

# Data Collection

*In order to support the growth of the ECHO movement, Project ECHO® collects participation data for each teleECHO™ program. This data allows Project ECHO to measure, analyze, and report on the movement's reach. It is used in reports, on maps and visualizations, for research, for communications and surveys, for data quality assurance activities, and for decision-making related to new initiatives.*

# Intermountain Project ECHO

## Eating Disorders

# The Impact of Social Media on Eating Disorders

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# Disclosure (option 1, I have no financial interest to disclose)

*The content of this presentation does not relate to any product of a commercial entity; therefore, I have no relationships to report.*

*Off-label indications **will not** be discussed.*

# Objectives

*At the conclusion of this activity, participants should be able to successfully:*

- 1. Review research demonstrating the impact of social media on body image and eating disorders
- 2. Understand how patients use social media to facilitate their eating disorder or their recovery
- 3. Apply knowledge to help patients curate their social media use and platforms toward recovery-oriented material and communities

In the beginning, there was Fiji



# Fiji Study

- American television introduced in 1995
- Three years later:
  - Teenage females idealized the bodies on television
  - Associated thinness with success
  - Increased in body and weight preoccupation
  - High cultural dieting rates (62% active in study time frame)
  - 74% of girls reported feeling they were too big or too fat
  - 45% of adolescent girls reported purging in the last month (some having gotten traditional herbal purgatives from their mothers)

# Clinical Implications

- “Western media imagery may have a profoundly negative impact upon body image and disordered eating attitudes and behaviors, even in traditional societies in which eating disorders have been thought to be rare.”

# Why do we care about Fiji study?

## Fiji in the 90s

- Valued larger bodies
- This wasn't **social media** exposure
- No social comparison among friends or influencers
- No chronic access to media
- No direct targeted ads
- No ability to search specific content
- No filters

## United States today

- Culture already values thinness
- Social media is accessible 24/7
- Direct targeted ads
- Proliferation of searchable, toxic content
- Social comparison with peers and influencers
- Filters and specially curated feeds to create idealized images and life

# Cultural programming

- “Girls get the message, from very early on, that what’s most important is how they look, that their value, their worth depends on that...We get it from advertising, we get it from films, we get it from television shows, video games—everywhere we look. So no matter what else a woman does, no matter what else her achievements, her value still depends on how she looks.”-Jean Kilbourne, creator of the film series *Killing us softly: Advertising’s image of women*.

# Social Media Use

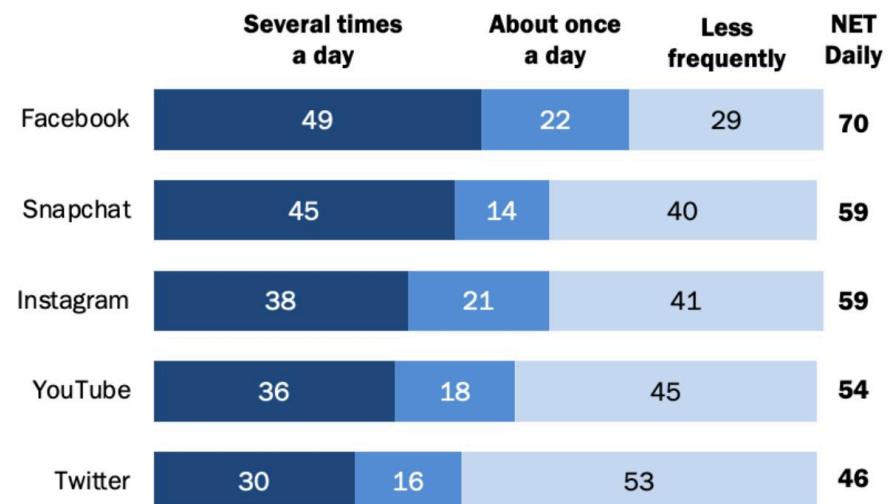


# Social Media Use Today

- Seven in ten Americans use social media
- 84% of teens use social media
  - 62% use it daily
  - IG, TikTok, and Snapchat most popular among teens
    - (common sense media)
- 13-17 year olds
  - 72% use IG
  - 85% YouTube
  - 69% Snapchat
  - 51% Facebook
- 9-11 year olds
  - 30% use TikTok
  - 22% use Snapchat
  - 11% use IG
  - 6% use Facebook

## Seven-in-ten Facebook users say they visit site daily

Among U.S. adults who say they use \_\_, % who use that site ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. "Less frequently" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, every few weeks or less often.

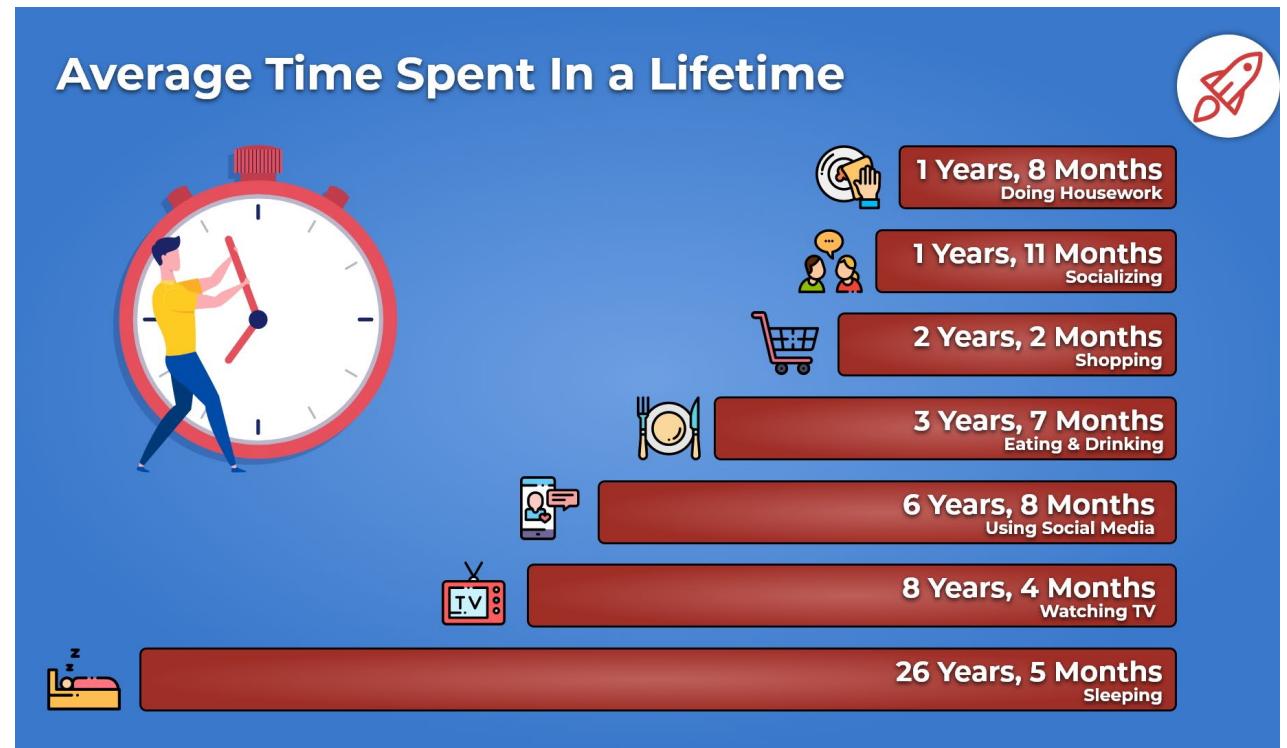
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.

"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# The hours we spend

- Americans spend more than 11 hours a day using media, according to US based global marketing and research firm, The Nielsen Company
- Worldwide, people use social media 147 minutes a day, according to Broadband Media



# The Impact of Social Media



# Social Media and Mental Health

FB bought IG in 2012

2018 FB starts its own study on the effect on IG and mental health

- “Teen Mental health deep dive”
- While findings were shared inside the company, findings were kept private from public

Findings:

- Have you felt suicidal, and did the feelings begin on Instagram?
  - Yes: 6% of US teen users
- Do you feel alone or lonely and did the feelings begin on Instagram?
  - Yes: 21% US teen users
- More teen girls than teen boys say IG made them feel worse about themselves
- Constant comparison contributes to higher levels of anxiety and depression

# Social Media and Body Image

Using social media for as little as 30 minutes a day can change the way you view your own body

Teen social media users were significantly more likely than non-social media users to have internalized a drive for thinness and to engage in body surveillance

Using social media for specific appearance-related features has a stronger relationship to internalized thin ideal than a broader social media use

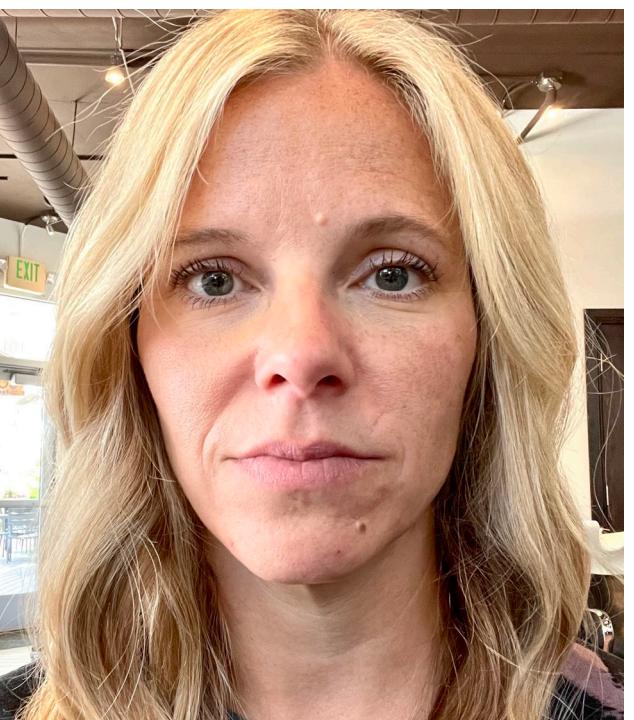
More time on social media, especially following fitness or appearance- based accounts, the worse females felt about their bodies

Female college students who share more photos on FB report higher appearance-based contingencies of self-worth

Research indicating that looking at attractive peers negatively influences body image while interacting with family members does not

# Internal Facebook Research on Body Image and ED

- IG made body image concerns worse for 1 in 3 teenage girls
- IG could
  - push teens toward eating disorders
  - Depression
  - Unhealthy body image
- IG Explore page provides content that can be harmful
- Qualitative study found IG has negative effect on teen mental health, especially related to social comparison
- Conclusion that social comparison is particularly worse on IG compared to other social media platforms



“Fun” with Filters  
2017 poll, 2/3 of Americans admit  
to filtering their photos

# On Comparison

- M, “This is one of the reasons I quit social media. I would compare my life to others. I would want the bigger house and smaller body. I would want the vacations and fun. It made me feel more depressed and like I failed as a human. I rarely posted because I didn’t want people to judge me. (Let’s be honest because I was judging other people!) The other thing that would happen is because I am in a bigger body, I would have “friends” crawl out of the woodwork to get me to sign up for Beachbody, optivia, medifast, wraps, pills, shakes and so much more.”

# On Comparison

- R, “I absolutely compared myself to others, both those I followed and other “influencers” and celebrities on social media. In the depths of my eating disorder, posting a photo of myself was anxiety-inducing. I remember zooming into various parts of my body to make sure they looked “toned” and “skinny”. I was really worried about how others would perceive that photo of me.”

# Protecting Kids Online: FB, IG & Mental Health Harms-Senate Hearing Sept. 2021

- Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. had his office create a fake IG account to pose as a 13 yo girl
- Followed “easily findable” accounts that create content related to dieting and disordered eating
- Within 1 day, IG served content that promoted Eds and self-harm
- “Our research has shown, in real time, IG’s recommendations will still latch on to a person’s insecurities, a young woman’s vulnerabilities about their bodies and drag them into dark places that glorify eating disorders and self-harm.”

# Designing for Disorder: IG's Pro-ED Bubble

153 seed accounts (The Pro-Ed bubble)

- Met following criteria:
  - Public
  - Over 1k followers
  - Posted visual content that celebrated “thinspiration” or “bonespiration”
  - Underweight based on BMI
  - Description included ED content
- Cumulatively had over 2.3 million followers
- Identified followers who followed 2 or more of the seed accounts →
- Found 88,655 users and analyzed available data on them
- 20 million individual users following and receiving content from IG's Pro-ED Bubble

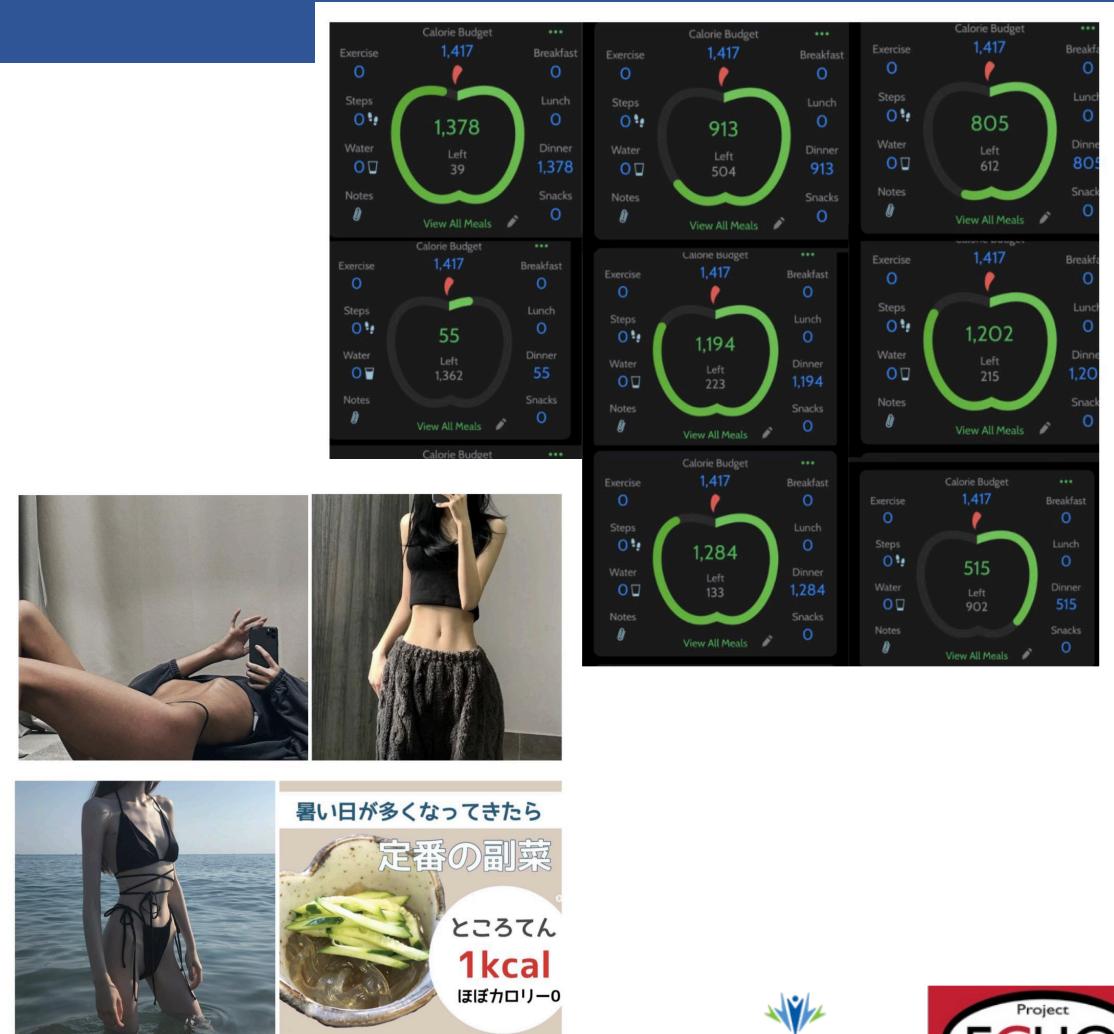
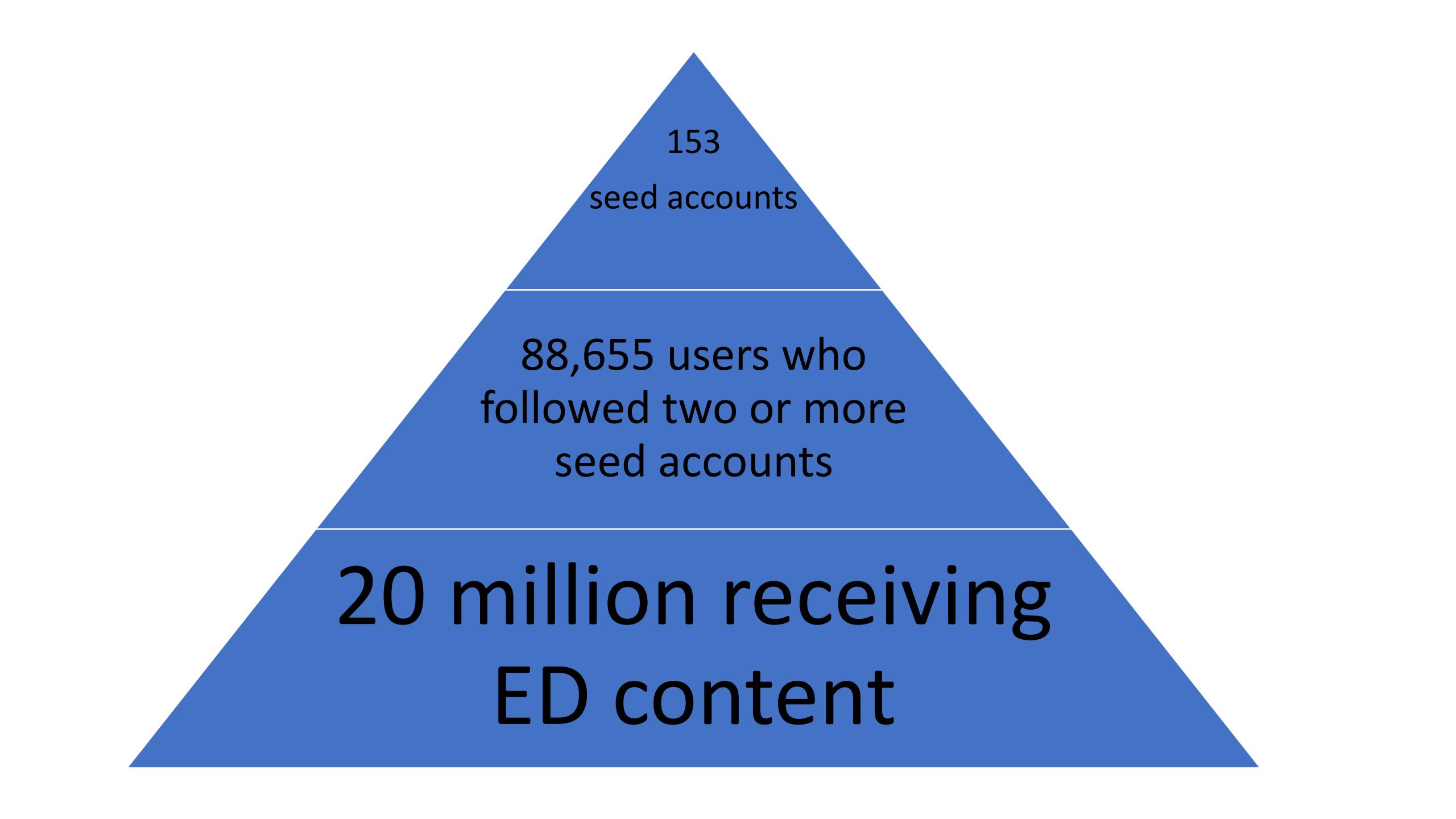


Figure 1: Examples of content from the three of the larger seed accounts. In this research, users that followed three or more of these seed accounts were included as in the pro-eating disorder bubble.



153

seed accounts

88,655 users who  
followed two or more  
seed accounts

20 million receiving  
ED content

# Results

- That's 1.4% of IG's user base
- 1 in 75 users
- Average age 19
- 1 in 3 accounts belonged to a minor
- 21 accounts belonged to children under 13 years old
  - Some as young as 9 years old
- 760K followers (Over half a million people following children from IG's Pro-Ed Bubble)
- Estimate annual revenue \$227.9 million from all those who follow it
- Estimate \$62 million in annual revenue from underage followers

and lives inside my head

12 years old  
Starving for perfection 💔

💜 I am 11 years 🍉  
And this is my weight loss vlog 🍎

~hi~

- 12 years old 😊
- Maximum weight: 106 lbs 🐱
- Minimum weight: 95 lbs
- Current weight: 99 lbs 🌻

„ „  
cw: 49  
gw: 47

~~~ weigh ins & stories ~~~  
STRICT ANA COACHES HMU 😊

🌸 🌻 weight journal  
67 lbs 🔒 ❤️  
61 lbs 🔒 ❤️  
51 lbs ❤️

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# Algorithm Promotes ED bubble

- Researchers made experimental accounts that showed interest in Pro-ed content
  - One account was active for 5 days
    - gained 88 followers
  - Went inactive for 5 weeks
    - gained 686 followers
    - attributing growth solely to the algorithm that was recommending other people in the Pro-Ed bubble follow this experimental account
- Source: Tech Transparency Project 2021  
Dangerous by design: Thinstagram



# Eating Disorder Content

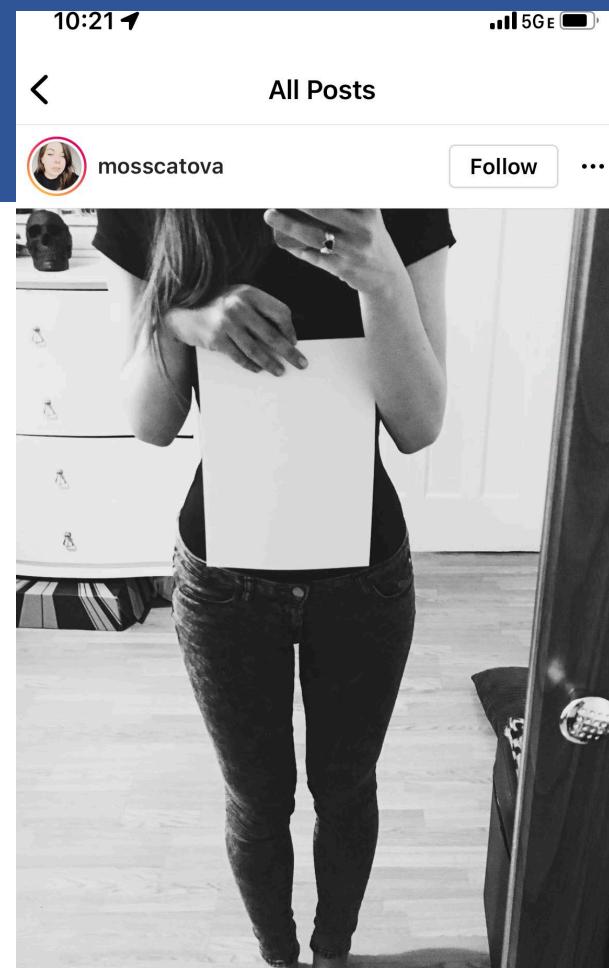


# ED Content is easy to find

- #fitspo, #thinspo #bonespiration, #thinspiration, #A4challenge
  - Misspell search terms:  
#eatingd1sorder, #anarexia  
#anarexiameeme #th1inspo #an0rexic  
#annarexianervosa #sk1nnny,  
#thinspø #th1n #4n4 #thighgap #diet
    - WIEIAD trend
- Less regulated platforms like Tumblr and TikTok



# Trends



# Client story

- K, “I think my desire to look “better” started based on who I followed on Instagram. I idolize Nastia Liukin. I love her as a person, gymnast and for what she does today. But when my feed slowly became so full of pictures of skinny, beautiful, toned women who were fit to walk a runway, it makes sense that I started to feel like my actual body was never quite good enough. So when I really started to want to have control over how I looked, I had the perfect images and role models to look up to. Once I started using very disordered behaviors, I avoided hunger by scrolling on social media. I spent SO much time in my room looking at social media. Especially because I had a hard time sleeping. I would scroll through fitness accounts and models and gymnasts on instagram. And eventually through very pro-eating disorder things on tumblr. And then I started reading hours of forum posts on myproana.”

# Client Story

- A, “I did follow pro-ana sites. I learned a lot of information that fueled my eating disorder. This included some ridiculous information. I learned you could inhale calories just by smelling food. So I wouldn’t go to movies because I would get fat just sitting there smelling all the food around me. I know that is ridiculous now but then I was sick that I didn’t think rationally.”

# Reshaping Social Media

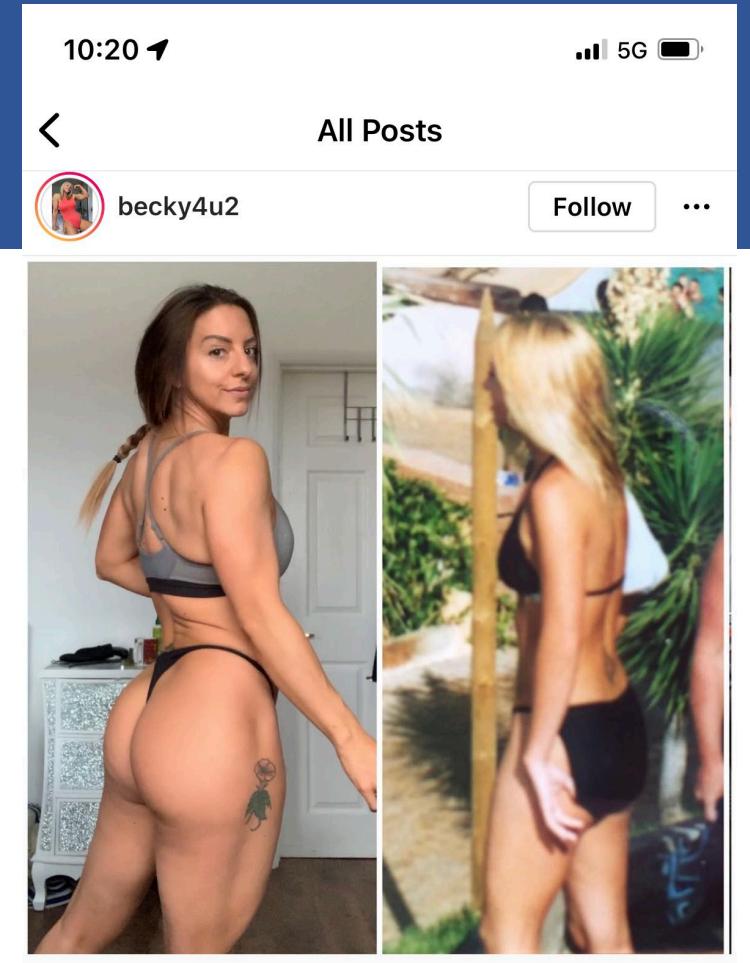


# Progress

- FB is working on making its sites more positive
  - Project Daisy (didn't change much)
  - Tool to nudge users to more positive content
  - Testing a way to ask users if they want to take a break
- Influencers and professionals providing positive content
  - Psychoeducation about dieting and eating disorders
  - Advocating for body acceptance and body inclusion
  - Psychoeducation about fitness and exercise and healthy movement
  - Challenging media to show more diverse body shapes, sizes, race, and ages
- Recovery support and communities

# Recovery before and after photos?

- A, “I hate them. Throughout my recovery, it’s been hard not to post them myself. The only reason I would post them would be for my own validation but I see that they aren’t helpful for anyone. When I have wanted to post them, it hasn’t been to show how recovered I am, it was to show my eating disorder was real and how sick I was.”
- K, “This is one of my least favorite things because it just reminds me that I have never been sick enough to actually need to recover. I will see pictures of someone who was clearly underweight in my eyes and then their “recovered” bodies, which can range anywhere from still really skinny to overweight, and it reinforces the fact that if I was never physically perceived as underweight, it isn’t “ok” for me to gain weight in recovery. It always makes me feel like if I don’t look like I have an eating disorder, then gaining weight isn’t acceptable to do because I don’t look like I’m on death’s door.”



# Recovery Community: A mixed bag

- A, “In some ways. I got my first social media based on connecting with friends from treatment. This kept me in an eating disorder mentality and kept me from learning how to relate to people outside of an eating disorder. However seeing people do well motivated me to do well and feel a sense of comradery. When people would struggle, I’d feel jealous and angry. Now I have found a community of weight inclusive dietitians and therapists and my account is catered that way and is very positive.”

# Recovery Community: A mixed bag

- R, “My relationship with social media can be a struggle at times, so I often delete the apps because I find myself mindlessly scrolling. However, I find myself comparing to others less. Seeing friends from treatment on social media was very encouraging at times, especially when they would post recovery-related content. It was nice to be able to check in with these individuals and see how they were doing. If it wasn’t for the benefits of the recovery community, I would not have apps such as Instagram, but the content on them is such that the pros outweigh the cons.”

# Interventions



# Curating the social media experience

- Honest introspection about usage and effects of use on well-being
- Media Fast
- Move apps off homepage to create a pause
- Set time limits
- Beware of explore page
- Unfollow, unsubscribe, mute and opt out
- Follow and like uplifting content and profiles
- Follow and like a variety of interests
- Post images and captions that reflect reality
- Post fewer images of how you look and more what you experience and feel

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