Social media has become a popular addition to many people's everyday routine. Research has begun to study the effects of social media on its users but has varying reports. This study offers an addition to social media research with the consideration

Social media has been described broadly and in various definitions across previous literature. It is widely referred to as different kinds of applications used to communicate through a profile in various ways. For example, WhatsApp is used for messaging, and Facebook incorporates messaging with posting and interacting. Social media users may interact with others through likes and comments on posted pictures and videos. According to a study done in 2021 by the Pew Research Center, the social media applications that were most frequently used among 18-24-year-olds in the United States were Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok; at percentages of 76%, 75%, and 55%, respectively (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Applications such as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter) are common for people of all ages (Auxier & Anderson,

had a high frequency of social media use also had higher scores of psychological well-being

when social media was routinely used as a normal social behavior. However, participants who

recorded high emotional connection scores to social media use also recorded lower scores of

psychological well-being (Bekalu et al., 2019). As the discussion of this study notes, social

media use can vary by user, therefore positive and negative effects may also vary (Bekalu et al.,

2019).

Social capital is a concept that has accounted for some of the positive effects of social

media use. Previous studies define the concept of social capital as resources or norms that allow

people to communicate and feel connected with others (Ostic et al., 2021). Research on this

subject branched off into two subgroups; bridging and bonding (Ostic et al., 2021). Bridging

refers to the opportunity to connect with those who are from different backgrounds and bonding

refers to the strengthened support social from those one is already connected with (Ostic et al.,

2021). Ostic et al. (2021) emphasize social media's strong connection with social capital and

speculate that it positively impacts psychological well-being. However, they also hypothesize

that social media use leads to social isolation, "phubbing" (ignoring others to interact with one's

phone), and smartphone addiction. The results from participants' responses to questionnaires

supported these notions that social media may positively affect psychological well-being by

building social capital. On the other hand, social media use also had a positive correlation with

social isolation, "phubbing", and smartphone addiction and these concepts also correlated with

negative psychological well-being (Ostic et al., 2021). The use of social media may not always

result in negative effects and can positively affect users by enabling social interactions when

face-to-face connections are not as prominent as they used to be (Ostic et al., 2021). However, as

previously discussed, studies suggest that different kinds of social media use may lead to various effects (Bekalu et al., 2019; Ostic et al., 2021).

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(Verrastro et al., 2020). By presenting photos that are not accurate representations of oneself but rather projections of beauty standards, social media enforces the need to abide by beauty standards defined in society. Verrastro et al., (2020) look into researching social media users' views of themselves, especially those who alter their photos. As stated above, people are comparing themselves to photos of others on social media, yet these photos are often not an accurate representation of their appearance in real life. They are also feeling pressured to abide by these falsified beauty standards by altering their pictures. Verrastro et al. (2020) found that the participants who altered their pictures scored higher on scales of social comparison, negative perceptions of and anxiety about their body, and beauty standard adherence than those who did not alter their photos (Verrastro et al., 2020). Therefore, people with high social media use may engage in more social comparisons which leads to negative views of oneself. These negative views of oneself add to one's willingness to abide by beauty standards by modifying their appearance.

Social comparisons due to social media are not only causing a lot of distress for users, they also force them to analyze themselves which often leads to negative views. Seekis and Barker (2022) define interactions with content that include modified photos and overemphasized beauty standards as beauty social media engagement. This type of content was found to evoke social comparisons and correlated with dysmorphic views of one's body. Body dysmorphia can be understood as an intense negative view of o

media use. An analysis of four different studies was combined to assess the relationship between

social media use and these traits. Participants in each study filled out a questionnaire regarding

their frequency of social media use and scales that measured empathy, narcissism, and

alexithymia. Analyses indicated that participants who frequently used social media also scored

high on levels of narcissism. The statistical analyses sho   A

only make up 9% of this population (National Sexual Violence Resour

Victim blaming can be defined as a third-party opinion that attributes blame to the survivor for their characteristics or behaviors. For example, outsiders claim that what the victim was wearing, doing, or saying caused the perpetrator to assault them (Klettke et al., 2018). Rape myths, which are defined as common justifications for sexual assault, put the sexual assault victim at fault for their behaviors or appearance and displace blame off the perpetrator (Whiting et al., 2021). Once rape myths are established in a sexual assault case, the victim may become a target of hate and the fault of the perpetrator may not be discussed. Previous researchers have made efforts to understand the relationship between rape myths and the attribution of culpability on victims of sexual assault, meaning there is an abundance of literature looking into a connection between victim blaming and different rape myths, such as the victim ingesting alcohol, putting themself in a dangerous situation by walking home alone, wearing clothing that is too revealing, or engaging in behaviors that lead the perpetrator to believe they wanted to be sexual. A common rape myth for researchers to explore is the topic of appearance.

Victim Blaming Based on Appearance

Researchers are attempting to understand people's attributions of blame to the various aspects of victims' appearance. For example, Klettke et al. (2018) studied attributions of blame to survivors of sexual assault based on their age and several other factors derived from rape myths. The perception questions included scenarios of females aged 10, 15, and 20 who wore "sexually revealing clothes" or behaved in a "sexually provocative manner," acted affectionately or promiscuously, or did not try to verbally or physically resist the abuse. The results showed that male participants and participants with children were more likely than female participants to attribute blame to survivors described as wearing "sexually revealing clothes." There were also findings from male participants and those who had children that supported attributions of blame

to victims based on their lack of physical or verbal resistance (Klettke et al., 2018). Rape myths

justify perpetrators' actions by overemphasizing victims' behaviors that are perceived as

provocative or wrong which is why participants in this study may attribute blame to victims

whose appearance elicited a sexual perception. The negative perceptions that are associated with

objectification and revealing one's body may have an impact on the attribution of victim blame.

Furthermore, people may view women who reveal their bodies as putting themselves at risk for

violence such as sexual assault (Marks & Zaikman, 2023).

The way people perceive others' appearance seems to play an important role in the level

of attribution of blame to sexual assault victims. Loughnan et al. (2013), focused on

objectification of women in sexual assault cases and observed an increase in attribution of blame

when described as such. Participants were shown a picture of a woman who was portrayed as

sexualized or non-sexualized. They were then asked to respond to a mind attribution task, which

measured how the participants perceived the pictured woman's mental activity levels.

Participants also completed a moral concern scale which measured the   F R Q F H U Q

the sexualized woman which seems to denote a negative perception of the victims who were

sexualized.

Researchers have found support for appearance being a factor for why victims of sexual

assault are attributed blame and have also studied the effects attractiveness has on perceptions of

victim culpability. Wareham et al. (2019) conducted research on attributions of blame and verdict

judgments of defendants in cases of sexual assault, physical violence, and domestic violence

based on the victim's attractiveness. Participants were presented with images of female victims

and vignettes depicting the various forms of violence previously noted. They were then asked to

respond to questionnaires on victim and defendant culpability. Wareham et al. (2019) found a

correlation between the rape vignettes describing the victims as attractive and the participants' higher

likelihood to attribute blame to the defendant. This means that participants were more likely to

attribute blame to the defendant in cases of sexual assault when the victim was pictured as

attractive as compared to those considered average-looking. This study supports previous

researchers' findings that attractiveness lessens blame for victims of sexual assault.

However, other researchers have found the opposite or varying results on the effect

attractiveness had on attributions of blame (Maeder et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2007; Yndo &

Zawacki, 2017). Yndo and Zawacki (2017) conducted a study with only male participants to

understand how they label nonconsensual sex when considering the female victim's

attractiveness and perceived sexual interest. Male participants were shown a photo that depicted

participants who considered attractive victims sexually interested in the rape vignettes also

reported decreased labeling of the scenario as being sexual assault. Furthermore, victim

attractiveness affected the way people perceived a sexual assault incident, and, in this case,

participants did not consider the attractive victim's incident to be sexual assault. Attractive

victims were attributed more blame because they were perceived as sexually interested.

 This concept is similar to the rape myth that claims victims of sexual assault wanted the contact.

Consequently, attractiveness played a significant role in attributing blame to victims. The

attractiveness of sexual assault victims has both increased and decreased attributions of blame in

previous studies. These contradictory findings make understanding the actual effects of

attractiveness on attributions of blame difficult.

        Some researchers have even found that attractiveness did not affect attributions of blame

of sexual assault victims. Rogers et al. (2007) conducted a study on sexual assault victim's age

and attractiveness and attributions of blame. The study included pictures of children who were

considered attractive or unattractive for participants to view and then record their perceptions of

culpability in their sexual assault scenario. Participants' responses to the validated questionnaires

on victim culpability reported that there were no differences in attributions of blame based on the

attractiveness of the children. (Rogers et al., 2007). These studies on attributions of blame on

victims of sexual assault regarding attractiveness cited studies that were conducted before the

2000s, reported varying results (Maeder et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2007; Wareham et al., 2019)

and excluded female participants (Yndo & Zawacki, 2017). The research is limited and

contradictory therefore, more research needs to be conducted in this area to understand the

effects of attractiveness on attributions of blame of sexual assault victims.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Participants would attribute more blame to unattractive victims regardless of their level of social media use.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): High social media users would blame attractive victims of sexual assault less as compared to low social media users.

The participants were sampled from psychology students at Stockton University. Participants were recruited using SONA and awarded 1 point for their participation which went towards credit in psychology classes. Data was collected from 202 participants to provide adequate power for the statistical an

spend per week on this platform?"), follower count (e.g., "How many followers/friends do you

have on this platform?"), and posti

effects, then it is likely that their negative mindsets could transfer onto others as well. Ertürk

(2016) and Martingano et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between high social media use

and high levels of narcissism. People who have the trait of narcissism are unable to understand

others' perspectives or emotions. For example, if someone were to go through a traumatic event,

a person who has the trait of narcissism may not be able to sympathize

perceptions of victim and perpetrator culpability in sexual assault cases assigned more blame to the perpetrator when the victim was attractive (Wareham et al., 2019). A study on male perceptions of women's level of risk of sexual assault from their responses to unwanted sexual advances supported victim attractiveness being an important factor in judgments. This study discovered that attractiveness was correlated with less perceived risk of sexual assault occurring (Nason et al., 2020). However, another study observed male perceptions of attractive female sexual assault victims correlated with higher perceived culpability in a sexual assault scenario (Yndo & Zawacki, 2017). Furthermore, in a study about child sexual assault cases, attractiveness did not affect perceived culpability (Rogers et al., 2007). Due to the varying results of the effect of attractiveness on perceived victim culpability, the basis of this hypothesis used the previous literature's skew toward more sympathy toward attractive victims. Many of these studies reference the social psychology theory that "beauty is good," therefore attractive individuals would be considered less culpable in sexual assault cases. One potential reason this hypothesis was not supported was because the stimulus of the attractiveness conditions was not strong enough. For each condition the only difference in the rape vignette was the woman was considered attractive, unattractive, or there was no mention of her appearance. One-word differences between the conditions may not have been powerful enough to evoke varying responses.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that participants who frequently used social media would be less likely to blame attractive victims of sexual assault than participants who did not frequently use social media. The defensive attribution hypothesis was used as a basis for this prediction. The defensive attribution hypothesis refers to an observer's level of identification with a victim (Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Participants with high levels of social media use were also expected

others, this area of research may have new revelations to add to the literature. With a lack of

current research on this topic, social media may not affect users' views of others. However,

future research could measure participants' social media use and compare it to their judgments of

the appearance or characteristics of a person based only on a picture. This procedure may offer

more information on the relationship between social media use and perceptions of others.

      The literature on the importance of attractiveness in the perception of others varies

between different studies. This study could have benefited from using a description or photo to

identify different attractiveness conditions. This strategy would be useful for eliciting reactions

based on the participants' understanding of attractiveness rather than being told whether the

victim was attractive or not. Furthermore, future researchers could consider other identity

factors, such as age or sexual orientation, when measuring the importance of attractiveness in

sexual assault victims' perceived culpability. By analyzing the differences between participants'

identities, the responses to victims' perceived culpability may vary.

      The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of social media use on the perceived

culpability of sexual assault victims with varying levels of attractiveness. This was the first

study, to the knowledge of the researcher, that attempted to measure how the frequency of social

media use affects users' perceptions of others. The results did not support the attractiveness of

the victim being a significant factor in the perceived culpability of victims. There were also no

differences between the low and high social media groups' perceptions of the culpability of the

sexual assault victim. This study did not find a relationship between social media use and victim

culpability.

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Prefer not to say

Other

Please select all that apply to your social media use

	On average how much time do you spend per week on this platform?			How many followers/friends do you have on this platform?			How many photos or videos of yourself do you have posted on this platform? (not applicable to Snapchat)			How many photos or videos of yourself do you post on this platform per week?		
	About 14 hours per week or less	More than 14 hours per week	I don't use this platform	About 500 followers or less	More than 500 followers	I don't use this platform	About 100 posts or less	More than 100 posts	I don't use this platform	About 14 posts per week or less	More than 14 posts per week	I don't use this platform
Instagram												
TikTok												
Snapchat												
X (previously known as Twitter)												
Facebook												

continues anyway. Despite Chaya's repeated objections, Nick holds her down and has sex with her.

Please answer the following questions using this scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral) 4 (agree), 5(strongly agree)

1. The police should take this event very seriously. Do you agree? [assault seriousness]

2. Do you agree that Chaya should be blamed for what happened? [victim blame]

3. People should be sympathetic towards Chaya in this situation. Do you agree? [sympathy for victim]

4. To what extent do you agree that Nick is to blame in this situation? [perpetrator blame]

5. Chaya was not responsible for what happened to her. To what extent do you agree with this statement? [victim responsibility]

6. Chaya will be traumatized by this event. To what extent do you agree? [victim trauma]

7. Nick was not responsible for what happened to Chaya. Do you agree? [perpetrator responsibility]

8. Nick is guilty for this event. To what extent do you agree? [perpetrator guilt]

9. Do you agree that Chaya's life will be negatively affected by this event? [negative affect]

10. Do you agree that Chaya was sexually encouraging towards Nick? [victim encouraging]

Estimated Marginal Means of Total Victim Sympathy

Estimated Marginal Means of Total Victim Sympathy