

The Interaction between Social Network use and Eating Disorders in males

William Parker¹, Konstantinos Ioannidis²

1. Medical Student, University of Cambridge

2. Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust & University of Cambridge & University of Maastricht, Care and Public Health Research Institute

INTRODUCTION

While the literature surrounding the interaction between Eating Disorders (EDs) and social network use (SNU) is mounting, few studies have focused on males only. ED psychopathology has been associated with social media consumption in female samples in many studies across the globe. Due to the prevalence of social network use in males, it might be hypothesised that this relationship should also be present in males with EDs.

METHODS

We conducted a literature search using the Medline data base via Ovid, identifying papers published between 1996 and November 2021, investigating the association between SNU and EDs using male samples only, published in peer review journal and written in English. In total, 32 papers were included via literature and manual search of references.

RESULTS

Identified studies seem to support a mixed role of social networking in males with EDs. SNU is not just restricted to social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, but includes platforms such as dating applications and online forums in addition to many others (see Fig 1). These are becoming increasingly more easy to access, especially at a younger age than previously. Some studies highlight SNU relating to vulnerability and heightened degrees of ED psychopathology (see Fig 2, recent meta-analysis showing significant correlation between problematic usage of the internet and body dissatisfaction in males), whereas others suggest that SNU helps to promote awareness and try to reduce the stigma that surrounds EDs in males. Reducing the stigma that shrouds male ED may encourage more males to open up and confront their ED. Currently, very few males seek medical help for their ED.

Future directions seem to support a potential role for digital phenotyping/ mobile sensing to identify individuals who may be at risk, however ethical dilemmas exist in respect to privacy and confidentiality for the user.

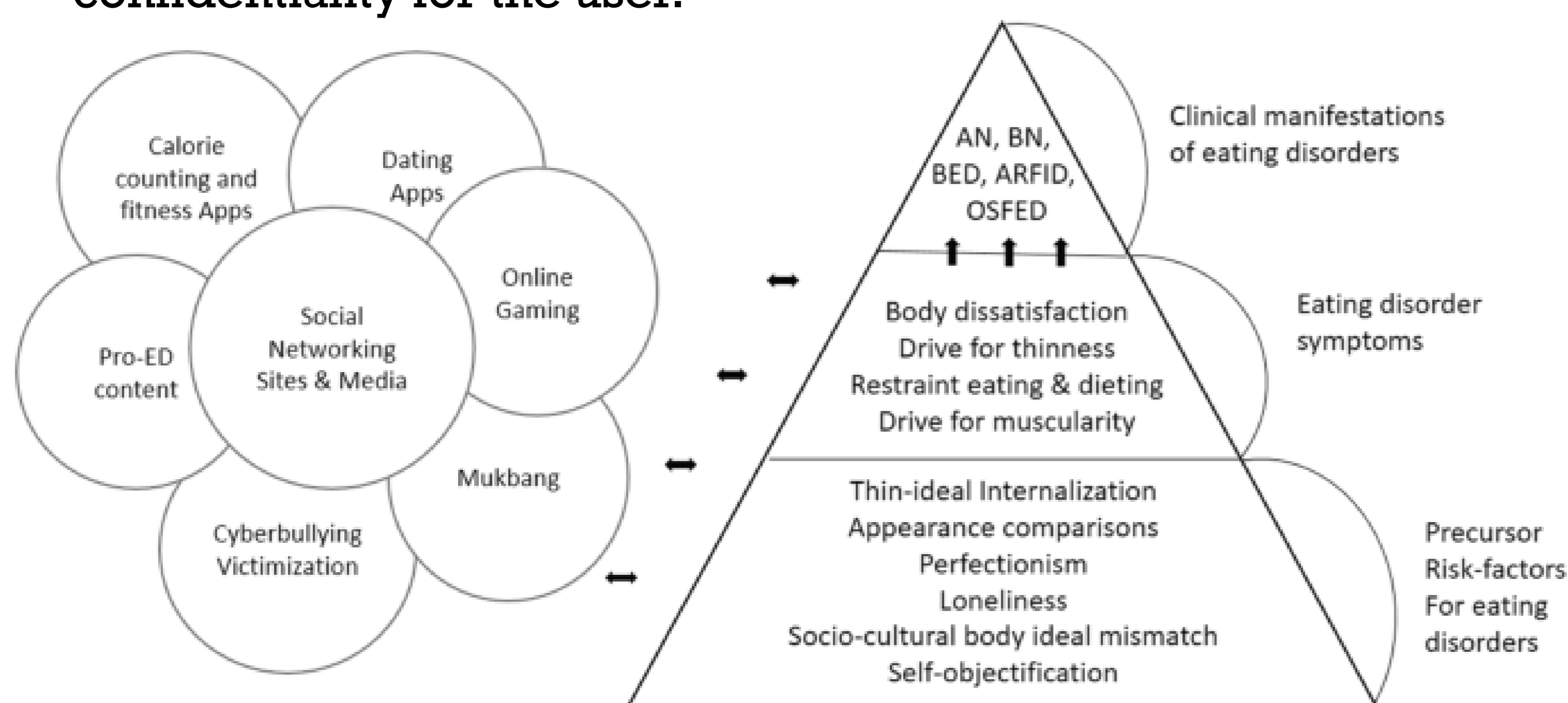


Figure 1: Illustration of the relationship between multiple facets of Internet usage and risk factors, precursors for feeding and eating disorders, as well as eating disorder symptoms reproduced with permission from Digital Hazards for Feeding and Eating: What We Know and What We Don't (Ioannidis and Chamberlain 2021)

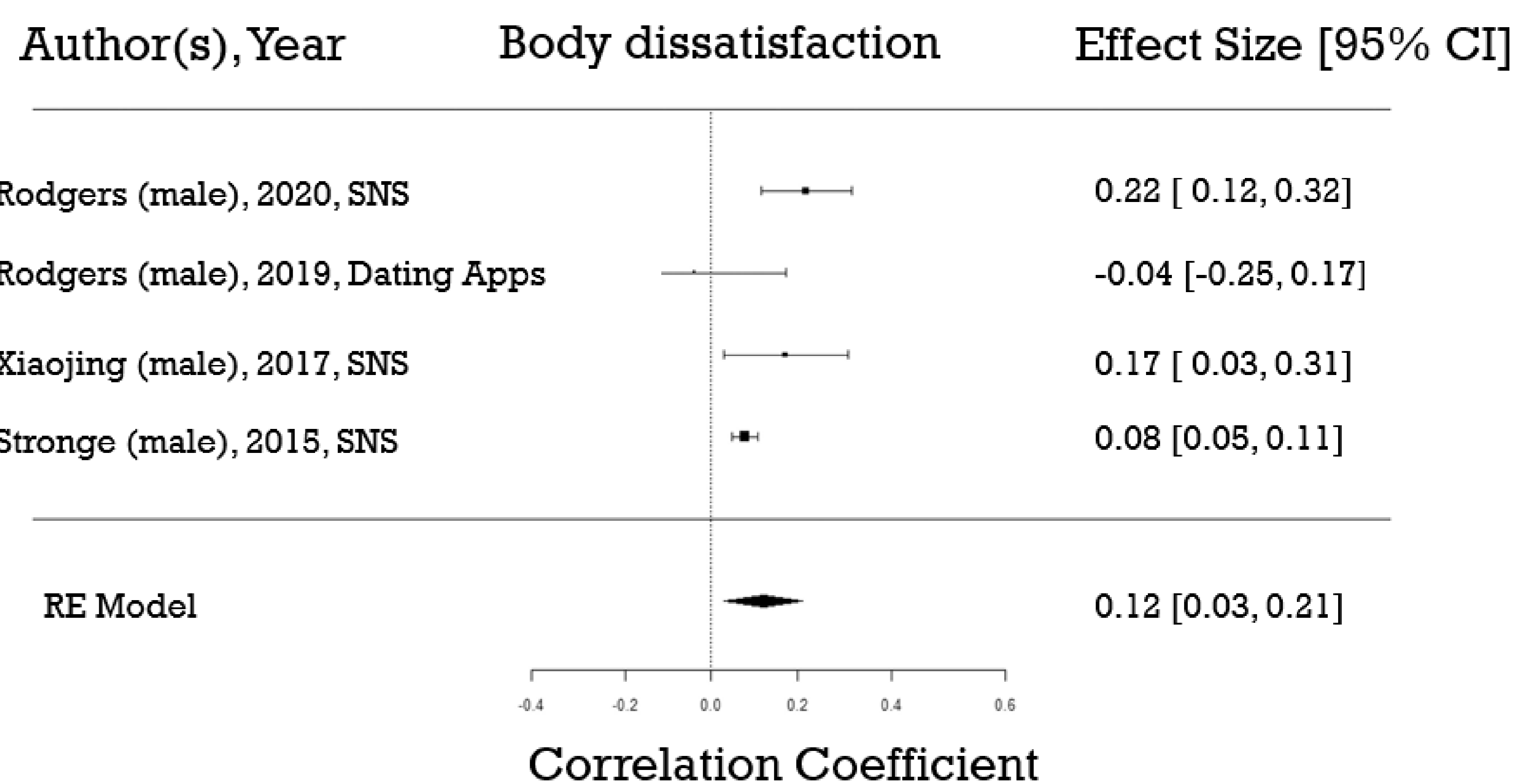


Figure 2: Meta-analysis of Problematic usage of the internet (PUI) by 'body dissatisfaction', using Pearson correlation for studies using male samples only reproduced with permission from Problematic usage of the internet and eating disorder and related psychopathology: A multifaceted, systematic review and meta-analysis (Ioannidis et al 2021)

CONCLUSIONS

There is growing recognition for the role of SNU in ED development and maintenance in males, however research is limited and study results are mixed. Future studies should aim to investigate this interaction and a better understanding may aid in intervention and prevention strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful to the authors that provided the original data for meta-analyses. The views expressed in this work is not necessarily those of the employers or affiliated institutions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

REFERENCES

- Bohrer, B. K., Carroll, I. A., Forbush, K. T., & Chen, P. Y. (2017). Treatment seeking for eating disorders: Results from a nationally representative study. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 50(12), 1341–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22785>
- Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., Krug, I., & McLean, S. A. (2018). The Contribution of Social Media to Body Dissatisfaction, Eating Disorder Symptoms, and Anabolic Steroid Use among Sexual Minority Men. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 21(3), 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0375>
- Ioannidis, K., Taylor, C., Holt, L., Brown, K., Lochner, C., Fineberg, N. A., Corazza, O., Chamberlain, S. R., Roman-Urrestarazu, A., & Czabanowska, K. (2021). Problematic usage of the internet and eating disorder and related psychopathology: A multifaceted, systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 125(March), 569–581. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2021.03.005>
- Sweeting, H., Walker, L., MacLean, A., Patterson, C., Räisänen, U., & Hunt, K. (2015). Prevalence of eating disorders in males: a review of rates reported in academic research and UK mass media. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 14(2), 86–112. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jmh.1402.86>
- Yan, H., Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E., Goodman, M., Krauss, M., Das, S., & Cavazos-Rehg, P. (2019). Automatic detection of eating disorder-related social media posts that could benefit from a mental health intervention. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 52(10), 1150–1156. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23148>

