Social Networking Site Use, Self-Compassion, and Attitudes Towards Cosmetic Surgery in Young Australian Women

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with TikTok projected to be one of the most popular in 2023 (Bernhardt, 2022).

Sociocultural theories of body image, such as the Tripartite Influence Model, posit that media messaging has profound effects on individuals' standards of beauty (Thompson et al., 1999; Tiggemann, 2011). That is to say, the appearance-focused nature of SNS is constantly providing and enhancing today's latest beauty ideals (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Many SNS users create and post content that is edited to show their best appearance, rather than a more representative selection of their everyday appearance (Veldhuis et al., 2020). Concerningly, due to the availability of SNS, users are subject to appearance pressures at all hours (Veldhuis et al., 2020). Several years of research have associated SNS use with poorer body image outcomes (see Fioravanti et al. (2022) for a comprehensive review).

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the rising popularity of SNS use is occurring in conjunction with an increasing number of young adults having cosmetic surgery (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2020 ; Walker et al., 2021). Cosmetic surgery is known as an invasive procedure where the intention is to alter an individual's appearance to appear more desirable or aesthetic (Dean et al., 2018). This differs from reconstructive surgery whereby the latter intends to restore the intentional function and usual appearance of the body (Walker et al., 2021). Cosmetic surgery may represent a real-life attempt to achieve the idealised exposure presented online by SNS (Walker et al., 2021).

Evidently, cosmetic surgery has become an increasingly popular means of changing one's appearance, as from 2010 to 2018, cosmetic procedures and surgeries in Australia almost doubled from approximately 117,000 to more than 225,000 (Australasian Foundation for Plastic Surgery, 2018). The American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (2017) has previously reported an increase of cosmetic surgery specifically to improve individuals' appearance in selfies. Similarly, Sun (2020) found that selfie editing was significantly positively correlated with consideration of cosmetic surgery. More recently, Di Gesto et al. (2022) found that image-based Instagram activities that were related to celebrities and the self were significantly related to acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Although there is some research regarding cosmetic surgery tendencies in Australian women (e.g. Sharp et al., 2014; Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010), these have scarcely been in the SNS context; however, collective global findings may suggest that being exposed to SNS may be associated with more positive attitudes towards cosmetic surgery (e.g. Di Gesto et al., 2022; Sun, 2020; Walker et al., 2021).

Although SNS use may lead some to have more positive attitudes of cosmetic surgery, not all users experience the same desire to surgically change their appearance (Arab et al., 2019). One explanation for this may be due to the user-generated nature of SNS and the nuances of behaviour that differ amongst individuals (Di Gesto et al., 2022). Several studies have explored the effects of different SNS behaviour on body image outcomes (see Fioravanti et al., 2022 for comprehensive review). Additionally, some SNS users may be less likely to have positive attitudes towards cosmetic surgery due to individual characteristics, such as self-compassion, that may moderate the relationship between SNS use and body modification behaviours (Nerini et al., 2019). Current research suggests that self-compassion could be an important factor in understanding body image concerns (Wang et al., 2019). Self-compassion encourages individuals to acknowledge their flaws with neutrality and can be conceptualised as an intention of alleviating interpersonal distress (Allen & Leary, 2010). As such, Neff (2003) has defined self-compassion as being open to one's own suffering and generating desire to alleviate this and to heal oneself with kindness.

Although there are few studies that have specifically explored the relationships of SNS use, self-compassion, and cosmetic surgery, comparatively Nerini et al. (2019) examined the components of self-compassion, body dissatisfaction, and cosmetic surgery acceptance. Neff (2003) describes self-compassion as several negative and positive pairs that interact with each other to establish the whole. The six components of the Self-Compassion Scale, also used in the present study, include the positive (self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness) and negative (self-judgement, isolation, and over-identification) aspects of self-compassion (see Neff, 2003 for further information). Findings from Nerini et al. (2019) found that in a sample of young Italian women, higher mindfulness was directly linked to lower cosmetic surgery acceptance, and over-identification was associated with body dissatisfaction and acceptance of cosmetic surgery. According to Neff (2003), mindfulness and over-identification refer to a balanced approach to negative emotions so that feelings are not suppressed or exaggerated.

The Present Study

The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2020) conducted a global survey and found that females aged 19–34 years of age received the most cosmetic procedures across most categories. Additionally, Australian SNS reports suggest that young adults, aged 18–29, may be amongst the largest consumers of SNS (Sensis, 2020). This is a potentially problematic set of conditions that makes this group vulnerable to SNS appearance pressures and more positive attitudes to cosmetic surgery. Overall, previous research has demonstrated that SNS use is associated with more positive attitudes towards cosmetic surgery (e.g. Di Gesto et al., 2022; Sun, 2020; Walker et al., 2021). Additionally, self-compassion

allows individuals to accept their flaws and provide neutrality to the feeling of imperfection and, as such, may be a protective factor in the prevention of cosmetic surgery acceptance (e.g. Nerini et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study aimed

Self-Compassion Scale The 26-item Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) created by Neff (2003) measured self-compassion through positive components (i.e. self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and negative components (i.e. self-judgement, isolation, and over-identification) and a total score. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). An example question is "I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain". Empirical evidence supports the use of a total or component score rather than a collective positive and negative score (Neff, 2018, 2020). Neff et al. (2017) reported that the use of a total or component score shows predictive,

recommendations by Field (2018). Daily SNS use and participant age were entered as predictors in the first step, and self-compassion components were entered at the second step. Bivariate correlations found that negative self-compassion components were significantly negatively associated with attitudes towards cosmetic surgery, whereas positive components were not significant and therefore excluded in the hierarchical regression. The hierarchical multiple regression sought to determine what variables of interest explain a significant amount of variance in the attitudes towards cosmetic surgery, after accounting for step 1 variables.

Results

The most reported frequency of SNS use in the sample was 3 to 4 hours each day (36.3%). Facebook was the most accessed SNS amongst the sample at 91.18%, closely followed by Instagram (90.76%) and Facebook Messenger (85.29%). When exploring preferences, over 34% stated that the SNS they spent the most time using was Instagram (34.03%), followed by TikTok (28.15%). A total of 1.2% of responses reported regularly using SNS that were not listed (i.e. BeReal, Pinterest, and Reddit).

Over 16% of the sample stated having previously received cosmetic surgery, with the most common being dermal fillers. When presented with the statement "In the future, I

Discussion

The present study sought to explore the relationships amongst SNS use, self-compassion, and attitudes towards cosmetic surgery using self-reported data from 238 young Australian women. Overall, SNS use significantly positively correlated with attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. This finding supports previous research that has demonstrated similar results in the SNS use and cosmetic surgery relationship (e.g. Di Gesto et al., 2022; Sun, 2020; Walker et al., 2021). Additionally, the present study found negative correlations between SNS use and total self-compassion, as well as total self-compassion and attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. Contrary to the prediction, self-compassion did not significantly moderate the relationship of SNS use and attitudes towards cosmetic surgery; however, both self-compassion and SNS use independently significantly predicted attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. This result was investigated further, with the over-identification component of self-compassion significantly predicting attitudes towards cosmetic surgery over and above SNS use and age.

Women in the present study reported using SNS at rates higher than the global average of 2 hours and 30 minutes per day (Dixon, 2022). SNS are experiencing year-on-year increases in user enrolments and time spent on their platforms (Dixon, 2023). The trend of continued increases in the time spent on SNS may be due to the continual release and rising popularity of new platforms (e.g. TikTok) and the continual introduction of new features on platforms

procedures having been reported. Interestingly, the highest reported surgery in our sample was dermal fillers which was contrary to expected as previous research suggests that botulinum toxin type A (Botox), nose reshaping, eyelid sur-

reported frequency of SNS use was 3 to 4 hours per day, which is above the suggested global average of 2 hours and 30 minutes (Dixon, 2022). An additional objective measure of SNS use, such as a smartphone application that tracks time spent on each SNS application, may be more accurate (Rideout, 2016). Evidently, the use of self-reported measures may not appropriately capture behaviours or attitudes and may introduce the potential for bias (Van de Mortel, 2008). It is also important to note that due to the specific geographical requirements of the present study, these findings may not be generalisable to other populations; however, future studies could aim to include multiculturally inclusive standards of body image and encapsulate the different attitudes some cultures have towards cosmetic surgery. This may contribute to the exploration of minority groups and body image within Australian society. The present study had several participants who disclosed having received blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery). This procedure is completed to change the appearance of the eyelid, often by creating an extra fold to appear Caucasian (Wang et al., 2021). This surgery is the most popular cosmetic procedure for young Asian women and could show multicultural attitudes towards cosmetic surgery within the present sample (Wang et al., 2021).

Despite these limitations, the present study echoes findings regarding the influential role of over-identification and attitudes towards cosmetic surgery (Nerini et al., 2019). Of importance to clinicians are the implications of these findings for screening practices. Widespread concern has been raised within the cosmetic surgery industry, as there does not appear to be standardised, compulsory screening protocols for the psychological safety of cosmetic surgery patients (Wildgoose et al., 2013). Due to previous research suggesting that less than 40% of patients are satisfied with their post-surgery body (Asimakopoulou et al., 2020) and that

References

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