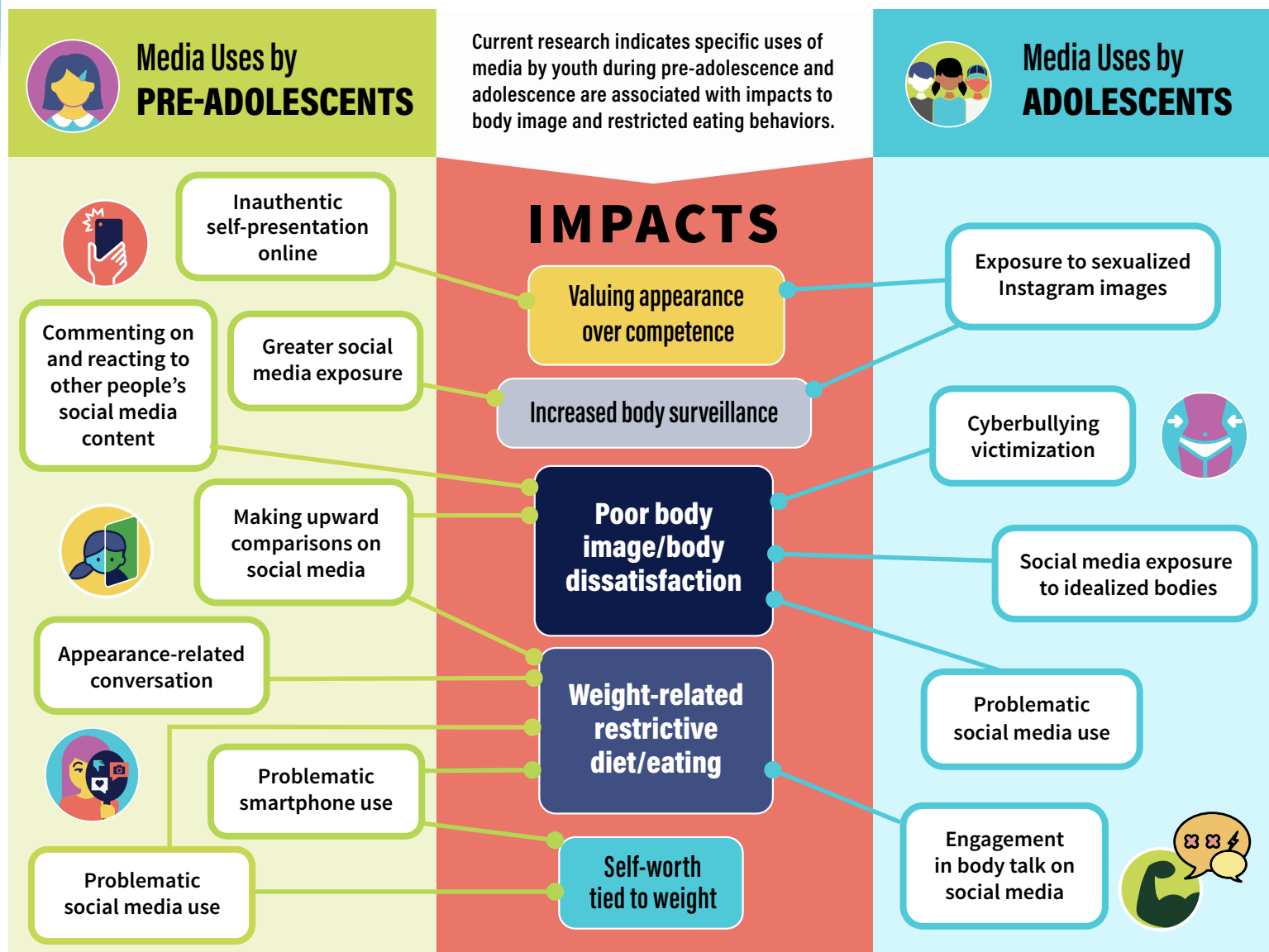


Digital Media and Youth Body Image

2025

How Children's Media Use Impacts Their Body Image



(Chu et al., 2024; Damiano et al., 2015; de Coen et al., 2024; Fioravanti et al., 2022; Jarman et al., 2023; Leggett-James et al., 2022; Meeus et al., 2023; Salazar, 2017; Skowronski et al., 2021; Steinsbekk et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023)

Adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to the effects of social media on body dissatisfaction due to:

- Developmental stage (importance of peer approval, self-consciousness, puberty)
- Gender socialization (social fixation on female appearance, objectification)
- Social media features (peer-edited images, quantified feedback, public content 24/7)

(Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022)

Greater media exposure and appearance conversations were the strongest predictors of weight-related dietary restriction in 5-year-old girls.

(Damiano et al., 2015)

Content Matters



- **Social media content that is placed in risky context** (e.g., no “buffers” like self-compassion quotes), is **appearance-oriented**, and **frames appearances as “ideal”** amplifies the negative impacts of social media on adolescent body image.
- **Photo-based platforms** do the most harm to youth body image, with likes and comments on photos strengthening or weakening the impact the photo has on children’s body image.
- **Exposure to thin and thick models in advertising** on Instagram associated with greater willingness to engage in appearance-altering practices to obtain these body shapes.
- **Thinspiration and fitspiration content** on social networking sites promoted problematic attitudes toward fitness, body image, and restrictive eating.

- **Fitspiration content** promotes an idealized “fit” body by objectifying the body and promoting a single body type.
- Analysis: nearly 60% of 100 **leading Instagram fitness accounts** were rated “not credible” due to featuring:
 - » Under 4 fitness-related posts out of 15 posts
 - » Sexualizing and objectifying content
 - » Nudity or inappropriate clothing
 - » Extreme body types
- The top grossing **animated films from 2004-2018** promoted male muscularity, female thinness, and personal weight control, with higher weight associated with negative traits (e.g., evil) and thinness and muscularity associated with positive traits (e.g., kind, happy, successful); these themes have increased over time.
- **Pornography** use has a negative, short-term impact on adolescent body satisfaction.

(Alberga et al., 2018; Curtis et al., 2023; de Valle et al., 2021; Ferdousi et al., 2023; Harriger et al., 2018; Paquette et al., 2023; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Vandenbosch et al., 2022)



The Role of Selfies, Filters, and Avatars

SELFIES

- Taking and editing selfies is more harmful to children’s body image than posting selfies.

FILTERS

- An analysis of beauty filters showed that these filters have ethnocentric (white) biases by whitening skin color and altering facial features to be more Eurocentric.
- Among pre-adolescents (10-12 years):
 - » 62% of girls occasionally contemplated using a social media filter, with 34% saying they were hesitant to share unfiltered photos
 - » 55% of boys preferred to share filtered over unfiltered content
 - » Girls showed a greater discrepancy between their virtual and “real” selves compared to boys
- Adolescent girls (12-18 years) who used body and face filters were more socially motivated to undergo cosmetic surgery than girls who did not use these filters.
- Exposure to beautifying augmented reality filters significantly reduced body satisfaction in emerging adult women (18-25 years), with this relationship strongest for those with lower self-esteem.

AVATARS

- Creating body avatars with idealized body shape and size associated with improved body satisfaction for adolescents and emerging adults compared to those who didn’t adjust their avatars to fit their body ideals.
- Experiencing a virtual body larger than one’s actual body associated with greater body disturbances and body anxiety during adolescence and young adulthood compared to participants’ experiences with a virtual body their actual size.

Interventions and Protections

- **Body positivity digital content** has greater potential for improving youth body image than digital fitspiration content (which can worsen body image) and disclaimer labels (i.e., acknowledging a photo has been edited).
- **Balancing idealized and counter-idealized** (e.g., body positivity) bodies in digital content can protect adolescents (12-19 years) against body dissatisfaction; TikTok promoted the most body diversity.
- Early adolescent girls (12-13 years) who participated in a **classroom-based digital intervention to improve body satisfaction through digital media literacy** had improved body satisfaction 1 week and 8 weeks post-intervention compared to girls who did not participate in the intervention.
- **Digital body appreciation micro-interventions** had a protective effect on young children’s (4-6 years) body appreciation.
- Adolescent girls (14-18 years) reported that **body image interventions led by social media influencers** could benefit them under certain conditions:
 - » Influencer’s messages and core values needed to align with a body image focus
 - » Influencer had to have personal experience with body image dissatisfaction
 - » Influencer needed to appear authentic
 - » Influencer needed to collaborate with mental health professionals on their content
 - » Videos needed to be between 10-20 minutes

(Digennaro & Iannaccone, 2025; Dijkslag et al., 2024; Garcia et al., 2019; Maes & Lenne, 2022; Park & Kim, 2025; Riccio et al., 2024; Vandenbosch et al., 2022)

(Bell et al., 2022; Craddock et al., 2025; Paraskeva et al., 2024; Trekels, 2024; Vandenbosch et al., 2022)

