seems to hinder individuals' well-being (Yang et al., 2019). This issue has also not been adequately addressed with populations of African American individuals, particularly those in college. The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between social media use and body image and the moderating role of social comparison. My hypothesis was that social comparison will moderate the relationship between social media and body image in African American college students. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study by analyzing the data and describing the study participants, data collection and preliminary analyses.

### **Data Collection**

After receiving approval from the IRB (02-06-24-0620106), the participants from this study were recruited using Facebook groups. I began by creating a post indicating that I was conducting a research study and was seeking participants. However, I made sure to state that the participants had to be over the age of 18, African American, and were current college students. I posted in three different groups on Facebook including Divine 9 Greek group, National Health Initiative group, and New Growth Behavioral Health Mentoring group. It took me from February 12th to February 18th to acquire 132 participants, which surpassed my required sample size.

### Sample Characteristics

The data were collected within 1 week through SurveyMonkey. A total of 132 participants contributed to the online survey. Of the 132 Participants, only 115 completed the entire survey, meeting every requirement of being over 18, currently enrolled in college, and African American. Seventeen were removed from the study because they provided incomplete or missing data. The sample size estimation included in Chapter 3 indicated that a total of 100 participants would be needed for the study to have statistical power. Therefore, the study had the required number of participants to complete the analyses. Participant demographics shifted toward male representation, with 44.3% identifying as such and the remaining 55.7% as female. The average age of the participants was 22 years with a standard deviation of 2.70, indicating a relatively homogeneous age distribution. See demographic characteristics of study participants in Table 1 below.

**Table 1***Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 115)*

Variable	n	Valid Percent
Gender		
Female	51	44.3
Male	64	55.7
Age Groups		
18	8	8.1
19	10	10.1
20	11	11.1
21	8	8.1
22	13	13.1
23	8	8.1
24	13	13.1
25	16	16.2
26	20	20.0
27	8	8.1
Ethnicity		
African American	115	100.0
Profession		
Student	115	100.0

### Preliminary Analysis

Once data were collected, they needed to be merged to SPSS. The first step that I took was to download the data from SurveyMonkey and export it to an Excel spreadsheet. Next, the data were successfully transposed into SPSS, where data cleaning were conducted. Some data were removed due to incompleteness, and some participants did not answer all of the questions. I removed 17 participants in total., and out of those 17, four missed a significant amount of questions, making their input unreliable, resulting in a total sample size of 115 participants. Once data were moved to SPSS and data cleaning were completed, I adjusted and manually coded everything into SPSS, typed all the questions, and changed everything from string to numeric. The next focus of the



initial analysis was to ensure scales were reliable by testing the reliability of the scales being used for my study. Once reliable, I could compute the mean and conduct the main analyses for this study. This step was repeated for my body image scale (BISS) and my social media scale. The scales and the variables in this study showed that the Cronbach alphas were all acceptable.

**Table 2**

*Reliability Statistics of Social Comparison*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.739	11

**Table 3**

*Reliability Statistics for The Body Image States Scale*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.669	6

**Table 4**

*Reliability Statistics for Social Media Intensity*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.684	11

Because the scales were reliable and no variables needed to be reverse-coded, I computed each variable and then took the mean of all of the items of each scale. The means of each of the variables are as follows: social comparison ( $M = 33.7$ ,  $SD = 5.0$ ), body image ( $M = 28.6$ ,  $SD = 7.4$ ), body image ( $M = 33.2$ ,  $SD = 6.4$ ). Next, I tested for outliers to see if any of the individual scores were outside the range of three standard

deviations below and above the mean. No outliers were found when determining the mean and standardized deviations with my variables.

### **Tests of Assumptions for Linear Regression**

The moderator, predictor, and dependent variables were tested and confirmed the assumptions of linear regression analysis, which are presented at the bottom of this webpage. The predictor variables are social media and social comparison, and the dependent variable is body image. To conduct the main analyses, linear regression was performed. I used this analysis to capture effect size using R square. The R square tells the percentage the model explained when predicting the dependent variable. The assumption that was being tested, was identifying the effects of social media use and social comparison as it pertains to body image. The assumption is that social media use which is my dependent variable will have a substantial impact as it pertains to the independent variables such as social comparison and body image.

### **Results**

First, I wanted to test the direct effects of social media use and social comparison for body image. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5. It was determined that social media and social comparison explained 25% of body image. If the R square is near .1, it is a small effect size. If it's .3, it's a medium effect size, and if it is .5, then it is a large effect size (Ialongo, 2016). In this case, the R square is considered a medium effect size.

**Table 5***Model Summary*

Model	R Square	R Square Change	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.500	.250	.236	1.08666

Next were the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results. The results of the ANOVA showed significant relationships between the predictors and body image. In the first model, which included two predictors (social media frequency and social comparison), the regression model explained significant variance in body image, as evidenced by a significant F-value of 18.633 ( $p < 0.001$ ). This means that the combination of social media frequency and social comparison explained a significant amount of variation in people's body image perceptions. Similarly, in the second model, which included an additional predictor (the interaction term), the regression model remained significant with an F-value of 13.417 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

These findings suggested that social media use, social comparison, and the presence of a moderating variable (the interaction between social media use and social comparison) collectively related to people's body image. Thus, while Model 1 provided valuable information about the relationship between social media and body image, Model 2 extended it by considering the moderating effect of an additional variable (social comparison), providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing body image. The F-value for Model 1 is 18.63 with a p-value that is less than .001, which shows that the model is significant.

Lastly, the results of my coefficients are presented in Table 6. This analysis displays my intercept and standardized and unstandardized beta coefficients. My constant, also known as my intercept, represents the average body image score before accounting for the independent variables. My predictors were social media and social comparison. For this table, I determined the unstandardized beta coefficient and the significance of my intercept and predictors. The unstandardized beta coefficient for body image is 1.4, and the significance is .10. For social comparison, the unstandardized beta coefficient is .96, with a significance of .67. Lastly, the social media unstandardized beta coefficient is 1.018, with a significance of <.001. For social comparison, which is my moderator, the significance is not less than .05, so for the participants in this study, social comparison does not seem to be a factor that supports my literature review in Chapter 2. However, social media is significant, which means the more time or intense people spend on social media, their body image stress increases. Please see Table 6 below for the coefficients.

**Table 6**

*Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficient SE	Standardi zed Coefficie nts Beta	t	Sig.
1	Intercept	1.401	.847		1.655	.101
	Social Comparison	.96	.222	.035	.432	.666
	Social Media	1.018	.168	.498	6.078	<.001

Next, I conducted moderation analysis, which was the main analysis used to address the research question. The results are presented in Table 7. It identified that

adding the moderator changed the R square from .250 to .266, leading to the “Sig F Change” changing from  $<.001$  to .117, meaning that adding the moderator did not significantly change the model.

For the ANOVA results, Table 8 presented that model 1 was significant ( $f = 18.633$ ,  $p = <.001$ ), and model 2 ( $f = 13.417$ ,  $p = <.001$ ) remained significant without the moderator. However, the change in R-squared between models 1 and 2 (0.16) was relatively small and the associated F-value of 2.490 was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.117$ ). This suggests that the moderator variable may not significantly improve the predictive power of the model due to the influence of social media use and social comparison behavior alone. Thus, although Model 2 provides a more comprehensive account of the factors influencing body image, the inclusion of a moderating variable (social comparison) did not significantly strengthen the model. The results thus support the hypothesis that social media use and social comparison significantly influence people's body image, but there is limited evidence suggesting that social comparison moderates this relationship. Thus, my hypothesis was not supported.

**Table 7**

*Model Summary*

Model	R Square	R Square Change	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R square change	F change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F. Change
1	.500	.250	.236	1.08666	.250	18.633	2	112	<.001
2	.516	.266	.246	1.07950	.016	2.490	1	111	.117

**Table 8***Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficient SE	Standardized		
				Beta	t	Sig.
1	Intercept	1.401	.847		1.655	.101
	Social Comparison	.96	.222	.35	.432	.666
	Social Media	1.018	.168	.498	6.078	<.001
2	Intercept	5.861	2.949		1.988	.49
	Social Comparison	-1.279	.899	-.472	-1.423	.157
	Social Media	-.508	.982	-.248	-.518	.606
	Moderator	.471	.299	.921	1.578	.117

**Summary**

In this chapter, my research questions and hypothesis were tested, which aimed to understand the relationship between social media use and body image, while testing social comparison as a moderator, among African American college students. As stated previously, the data were collected within 1 week through Survey Monkey. A total of 132 participants contributed to the survey. Of the 132 Participants, only 115 completed the survey, meeting every requirement. Seventeen were removed from the study because they provided incomplete or missing data. The sample size estimation included in Chapter 3 indicated that a total of 100 participants would be needed for the sample to have statistical power. In the study, the primary participants were African American College students over the age of 18, and all of my participants were recruited using social media outlets such as Facebook and Survey Monkey.

The first step that I took was to download the data from Survey Monkey and export it onto an Excel spreadsheet. During this process, some data were removed due to incompleteness, and some participants answered only some of the questions. The total

number of participants that were moved was 17, and out of that 17, four missed a significant amount of questions, making this input unreliable. Once the data were moved to SPSS, I conducted a complete data cleaning and adjusted and manually coded everything into SPSS and typed all the questions while also making sure everything that was string was changed to numeric. Reliability analysis was conducted to test the scales being utilized and displayed that all Cronbach alphas were acceptable. The Cronbach alpha was .739 for the Social Comparison scale. Cronbach's alpha was .669 for the Body Image States Scale, which was weaker but still good, and Cronbach's alpha was .684 for the Social Media Scale.

I completed the following for this study: computing the mean, reliability analysis, linear regression, descriptive analysis, frequencies, and moderation analysis. The findings showed that social comparison is not a factor for African American individuals. Caucasians care a lot more about knowing how they compare themselves to others. However, it also showed that the more intense people are on social media, their body image stress increases for African American individuals in comparison to Caucasians. African Americans are not using social media to compare themselves to others. They are using it for other reasons, whether personal or professional. Chapter 5 will include further discussion of the findings and limitations in their entirety.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Social media use is widespread, providing for communication between friends, people with similar interests, entertainment and even a means of income. Previous research indicates that there is a negative relationship between social media use and mental health, particularly body image (Glowacz & Schmits, 2020). My goal for this study was to understand the impact of social media use on the body image of African American college students and to test if social comparison moderated this relationship. The research question that I used to guide this study was: To what extent does social comparison moderate the relationship between social media and body image with African American students?

Research studies refer to the process by which social media use affects body image as one of social comparison, and this comparison and judgement of the self-based on idealistic but unobtainable assertions of attractiveness can impair the well-being of an individual (Naslund et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2019). The results of this study, however, supported the null hypothesis. Yet, social media frequency and social comparison did explain some of the variation in people's body image perception. This chapter includes discussion of the interpretation and theoretical implications of the results, recommended future studies to advance understanding, and the potential contribution of this study to positive social change.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The current study had two main findings: (a) the intensity of social media use was related to increases in body image stress for African American participants and (b) social



comparison was not a factor for the body image of African American participants in this study. The first main finding has implications for social comparison theory, and the second finding is consistent with past research. Previous studies identified that mental health issues and body dysphoria are present in the African American community as it pertains to social media (Wanberg et al., 2020). In other words, other researchers have found that high social media use could predict declines in body image satisfaction.

There are a few reasons why social media frequency was related to more body image stress for participants in this study. African American college students might feel pressured to conform to unrealistic body standards, leading to increased body image stress. For instance, Olayinka et al. (2021) examined social media's impact on African American college students and discovered that understanding representation and cultural influences on the perception of beauty can affect African American college students. This finding relates to the current study, as people may feel insecure in their own image due to their body internalization, as opposed to social comparison. Another study on social media use identified that the images of African American women in the media are limited, as they are not nearly as frequently featured in primary roles as European Americans (Awad et al., 2015). The current study extends this research by focusing on African American college students, and supports the rationale that there are pressures to have a specific appearance, regardless of cultural background. Essentially, African American emerging adults may feel worse about themselves because they think they need to conform to what they see online.

Conformity is different from social comparison, as conformity is the tendency of an individual to align their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with those of the people around them (Lowry et al., 2021). An example of this process is normative conformity, which occurs when an individual decides to dress in a particular style because they want to look like their peers who are members of a specific group (Pulford et al., 2018). While cultural norms may mitigate this stress, explaining the outcomes does not mean that this stress does not have an impact (Fardouly et al., 2018; Lowry et al., 2021). Cultural norms are set behaviors and beliefs that a set group may follow. Variables such as cultural representation and media portrayal of African Americans, as discussed by Awad et al. (2015), could also play a role in cultural representation in conjunction with media portrayal., providing unnecessary pressure to have to conform in order to be accepted no matter what it may cause which in some cases has resulted in an increase in body image stress and more intense social media usage. Therefore, individuals may be anxious as a result of conformity.

Furthermore, the results also show that people with low body image may spend more time on social media. This observation is based on the assumption that the user could be seeking companionship or acceptance. Riehim et al. (2019) discovered that individuals who spend more than 30 minutes on social media may be at a heightened risk for physical and mental health problems, particularly internalizing problems. The internalized problems included low self-esteem and acceptance of how they feel about themselves physically. Furthermore, a reason for this extended time from individuals on

social media was to find like-minded individuals dealing with this issue to connect with. Spending time on social media could possibly be to seek support for anxious symptoms.

The intense use of social media among African American participants might be influenced by the need to connect with peers and maintain a social presence, which can impact body image stress. For instance, social media influencers within the African American community are only successful based on how their bodies are perceived by those they interact with, and from a companionship level, the more desirable you look physically, the more you are accepted. The desire to connect and obtain companionship as well as be perceived a certain way has contributed to detrimental psychological and physical developments for men and women, which has proven to be impactful to body image (Olayinka et al., 2021). Being mindful of these potential risks will allow for the implementation of different ways to combat this potential issue.

Although social media use was associated with body image, social comparison did not directly or indirectly impact body image concerns. In this study, social comparison occurred with participants but did not relate to body image. This null finding could be attributed to how African American college students use social media. For example, 73% of African American online users between the ages of 18-29 prefer platforms such as Twitter, where they can express themselves verbally (Olayinka et al., 2021), which does not directly relate to image-based consumption.

Additionally, positive body image reinforcement, such as #blackgirlmagic, has positively impacted the African American college community, which has contributed to the null finding of social comparison not impacting body image concerns regarding this

variable. Minimal social comparison has occurred due to positive body image because humans have an innate drive to evaluate their abilities, progress, and standing in life (Pulford et al., 2018). In this case, as identified, less social comparison occurred because, for this specific demographic, the foundation of acceptance was not physical acceptance. It was through verbal expression, which is why the preferred platform among this demographic was Twitter, where they can express themselves verbally. This phenomenon is present with African Americans, not present with other groups.

### **Conceptual Framework: Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Leon Festinger's social comparison theory (1954), which proposes that individuals determine their social and personal worth based on comparison to others. This study's findings were inconsistent with the theory. The findings suggest that while social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) is relevant, it might only partially apply to African American college students in the context of social media and body image. African Americans often have more self-esteem than other demographics, predominantly because of community support, and therefore, may be less susceptible to social comparison (Gibbons et al., 1999). This evidence indicates the need for more culturally sensitive adaptations of the theory (Pulford et al., 2018).

### **Limitations of Study**

This study advances research on social comparison and social media with African American college students, but it has limitations. The first was the need for completed surveys, as many participants skipped questions and were dropped from the study. This

reduced the total number of participants and the validity of the findings. Having too many participants who did not follow all of the required instructions would have caused my study to have further limitations, and the validity of my findings would be invalid. A second limitation was that social desirability bias may have influenced how the participants responded. Some participants may have wanted to be perceived in a way that could accurately depict how they felt. Third, it was beyond the scope of this study to control for demographic variables, so I did not control any additional variables due to sample size restrictions. I encourage future studies to capture larger samples and to include control variables in the analysis. A fourth limitation was examining only college students, so my results were not generalizable to all African Americans or college students. The purposive sampling method, which saw recruitment from the social and professional circles of the researcher, further restricted the generalizability of findings.

Finally, upward and downward comparison wasn't as impactful as hypothesized due to the intensity of social media use being related to increases in body image stress for African American participants. Social comparison was not a priority regarding this sample group, so it was not as impactful. However, this opens up new avenues for future research. Finally, because the study was cross-sectional., it is not possible to determine cause and effect. It is recommended that future studies capture these variables longitudinally so that casual statements can be made.

### **Recommendations**

Social comparison through social media does not moderate the relationship between social media use and body image in African American college students.

However, it indicates that the frequency or intensity of social media use relates to increased stress levels. Future studies should explore other variables, such as cultural influences and media portrayal of African Americans (Awad et al., 2015), to better understand this relationship between individual stress and social media. About the theoretical foundations, further work should identify mitigating factors of body image stress, such as community support and positive role models, and how they work to advance beyond merely identifying stress factors to creating effective interventions. An intriguing research study that would help would be introducing the psychological and emotional adaptation of yoga and meditation, which is something that can be easily adapted no matter your gender or race. This falls in line with community support because the expectation and completion of this new implementation will be based on something other than how you physically look but more or less on how you feel. Relying on other coping methods rather than medicine can be a significant part of social change.

The specific characteristics of social media stress and variation by ethnic or cultural background should provide for exploratory comparison research to identify better who is at risk, why, and the potential for cultural mitigating factors to be leveraged as protective factors for the population. Specific empirical evidence is needed for research that can be translated into practice, such as therapeutic support on college campuses to help students reduce social media use and recognize signs of stress that may be related to social media overuse. Furthermore, qualitative research could be used to identify what resources African American college studies have to address concerns. These mechanisms and how they work need to be better understood. Investigating more phenomenological

experiences of African American students of both genders is warranted to formulate better theoretical frameworks to accommodate cultural variation in social comparison outcomes. This study will not be limited to only African American college students. Still, it will be generalized so that this underrepresented community can see how impactful social comparison is to the entire race. This will allow future researchers to bring the potential risks of social comparison to social media and body image to light and would allow for the implementation of different ways to mitigate any issues that come up.

Once clear, high-quality evidence exists, existing research evidence could be synthesized to provide best practices and warnings. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) could raise awareness of the relationship between social media intensity and body image distress for African American participants. This could inspire more research to specifically focus on African American participants. In the meantime, there are many research questions, from the demographic points of comparison to determine the direction of the relationship between stress and social media use, the extent to which one variable is independent, and how they may reinforce one another. For African American students, while they are impacted by body image stress, cultural factors buffer the outcomes of body image (Bergagna et al., 2018).

### **Positive Social Change**

My goal for this study was to understand the relationship between social media use and body image in African American students and how social comparison moderates that relationship. I sought to raise awareness of the barriers African American college students face regarding the effects of social media. I found that social comparison does

not moderate the relationship between social media use and body image and that how intensely social media is used is related to the increase in body image stress. The results of this study can be helpful in both theory and practice.

In this study, I addressed a void in the theory and academic progress regarding African American body image and social media use impacts. In general., too few studies focus on this population and their well-being. At a broader level, it speaks to the potential to better understand, from the Festinger social comparison paradigm (Vogel et al., 2015), that future research on other culturally distinct groups would be beneficial as the social comparison may only be prevalent for someone based on their culture.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the potential dangers of overusing social media, particularly in the context of body image stress. While social comparison may not be the sole issue, the study underscores the need to address other potential issues that could hinder body image. By broadening the focus beyond African American college students, this study equips a wider audience with the knowledge and resources to effectively manage the risks associated with social media use.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, I examined the relationships between social media use and body image and the role of how social comparison moderates that relationship with African American college students. I addressed a gap in the existing research literature using a sample that is rarely focused on in research. I assumed that social comparison would be impactful due to the current impact of social media and the constant upward and downward comparison found in previous studies (Gibbons et al., 1999). Furthermore, the



social comparison theory was not as impactful as it was implicated before the study. This was limited because it specifically provided a perspective of only African American college students, dealing with the social desirability bias of the participants, which may have influenced how some of the participants answered their questions.

Furthermore, sample size restrictions were due to sample size and the inability to control the demographic variables. Lastly, participants had the risk of low participation and needing to fully answer all questions, which could have affected the validity of my findings. These results provide some context for future research. This study contributes to positive social change because it brings awareness of how impactful it can be in emphasizing the importance of therapeutic and mental health support for African American college students to help alleviate issues caused by the overuse of social media and the stresses it may cause regarding body image.

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## Appendix A: Copy of Survey

**Social Comparison Orientation Scale**- Measuring the tendency to engage In social comparison.

How often do you make comparisons with loved ones?

How often do you compare your own and other accomplishments to one another?

How often do you evaluate your accomplishments through comparison?

How often do you compare your social ability to others?

How often do you find yourself denying any comparison that you may have done with others?

How often do you compare life accomplishments with others?

How often do you exchange opinions and experiences with others?

How often do you find interest in similar others thoughts?

How often do you find interest in similar others coping strategies?

How often do you gain knowledge through others thoughts?

How do you make no comparisons of personal life situations in comparison to others?

**Body Image States Scale**- will measure and evaluate an individual's affective body image state at any given moment.

Are you dissatisfied or satisfied with your overall physical appearance?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

Are you dissatisfied or satisfied with your body size and shape?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

Are you dissatisfied or satisfied with your weight?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

Do you experience feelings of attractiveness or unattractiveness often?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

Do you experience feelings about how you look relative to how you usually feel  
about yourself often?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

Do you believe people evaluate how they appear relative to how an average person may look often?

1 = Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Slightly Disagree

4= Undecided

5= slightly agree, Moderately Agree

6= Strongly Agree

7= Very strongly agree

8= completely agree

9= Fully Met expectations

**Social Media Intensity Scale**- will explore the basic dimensions of everyday social media use through the four fundamental contributing factors.

If I could visit one site on the internet it would be any of social media outlet.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

I feel bad if I don't check my social media pages I own daily.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

I often search for Internet connection in order to visit social media.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

Before going to sleep, I check my social media pages once more.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

Scrolling through social media post is good for overcoming boredom.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree



3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

When I'm bored, I often go to social media for entertainment.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

If I'm bored, I login on to my social media accounts.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

I spent time on my social media at the expense of my obligations.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

I spend more time on my social media than I would like to.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

I like refining my social media accounts.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

It is important for me to update my social media accounts on a regular basis.

1= Strongly Agree

2= disagree

3= neither agree or disagree

4= Agree

5= strongly agree

## Appendix B: Permissions

Khalil R. Coleman

Sunday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023 8:40pm

Subject: Social Comparison Orientation Scale

Good evening

In preparation of my Appendix and gaining permission for each of my Scales it was identified that the site that I would like to obtain the PDF for my scale does not require me to ask permission to use this scale. This directly from their page below. Below that is the version where the PDF is available as well.

*Terms of use: Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes. You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/150905>- THIS is where the Scale can be downloaded from*