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<div align="center">Social Media's Influence on Eating Disorders</div>

When scrolling on social media, how does it make you feel? There are so many images and so much negative content that is plastered all over social media that can really damage how we view ourselves and how we treat our bodies. We see all kinds of altered images and pictures of models or celebrities that can make people feel that that's how they should look. Aside from these images, society's standards of beauty can make people feel that they have to conform to these unattainable standards. There are also accounts and websites on the media that post "pro anorexia" (or pro ana) content, which can really affect how individuals perceive themselves and treat their bodies. All of this negativity across social media can be very triggering and lead to eating disorders. Aside from the negative, there are also people that see social media as an opportunity to spread body positivity. People feel that there are individuals in the media who promote self love and body positive content, making up for the negativity in the media. Although there are definitely positives to social media, they do not counteract the negative content that can be damaging to individuals. Through things such as altered images, societies high beauty standards, and pro ana websites, social media can have a very negative impact on individuals body image, thus leading to unhealthy eating behaviors and disordered eating.

Social media is an outlet of very many altered images. Researchers from University of London report that 90 percent of 175 surveyed young women say they filter or edit all of their photos before posting them online. This includes evening out skin tone, whitening teeth, and

shaving off some weight (John Anderer, Study Finds). When coming across all of these images, it creates a false reality as to what individuals feel they should look like. We see all of these photos and question why we don't look like that, when in reality most of those images are edited and not real. When constantly seeing people who evidently have "perfect skin," "perfect hair," "perfect body," etc. it can be very damaging to an individual's mental health. Even if a photo is unedited, it is most likely still someone's best picture. It's rare to see someone post a picture of themselves that they feel they look bad in. Coming from a young girl who uses social media, there typically are over 100 photos taken just to make sure the best photo is chosen to go online. This again creates another false reality, as people don't see the bad and more realistic photos of others. They don't see the photos of when someone is bloated or when someone's skin is breaking out, they only see the good and curated photos. This gives people the idea that that's what models and influencers always look like, when in reality not everyone always looks picture perfect all the time. Altered and curated images on social media are a perfect example of how toxic social media can be. Seeing them constantly can lead to worsened mental health, body dysmorphia, and varied eating disorders.

Society has always held both men and women to extremely unrealistic beauty standards. Men in the media are always shown to be muscular and very fit. Whereas women will likely be shown to have an unrealistic "hourglass" body shape or be very thin. There even tends to be "body trends" in the media. Sometimes it's more trendy for a woman to be thinner whereas sometimes the media prefers curvier models. These trends are always changing, almost seeming like no body will ever be up to society's standards. Someone that fits society's standards right now, may not a year or two from now. With these terribly unrealistic trends being woven into people's brains, it leaves them constantly fighting with themselves to look a certain way.

Negative coverage surrounding any body that isn't what society has deemed to be "perfect," can leave individuals feeling that they are not worthy. "The thought of being 'fat' and 'bloated' goes through people's heads daily. Negative connotations reflect the widespread mentality that nothing but a flat stomach is acceptable. Nowadays, beauty is not measured by uniqueness, but by a number on a scale or the size of one's waist. Body standards are a social construct that are enforced in day to day interactions and are perpetuated by social media"(Yasmina Kassir, The Standard). These trends may make people feel that they are not worthy enough and they will do everything they can to try to change or "fix" the way they look. These unrealistic standards have people in a chokehold so they can please themselves and the outside world around them. These expectations of how your body should look can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors and disordered eating.

When the media puts a large amount of pressure on young men and women to meet a certain social standard of beauty, it can inevitably lead to poor body image and eating disorders. "The etiology of eating concerns is multifactorial and includes biological, psychological, intrapersonal, and environmental influences. One environmental influence—exposure to media such as fashion magazines and television—has been associated with the development of these issues, which is likely mediated by thin-ideal internalization. This combination of visual media and propagation of stereotypes among peers may be linked to increased risk for eating concerns"(Jaime E. Sidani, Ariel Shensa, Beth Hoffman, Janel Hanmer, & Brian A. Primack, National Library of Medicine). When constantly exposed to these unrealistic standards, individuals may find them reflective of how they should look. In an effort to keep up with society's expectations of what a young man or woman should look like, people put their mind

and body through lots of stress because they don't feel they are good enough. The built up stress on the body can turn into an eating disorder caused by society's high beauty standards.

Not only are young men and women likely to develop eating disorders from beauty standards in the media, but there are also websites and social media accounts that do so much as promote eating disorders. Pro ana (short for pro anorexia) websites and social media accounts post content to essentially glamorize eating disorders. These accounts and websites will post very small portioned "meals" or photos of very thin models and influencers to promote eating disorders. These posts are put onto the internet without addressing the dangers of what not eating can do to your body. Posts from these accounts will float around the internet using different hashtags such as #proana and #thinspo, which can be very triggering to people who already suffer from an eating disorder or are possibly in recovery. As a young girl on social media I see lots of websites and posts that encourage eating disorders. I see first hand how harmful and triggering they can be to people. Pro ana websites and accounts show a very toxic and triggering side of social media that can lead to more serious issues with disordered eating.

Pro ana websites and accounts are very triggering and toxic to spend time viewing. "These websites have been defined as 'a type of website that promotes anorexia' and their participants as 'someone who thinks anorexia is a lifestyle and gets help from a web community to achieve his/her goals.' A recent academic study has likewise argued that they 'encourage knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to achieve terribly low body weights'"(Karin Eli &Stanley Ulijaszek, Obesity, Eating Disorders and the Media). The people that create these websites want to use them as inspiration boards to be unhealthily thin. People who already struggle with their relationship with food, may stumble across these websites and become very triggered. Pro ana could trigger old eating habits or encourage someone to continue with inconsistent eating

patterns that they have already started. If someone who has never had an eating disorder sees one of these websites it can lead them to disordered eating as well. No matter the circumstance, these websites and accounts that post pro ana content should not exist, as they are encouraging unhealthy body image and eating habits and can be extremely triggering.

Although there is plenty of negative across social media, some argue that it is full of positivity and encouragement as well. Certain creators and accounts on social media have positive effects on body image, as they promote body positivity. Consistently viewing body positive content on social media platforms, can help individuals become more accepting and appreciative of their bodies. A lot of these content creators will show the more realistic aspects of their lives and their looks. You will see them posting photos where they may feel bloated or have some breakouts, and show that it is completely normal. This kind of representation in the media is fantastic, and hopefully the amount of people being real on social media will only continue to grow. Aside from this, there may also be people on social media who open up about struggles they've gone through, such as eating disorders. This kind of vulnerability and representation is amazing, because it can make people who are going through the same struggles not feel as alone. They can follow these people for healthy inspiration when they're recovering from eating disorders. Following body positive accounts on social media is an outstanding way to see past the negativity and possibly help with body dysmorphia and disordered eating.

While yes, there is no doubt that there are positive aspects to social media, that doesn't mean the positives counteract the negatives. While I do think it's great to follow these positive influencers, there will still always be the negative posts on the media as well. I unfortunately don't think there's a way to shut down all accounts that are posting negative content. Although accounts can get taken down, there will always be people that try to work around the guidelines,

so that doesn't happen to them. It's not always easy to completely cut out social media. Therefore a good solution would be to monitor what you are viewing on social media and make sure none of it is harmful to your mental health. Rather than following accounts that can be damaging to your mindset on food and body image, follow some of the accounts that are more body positive. Not following people and creators who post content that can be triggering to your mental health or eating disorders can make a difference.

There is no doubt that there are both positive and negative images and content displayed in the media. Some influencers will post body positivity content and show more realistic aspects of their day to day life. However, there are also altered images, high beauty standards, and pro ana websites/accounts that can cause social media to have a very negative impact on individuals' body image, thus leading to unhealthy eating behaviors and disordered eating. Although there are positive aspects, social media may always be toxic. It's important to not follow people that don't make you feel your best self, and avoid creators and content that can be triggering to your mental health or eating disorders. While it may be hard to completely cut out social media, it is possible to avoid the negative connotations you may come across. If you need to log off the media for a while that is okay too, it's important to take care of yourself and make sure your health comes first.

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