

**Empowerment, Control & The Female Body:
Is Instagram a Platform for Change?**

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ABSTRACT

Although there is an extensive amount of literature on the influence of mass media, including Facebook, on body image few studies have explored the social media app that is based on photographs-Instagram. Instagram is an important space to investigate for body image research, as the everyday individual has the ability to be an active producer, the platform is becoming increasingly popular, and the sole research being conducted is for branding and marketing. In this study, I conduct a content analysis of images and text specifically focused on women's bodies. By examining the most popular hashtags, body accounts, and "body positive" accounts, I seek to understand whether Instagram can provide a platform for resistance and for changing how we conceive of women's bodies. However, despite the app allowing women to present alternative representations of women's bodies than those portrayed by traditional media, the majority of images on the app reproduce the same as those presented by corporate mass media.

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Introduction

One's body image is constructed around ideas or expectations presented by society of how bodies should appear, and not solely how one perceives their body shape. Despite research having uncovered information on phenomena associated with body image such as distorted body image perceptions, or positive body image, the topic remains not fully understood (Halliwell 2015:177). Although the focus of body image research has drastically changed over the last decade, scholars have discovered that individuals in societies are concerned with how others perceive their bodies, is influenced by sociocultural environment and the historical time period (Bartky 1988:34; Cash 2003:2; Paquette & Raine 2004:1056). Research has also explored how traditional media has an influence on body image, and explains that exposure to media images can be associated with negative or unhealthy body image (Halliwell 2015; Sidesmoore & Tochkov 2011). More specifically, research has looked at traditional media images, such as television, magazines, advertisements, how they portray ideals, and how individuals consume them (Andsager 2014:407).

There has been minimal research done on how bodies are portrayed in social media, and as social media and networking sites are highly used worldwide it is essential to investigate these spaces. Social media images are as influential as images found in traditional media, as the images may present more diverse representations of bodies, the everyday individual now has the ability to be a producer, and the application has a younger demographic (Andsager 2014:408, Salomon 2013:409). The purpose of this paper is to explore how Instagram provides a platform for changing how we conceive women's bodies. My research will also seek to explore whether the ability of women to

be active producers, rather than just passive consumers in traditional corporate run media, shifts how women's bodies are being portrayed. Drawing on Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of The Self in Everyday Life* and Sandra Bartky's (1988) theory on femininity, I argue that women's increasing ability to challenge normative portrayals of women's bodies by corporate mass media images will not change the presentation of what are considered "good" or "bad" bodies.

Social media websites and applications allow users to retrieve information, share content and interact with other users. Instagram is one of the most popular online photo-sharing social media applications (app) worldwide and can be a new and effective way to disseminate information on body image (Hempel 2014:73). The social networking app presently has over 20 billion users worldwide, who upload or share approximately 60 million photographs per day, and is becoming increasingly popular with the app's visual style of communication in contrast to its competing social networking sites, such as Facebook (Hempel 2014). Despite billions of individuals participating in the online social networking space, and approximately one in every six smart phone users in the United States alone using the app, only a select few have used Instagram for social research (Biggs 2014, Hempel 2014:77).

Instagram will be used to understand whether the social media application can be a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies and whether awareness that is crucial for change may come through this space. The application will be used to help explore these issues, as there have been major declines in magazine readership and other forms of traditional media, and because the millions of images are now being shared on this platform every day. The app may also contribute to societal norms of attractiveness,

which has various implications because the everyday citizen is attempting to present him or herself in a certain way (Perloff 2014:363, Mask 2011). The social media app is based on images, as opposed to text, presenting images that may produce ideas around body image and can reinforce certain ideals, which then can be further reflected in the commentaries that individuals attribute to them. Instagram is an interesting tool for body image research as the app can be viewed as a “visual diary” where individuals display their daily lives, edit or manipulate pictures, and users are also known as “followers” in contrast to “friends”, which allows individuals to have access not only to people in which they have contact with, but also to seek out popular pages, celebrity accounts, and allow anyone to follow them (Bates 2012, Hogan 2010:384). To help explore how the platform of Instagram may change how we conceive of women’s bodies, I conducted a content analysis of images and text on the platform to explore how individuals are presenting themselves, by using some of the application’s key features such as hashtags and user tags.

Literature Review

This literature review will explore existing works conducted on body image and how the focus of body image research has transitioned over time. Due to the proliferation of social networking platforms worldwide and the sharing of images more research is still required. I will also discuss body image more specifically on social media as past research has heavily focused on traditional media, and how people are now more in control of media images. In addition to this, I will discuss how individuals construct themselves online, have the ability to present idealized versions of themselves, and also use the space to empower others. I will then proceed to discuss how Instagram has been

used for other research, but can also be a new way of disseminating information for body image and how we conceive of women's bodies. Through my research I plan to explore how women's bodies are presented on Instagram, and whether the app's public accessibility and ability of women to be active producers changes the portrayal of women's bodies from no longer solely being those of corporate portrayals.

Traditional Body Image Research: Transitioning Focus

Body image is one's belief of how others perceive one's self based upon physical appearance (Featherstone 2010:194). Research into how individuals believe others perceive their own physical bodies has existed over a century, or what is known as body image, but was first described by Schilder (1935) in attempts to understand the brain's connection to bodily experiences (Cash 2003:2). Body image research began its focus on the brain's functioning and its connection to bodily experience, then transitioned to focus on distorted perceptions leading research into other areas such as young women and disordered eating (Cash 2003). Preceding these findings research also began to expand and explore connections between appearance and body image in diverse cultures, and the factors which influence negative and positive body image (Cash 2003:2, Slade 1993). Despite the focus of body image research changing drastically from distorted brain perceptions to the importance of constructing positive body image, the research has illustrated that individuals are concerned with how people perceive their bodies in all societies, and that body image is highly influenced by individuals' sociocultural environment and period of time (Cash 2003; Halliwell 2015:178).

Individuals' social environments and their interactions with others help to contribute to ideas of what bodies should look like, what bodies are glorified, or which

are perceived as transgressive (Kelly & Field 1997:359, 360). More recent research suggests that for women negative body image is caused either by them perceiving their bodies as being different than they actually are, or because of unrealistic expectations, or distorted beliefs which are often shaped by images in their external environments (Blood 2005:2). Body image perceptions of individuals has been a focus of research, and is of importance for all societies as positive body image is associated with optimism, self-esteem, or overall well-being and acts as a protective factor (Halliwell 2015:179). In contrast, negative body image tends to be associated with negative factors and can lead to social avoidance and impaired social interactions (Halliwell 2015:182-6). To be satisfied with one's physical appearance and have a positive image of one's body for many means rejecting societal ideals of attractiveness and it is for this reason that it is crucial to examine social environments and the images that individuals are presented with.

Traditional media images have been a significant focus of body image research, as within consumer culture there is an obsession with the body, and images presented by the media display images of celebrities, beautiful bodies, and models who "exemplify the good life" (Featherstone 2010:196). Body image is said to reflect "cultural obsessions and preoccupations" (Bartky 1988:28) in the way individuals look, and aspects such as the thin attractiveness norm presented by traditional media such as television, advertisements, and magazines contributes to satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's own body (Paquette & Raine 2004:1048). When images of certain physical body shapes and sizes are presented by the mass media to women, norms or expectation of what their bodies should look like are created. When women do not present a similar image to these norms or expectations there can be negative outcomes such as low self-esteem.

Countless studies have shown that beauty magazines for women which portray a thin body type, and fitness magazines for men portray a lean, fit body type, influence judgments of both men and women's own bodies and can be one of the sources related to eating problems (Paquette & Raine 2004; Halliwell 2015:186; Sides-Moore & Tochkov 2011). Although the thin or lean norm may not be representative for all societies, the mass media portrays body shapes or sizes, such as with advertisements by fashion companies or beauty industries, which can lead to dissatisfaction which is only to their benefit (Paquette and Raine 2004:1048). For women in Western cultures, the mass media portrays slender or thin bodies as attractive and associates them with success, youthfulness, or social acceptability, in contrast to overweight bodies, which are often linked to a lack of control or laziness, leading women to be dissatisfied or pressuring them to either lose weight or be thin (Grogan 1999: 6; Mask 2011:54). Studies focusing on how traditional media images can lead to dissatisfaction, explain that images presenting unattainable bodies often leads to changes in behaviours such as diet and exercise, but also help offer ways to appreciate one's own body despite differences such as by being critical of media images (Cheng 2009:365; Halliwell 2015).

Body Image & Recent Studies

Many studies have investigated the content, control, and implications of traditional media on body image, but due to the reduction in use of these forms of media and the increased use of social networking sites, current research has begun to investigate online platforms (Meyrowitz 1986:15). Social media sites are as important as traditional media to examine for research, as young adult women not only see their identities from consuming goods and services by corporations but also from messages that come from

their friends and family online (Lucal 2002:429). These spaces are increasingly undergoing commercialization, such as “suggested posts” of Facebook and required ads on Youtube. In addition to this, mediated content is transitioning from traditional to more user-generated content since the everyday individual can now be an active producer (Marshall 2010: 38). Social media sites and apps present users with images they seek, but also with images that the user did not actively seek out from others’ posts, thus providing users with images that could potentially present more diverse images of the female body (Andsager 2014:407).

An online space that has recently been of interest for scholars is Facebook, as the website and apps’ influence extends beyond the online space into every day interactions. Many content analyses of photographs and commentaries have been conducted on Facebook, and illustrate that the social networking site has implications for social ties, social capital, identity construction, self-presentation and overall communication within societies (Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, Schat & Bevan 2011). Facebook is an important space to investigate for body image research, as the space is a platform in which individuals communicate, share information, and can help to generate content in which they desire. The elements in which Facebook consists, such as uploading images or statuses allows users to present themselves how they desire to the larger community, such as the profile picture, the single photo by which Facebook users choose to identify themselves within their entire network (Hum et al. 2011:1828).

Facebook is a platform that became introduced to cellular devices in 2007, allowing it to be easily accessed during individual’s everyday lives (Goggin 2014: 1069-71). Many studies on Facebook use Goffman’s theories to examine how and why people

present themselves the way they do online (Lang & Barton 2015:148). They have explored how the photographs in which individuals post on the space are used as performance tools to control and construct the identities in which they desire to their audience, which they decide “backstage” or offline (Lang & Barton 2015:148). Other studies have investigated exposure to Facebook and the networking sites direct relation to mood and body image, and found that exposure to the space is more related to negative mood and body image (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian & Halliwell 2015). One study conducted found that exposure to Facebook is related to negative mood and negative body image more so than exposure to traditional media, but also traditional media online, such as online fashion magazines (Fardouly et al. 2015:38). In contrast to traditional media such as magazines, even when published online, individuals have a greater chance of being exposed to images they may not have sought out on social media. In addition to this, if women possess vulnerability factors such as being in distress, they may also use the social networking space to seek out exactly what they desire, such as those like-minded to seek reinforcement, or follow those presenting images in which they desire to attain or perceive as attractive (Andsanger 2014:409-411; Perloff 2014:6).

Social media is becoming more of a focus in social research and has been known to help in the empowerment of women. Social media can lead to empowerment, which allows one to be aware, help build greater participation, decision making, and power leading to “transformative action” (Karl 1995:370). A prime example of this can be seen in the restriction and control over mass media in the Middle East where the everyday individuals is unable to be a producer. Many women are unable to receive information and use social media to empower other women (Odine 2013:1). Despite women in other

regions of the world not all being excluded from participation in nation-development, like in Tunisia or United Arab Emirates, they still have the ability to use social media as a space of empowerment (Odiere 2013). Those marginalized or unable to participate in their communities or politics can also use social media as an alternative space to organize, and to create identities in freedom (Sampaio & Aragon 2001:126). Women can construct themselves how they desire in these spaces, create women advocacy spaces, and cyberspace itself acts as a means to undermine “the gatekeeping role of traditional print media and opening up new opportunities for the publication and dissemination of women’s work and other related interests” (Sampaio & Aragon 2001:131). Empowerment produced by social media is unquantifiable and involves conditions of choice, power and entails a process of change (Kabeer 1999:435). In order to make changes, the process of awareness is crucial, and this awareness comes about through aspects of culture such as social media apps such as Facebook and Instagram.

Instagram: How it works & why it is useful

Instagram is a free application designed primarily for mobile devices; content can be accessed but not generated on computers and tablets. The app was created for users to be able to share photographs easily and is described by the application itself as “a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures” where one can “snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever” (Instagram FAW 2014). The application allows users to use filters to edit their photographs, and share them with accounts or users that they desire. Once individuals create an account, they can select users to follow, such as

friends, celebrities, or restaurants, and can control who has access to view their account or follow them. Users can also create tags to link their images or videos to other pages. Instagram has an extensive number of features from tagging friends, locations, uploading images, uploading videos, and sending messages.

The app is the fastest growing social media site worldwide, with over 300 million users, which can also be attributed to its portability, due to the app being able to be accessed on mobile devices (Guerin-Eagleman & Burch 2015). Miles (2014) describes Instagram as being “social media lite” (11), requiring less conversation than other competing social media platforms and being less “conversation-intense” (11). In addition to this what is posted is believed to stay more popular than posts on other social networking sites (Guerin-Eagleman & Burch 2015:2). In addition to requiring less communication, the presentation of images, and the visual style of the application itself are believed to be other reasons for its popularity. One of Instagram’s features that also makes it unique and separates the app from other social media platforms is “geo-temporal tagging,” where user-generated content is stamped with a specific time, rather than a specific date (Hochman & Manovich 2013). For example, rather than dating specific images the app will show users that the content was posted “four days ago”, allowing other users to simply see the time periods in which they desire.

The app also allows users to post videos and to send personal messages to other accounts if authorized. Instagram allows individuals to use the space for recreational purposes such as connecting with friends or family, but can also be useful for both qualitative research, with regards to content of what users upload, or by highlighting

various patterns, or for quantitative research such as by investigating the number of “likes” of content, and for research on other social phenomena.

The visual communication style and simplicity of the technology has users actively engaging in the platform, as well as new users continuing to join. The app is becoming increasingly popular, consists of a younger demographic, and is an important space that researchers investigate, as the images may contribute to ideas of how bodies should appear and how we conceive of women’s bodies. Young adults are using social media in general more than older adults, and presently more young adults are beginning to use Instagram opposed to other social networking spaces such as Facebook (Duggan & Brenner 2013:2, Salomon 2013:408). The app is also used more by young adult women between the ages of 18 and twenty-nine than males, is more popular in urban areas around the world, and has more diverse demographics than other social networking spaces (Duggan & Brenner 2013, Manikonda, Hu & Kambhampati 2014).

The app consists of many users coming from different countries such as Turkey, England, United States, and Brazil, but also has high indexes of African American and Latinos, in addition to consisting of users from a wide range of income levels (Salomon 2013: 408, Duggan & Brenner 2013). The social networking space attracts many girls, as well as young adult women of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as it has different values for them such as allows for ongoing contact with family or friends, can help to create new relationships, and can be used to share or retrieve any desired content (Bailey & Steeves 2015: 9). The demographic thus makes it a beneficial space to gather information on how women’s bodies are being presented, and can also help to reach out to young adult women of different classes and races.

Instagram & Body Image Research

Extensive amounts of research have been conducted on how Facebook allows for self-expression and how individuals construct themselves and are now in control in contrast to traditional media images by which they are surrounded (Hum et al. 2011, Goggin 2014). Presently though, scarce amounts of research have been conducted using the new mobile application Instagram, the use of which is increasing exponentially worldwide. The app, similarly to Facebook, allows individuals to have control over what they post, or view, and may influence body image perceptions more than traditional forms of media or in a different manner, as idealized images can now be presented by one's everyday neighbour and not solely celebrities.

Using this app to understand how Instagram can provide a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies, the ways in which the images in the space are the same as traditional media or different, is more beneficial of a platform than others such as Facebook, as the images uploaded by users are snapshots of what they desire to present at specific places or time, the platform is more popular, there is greater variation or diversity of bodies being presented or that can be sought out, and users have the option to manipulate their pictures using simple editing tools within the app itself. Instagram is also focused primarily on images, as opposed to Facebook, which is used more for written communication.

Although Instagram can provide extensive information on social phenomena by allowing individuals to examine location of data entries, specific periods of time, types of content such as images, or commentaries of users, there remain few studies that use the

app for social research (Highfield & Leaver 2015). The information or data that has been retrieved on Instagram has primarily been used for marketing, or to investigate branding. A prime example of this can be seen with one of the sole studies that uses Instagram as a research tool, but does not look at body image, conducted by Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2015) examining Olympic athletes' self-presentation on Instagram as a means to build their own personal brand and or as a marketing tool (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch 2015: 1). Instagram is being used by many global brands, as a "business analytics tool," as brands can easily be tracked by the hashtags used on the application, which can be problematic as almost no other research is being done (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch 2015: 1). This can be problematic as the images on the space will become targeted more for the consumption of products, and may reproduce specific ideal bodies that will be consumed.

According to Bailey & Steeves (2015:7), those using social media who have not yet reached adult age are cultivating a performance of their image as a brand. Young adult women, as well as young girls are more interested in social media as they use it for communication or self expression, in contrast to males and young boys who prefer other websites such as those for gaming (Regan & Steeves 2010). Regan and Steeves' (2010) suggest that children from eight to approximately 13 years of age play or do homework with their free time, then they begin to communicate more with their peers, and by 15 to 17 they have higher levels of social communication and begin using forms of online communication such as Instagram (151-152). Those in their early teen and teenage years are attracted to social networking spaces because it enables a kind of publicity, but do not have the same understanding of privacy in contrast to young adults and adults, and are less aware of privacy dangers (Steeves & Regan 2014: 299, 302). Although publicity may

be considered to be one of the benefits of social networking spaces like Instagram, the online space is difficult to navigate and one “misstep” or decision to present oneself or other images, may ruin one’s reputation (Bailey & Steeves 2015: 7). Furthermore, publicity may lead to judgemental or negative reactions when girls are not presenting an image that fits the “girl” stereotype. The app allows girls to have agency, be visible or have publicity, but also increases the demand for photos of girls’ bodies and can make them vulnerable (Bailey & Steeves 2015: 7, 11). They are vulnerable as there is a possibility of negative reactions from other users, and because boys perform masculinity for their part by collecting the images of the girls’ bodies or selectively displaying them to claim their “territory”, which then translates into offline behaviours such as increased judgment of girls’ bodies (Bailey & Steeves 2015: 11). Although users of the app have control over what they present, whether they are teenagers or adults and may be disciplined in presenting what is valued, they do not have the same understanding of privacy.

In summary, although the social networking platform is beneficial for businesses and branding, the app is a new source of data for understanding how current conceptions of body image are developed. Individuals using the app are at an important age in their identity construction, the space may offer more diverse representations of female bodies, and women can now be active producers. The app also consists of features that can help to explore whether the ability of individuals to be active producers creates any change in how women’s bodies are presented than those of corporate mass media portrayals.

While the literature on body image has transitioned its focus, explored traditional media extensively and examines how individuals present themselves on Facebook,

studies have yet to explore body image on Instagram. The existing literature on body image lacks recent contributions on how current conceptions of body image are developed on other heavily used social media applications. Studies are beginning to investigate young women and social media but none of which focus on this app as it has a younger demographic. The app has not been used for social research, and has mainly been used for branding and marketing purposes. The examination of images and commentaries being shared on the app will help contribute to our understanding of how cultural constructs of “good” or “bad” bodies are being disseminated.

Theory

Much of the theoretical literature on body image focuses on the ways in which bodies are portrayed within patriarchal and capitalist social structures. However, I will draw on theorist Erving Goffman (1959) and Foucauldien feminist theorist Sandra Bartky (1988) to argue that Instagram allows women to challenge these power structures. By allowing women to have more control in contrast to being constrained by those with power and money, our understanding of what are considered “good” or “bad” bodies may change.

I draw on Sociologist Erving Goffman as he demonstrates how individuals “perform” in interaction with others and how they may present themselves in ways that are valued in society rather than being a genuine representation of the self (Goffman 1959:35). I then draw on Sandra Bartky as she raises feminist consciousness and an understanding of how female bodies are expected to appear by arguing that the female body is a social construction wherein women are constantly surveilled to maintain male dominance over women (Bartky 1988:8, Bartky 1990:1, Foucault 1979). Although one

extension of this argument might see that Instagram would reinforce social constructions of femininity due to women being constantly surveilled, I argue that the opposite is also possible.

By examining body image on the app from a constructivist standpoint, using Goffman's (1959) theory of presentation of self and Bartky's (1988) theory of femininity, what is discovered will be "a construction based upon the actors' frame of reference within the setting" (Guba & Lincoln 1985:80). Constructivism is a paradigm in which the central belief is that knowledge is produced from the interaction of individuals, their experiences, the environment, and that different realities can be constructed (Lincoln, Lynham, Guba 2012: 98, 107). By aiming to gain an understanding of how Instagram provides a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies and how control has been transformed, I will interpret images, and the reactions written in text below the images.

Presentation of Self on Instagram

Erving Goffman's theory of the presentation of self helps to define the characteristics of social interaction. Although intended to be applied and be of benefit for social establishments, the theory is helpful for exploring how the social media app provides a space for changing how we conceive of women's bodies (Goffman 1959:239). He helps us understand how and why individuals decide to present themselves, and how their presentation of the self becomes socialized. This can be applied to Instagram because users carefully select offline what they desire to present online app.

Goffman (1959) explains that individuals perform by controlling their actions and presenting themselves in a certain way to others which they deem to be in their best

interest (1-4). He also explains that individuals are interested in information to help define situations, and those carriers of information or ‘vehicle signs,’ convey signs through their ‘personal front’ which is their appearance, more specifically their looks, clothing, size, and their manner (Goffman 1959: 1, 24). This highlights the importance of how people present themselves and how their “personal front[s]” will not necessarily be authentic but rather will “incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society” (1959:35).

In order to present oneself for one’s best interest or by adhering to what is valued in society, individuals may perform in ways which conceal certain information. Goffman (1959) explains that individuals may decide to conceal ‘secret pleasures’ or disregard certain information from their performance, or manage the impression they give, as either may be incompatible with expectations of their society (43).

The ways in which individuals perform or present themselves, such as what they decide to present and conceal is also highly dependent on context. As expectations, norms, or what is valued varies based on society, so does the performance of individuals. Goffman (1959) also finds that performance is based on regions, and that people perform based on what is valued within the boundaries of time and place (112). When individuals in societies do not attend to their bodies in ways that adhere to the expectations of their society, such as by being overweight or letting their appearance go, they become perceived negatively and even as having a flawed self (Featherstone 2010:196).

On Instagram individuals present themselves in specific ways as they perform by selecting specific images that they desire to display to their audiences, and not necessarily videos in which any flaws can be seen. On the app women not only present idealized

versions of themselves, and follow certain societal expectations by using products, such as makeup and specific clothing, which contribute to the capitalist system. Although Goffman's theories have contributed immensely to understanding how and why individuals present themselves on Facebook, his theories are as beneficial, if not more beneficial on Instagram, as the app allows women to present themselves exactly how they desire, even more than other social networking sites with the app's simple editing tools (Bullingham & Vasconelos 2013; Lang & Barton 2015:148) or through their deliberate selection of images they desire to present, and also who they "follow", or their audience who can "follow" them. Goffman helps us to understand of how people perform and present themselves in ways that are valued in society for their audiences and by applying this to the establishment of Instagram, we can obtain a better understanding of how body image is portrayed as users of the app have full control over how they present themselves, and as the online space consists of users of various cultures in which have different societal expectations.

Control & the Female Body

Foucault (1979) explains that subjective and practiced bodies, are known as docile bodies and explains that bodies are within Panopticon in which they are disciplined and under constant surveillance (138). Sandra Bartky's (1988) theory on femininity builds on Foucault's (1979) theories, explains that women are not only under the imposition of discipline or control in specific institutions such as factories or schools (as Foucault focused on), but that they are also under surveillance to present femininity or a feminine body (Bartky 1988:26, 36). Bartky (1988) uses 'docile bodies' and the Panopticon to

show that women are further surveilled and expected to appear in a certain way, and if they do not they are then expected to change. They are expected to transform following certain disciplinary practices in order to fit the expectations of how their physical bodies should appear depending on the culture (30). She helps us to understand how femininity is socially constructed, and how femininity is exercised through the female body. She explains that women are either expected to follow regimes such as diet plans, have specific body characteristics such as the “hour glass” shape, wear specific clothing, and use products like cosmetics (Bartky 1988: 8; Bolin 1992:801).

Beauty, attractiveness, and femininity then become tied to fashion, diet, adornment, and more specifically become economic structures of capitalism, as individuals are encouraged to buy specific products (Bolin 1992:82; Peterson & Kerin 1977:59). Capitalist industries fund traditional mass media images that portray these specific “feminine bodies”, promote specific products to use, and also promote how the female body is supposed to appear depending on culture (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, Zoino 2005:215). The specific bodies, or ideals become “cultivated” by media images in women’s environment such as medical, diet, and beauty industries, all elements of the capitalist system (Hesse-Biber et al. 2005:220). Bartky (1988) explains that women are responsible for maintaining a certain body shape or size, which requires the use of products, self-improvement, and self-control which results in the overall control of their time, money, and energy (Hesse-Biber et al. 2005:220; Featherstone 2010:194).

Despite the female body being a controlled space that can be observed at any time, where women are expected to appear in a certain way by following practices or using products, women’s bodies may be less controlled than in the past. The micro-level,

everyday interaction on Instagram where all users can be active producers may influence the macro-level or broader societal expectations of how bodies should appear. The social media app transforms control, as it provides power and opportunities to create messages. By individuals having the increased opportunity of control online, power is then more dispersed (Conboy & Medina 1997:147). By the social networking space allowing all individuals to participate, individuals can select what they decide to seek out on the platform, and also present themselves how they desire, whether what they present is similar to capitalist interests or in ways that contradict the corporate portrayals.

Despite both theories being developed prior to the creation of Instagram they can help explore how cultural constructs of the “good” body are being disseminated. Erving Goffman’s theory of the presentation of the self (1959) helps to explain how individuals decide to conceal specific information or presenting idealized versions of themselves online, and whether interests or corporate portrayals of women’s bodies are being reproduced today. In addition to Goffman’s theory (1959) Bartky’s Foucauldian theory on femininity (1988) helps us to understand the ways in which women in particular are expected to appear in a way that reflects their culture, and must master the “disciplinary practices” in the pursuit of the right body shape and size (28, 30). Although the everyday woman now has the ability to be an active producer on the app, more specifically a producer of knowledge, and can challenge these power structures there may be no shift from previous constructions of the feminine body. Women may be solely reproducing these “feminine” bodies online. Goffman reminds us of how individuals carefully select what they present to their audiences, while Bartky explains that the way women present themselves to their online following gender norms or expectations, and even if they may

not in everyday life they give the impression that they are online (Goffman 1959; Bartky 1988:28).

Methods

This research will use a qualitative approach from a constructivist standpoint to help understand how Instagram can provide a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies; furthermore, whether the ability of women to be active producers allows for more alternative representations of bodies that go against corporate mass media portrayals of women's bodies, or solely reproduces them online.

In order to understand how the app provides a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies and how women are presenting their bodies online, there are many ways in which one could analyze the space. The method that was used to help explore how Instagram provides a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies was done using a qualitative content analysis of images and text. A content analysis, or "a systematic and replicable method" (Guerin-Eagleman & Burch 2015:6) for the analysis of both the images and written text was the most beneficial method, as the majority of content important for body image research was found on the users' images and the text attributed to them. The directed content analysis focused on the images presented on the app, and their relationship with text attributed to the images, which together influenced cultural constructs of what is a "good" or "bad" body (Hsieh 2005:1281; White & Marsh 2006:27). This method was selected to explore how women are presenting their own bodies, as it is flexible, unobtrusive, minimizes interview bias

and any discomfort individuals may have when discussing bodies, as it can be a sensitive topic (White & Marsh 2006:38).

Popular Hashtags & Images

In order to use Instagram to its full potential for research, hashtags (#) were used to explore how women are presenting their bodies on the social networking application. The “@” or user tag was also used to further utilize some of the application’s key features and explore specific accounts. A purposive sample was collected by using the most popular hashtags based on the list found on Top-hashtags.com to determine top hashtags pertaining to body image, as users attribute these tags to the photographs in which they post. The five hashtags #Beachbody, #Eatclean, #Fitspo, #Instafit, #Strongisthenewskinny were the hashtags selected for the purpose of this study. These hashtags were found under one of the most popular category of hashtags “body,” that are the most popular pertaining to ideas around body image which helped to explore how Instagram does provide a platform for changing how women’s bodies are conceived. The top six photographs found under each of these hashtags was used as they are the most recent photographs posted on the platform, and were screenshot using an iPhone each day, over a seven-day period between January 11th and January 17th, 2016 . Two photographs were selected in the morning, between 8:00a.m. and 10:00a.m., two in the afternoon between 12:00p.m. and 2:00 p.m., and two in the evening between 6:00pm and 8:00p.m. for a total of 42 photographs for each hashtag that was analyzed as well as the commentaries left on the images. Using photographs during this period of time at specific moments of day, also helped to demonstrate whether there were any differences in how individuals present themselves at different times of day.

After collecting the first set of data, the screenshots of the photographs were uploaded on to a computer and organized into folders, separating each by date and time. The second sample of images was then taken from specific accounts.

Popular People

The “@” or user tag was used as a tool to investigate specific accounts to help explore how women are presenting women’s bodies on Instagram. A purposive sample of five of the most popular inspirational female fitness accounts on Instagram was used for this study. A purposive sample of the five most body positive accounts was also explored. Due to Instagram being unable to identify the most popular accounts of a specific category, Google’s search engine was used to find the most popular body accounts for women listed by Harper’s Bazaar (Harpersbazaar.com). The accounts provided by the online fashion magazine’s list are accounts of yogis, celebrities, athletes, trainers, or models from around the world, who are also known as “Instagram’s Inspiring fit girls to follow” (Harpersbazaar.com). These top inspiring female fitness accounts were selected as they had they were the most popular to help explore how women’s bodies are present image on Instagram, as these individuals give advice such as on dieting, and use the social media platform to present success stories or before and afters of bodies. These women present not only themselves on Instagram, but also present other individuals’ bodies, further helping to produce ideas around what bodies should look like. Content including both the photographs and the commentaries left on photographs were used from these women’s accounts: @Amandabisk, @Twobadbodies, @Iza_goulart, @Kayla_itsines, @Natalieuhling (Harpersbazaar.com). During the period of sampling using the most popular hashtags, the most recent ten photographs from each of these

accounts was screenshot using an iPhone, for a total of 50 photographs. Similarly to analyzing the hashtags, descriptive information was written on these images found on these accounts which was then coded and analyzed to draw out common themes.

Instagram does not identify what are the top accounts, as such, I used a list from the online feminist magazine *Bust* to identify what they considered the top ten body positive accounts and selected the top five. I then verified that these were indeed the most popular by examining the number of followers of these particular accounts compared to other account holders such as those using body positive hashtags.. The online magazine recommends women to follow these accounts for self-assurance, and explains that these women present images that demonstrate no matter what size, shape, skin colour, all women are still beautiful and can wear or eat what they desire (*Bust.com*). Similar to literature by being “body positive” these accounts are said to help one embrace their body; retaliate to media images portraying bodily ideals such as the “thigh gap”, and nurture bodily acceptance of all sizes or colours (Sastre 2014: 929). Since this is a popular feminist magazine and the list of accounts is intended to be the most body positive, drawing from this list meant I was allowing for a higher likelihood of seeing transgressive, anti-corporate portrayals of women in my analysis. Content, both the photographs and the commentaries left on photographs were also used from these body positive females’ accounts: @Honorcurves, @Daniellevanier, @Nadiaaboulhosn, @Fullerghurefullerbust, and @Cupcakesloveme. During the same period of sampling, the ten most recent photographs from each of these accounts was screenshot using an iPhone, for a total of 50 photographs that were taken and analyzed.

By using the hashtag feature of Instagram, as well as the user tag feature, this

helped to demonstrate how these features can help provide insight on how current conceptions of body image are being developed. Online magazines were used to help locate the specific popular tags and accounts, as the most popular accounts are not presented by the app, but can be located once identified. These methods also helped to examine how these individuals are presenting themselves differently on the platform, and depending on how the platform is used can contribute to our understanding of how cultural constructs of the “good” and “bad” body are currently being disseminated.

After all of the data was collected, notes on the images were taken and summarized in order to identify codes. The coding was descriptive and helped to sort the text and visual images into categories (Creswell 2007: 149). Once the list of descriptive codes was created, they were compared and then reduced to themes to help explore the research question.

Table 1. Grid of Popular Body Accounts and Popular Body Positive Accounts Used to Retrieve Sample of Images

Popular Body Accounts	Popular Body Positive Accounts
@Amandabisk	@Honorcurves
@Twobadbodies	@Daniellevanier
@Iza_goulart	@Nadiaaboulhosn
@Natalieuhling	@Fullerfigurefullerbust
@Kayla_itsines	@Cupcakesloveme

Content Analysis Grids & The Coding Process

There has been minimal research and publications on how to conduct a content analysis on Instagram, and although many have been written for other social networking spaces such as Facebook, the platform of Instagram works quite differently. By using many images and different methods for collecting samples, such as by using different

features, it can leave researchers feeling overwhelmed with all the images and content. In order to help organize the images selected for the samples and facilitate the coding process, two content analysis grids were created for the purpose of this research. The first grid consists of the images sampled through hashtags, separating the images by day and time period of day, and presents the numeric value that was given to each image. By administering a numeric value to each image, starting from photograph one to photograph two hundred and ten, a list was created, where each photograph could be open-coded and described next to its given numeric value. The numbers were given to each photograph in order per hashtag and then continued to increase for the next hashtag. Each hashtag number was also allocated to the time of day (morning, afternoon and evening) that the image was taken to show any trends in what is posted at different times of the day.

Table 2. Example of Coding Sheet for Photographs by Hashtag

Hashtag	Day 1			Day 2			Day 3			Day 4			Day 5			Day 6			Day 7		
	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M	A M	A F	P M
#beachbody	1,2	3,4	5,6	7,8	9,10	11,12	13,14	15,16	17,18	19,20	21,22	23,24	25,26	27,28	29,30	31,32	33,34	35,36	37,38	39,40	41,42
#instafit	43,44	45,46	47,48	49,50	51,52	53,54	55,56	57,58	59,60	61,62	63,64	65,66	67,68	69,70	71,72	73,74	75,76	77,78	79,80	81,82	83,84
#fitspo	85,86	87,88	89,90	91,92	93,94	95,96	97,98	99,100	101,102	103,104	105,106	107,108	109,110	111,112	113,114	115,116	117,118	119,120	121,122	123,124	125,126
#eatclean	127,128	129,130	131,132	133,134	135,136	137,138	139,140	141,142	143,144	145,146	147,148	149,150	151,152	153,154	155,156	157,158	159,160	161,162	163,164	165,166	167,168
#strongisth enewskinny	169,170	171,172	173,174	175,176	177,178	179,180	181,182	183,184	185,186	187,188	189,190	191,192	193,194	195,196	197,198	199,200	201,202	203,204	205,206	207,208	209,210

The second grid lists the top accounts pertaining to ideas around women’s bodies, as well as the top female body positive accounts, and the ten most recent photographs for each. A numeric value is given to each photograph. The numbers were selected for the photographs to locate them easily, to help organize them for the open coding processes, as well as to help group them in the axial coding process to produce themes.

Table 3. Example of Coding Sheet for Photographs by User

Name of Account	Ten Most Recent Photographs (January 11 th -17 th)									
Top Accounts Pertaining to Ideas Around Women’s Bodies										
@Amandabisk	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220
@Twobadbodies	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230
@Iza_goulart	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240
@Natalieuhling	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250
@Kayla_itsines	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260
Top Female Body Positive Accounts										
@Honorcurves	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270
@Daniellevanier	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280
@Nadiaaboulhosn	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290
@Fullerfigurefullerbust	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300
@Cupcakesloveme	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310

By creating two separate grids, each picture became numbered, assisting in locating specific images, as well as creating lists in which each image could be easily coded. I began the coding process by open coding the images selected, for the purpose of exploring how Instagram provides a platform of changing how we conceive of women’s bodies. I open coded the images by observing the shapes, colors, position of objects, position of the subjects, where the subjects were looking, the framing or focal point of the image, and the angle of the camera. I began solely describing what appeared in the

images trying to be as objective as possible without applying any meaning to the images. I then went on to reflect on the images, interpreting what I saw, began axial coding and finding various themes to assist in creating a formal analysis and to help answer the research question of: How are women's bodies presently being portrayed, and does Instagram provide alternative images of women's bodies that contradict corporate mass media images?

Despite the use of these content analysis grids and the descriptive open coding process helping to explore and answer the research question, there still remain sampling issues in the collection of photographs on Instagram. For example, two of the top body positive accounts listed at Bust.com were no longer in existence, so the following two popular body positive accounts had to be selected for this research based on their ranking by having more followers. There always exists the possibility users deleting their accounts, as well as an account with two people may split up such as @Twobadbodies that was used for this research. Other issues in sampling on Instagram may also include: invaluable commentaries such as of gibberish, usefulness of tagging, and the accuracy of using top lists. Many comments left on images on Instagram are not extremely useful and do not help to answer research questions. In addition to this many of the comments left on the images on the app are solely to tag other individuals' accounts to share the image. Another issue with sampling on the app is with the use of top lists as they are not always best for producing what is the most popular. The top lists may also lead to accounts that are no longer being used or updated, as well as in existence. The top lists can lead to accounts that may not be useful, in addition to hashtags that may not help to explore the research question or have any use. A prime example of this was seen in the research with

the hashtag #Instafit found using a top list, consisted of images of subjects that were male, meanwhile the scope of this research only focuses on females.

Methodological & Ethical Concerns

Instagram is one of the newest social networking applications and is beginning to be used for various types of research. Institutional Review Boards face challenges and guidelines for the apps used and these guidelines still remain unclear (Moreno, Goniou, Moreno & Diekema 2013: 708). Many of the concerns of using social media applications like Instagram, are in terms of privacy and ensuring individuals are not identifiable. Another challenge that can be faced when conducting studies on these online spaces, is identifying whether a subject is a minor, in which consent would then be required (Moreno et al. 2013). Despite this fact, the study I conducted solely investigate accounts and photographs of which are available for public access, opposed to receiving consent for those with private accounts. Due to the accounts being open for public access, ethics approval was not required but to have proper research etiquette, all research participants were sent a message and informed of this research, some of which replied. One problem with informing account users of the research prior to retrieving the photographs is that they may change their accounts privacy setting ensuring that no information is retrieved. For this research, the message was sent to users following the retrieval of photographs on the app.

Another problem of utilizing public accounts is that the participant's age is unknown. Although those below the age of thirteen are not permitted to use the Instagram, there are users not only below sixteen years of age using the app but also those below the age of thirteen. The popular accounts pertaining to ideas around women's

bodies, as well as the popular body positive accounts only consisted of young adult women.

Findings

The images being presented on Instagram include photographs of individuals themselves, groups of people, landscapes, objects, and specific commercial products. By exploring the specific hashtags pertaining to ideas around bodies: #Beachbody, #Instafit, #Eatclean, #Strongisthenewskinny, #Fitspo, many of these different types of photographs posted by different Instagram users appear, but the majority consist of one central and main subject. Using hashtags allows one to see portrayals by the creators and the reactions of consumers. By selecting images that are tagged with these hashtags and exploring popular body accounts, many images of white able-bodied women in bikinis appear, women in sports bras, leggings, or wearing minimal clothing. In addition to minimal clothing, many of the photographs sampled through these tags, popular accounts, as well as the body positive accounts are images of food, women using their hands to touch their face or body, or to hold a product. In addition to using hands they also position their bodies in ways that appear unnatural or different than how one would stand in everyday life. Images also combine snapshots at different time periods, as well as photographs that were shot in different settings such as selfies within the residential home, on a beach, or in other settings. The body positive accounts, popular body accounts and popular body hashtags all presented images with text or a photo with solely motivation text, written jokes, or announcements. Although the photographs sampled through these techniques show similar images, the body positive accounts have different

settings or and do not wear minimal clothing with the except of @Nadiaabouhosn account, and none share images with combined photographs showing before and afters.

Instagram: A platform for consciousness and change or a site that reproduces the same?

Major themes are evident as the photographs being uploaded by users are reproducing corporate mass media portrayals of how women's bodies are expected to appear, as they are of women posing, staging advertisements, using the same feminine movements such as "touch" as in traditional media, making fitness more feminine, as well as reproducing the idea that "sex sells" (Goffman 1976: 45-6).

Despite the majority of the sampled photographs reproducing the same ideas, there are certain points of resistance. The ways in which Instagram is different than traditional media, and how the app may be a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies can be seen with certain moments in which relative size and authority are challenged, and with images that portray real life, particularly on the body positive accounts.

"Sex Sells" on Instagram, & The Feminization of Fitness

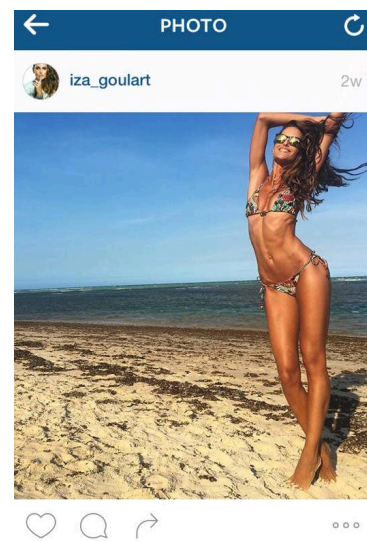
Body image research has established that social environments, the interaction with others, and traditional media images contribute to ideas of how bodies are expected to appear (Kelly & Field 1997:359, 360). As traditional media present images of celebrities, beautiful bodies, and models who "exemplify the good life," Instagram does so (Featherstone 2010:196). The users on Instagram, not solely the accounts of models, or "Instagram Celebrities", present photographs of themselves in minimal or revealing clothing, such as sports bras and bikinis as seen in previous Figures 1 through Figures 6. Similar to advertisers illustrating that women should impress others by wearing

fashionable or “risqué” clothing is being reproduced on the app (Gengler 2011: 68). Sex is also used in advertising to sell certain products is also heavily used on the app by individuals. Many women present images in which their bottoms are exposed, they are in small bikinis or they present more of a “sexy” image. In Figure 1 and Figure 2, for example, we see women wearing small bikinis and sunglasses posing at a distance from the camera.

Figure 1. Photograph of woman wearing small bikini on the beach found using #Beachbody tag



Figure 2. Photograph of woman in a bikini on the beach found on popular body account for women @Iza_goulart



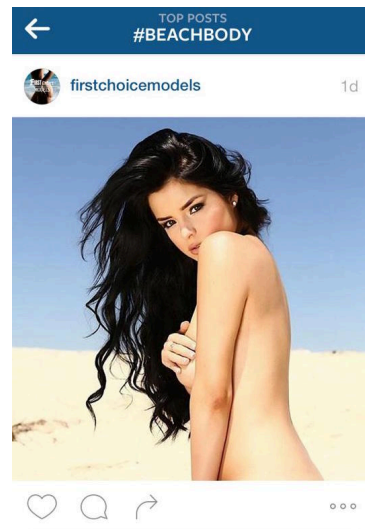
Both the photographs that were tagged using the specific body focused hashtags and the images presented by the popular accounts pertaining to ideas around bodies: @Amandabisk, @Twobadbodies, @Iza_goulart, @Kayla_itsines, @Natalieuhling present images of women in small bikinis. As we can see in Figure 2 @Iza_goulart presents images of a female body in bikinis on a beach or other settings others

such as @Kayla_itsines account present images of female bodies in small articles of clothing such as active sportswear. These accounts and other women's accounts also present images in small swimwear with their bottoms almost fully exposed, or wearing no clothing at all taken by others such as those in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Figure 3. Women on beach in “sexy” pose with image taken from behind found using #Instafit tag



Figure 4. Photograph of the side of a female taken at a close distance found using #Beachbody tag.



Women also share images that they take themselves wearing almost no clothing, or showing their rear-ends. In Figure 5 the women's bottom is also visible to other users as she is wearing small underwear with her backside positioned towards the mirror, and in Figure 6 the women is taking a photograph straight on in her underwear.

Figure 5. Women touching hair and turned backside towards mirror found using #Instafit tag.

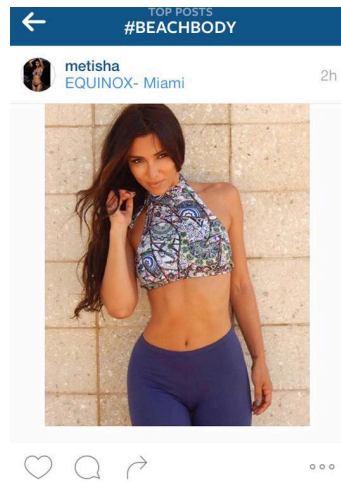


Figure 6. Photograph of female taking picture of herself wearing minimal clothing in the mirror found using #Eatclean tag



Images found on the platform not only show minimal clothing such as wearing bikinis on the beach or indoors, small active wear, and undergarments but they also show smaller articles of clothing such as crop types like in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Photograph of female wearing cropped shirt found using #Beachbody tag.



In addition to women wearing minimal clothing such as crop tops, undergarments and bikinis in the images that they present they also pose in “sexy” ways such as having an arm up, pushing one hip to one side as seen in Figure 8, or legs apart like in Figure 9 and Figure 10.

Figure 8. Woman posing in swimsuit on Beach found using #Beachbody tag



Figure 9. Woman sitting in “sexy” position with legs open found using #Instafit tag

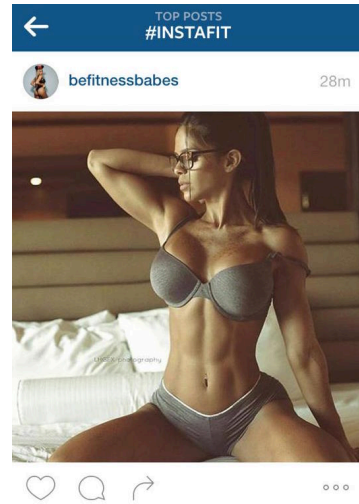
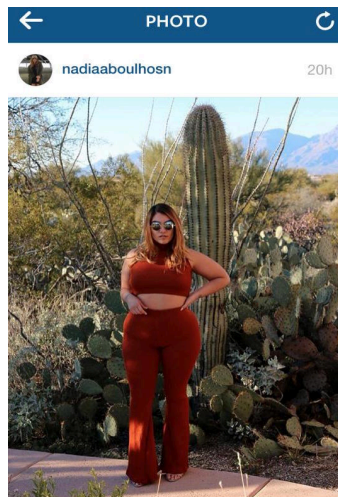


Figure 10. Photograph taken or filtered in black and white found using #Beachbody tag.



As the popular hashtags pertaining to ideas around bodies yields images of women wearing small items of clothing such as crop tops or swimwear so do the all of the popular body accounts and one of the body positive accounts. The majority of the body positive accounts do not present images of females wearing minimum clothing or posing in a sexy manner with the exception of @Nadiaaboulhosn. In Figure 11 it is evident that her clothing choices are similar to other accounts that are not body positive and that she wears similar things but in a larger size.

Figure 11. Posing wearing cropped shirt and tight pants found on @Nadiaaboulhosn account

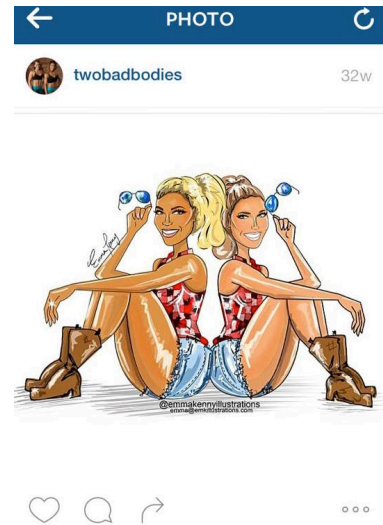


The majority of the popular body accounts present images of themselves wearing bikinis, minimal clothing and posing in more “sexy” ways. The photographs on the popular body accounts almost always present themselves posing wearing small or tight clothing as seen in Figure 12, and even when they present images of themselves in cartoon like @Twobadbodies seen in Figure 13.

Figure 12. Photograph of women lying in front of fire in small bikini found on @Iza_goulart account

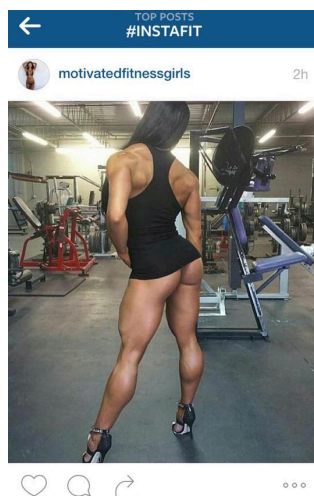


Figure 13. Photograph of cartoons wearing short denim shorts found on @Twobadbodies account



In addition to women posting photographs of themselves in risqué apparel, or high fashion, they also present ways in which they do fitness or exercise in a way that appears beautiful or “feminine”. Wearing minimal clothing is not restricted to the beach or the residential home in the images on the app, but also take place in a gym setting. Similar to the images of women’s bottom being exposed as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 5, in Figure 14 the women is facing away from the camera wearing high heels in the gym with her bottom exposed.

Figure 14. Posing without pants in the gym found using #Instafit tag



Despite the majority women wearing pants in the images found using popular body hashtags and popular body accounts many women wear sports bras and tight leggings and pose in ways to make their bodies appear their best. In Figure 15 and Figure 16 the women are both posing with the attention of making their bodies appear their best and selected more revealing active wear.

Figure 15. Female wearing small sports bra posing with hip out found using #Fitspo tag.

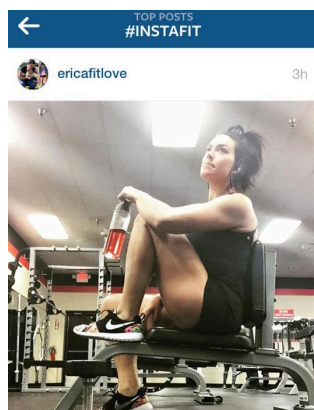


Figure 16. Female posing to side found using #Strongisthenewskinny tag



The photographs found using popular hashtags lead to images of women in the gym wearing revealing clothing, positioning themselves in more sex ways opposed to utilizing the gym space like in Figure 17. The woman in the picture has her knee bent up and dis resting on the piece of equipment.

Figure 17. Women resting in gym found using #Instafit tag



The body positive accounts also present images of women resting in the gym or taking a selfie, however they wear full-length shirts and bottoms and do not pose like in Figure 14 or Figure 15.

Body Posing, Staged Advertisements & The Feminine Touch

In Western cultures, the mass media portrays slender or thin bodies as attractive and associates them with positivity in contrast to overweight bodies (Grogan 1999: 6; Mask 2011:54). According to Sandra Bartky women are expected to present a body of a specific weight and they are also under surveillance to present femininity or a feminine body. Women are shown that in order to achieve this they seek out specific aspects or economic structures of capitalism, such as fashion and diet (Bartky 1988:26, 36). Women on Instagram have the opportunity to change the reproduction of these images by presenting images that do not demonstrate that women should have specific “feminine” bodies or should use certain products. The sample of images from using the app’s hashtag feature as well as the sample from both popular body accounts and body positive accounts, for the majority, are reproducing these images. Prime examples of these can be seen on the app as almost all women are posing in their pictures, such as placing a hand on a hip, as well as overtly and in-overtly advertise. The same images in which are seen in traditional media that demonstrate success being achieved through beauty, or can be purchased represent the majority of images being shared on the platform, whether they are overt advertisements or advertisements in disguise (Gengler 2011: 68-9). In Figure 18, Figure 19, Figure 20, and Figure 21 sampled through popular hashtags, popular body accounts, and popular body positive accounts ways in which corporate mass media images are being reproduced can be seen with overt advertisements for specific products

and places on the app. The overt advertisements are not limited to popular body accounts and are shared as frequently on popular body positive accounts. The account holders show specific products, attach tags to show where they can be purchased, and the photographs found using hashtags also include a location tag such as in Figure 32.

Figure 18. Image of produce from Trader Joe's found using #Beachbody tag

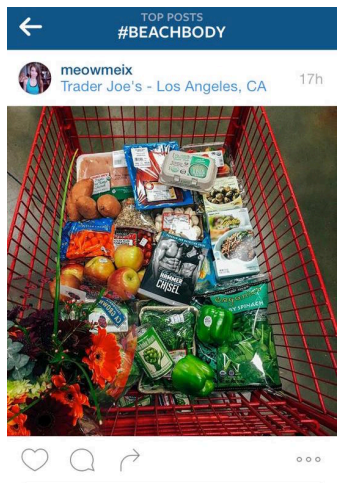


Figure 19. Photograph of inflatable pineapple found on body positive account @Daniellevanier



Figure 20. Photograph of travel kit found on popular body account @Natalieuhling



Figure 21. Photograph of paleo bread ad found using #Instafit tag



All of the advertisements on the platform are not as overt as Figures 19, 20, and 21. Some advertisements are also covert such as Figure 22, where a female has taken a close up image of herself wearing a Nike sports bra and Figure 23 where popular body image account holder presents an image with the products she is using in the background

Figure 22. Nike sports bra found using #Instafit tag

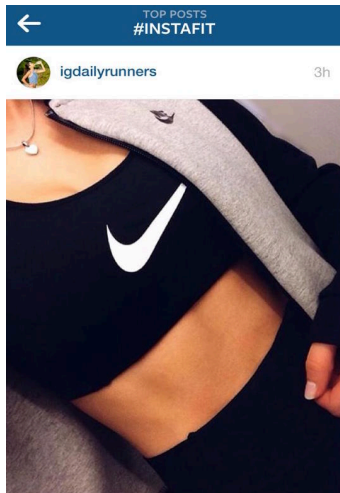
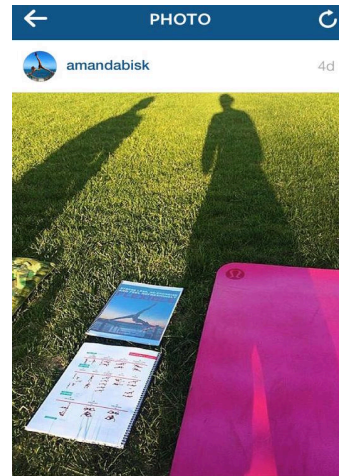


Figure 23. Lululemon yoga mat and flexible workout plan found on @Amandabisk account



In addition to overt advertisements such as an ad for gluten free paleo bread seen in Figure 21, or a bikini body guide, or ones in disguise such as women having manicured nails, holding an object, women are also using their hands in ways similar to advertisements in traditional media. Goffman (1976) explains how pictures in advertisements are “doctored”, and use women’s hands to trace outlines, hold themselves, or hold an object with a “feminine touch” (29). In Figure 24 one can see the idea of a “feminine touch”, where the woman’s hands are place around her juice. Similar to this in Figure 25 the female is using her hands to hold and display her bottle of water, as she poses with one hand on her hip.

Figure 24. Feminine touch on drink found using #Eatclean tag

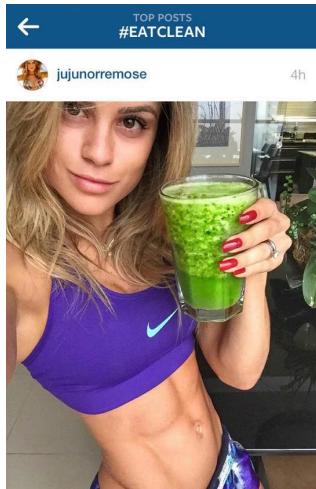


Figure 25. Hand holding water bottle and hip found using #Eatclean tag



The feminine touch is also a focal point for many photographs, as samples from hashtags, popular accounts and body positive accounts have images of the female hand holding food or products like in Figure 26 with the female hand displaying a cup of food and Figure 27 where body positive account holder @Fullerfigurefullerbust uses her hand to hold a bag of dark chocolate cranberries, and has artificial painted nails.

Figure 26. Photograph of feminine touch and the display of food #Eatclean tag



Figure 27. Photograph showing feminine touch and presentation of a product on body positive account @Fullerfigurefullerbust.



Images of a “feminine touch” with women placing their hands and fingers on food, products, their faces and on their bodies appear on both- body positive and popular accounts, as well as on the photos examined through the hashtag analysis. In Figure 28 body positive account holder @Nadiaaboulhosn takes a photograph in close proximity, as and has her index finger resting on her lip and painted nails below.

Figure 28. Photograph feminine touch, hands placed on face and lips found on body positive account @Nadiaaboulhosn.



Similarly to the image shared by @Nadiaaboulhosn, in Figure 29 the subject also has painted nails. In this image rather than the subject touching her face, she is holding holding her hip with her hand.

Figure 29. Photograph of female lying down with hands holding her hip found using #Eatclean tag.



Photographs on the platform have women using their hands and fingers as seen in Figures 24 to 29, as well as they position their bodies in various ways. Images found using the popular hashtags and popular accounts include images of women positioning their bodies such as by placing their hands on their hips similar to Figure 29. Many of the images also have the women placing their hands on their head, having their knees bent or positioning their bodies in unnatural ways like in Figures 30 and 31.

Figure 30. Photograph of two females posing found on popular body account @Twobadbodies



Figure 31. Photograph taken of side profile of female found using #Instafit tag



Images of women posing are done in a range of ways on the app from being covertly “doctored” such as un-natural pose like Figure 30, to having “rigged displays” such as an image of a female outside in the winter without sufficient attire in Figure 40, and are exaggerated or a “hyperrealization” of the natural in ads and for the majority on the social media platform (Goffman 1976:15, 84).

Figure 32. Rigged display found using #Beachbody tag



Although there is no difference between photographs of rigged displays being shared by body positive accounts, popular accounts, or found through hashtag analysis, the setting in which photographs are taken often vary. Photographs are taken by the app users themselves, taken indoors, and also taken outdoors in different settings. Popular accounts presented images on a beach, whereas body positive were not like in Figure 34. The popular accounts present goals or ideal images in contrast to the body positive accounts presenting more mundane, or real life settings.

Figure 33. Photograph of woman walking away from camera on beach found on @Iza_goulart



Figure 34. Photograph of an outdoor residential setting in which appears to be winter found on body positive Account @Cupcakesloveme



Despite many photographs found using popular hashtags and popular body accounts being located on a beach or tropical setting, only one body positive account belonging to @Nadiaaboulhosn showed similarities in terms of setting and choice of clothing. The body positive account holder @Nadiaaboulhosn was the sole body positive account holder who shared images of her biting her nails, wearing minimal clothing, and being in a tropical setting. Other body positive accounts had less tropical settings, and even less attractive winter settings as seen in Figure 34.

Another way that the images found through the three different samples of photographs (popular, body positive accounts and photos with the top body hashtags) reproduce corporate mass media images is through body position and relative size. Goffman describes the head and knee “cant” where one’s knee is bent or have a lower body position popular in advertisements, which is also popular on the apps as many women present images of themselves where they are looking into their cellular device (Goffman 1976: 46). The lowering of the female body, he describes as lowering the body physically, and explains that in advertisements there is a ritualization of subordination where women are lower, often on beds or floors, which is also heavily seen on the app (Goffman 1976:41). On the app images of women lying down like in Figure 35, or on floor and beds like Figures 9, and 36 reoccur through images sampled from hashtags and popular accounts, but not body positive accounts.

Figure 35. Close-up of women lying down found using #Strongisthenewskinny tag



Figure 9. Woman on bed found using #Instafit tag

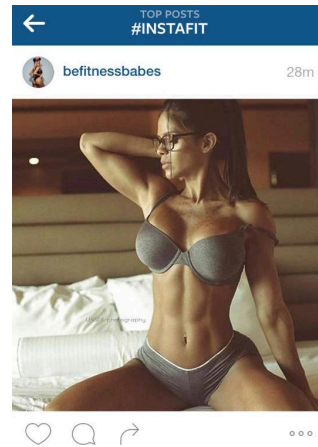


Figure 36. Women stretching or doing yoga on bed found using #Instafit tag



The ritualization of subordination can also be seen in images with images of men and women together such as in Figure 37 where the women is physically lower than the male and he is leaning over her. The image is also an advertisement for a photographer and has been water marked.

Figure 37. Ritualization of subordination on beach found using @Beachbody tag



Visual Comparisons & Emotions: The “Before and After”

Studies have examined how traditional media images can lead to dissatisfaction and that by presenting unattainable bodies, women often attempt to change behaviours such as diet and exercise (Cheng 2009:365; Halliwell 2015). In addition to this, advertisers also try to convince individuals that they “are in need of constant improvement” to get attention from the opposite sex and to make one self “better” than what they are presently (Gengler 2011: 68). The images in traditional media and the images produced by advertisers show women how they can improve their bodies with the use of products or certain exercises, as they illustrate how change can lead to happiness and success. Before-and-after photographs showing those who have become more fit or lost weight are in various magazines, as well as television advertisements for products such as teas, supplements, and fitness or food programs. Similar before-and-after photographs are also highly evident on Instagram, although not all are advertising for a

specific product, but rather show the subjects self-improvement. By using the popular body hashtags and popular body accounts, the sample of images consisted of many “before and after” photographs, where users always had a lower fat percentage in the present or after photo, and many of the subjects in the images were showing emotion such as confidence and or happiness as seen in Figure 38 and Figure 39. In these figures any visible emotion or change in emotion that is evident is happiness.

Figure 38. Happy “after” found using #Strongisthenewskinny tag

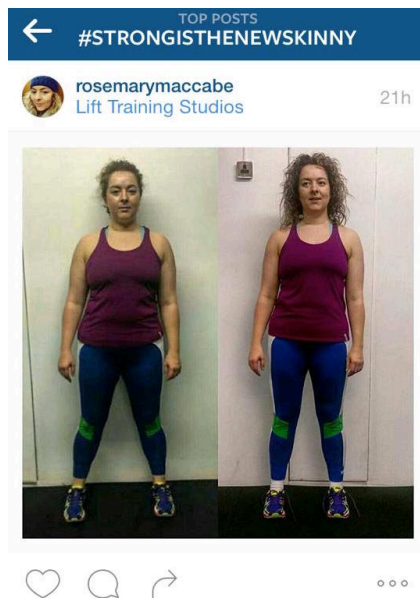
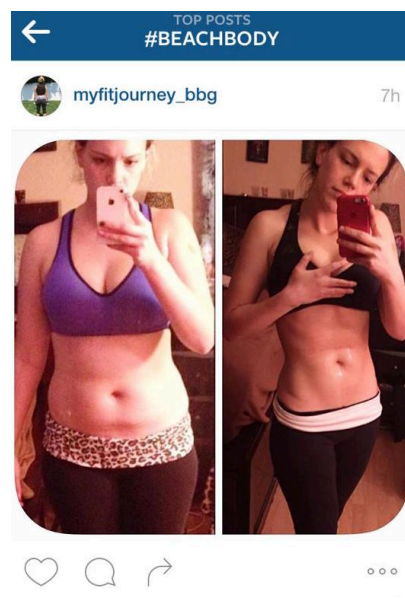
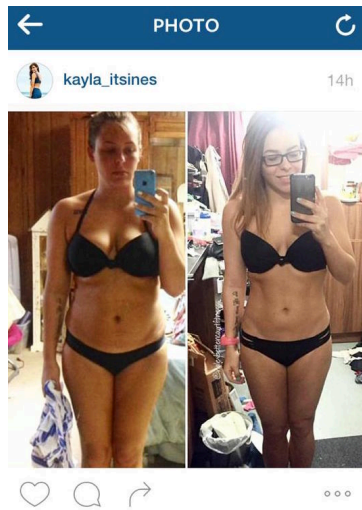


Figure 39. Before and After photograph found using #Beachbody tag



The women presenting these “before and after photos” also show their “success stories” and how they successfully became smaller or fitter. Many of the women in the photographs on the platform were not overweight at the start, but changed their body composition. In addition popular body accounts, such as @Kayla_itsines, base their accounts around the “before and after” photographs of other women who follow their guidelines in how to achieve the “perfect body” or a better body by following bikini guides and also show their clients such as the one in Figure 40 being happier.

Figure 40. Happier “after” photograph found on popular body account @Kayla_itsines



The reproduction of corporate mass media images is apparent in images such as Figure 41 as the photograph presents a woman’s body transformation or weight loss, and the BBG or bikini body guide that can be purchased to achieve these results.

Figure 41. Photograph of two images of a female showing a weight loss found on @Kayla_itsines account



Despite before and after photographs frequently appearing using hashtags and on popular body accounts, they are not evident on body positive accounts, as they present to

users their bodies or the bodies of others without transformation, but rather acceptance of the bodies' appearance.

Points of Resistance

The sample retrieved from using the hashtags and user accounts on Instagram yielded endless photographs that fail to resist, or offer images that go against mainstream portrayals of women's bodies and are solely reproducing them on the space. Many accounts share 'sexy' images or women wearing minimal clothing, images of self improvement which the media portrays as necessary, or posing and positioning themselves in the same manner as advertisements, even advocating or presenting specific products to other users. Despite the majority of photographs in the sample reproducing these images, there are photographs that challenge normative beliefs of how women's bodies are supposed to appear, and certain points of resistance, particularly in the body positive spaces. Other aspects that demonstrate resistance or differ from those in traditional media, such as magazines and advertisements is linked to relative size, social weight and authority as there are images on the platform in which women are higher than men, or showing incredible strength, such as by lifting heavy objects. In addition to social weight and authority being challenged on the space, on Instagram there are photographs that may be more authentic, such as real portraits and daily life events, where the image may not be flattering to the subjects.

Relative Size & Authority

Advertisements in traditional media position subjects in photographs strategically, and the majority of the time they position women lower than men, as well as ensure that the women are smaller or have less authority (Goffman 33). By exploring the sample of

photographs on the app it is evident that this is not the same on the platform, as women are above men, as well as appear to have authority. Some of the photographs demonstrate women lifting heavy weights, or running over fires like in Figure 47, as well as place males in subordinate position like in Figures 48 and Figure 49.

Figure 47. @Twobadbodies running over fire covered in mud



Women are seen to be in dominant position in some photographs, where the men are physically lower. In Figure 48 @Nadiaaboulhosn is standing above the male in the photograph, as well as braiding his hair. Similarly to Figure 48, Figure 49 has the male in a subordinate position as the women is standing on top of his back and elevated higher than him.

Figure 48: Photograph of male in subordinate position found on @Nadiaaboulhosn account

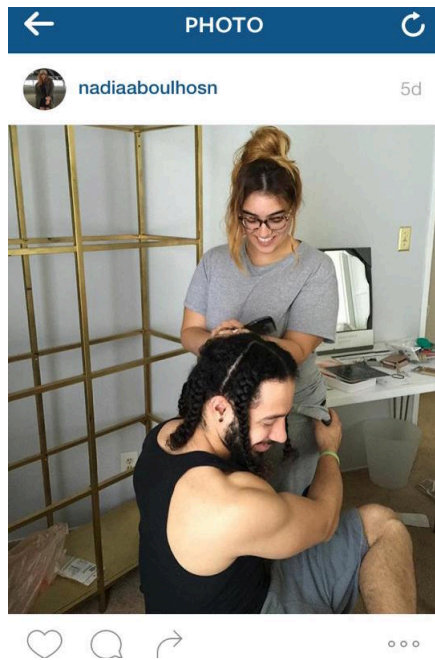


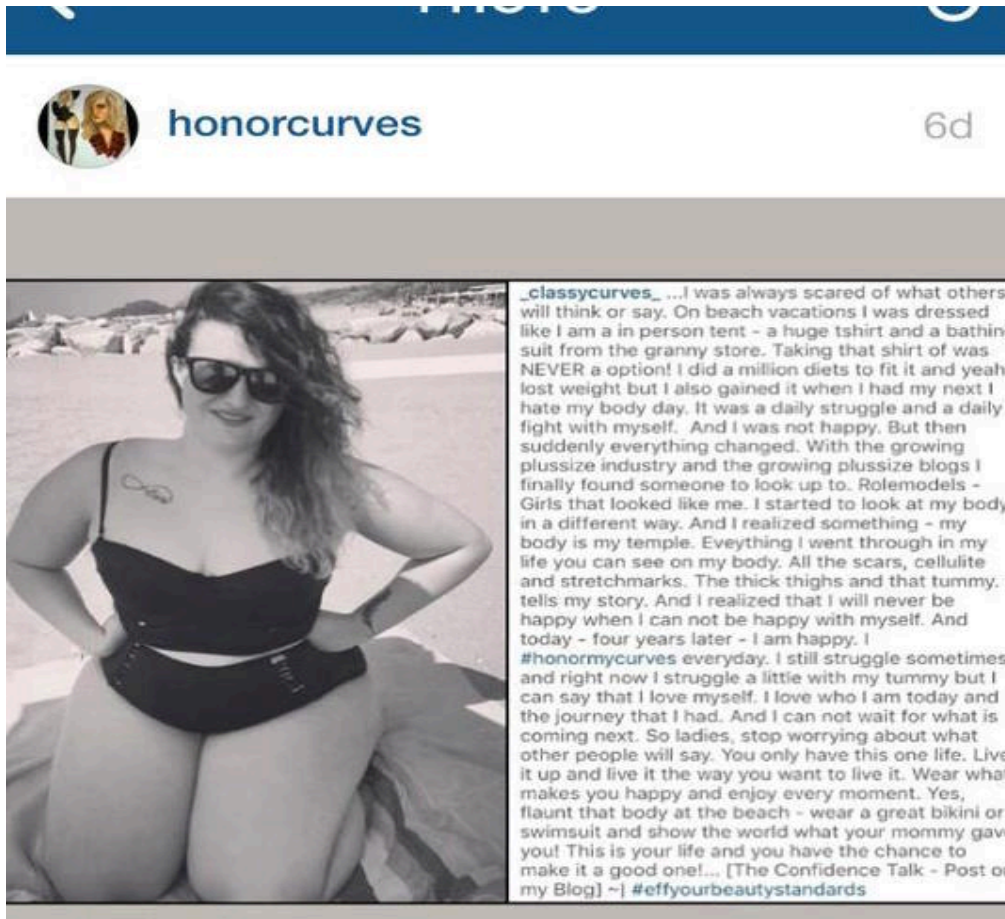
Figure 49. Photograph of male in subordinate position found using #Beachbody tag



Authenticity

Major instances of resistance can be seen in the sample of photographs retrieved from the body positive accounts. Although certain body positive accounts tend to reproduce the same ideas presented under profit-oriented corporate media, such as advertising for products, or presenting the same ideas such as sexy sells at a larger size, points of resistance are apparent. A prime example of this can be seen on the body positive account @Honorcurves, as she includes text in her photographs as seen in Figure 50, as well as photographs of herself wearing a bikini at a larger size, and explains to other users that it is important to be happy and that you do not need to be a specific shape or size, or even close to perfect.

Figure 50. Image combining text aimed at empowering women found on @Honorcurves account.



This account holder also shares images of other females being content and presenting themselves in small articles of clothing such as crop tops, or that would not be illustrated in advertisements or the media as being beautiful, but rather requires improvement.

In addition to these women showing their bodies, or dressing how they desire despite having bodies that if presented by the media could possibly be perceived as transgressive, some of these women also offer real portraits, or unflattering, unedited pictures, such as during or after a workout, sweating. Similar to body positive account holder @Honorcurves, body positive account holder @Fullerfigurefullerbust shares

photographs of herself that demonstrate resistance. An example of this can be seen in Figure 51 and Figure 52 as @Fullerfigurefullerbust posts images of herself that are real life portraits in a gym setting, wearing no makeup and sweating opposed to posing in sports bra and bikinis.

Figure 51. Real life portrait on body positive account @Fullerfigurefullerbust

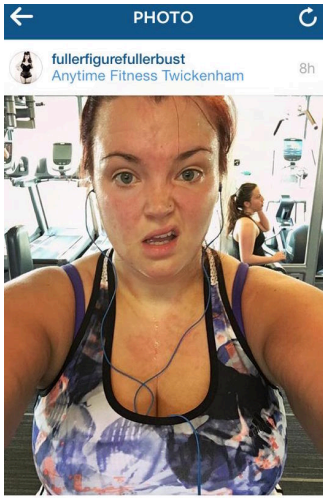
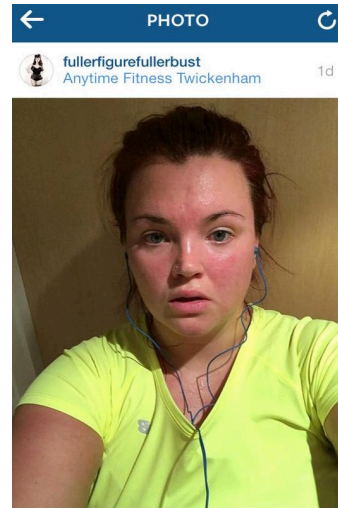


Figure 52. Photograph of @Fullerfigurefullerbust showing authentic version of herself



Other instances of resistance can be seen using the hashtag feature, where images such as Figure 53 illustrate women of all sizes and shapes are happy together.

Figure 53. Women of different sizes happy found using #Strongisthenewskinny hashtag.



In addition to a few photographs found using hashtags such as Figure 54 below demonstrate resistance by presenting real life portraits where flaws are exposed, or incorporate messages attempting to help empower other women and challenge normative beliefs of how women's bodies are expected to appear.

Figure 54. Real life portrait found using #Eatclean tag



Despite these instances where women challenge relative size and authority, present authentic images, and offer messages aimed at empowering other women the majority of images reproduce corporate mass media portrayals. Although body positive accounts like @Fullerfigurefullerbust as seen in Figure 52 presents authentic pictures of herself showing flaws, or @Honorcurves as seen in Figure 50 offering motivational text, the majority of these body positive accounts present images that focus on specific articles clothing and products.

Instagram is primarily visual, has few limitations in the photographs that are uploaded, empowering all users, although they can be reported and removed. Despite body image being psychological and linked to individuals' perceptions, body image is highly linked to optics and what is viewed, making Instagram an important space to research as young adult women are highly using the platform. Upon investigating specific

A Closer Look at the Commentaries: Reinforcement or Resistance

Commentaries on the sample of photographs are dependent on the image sampled, but they included compliments, sexual remarks, tagging of other accounts, and small conversations. The photographs found by using the hashtag feature illustrate that these popular hashtags are used by various cultures as they are in different languages such as Spanish, French, English, and Arabic. Many of the comments left on the images of women wearing minimal clothing or posing are labeled by other accounts using terms such as “sexy”, “fit”, “perfection” or “goals”. On many of these images other account users also leave commentaries that the images portray their own goals, inspiration, or motivation. In addition to these comments, images using all of the hashtags that are of “before and after” or transformations have comments such as “amazing transformation” or “you look incredible, great work”. For hashtags that lead to images of food, often times other users use it as a space to inform others of their blogs or accounts, share recipes, and explain that the dishes are good inspiration.

Similar to the commentaries differing for the hashtags they also differ depending on the specific image for both the popular women’s body accounts as well as the body positive accounts. The popular accounts pertaining to ideas around women’s bodies have hundreds of commentaries, which include tagging others, expressing that the image is their goal, tagging of other accounts, expressing that they love the outfits or products in the image and inquire where they can be purchased. When images are of the female’s body, often in minimal clothing such as bikinis or sports bras, other users leave comments such as “body goals,” “sexy.” In contrast to these accounts, the body positive

accounts have fewer comments, and not as many tags, with the exception of @Nadiaabouhosn which receives similar comments to the other non-body positive accounts. The body positive accounts' images do not have many commentaries that tag other accounts, except for the images of motivational text, which occurs for both popular body accounts, and body positive accounts. Commentaries left on the images of the body positive accounts also inquire on the clothing items, fitness equipment and gear but do not label the women in the same way. Although some of the body positive accounts' images received comments such as "body goals" for the majority most are described in the commentaries as being the "thick queen," "gorgeous," or "stunning."

Motivations

Instagram users, such as the popular accounts pertaining to ideas around women's bodies and the body positive account holders, have different reasons for presenting themselves on the platform although the specific motivations for uploading photographs on the platform may be difficult to distinguish. The photographs that users upload may portray their own bodies or the bodies of other women similarly to mainstream images or traditional media, or may show resistance with the motivation of empowering others. Some users may create or continue presenting their accounts for attention and to have others follow them, meanwhile other user accounts internalize capitalism and use the platform as a small business. A prime example of this can be seen with the popular body account @Kayla_itsines where sells her bikini body guide and displays progress pictures of her clients. Others may account holders may use the space to receive resources such as money or products, or to feel good and empower others. Keeping up with an account on the platform, requires constant work, and some do so with the aim over empowering

others and feeling good about themselves. By exploring the sample of images on the positive accounts as well as popular body accounts, we can see how the reward for many of the body positive accounts such as @Honorcurves, is to feel good about oneself, and empower other women. Despite more body positive accounts holders seeming to have the motivation of empowering other women, many of them also display products and may use the platform to obtain resources as well.

How the Theorists Would See It

Instagram can be a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies by challenging normative beliefs of how women's bodies are supposed to appear. Women have the ability to be active producers, presenting what they desire to upload, for whatever purposes such as to promote themselves or empower other women, and they can also tag their images how they desire. Despite them being able to challenge or resist normative beliefs of how their bodies should appear, and help to accept all bodies equally, Goffman (1959) would see the photographs found using hashtags pertaining to ideas around bodies, as well as found by using the popular body and body positive accounts, as images that are controlled and carefully selected based on what is valued in society. He would say that users carefully select what they put online, for example with their looks, clothing, size and manner, and are not necessarily being authentic. In many of the images both found through hashtags and the popular body and popular body positive accounts it is evident that the subjects of focus within the image frame are posing, whether it be with their hands positioned in specific ways, such as on the hip, or one knee bent up, to being in specific scenery like being outdoors in the winter without proper apparel for the weather conditions, and only a select few being real unflattering portraits.

Although, the reasons why individuals present themselves in these specific manners may be different, depending on the individual, a possibility is that these women have taken on the role of policing themselves. Bartky (1988) would say that although these women are not directly controlled, or told how to upload or present themselves in their photographs on Instagram, because they have been expected to present femininity or a feminine body, and have always been surrounded by these ideas, that they are under surveillance on platforms such as Instagram being able to be viewed by others at any time and furthermore take on the role of policing themselves. When women do not fit these expectations of having a specific body, they try and change to fit them which is evident in many before and after images, where lower fat percentage is shown as being the present, often with the subjects' presented as happy or smiling. In addition to these before and after photographs found using the hashtags and popular body accounts, many women are showing images of an "hour glass shape" or images of smaller waists, wearing certain revealing or small gym attire like a sports bra and leggings, as opposed to looser gym clothing that the everyday women would usually wear. In many images women are located in the gym and attempting to look feminine while working out, such as resting on leg up on the bench, or wearing makeup with their hair being done.

Conclusion

Overall, by examining how the images presented on the platform may be different, or the same as traditional media through the theoretical works of Goffman (1959) and Bartky (1988), this project found that despite Instagram empowering women to present their bodies in non-mainstream ways, there are only a few instances of resistance. There were only points of resistance in which users, more so body positive

user accounts, challenged normative beliefs of how women's bodies are supposed to appear. However, for the most part, images of women's bodies reproduced the same images seen in traditional media. Similarly to advertisements Instagram accounts sell products or ideas to other users that have girls and young women "doing gender" in ways that are expected of them "leading them to reproduce, rather than challenge, gender hierarchies" (Gengler 2011: 68). Despite the app being a platform that can yield consciousness to help create change, it appears to be a space of consumption. Empowerment does not come through consumption but rather comes from "solidarity, critical consciousness and collective action" (Gengler 2011: 69). In order for there to be any change, and women to be more critical I believe that there needs to be more awareness of how we consume images in our social environments.

When analysing the content, both photographs and commentaries on social media or networking sites, there will always exist concerns of representing the data and research interpretation. Both features that were used on Instagram together helped to explore how Instagram can be a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies. By using the hashtag to explore how the platform can be a space for change, there are limitations prior to the study being conducted, as all content may not be tagged, not all users may use hashtags, the hashtags can be removed or edited at anytime, and the hashtags used for photographs may not be relevant tags. In addition to this methodological limitation for exploring this research question, by investigating accounts, the account can no longer be used for the purpose of the study if users change the privacy setting of their accounts from non-private to private at any time, and can remove photographs or commentaries at any moment as well.

Gathering data online, such as on this app, is not simple, can be extremely complex, and raises different ethical questions depending on how the networking space is used (Fielding, Lee & Blank 2015: 8). Although there is research conducted on online methods, and on how to use social networking sites, such as content analyses on Facebook, specific ways to conduct content analysis on Instagram have yet to be specified. One aspect that has been highlighted as being beneficial, if not essential for online research methods is selecting a case, as this can help researchers to fully understand a specific social phenomenon (Fielding et al. 2015: 13). With the use of Bartky and Goffman's theories, we can understand how Instagram provides a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies, but the app can also help to uncover more on the social issues, as well as examine the male counterpart. Future studies should be conducted on how to use social media platforms like Instagram, and the most beneficial ways to use app as a tool for research as evidently app can provide extensive information for both qualitative and quantitative research.

Despite these limitations, by conducting a qualitative content analysis of both images and text on Instagram we can see how the app provides a platform for changing how we conceive of women's bodies. This builds on a body of research showing that growing impact of social networking websites and the implications of this social change. Research illustrates that individuals in society are increasingly participating in social networking. Presently, the online photo-sharing social media application Instagram is the fastest growing, most used application by young adults who are using the social networking space as an online diary, to access celebrity accounts, for the promotion of business, and for many other purposes. Research has only just begun to investigate the

implications of this app.

Upon looking at the images I became sad that women, including myself, are not using it as a space of empowerment, but are reproducing corporate mass media portrayals of how women's bodies are expected to appear. The reason that this saddens me is because although we should not compare ourselves to others on the platform, as a young adult woman I find myself doing so often. In addition to this young women on the space who upload many pictures or present themselves in specific ways become more popular and receive greater recognition. This can be seen as the top body accounts that belonged to fitness instructors, models, had more followers than the top body positive accounts, as well as received more commentaries on their images. Many of these top body accounts holders have also become Instagram celebrities.

Although it is hard to resist or offer alternative representations of women's bodies, women being critical and attempts to present authentic representations of themselves could make the platform a space for change. Like Bailey and Steeves (2015:7) suggest, stereotypes need to stop because even young girls are using this space for a large part of their communication with others and they are now disciplined into presenting themselves online as a brand. In order for any change to begin, media need to be more regulated so that stereotypes such as being a "girl" are not presented, as well as policies created that do not solely focus on "criminal responses" but also that limit access to larger corporations using the space to create profit (Bailey & Steeves 2015:7).

Unfortunately, traditional media of the past and present, our western cultural environment, and advertisements have shaped our ideas. The everyday person has began to police themselves, even on spaces such as this app where there are minimal restrictions

for users, and tries to present the absolute best version of themselves using apps or filters setting even higher expectations. By having our everyday neighbour looking like a “perfect” celebrity, individuals are likely to have poorer body image, and will have even more difficulty rejecting societal ideals of attractiveness. I am not suggesting that one avoid the internet, or not use the space but we need to empower and encourage all women, young and older, to be critical of the images they are consuming. Women should be critical of the images that they see on the space are attempts to sell them specific products in which users may or may not use themselves, as well as do not represent persons authentic body. If young women are becoming critical, and women work together in showing that it is okay that their bodies are different, and may not fit certain expectations, these expectations may change. Search engines’ results for women on Instagram producing “sexiest” or “most popular”, may also change to attributes such as “strongest” or “intelligent” women. This criticality and resistance by presenting alternative bodies is important as images of products or conceptions of women’s bodies will not be passively consumed. This may also help women to make less comparisons with others, and help them to have more of a positive image of their own bodies.

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