

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Body, Positive? How New Zealand women in young adulthood make sense of body positivity content on Instagram.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Wellington Campus,

Aotearoa New Zealand

Portia Campbell

2022

Abstract

Mass media has played an integral role in establishing societal norms around women and their appearances. Feminists have argued that media exposure have has had a negative impact on the way women view their bodies, creating narrow, unattainable bodily ideals and contributing to body image disturbances (Sarkar, 2014). The development of the body positivity movement intended to counter these ideals, rejecting homogenized Western centric standards of beauty, and promoting inclusive, bodily acceptance. Proliferated across social media platforms such as Instagram, the movement has been both celebrated as a reclamation of diverse definitions of beauty and criticized for its fragmented messaging; co-option by commerce and slim, white women and its continuation of the objectification of women.

This study considers how 11 New Zealand millennial women make sense of body positive content on Instagram and how these interactions impact their lived experiences. Through a critical realist informed phenomenological thematic analysis, it analyses qualitative semi-structured interview data using an inductive thematic analysis framework. Four themes were generated. One theme considers body positivity as accepting and normalizing difference, whilst another suggests that body positivity doesn't have enough empowerment power. Another theme analyses how body positivity reproduces normative appearance ideals and the final considers how Instagram facilitates problematic looking. When combined, the study's findings suggest that body positivity is complex and is full of emotion and nuance. As a movement, it has the potential to challenge stereotypical definitions of beauty but is limited in a variety of ways. The results contribute to growing literature demonstrating the multifaceted nature of sense making of body positive content on Instagram. The study's limitations and suggestions for future research directions are included.

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Sarah Riley for her guidance and support. Sarah, your advice, patience and expertise have been invaluable and I am fortunate to have been able to learn so much from you.

I would also like to thank my husband Mitch for his unwavering support during this journey. I am grateful for your encouragement and understanding, and for carrying much of the parenting load when I needed to focus on this thesis.

Finally, thank you to all of my participants. Without you this project would not have been possible and I am so grateful that you took the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me, particularly as New Zealand went into a level four lockdown during this project.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Body positivity: A history

Body image and traditional media

Social media

Body image theory

Body image and social media

Criticism of the body positive movement

Research aim

Chapter Two: Method

Chapter Three: Analysis

Body positivity is accepting and normalising difference

Body positivity doesn't have enough empowerment power

Body positivity reproduces normative appearance ideals

Body positivity on Instagram facilitates problematic looking

Chapter Four: Discussion & Conclusion

References

Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores how 11 New Zealand women aged between 25 and 35 experience body positivity content on the social media platform, Instagram. As a unique social intervention into body image discourse and experience, body positivity offers an important site to explore women's experiences of body image. This chapter introduces body positivity, explores its origins and epistemological framing, reviews existing literature on body positivity within both traditional and social media, explores criticism of the movement and considers the context within which this study was undertaken.

Body positivity: A history

Body positivity can be defined as any action which promotes feelings of positivity, acceptance and self-love of all bodies (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). It is a form of social activism that is both an act of resistance to patriarchal ideals of women's bodies and a celebration and promotion of all bodies (Tiggemann et al., 2020). Not limited to a singular movement, the phrase encompasses all aspects of self-love and bodily acceptance across a variety of movements and practices (Darwin & Miller, 2021) and can be enacted at an individual and collective level. It is in response to and challenges societal definitions of bodily norms and beauty and the normalization of thin, flawless women and the ingrained, generalized acceptance of them as the ideal definition of beauty. In contrast, body positive movements herald inclusivity and have expanded from simply being about body size, to include the acceptance of other bodily differences, including scars, visible hair, stretch marks and more (Cohen et al. 2019b, Sastre, 2014). At its centre is the notion of self-produced positive regard, underpinned by self-love and self-confidence (Gill & Elias, 2014). For the purpose of this thesis then the term 'body positivity' includes any messaging, either audio, imagery or text, which

intends to challenge traditional definitions and representations of beauty and promotes the notion of loving one's body.

Body positivity first emerged as a radical and fringe component of the wider Fat Acceptance movement which emerged in the 1960s (Morris, 2019). A social movement which rejected overarching societal structures that marginalised and oppressed fat bodies, the Fat Acceptance Movement demanded equal rights and treatment for people with fat bodies (Fletcher, 2009; Osborn, 2021). Originally intended to challenge the systemic discrimination experienced by fat people, the Fat Acceptance movement advocated for the rights of fat people and inspired the development of the not-for-profit, National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA). Fat activists sought inspiration from leaders within the Civil Rights movement of the time, drawing parallels between their drive for equality and freedom for oppressed communities, and freedom and liberation for fat people (Osborn, 2021).

While fat activism and body positivity shared origins in the same movement, they were distinguished by where they located the need for change, with fat activism focusing on driving social change, attempting to challenge how fat people were treated by society through picketing and protests, whereas body positive activists focus on the individual, positing that they hold the power to change, by choosing self-acceptance and self-love (Morris, 2019). Of these two approaches, body positivity gained more traction, first in a somewhat geographically fragmented manner, typically limited to specific groups who were usually physically close in proximity (Osborn, 2021), but gradually building momentum, particularly through social media as a route for sharing these ideas beyond minority group activism.

Body positivity, as it is understood today, became part of mainstream vernacular when the technology boom of 1998-2000 facilitated a rapid increase in accessibility to new information, resulting in a marked expansion in how messaging about societal norms were accessed, defined and distributed by connecting communities with shared agendas (*"A short*

history,” 2020). The current popularity of body positivity is therefore implicated with new forms of media and forms part of an ongoing dynamic between media and body image. Through social media and the opportunity to share images of bodies at unprecedented scale, it became based on the hypothetical premise that repeated exposure to diverse images online can challenge stereotypically Western centric sociocultural definitions of beauty.

As a communication tool social media has also democratised and decentralised the way that content is created, removing geographical barriers and giving a platform and voice to diverse experiences; voices which had previously been silenced, marginalised and excluded by mainstream media (Andsager, 2014; Morris, 2019). Driven initially by third wave feminism in the 2000s, content creators and activists leveraged this opportunity under the body positivity movement, establishing spaces where people in larger bodies and people with bodies which didn't fit previously stereotypical definitions of beauty, could feel safe, understood, celebrated and appreciated (Yeboah, 2017; Zavattaro, 2021). Now, with more than 17.9 million Instagram posts currently featuring the body positive hashtag, social media platforms have provided people with a far reaching communication tool for this messaging to be distributed. However the increased use of #bodypositive and #bodypositivity has included a new type of fragmentation, when multiple images, some of which seem to reference the thin ideal, become labelled under the movement. Whilst challenging these norms is widely recognised as being a key benefit of social media body positive content, it remains unclear if the fragmented distribution of this diverse content will be enough to fundamentally challenge the thin ideal promoted by traditional mass reaching media (Andsager, 2014).

Social media is undoubtedly an important site for exposure to diverse types of bodies. To evaluate what impact this exposure might have in relation to positive body image and the ideals of the body positive movement, I reviewed the development of social media and what is known so far about the relationship between social media and body image, including evaluating

the findings from experimental psychological research on the impact of exposure of body image related content underpinned by the tripartite theory and social comparison theory, and from more socio-cultural / critical psychological literature informed by post feminism.

Body image and traditional media

Throughout centuries, societal beauty ideals have varied greatly in their defining characteristics and have been historically communicated through art, music and literature (Thompson et al., 1999). Positioned as desirable yet unattainable, and accessible only for the elite, bodily ideals have ranged from the big breasted and fertile maternal figures of the 1400s and 1700s, to the flat chested and lean flappers of the 1920s, to the buxom hourglass shapes of the 1950s. The development of visual media in the 1950s and 1960s shifted attainability of these ideals, becoming a blurred mixture of fiction, reality and possibility, which were then readily communicated to the masses (Freedman, 1986).

The media's influence in communicating bodily ideals intensified in the late 1990s and early 2000s, where Western-centric beauty ideals were perpetuated globally through a heavy saturation of consumer media in popular culture, including print, television and cinema (Parker et al., 1995; Tiggemann, 2003). Media scholars have readily recognised these traditional media as playing a key and influential role in the establishment of these sociocultural ideals and norms, which saw thin white female bodies heralded as the ideal, establishing homogenous and exclusive definitions of beauty (Haboush et al., 2012; Nemeroff et al., 1994; Sarkar, 2014).

Despite some fluctuation in regards to its degree of influence, the thin ideal has been represented in media for a long time, generating critique and study into its impact on women and their sense of self (Luff & Gray, 2009). Ravary et al. (2019) found that when media perpetuate the thin ideal, those who believe that their bodies do not fit this ideal experience psychological harm. Substantial research on body image has resulted in number of studies

demonstrating that traditional media platforms such as television and print, have a positively correlated relationship with body image and body dissatisfaction (Grabe et al., 2008; Engeln et al., 2020; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; López-Guimerà et al., 2010). For example, Botta (2003) found that reading magazines, making social comparisons and critically analysing the bodies of others play a significant role in predicting body image and eating disturbances for teenage boys and girls. Tiggemann's (2005) study noted the positive relationship between time spent watching soap operas and a drive for thinness in both adolescent boys and girls.

Exposure to body ideals within traditional media is generally limited to a defined amount of time spent engaging with that platform, for example choosing to watch a one hour soap opera episode on television, or spending half an hour reading a magazine. It typically relies on the production of content generated by a large media company. The influence in reach of media intensified with the inception of social media, with opportunities for exposure to bodily ideals increasing significantly as a result of the proliferation of content created by the general public. Those opportunities are further amplified via the accessibility of smart phones, which allow users to access content whenever and wherever they choose, and for unrestricted periods of time.

Social media

Since its inception in the early 2000s, social media usage has rapidly risen with more than 4.2 billion people around the world now having a social media account (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021a). At 53.6% of the world's population, this is an increase of more than 13% on the previous year. People are spending more time on their smartphones than they are watching television, highlighting the role that smart devices are playing in people's everyday lives. In New Zealand, 3.97 million people have an active social media account, representing 82% of the population (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021b). The average time spent using

social media applications is more than two hours per day and an analysis of the trend trajectory suggests that this is likely to continue to increase.

Globally, Facebook remains the most popular social media networking site, followed by Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021a). All four are owned by Facebook. In contrast, in New Zealand, the top four most used platforms are Youtube, Facebook, Facebook Messenger and Instagram (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021b). Instagram is used by 57% of internet users in New Zealand between the ages of 16 and 64 (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021b). Instagram distinguishes itself from Facebook by defining itself as a free photo and video sharing application (Instagram, 2022). As a visually focussed platform, it is related to body image as it is where people are most likely to see body image related visual content.

Considered a ‘highly visual social media’ (Engeln et al., 2020), Instagram offers its users endless images by which to compare themselves to, through accounts that the user has chosen to follow, advertisements that are served to the user and through the platforms Explore feed. Instagram’s algorithms are designed to serve tailored content to users based on their behaviours online, including who the types of accounts that they follow and time spent engaging with these accounts, posing the risk that vulnerable populations may continue to be served content that reinforces thin ideals (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Having an unprecedented plethora of choice when it comes to media and entertainment sources, individuals must also choose which messaging to give their attention too, offering them more control over the messaging that shapes their cultural norms (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). This has fundamentally changed the way consumers engage with media, moving them from passive audiences who can only receive messaging that has been determined by other parties towards becoming active media creators, users and curators themselves. Eveland (2003) noted this interactivity as a key feature which differentiates social media from traditional

media. By choosing to follow certain people, brands and content themes, consumers can create their own tailored and customised feeds, directly influencing what messaging they are frequently exposed to. For inherently politicised movements such as the body positive movement, this evolution in audience experience has also enabled more people to become actively engaged in political processes (Farris-Berg & Granofsky as cited in Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Social media undoubtedly offers significant benefits to marginalized groups and communities. It can be used to create awareness, educate people, provide safe spaces for people to relate and communicate with others and can drive movements of digital activism, such as the body positive movement, Black Lives Matter and #PrideWeek. In contrast to traditional media companies, social media offers amateur and independent content producers a global platform to distribute their messaging, including opportunities for influencing body image concerns in a positive manner by challenging the dominant homogeneity of thin, white beauty ideals (Perloff, 2014; Zavattaro, 2021).

Notwithstanding its popularity, recent research has also shown that use of social media has been linked to a range of mental health issues, including general anxiety and depression (Perlis et al., 2021). In relation to body image, a recent Wall Street Journal investigative exposé revealed that Facebook's own internal research indicated that engaging with Instagram made a third of teenage girls feel worse about their bodies (Wells et al., 2021). The research also identified aspects of the platform which are considered the most harmful, including one of its key components, the Explore page (Bursztynsky & Feiner, 2021). Instagram's Explore page is a curation of public videos, images and photos that based on a user's individual interests. Content on the Explore page is generated by Instagram's algorithms, which evaluates previous content that user has engaged with, and uses these interactions to suggest similar content that the user would otherwise not encounter. It is a collection of content created by accounts that

the user doesn't already follow and is intended to expose the user to new content in the hope that they will spend more time on Instagram.

This study was undertaken amidst the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. Research has shown that the recent Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in people spending more time with digital technology and electronic devices due to being in lockdown with restrictions on physical social contact in place (Xiang et al., 2020). Whilst an increase in screen time can be attributed to an increase in working from home and an increase in video calling with family, studies have also demonstrated a significant increase in time spent on social media applications (Vall-Roqué et al., 2021). During the pandemic there has been an increase in weight focused content, with more than 60,000 Instagram posts using the hashtag #quarantine15 (Pearl, 2020). The narrative that accompanies this content reinforces the idea that fat or weight gain which may be attributed to lifestyle changes due to the pandemic is 'bad' or negative.

Swami et al. (2021) found that Covid-19 related stress and anxiety was associated with greater body dissatisfaction in both men and women, with Covid-19 related anxiety also contributing to a greater drive for thinness for women and a greater dissatisfaction with body fat in men. These results are thought to be reflective of increases in anxiety about changes to daily routines due to lockdown, increased pressure to conform to traditional gender roles within the home, or a lack of ability in engaging with such roles and an increase in messaging about self-improvement during lockdowns (Swami et al., 2021). Periods of social isolation, whether at home or in quarantine facilities, have also meant that people are spending more time alone with their own thoughts (Jennings, 2021). Those who are already at a higher risk of negative influence from social media may be at further risk of increased influence on their mental wellbeing as well as experiencing a lack of peer objectivity and perspective in their cognitions. With no clear date of life without Covid-19 restrictions, understanding how social media affects body dissatisfaction and self-esteem is critical in educating social media users about how they

can build resilience to appearance-based content on social media that may elicit bodily comparisons or generate negative affect.

Whilst there are benefits in increased accessibility to new knowledge and platforms which promote social activism and greater opportunities for communication with friends and family, there are also concerns that digital and social media facilitate the distribution of fragmented messaging and misinformation. This has been evident in the recent Covid-19 pandemic, with the authenticity and credibility of information sources being frequently queried and challenged (Gabarron et al., 2021). Within the body positive movement, misinformation and fragmented messaging has seen the inclusion of diet products and weight loss advice served alongside content insisting that people should love their bodies just as they are.

Instagram began commodifying user activity in 2013 (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Since then, their business objectives have aimed to increase the amount of time that individuals spend within the app, as this translates more advertising opportunities and greater revenue. The development of functions such as the Explore feed encourage this, providing users with content generated by individuals and brands which the individual doesn't already follow. By randomly generating content that may be of interest to the individual, based on their previous behaviours within the app, the Explore feed increases the likelihood that the individual will encounter content that they may otherwise not have sought out. This can pose challenges that traditional media does not, most notably the increased likelihood that individual may be exposed to unwanted messaging through digital algorithms (Andsager, 2014).

Anecdotal evidence has shown that there is an increasing amount of body-focused content served on Instagram's Explore page, despite individuals never having previously engaged with body related content (Jennings, 2021). Internet and social media journalist Jennings (2021) posits that this is instead based on Instagram's assumption that women are body focused. Others have described following body positive accounts, but not being served

body positive content in their Explore feeds, instead being shown content that promotes diet culture and weight loss suggestions (Woo, 2021). Given that a large portion of Instagram's advertising revenue comes from these consumer brands which often promote thin bodily ideals and unattainable beauty standards, Instagram's parent company Facebook appears reluctant to reduce these as doing so would have a direct impact on their revenue (Perrigo, 2021). Whilst unwanted messaging served through the Explore feed can be considered negative, it does also present opportunities for body positive content to have an unintended, yet positive impacts on users who do encounter it without actually searching for it (Andsager, 2014).

Social media has been both heralded as a solution to the patriarchal exclusivity of traditional media and simultaneously been criticised for its role in contributing to and perpetuating thin, white beauty ideals (Gill & Elias, 2014; Levine & Harrison, 2009). An example of perpetuating thin, white ideals can be seen in Instagram's censorship of fat, Black women, after the platform repeatedly deleted a semi-nude photo of Black woman Nyome Nicholas-Williams (Iqbal, 2020). Activists argued that the platform allows millions of images of semi-nude thin, white women, yet censored Nicholas-Williams' image and threatened to delete her account in an act of inherent fat phobia and racism (Iqbal, 2020). As a fat Black woman, Nicholas-Williams' experience is an example of the intersectional nature of body positivity (Zavattaro, 2021) and the contradictory standards that platforms such as Instagram hold. In response to this criticism, Instagram's CEO, Adam Mosseri, acknowledged the platform's need to address algorithm bias that affects underrepresented groups, which includes those who do not fit traditional societal definitions of beauty (Iqbal, 2020).

With people spending an increasing amount of time online and on social media platforms, there is increased opportunity for body-focussed content to be shared. Whilst the negative consequences of body focussed messaging related to body dissatisfaction and body concerns are well documented, this increased exposure also presents an opportunity for positive

body messaging to be disseminated, potentially having a positive impact on users who do encounter it (Andsager, 2014).

Despite its criticism, the advent of social media has enabled a democratisation of content generation, enabling a variety of diverse bodies and experiences to be seen and shared (Lazuka et al., 2020). It has allowed people of all body sizes, shapes and appearances to consume, create and comment on media content, in a way that traditional media has not, with Lupton (2017) noting the surge in visual media as playing a facilitating role in driving fat acceptance initiatives. The expansive reach of social media offers greater opportunities for promoting awareness of movements such as body positivity through re-shared images and identification markers like hashtags. For young women, the use of social media may increase the likelihood that a wider range of bodies are portrayed as socially acceptable, however Andsager (2014) suggested that further research on the content across different platforms be undertaken to determine whether this does occur and if so, to what extent.

Body image theory

Sociocultural models propose that body image is a social construct which is mediated through a number of relational influences (Fardouly et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Accepted as a popular framework by which the concept of body image is understood, Thompson et al.'s (1999) Tripartite Influence model posits that there are three key sources of influence on how we perceive our bodies; peers, parents and the media. The model proposes that at least two factors facilitate the relationship between these influences and any disturbances; appearance comparison and the internalization of media information (van den Berg et al., 2002).

Mass media is well recognised as the most influential of the three sociocultural influences, and with increased accessibility and an increasing amount of time spent online, the

trend suggests that the pervasiveness of influence will continue to grow as highly visual platforms such as Instagram only increase the opportunity for bodily ideals to be perpetuated and for appearance based comparisons to be made (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Tiggemann (2011) argues that is the pressure to meet these sociocultural ideals that is at the root body image disturbance.

The process of physical comparison is underpinned by Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which suggested that humans mediate and make sense of their own attributes by comparing themselves to others. Social comparison theory posits that some people innately determine their sense of self-worth and success by comparing themselves to others. This comparison can be both upwards, where an individual compares themselves to someone they perceive to be "better" than themselves or downwards, where an individual compares themselves to someone they perceive to be worse off than themselves (Festinger, 1954). Whilst upwards comparisons have been associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and downwards comparisons have been linked to lower levels of body dissatisfaction, research has also shown that simply having a greater tendency to compare oneself on any level is positively associated with negative outcomes (Fardouly et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2009).

Perloff (2014), however, suggests that it is unrealistic to believe that simple exposure to social media sites will have a direct comparative impact on an individual's perception of their body, proposing instead that the multifaceted determinants of body image mean that a much more complex sequence of events is at play, including both what the media content is and what the individual who is consuming it, brings to the experience. Andsager (2014) noted the benefit of adopting the 'uses-and-gratifications' approach when understanding why individuals choose to attend to one media message over another, suggesting that once an intention and need is understood, motivation and propensity to be educated becomes clear. Therein lies opportunity for the body positive movement to improve its potency; education

through greater media literacy, a practice which educates media users to play an active and critical role in the reception of the messaging which they receive across different media (Potter, 2004).

Susceptibility to influence from the media depends on a number of variables including social comparison tendency and a tendencies to internalize ideals thinness and beauty (Thompson et al., 1999). Whilst many people are aware of these sociocultural definitions of beauty, not all who are exposed to them internalize them to the same extent (Fardouly et al., 2018). Those who do internalize them are in turn then more susceptible to developing body dissatisfaction. Tiggemann et al.'s (2018) study noted this vulnerability to influence, finding that women who actively sought to increase the amount of 'likes' received on their Instagram photos, experienced higher levels of body comparison when compared to those who don't.

Body dissatisfaction is associated with negative health outcomes both at an individual and public health level (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). For individuals, body dissatisfaction is a risk factor in the possible development of eating disorders and depression (Andsager, 2014; Cooley & Toray, 2001; Paxton et al., 2006; Stice, 2002). Extensive research has also demonstrated that when women feel dissatisfied with their bodies, it has negative impacts on other aspects of their lives including their relationships, health and aspirations both academically and occupationally (Halliwell et al., 2014).

Through sustained and repetitive exposure of these thin, Western centric beauty ideals, individuals internalize them and come to hold them as goals for themselves, however unrealistic these ideals may be (Keery et al., 2004). Challenges arise when an individual feels that they fall short of these ideals, experiencing dissatisfaction with their own bodies, a known risk factor for the future development of disordered eating (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Stice, 2002). Imagery which establishes such physical ideals has been found to reinforce these as societal norms across a generation (Andsager, 2014). Furthermore, exposure to thin

body ideals at a young age is associated with body image disturbances, which in turn increase susceptibility to images which depict thin bodies as ideal (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). The relationship between thin ideals and body image disturbances also appears to be cyclical, with vulnerable young women with disordered eating or body image concerns more likely to seek out thin-ideal content on social media, sustaining these ideals as norms for themselves.

As an image based application, Instagram's algorithm plays a significant role in the perpetuation of physical ideals across cultures and has contributed to the normalization of thin, white beauty standards.

Body image and social media

As new digital media offerings have been developed, research focusing on body image and media has extended into these platforms, with studies that demonstrate a similar relationship between mental health, body image and social media now starting to emerge (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2017). Consumption of social media has been shown to have an adverse effects on body satisfaction, mood and self-esteem, with recent research finding a positive association between social media and depression, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). Englen (as cited in Cummins, 2021) supported these findings, arguing that the objectives of social media companies simply can't align with prioritising their users mental health, "When you want more users, more time, more content – when that's your goal – the mental health of your users cannot be your number one priority, because those things are mutually exclusive" (para. 13).

Correlational studies have also established positive correlations between use of social media networking sites and a variety of body-image related concerns, including self-objectification, internalization of thin ideals and higher drives for thinness (Fardouly &

Vartanian, 2016; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). The association between greater social media usage and body image concerns has been shown to strengthen over time (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016) and with social media becoming an increasingly integral part of modern life, this suggests that the pervasiveness of its influence may continue to grow (Engeln et al., 2020; Nichols, 2017).

Facebook

The majority of studies looking at the relationship between social media and body image have focussed on Facebook as, with more than 2.9 billion users worldwide, it is considered the most popular social media platform (Statista, 2022). Fardouly et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between young women browsing Facebook and an increase in reports of a negative mood. Modica (2019) highlighted the different outcomes reported by those who use Facebook for general use versus those who use it for specific-appearance related content, finding that those who seek to engage with appearance related content experienced greater levels of body dissatisfaction. De Vries et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between higher rates of social media usage amongst both male and female high school students and noted increases in body dissatisfaction and appearance related conversations with friends over an 18 month period.

Stronge et al.'s (2015) study focussed on New Zealand Facebook users and found that both male and female Facebook users reported significantly lower body satisfaction than non-users. Middle aged women were also found to report lower body satisfaction than their older and younger counterparts, something which Stronge et al. (2015) hypothesised as being attributable to middle aged women being more vulnerable to new media, as well as the demographic being arguably caught between younger ideals of youth and societal pressures after childrearing. These findings suggest that caution should be taken when making

generalisations about the impact of social media across different age groups. Popular discourse purports that only adolescents and young females are at risk of the influence of social media on body dissatisfaction, however this study indicates that its impact is much wider than potentially perceived.

Engeln et al. (2020)'s study comparing Facebook and Instagram with a control group found that use of either Facebook or Instagram increases an individual's propensity to engage in appearance related thoughts. Despite both platforms influencing this, it was Instagram use which resulted in more appearance based thoughts and appearance comparisons within the sample.

Instagram

Fardouly et al. (2018) found that Instagram use was positively associated with the self-objectification of young women. They also noted a positively related increase in the internalization of beauty ideals and an increase in reported body image concerns. Vall-Roqué et al. (2021) also found that frequency of Instagram usage has a significant positive correlation between self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and a drive for thinness in young females aged 14-24. Frequency of Instagram use also had a direct and positive correlation with a drive for thinness for women aged 25-35. Vall-Roqué et al. (2021) noted that following appearance focused Instagram accounts is associated with an increase in drive for thinness. Tiggemann et al. (2018) reported that exposure to thin-ideal imagery on Instagram has a direct correlation with an increase in feelings of bodily dissatisfaction. In addition, exposure to Instagram's significant portion of "fitspiration" imagery has also been shown to contribute to feelings of body dissatisfaction and appearance comparisons (Myers & Crowther, 2009). "Fitspiration" imagery tends to portray thin and toned women, reinforcing these as sociocultural ideals and continuing the objectification of women (Fardouly et al., 2018).

Different components of Instagram also appear to generate different results. Tiggemann et al. (2020) found that there was no positive correlation between body positive captions on Instagram and body dissatisfaction or body appreciation. This finding suggests that any influence that the body positivity movement may claim to have, is largely, if not solely, driven by imagery. It indicates that women compare themselves to images and don't take into account the positive messaging that traditionally accompanies these images. Furthermore, Instagram's prioritisation of imagery over text suggests that it poses greater risk in negatively influencing people's perception of body image (Engeln et al., 2020). This risk is amplified by Instagram's development and promotion of filters, which allow users to edit and distort their imagery in ways which promote societal definitions of beauty (Fardouly et al., 2018).

It must be noted however, that not all studies have produced similar findings across different social media platforms. Cohen et al.'s (2019a) study was the first to demonstrate that brief exposure to body positive content on Instagram was associated with improvements in positive mood, satisfaction and body appreciation. Nevertheless, the study also found that participants reported more appearance related statements after being exposed to both thin-ideal and body positive content, suggesting that any focus on an individual's appearance, whether positive or negative, may be associated with greater self-objectification.

Fardouly et al. (2018) also found that general Instagram use did not correlate to body dissatisfaction or a drive for thinness in their sample of young American and Australian women, however it was positively associated with self-objectification too. They hypothesized that this may be attributed to the celebrity saturated nature of Instagram, suggesting that young women may be aware of the unrealistic and unattainable nature of celebrities bodies and therefore may be less likely to compare themselves. Viewing "fitspiration" images on Instagram was, however, found to have a positive association with higher body dissatisfaction

and a greater drive for thinness. These findings indicate that a user's intent on social media mediates their relationship between the platform and any potential consequences.

General research into body positivity has tended to focus on focus on women as they represent a significant proportion of the population who are explicitly targeted by visual media, however the influence of social media on body image and self-esteem does not exclusively apply to women. Within the male population, gay men are also particularly vulnerable, with Scher's (2019) study finding that gay men felt that their bodies were inadequate as a result of exposure to social media, suggesting that platforms such as Instagram reinforce the notion that aspects of gay culture are exclusive only to those who also meet certain aesthetic criteria. In addition, the results of Griffiths et al. (2018) study of sexual minority men suggests that the relationship between image focused social media and body image is consistent across different demographics.

As social media is a relatively new and emerging digital platform, a significant proportion of existing literature considers the perspectives of adolescents (Cooley & Toray, 2001; De Vries et al. 2016; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). This study looks to contribute to add breadth to this body of literature, by focusing on the points of view of millennial women.

Criticism of the body positive movement

Whilst the body positivity movement has challenged Western-centric sociocultural norms, and to some extent enabled the reclamation of definitions of beauty that reflect diverse experiences, the movement sits within the often contradictory realm of postfeminism, with both feminist and antifeminist discourses about its definition existing concurrently (Gill, 2007). Postfeminism discourse is typically characterised by a number of features which differentiate it from second wave feminism; "the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and

discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference” (Gill, 2007, p. 149).

Many of postfeminism’s characteristics are evident within body positivity and as a consequence of its contradictory nature, the movement has experienced criticism from activists, academics and those within its own community. A gendered form of neoliberalism, an approach which favours free-market capitalism, postfeminism has shifted away from politically driven desires to change societal structures for the betterment of women as a collective, and instead focuses on empowerment of women as individuals, able to transform themselves through positive thinking, confidence and their own labour (Rottenberg, 2014). Winch (2015) expands further on relationship between the body and neoliberalism, arguing that in a highly visual digital landscape, the body has become recognised as the result of women’s labour, “it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy” (p. 21).

Gill & Elias (2014) posit that the body positive movement is a “distinctly postfeminist articulation of sexism that is quite distinct from earlier modalities” (p. 5). Arguing that the movement facilitates the dynamic perpetuation of power relations between men and women, it continues the objectification of women’s bodies and inadvertently maintains prioritisation on the appearance of women’s bodies (Webb et al., 2019). The theory of objectification is anchored in ‘the gaze’, a phenomenon described by Mulvey (1975) as men’s assertion of their sexual power, through the pleasure that they experience from observing female bodies. More than simply looking, the male gaze is an active practice, enabled by symbolic and structural power and which reinforces hierarchal standards of the patriarchy (Riley et al., 2016). By maintaining the objectification of women, the body positivity movement contradicts it’s

political and social activism roots and perpetuates patriarchal control over women's bodies (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

That is not to claim that the only gaze is singularly that of males. In contrast, the female gaze has been theorized as multifaceted; defined either as the comparison and idolization of female characters, or the adoption of the role of 'gazed upon', embracing the knowledge that they are gazed upon by men (Rome et al., 2020). Riley et. al (2016) describe a 'postfeminist' gaze, where through a reciprocal and oscillating exchange, women are both the subject and the object. Women scrutinize other women, but in turn also scrutinize themselves, viewing their own bodies as objects to be looked at and prioritizing appearance as a foundational contributor to one's value (Perloff, 2014; Riley & Evans, 2018). The image saturated nature of Instagram provides a rich environment for this 'postfeminist' gaze to occur (Lazuka et al., 2020). It encourages the surveillance of bodies and reinforces acceptance of this, by implying that women who engage with social media platforms are choosing to be looked at (Riley & Evans, 2018). Users both evaluate and analyse others, whilst simultaneously comparing themselves, perpetuating both the upwards and downwards aspects of social comparison (McComb & Mills, 2021; Meier & Schäfer, 2018).

Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues that through social media platforms like Instagram, body positive activists invite the gaze, explicitly objectifying their bodies and continuing the prioritization of women's appearances as being of most value. Perloff (2014) argued that the internalization of someone else's perspective on one's appearance can lead to an increase in self-surveillance and can subsequently contribute to the development of body image disturbances. The act of posting body positive content on social media also keeps neoliberal culture alive and well, encouraging the consumption of bodies and positioning health as a transactional performance (Saguy & Ward, 2011). Rivers (2017) agreed describing it as

evidence of the fourth wave of feminism, where advancement of the individual and the prioritisation of seduction is readily perpetuated via social media.

Postfeminism claims to recuperate power for women as individuals by incorporating critique and positioning it as opportunity, for example rebranding diets as healthy or ‘clean’ eating even though they involve restricting calories, or using the language ‘love your body’ to encourage women to work more intensely on their body (Gill & Elias, 2014). In relation to the body positivity, the movement’s objective was to celebrate, share and promote a diverse range of bodies, moving away from conventionally attractive, limited norms. However researchers have identified an increase in thin conventionally attractive women appropriating the content in ways that undermine the original proposition of the movement (Jennings, 2021; Oltuski, 2017).

When women who fit these descriptions post about their perceived ‘flaws’ and ‘fat’, not only are unintentionally making commentary about people larger or with greater ‘flaws’ than themselves, they are also stigmatising fat and inadvertently positioning it as unwanted and undesirable (Weiss, 2017). The consequences of giving appearance based characteristics moral values is also evident in the comparison of side by side photos, popular on Instagram to document either before or after changes or demonstrate the power of good lightning, poses and angles, as it can inadvertently ostracize those who identify their bodies as similar in the ‘before’ shot (Weiss, 2017). This ‘bad’ and ‘now good’ binary proposition, even when used to attempt to dispel diet culture and promote body positivity, can generate feelings of unworthiness, inadequacy and comparison to oneself. The inherently labelling of ‘fat’ or the characteristics referenced in the ‘before’ shots as ‘bad’ and undesirable, can have an adverse influence on viewers of that content, even in instances where the content creator may have body positivity messaging intentions (Byrne, 2021).

Critics have also debated the criteria by which the term ‘body positive’ appears to be defined, extending into questions of eligibility (Darwin & Miller, 2021). A point of conflict within the body positive community, some argue that whilst the movement is for all women, it shouldn’t focus on all women, given its original political intentions, advocating for those who had previously been excluded from mainstream society and its original fat acceptance roots (Shadijanova, 2019). Others argue that self-identification of people in larger bodies should be just that, something determined by the individual (Reid, 2007). Gill & Elias (2014) contend that the so called diversification of bodies and definitions of beauty that align with the movement are really only marginally different to the normative white ideals of attractiveness. In addition, the body positive conversation has often primarily focused on binary definitions of ‘fat’ and ‘thin’, neglecting to include and promote bodies which are less abled or scarred (Cohen-Rottenberg, 2017; Stamp, 2019).

Actress and feminist Lena Dunham, who is often understood as a body positive celebrity representative, described the contradictory definition of body positivity, arguing that it was only applicable to a privileged few who have bodies which people feel positive about (Friedman, 2021). Referencing Kim Kardashian’s ‘acceptable’ curves and lack of cellulite, Dunham argued that her experience of being curvy did not align with Kardashian’s, highlighting double standards of the body positive movement; one representation of curves appearing to be more socially acceptable and aesthetically pleasing than another. Lazuka et al. (2020) also found evidence of this contradiction within content that is tagged as body positive, noting the promotion of weight loss and the idealisation of thinness accompanying body positive posts in their analysis of body positive content on Instagram. They also found that more than half of the content purporting to be body positive neglected to include people in larger bodies. This further highlights the challenges social activist movements face on social media, where the adoption and altering of a movement’s purpose and definition is at the mercy

of potentially misinformed members of the public. Darwin & Miller's (2021) analysis of prominent blog articles supports this, highlighting the way in which social media platforms have enabled multiple feminist waves to coexist despite their significant ideological differences.

Some body positive activists have also argued that some people aren't large enough to be body positive, highlighting the unspoken privileges that those who society deems 'not fat', experience. Yeboah (2017) contends that whilst body positive activists understand and acknowledge that all bodies are important, it is not the role or objective of the body positivity movement to increase how people with conventionally acceptable bodies feel about themselves, arguing that social norms and society already do this. She posits that instead, the movement is inherently political and is about dismantling the prejudices that create rules of value about some bodies more than others. Sastre (2014) challenged the lack of boundaries and an widely agreed definition further however, asking that with a lack of central resource facilitating conversation around body positivity and an absence of authoritative figure paving the way, can the phenomenon accurately be described as a movement?

Further criticism of the body positive movement has also contended that feeling positive about one's body all of the time is unrealistic and that proclaiming that this is the both achievable and ideal, can be just as harmful as the reinforcement and normalisation of conventional thin, white beauty standards (Oltuski, 2017). Gill & Elias (2014) posit that negative body image is often portrayed in body positive discourse as being relatively easy to overcome; simply 'remember' how incredible you are or 'realise' how beautiful you are. This perspective disparages the systemic nature of the patriarchy, fails to address societal structures which perpetuate body dissatisfaction and places further responsibility for overcoming this on the individual.

Feeling positive about one's body can also be challenging for those with disabilities or lifelong chronic illnesses, who often report that being asked to love the very bodies that they feel betrayed them, is both frustrating and unrelatable (Haagenson, 2022; Kessel, 2018). Transgender people may also not feel positively about a physical body that doesn't match their gender, so messaging that tells them to love their bodies can be harmful and confronting (Raypole, 2021). Wood et al (2009) support the notion that feeling positive about your body all the time is unrealistic, suggesting that disproportionate positivity can have an unintended adverse effect. Their study found that participants with low self-esteem felt worse after being asked to repeat positive self-statements, when compared to participants with high self-esteem.

Toxic Positivity

Underpinning the notion that positive statements don't always have their intended impact is Sherif & Hovland's (1961) latitudes of acceptance theory. It proposes that messaging that supports an individual's existing perspective is more persuasive than messaging which differs from the individual's existing perspective (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Whilst evidence has shown that having a positive mindset can result in better emotional wellbeing (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), the overgeneralization of happiness and positivity combined with the absolute rejection of negative emotions is known as 'toxic positivity' (Quintero & Long, 2019). When positivity is promoted at any expense, inauthenticity arises as genuine emotions are silenced and the authentic human experience is invalidated (Quintero & Long, 2019). This can also reinforce the deficit model; if one doesn't feel positively towards their body all the time, the implication is that there is something inherently wrong with them which can contribute to the development of feelings of additional pressure and shame (Dajani et al., 2021; Hastings, 2022).

Toxic positivity can also create hyper focus on the individual, rather than addressing the systemic sociocultural standards which have created circumstances which in the first

instance. Amour (as cited in Oltuski, 2017) challenges the extreme positivity that the body positive movement advocates, educating her clients that loving their bodies is not a requirement or an antidote, to hating it. This notion supports an emerging approach to body image and how we perceive ourselves, known as body neutrality. First mooted in 2015 and described as prioritising self-acceptance over self-love, body neutrality promotes a move away from focusing on the appearance of one's body and instead recognising and valuing one's body as it simply is (Raypole, 2021). Body neutrality attempts to address the perpetuation of the objectification of women by placing less emphasis on an individual's appearance as a contributor to identity. It sets out to decentralize the body as an object, challenging the notion that your appearance determines a person's value and setting itself apart from the body positive movement (Raypole, 2021).

In response to criticism of toxic positivity, body positive activists have argued that constant self-love is not a foundational aspect of body positive movement, but rather one that is a result of mainstream media adopting body positive terminology and subsequently altering its meaning (Osborn, 2021). Parallels can be drawn with other feminist movements and language, including the theory of intersectionality, which was originally defined by Black Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in her revolutionary paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw, 1989). As a Black woman, Crenshaw argued that the positions of being Black and being a woman, could not be understood independently of each other. Instead, they must be understood as interactions with each other, both influencing and reinforcing each other. Despite being a ground-breaking theory which has shaped how the heterogenous experiences of being a woman has come to be understood, Crenshaw has since stated that the term intersectionality gets both over and under used, and that because of this, she herself often struggles to recognize it in literature (Robertson, 2017).

The body positive community argue that the same applies to the body positive movement, especially in relation to its adoption and adaption by thin, attractive white women which has arguably diluted its original intention, potency and potential (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). This co-option has weakened the movement's ability to challenge societal norms and enables the continuation of reinforcement of patriarchal and Western-centric standards of beauty (Osborn, 2021). Others have argued that the potential to drive social change as a result of the body positive movement is at risk, with the movement being perceived as "weak feminism" as a result of the commercial companies which have leveraged the movement for their own monetary benefit (Johnston & Taylor, 2008).

Critics of the body positivity movement have also noted its commodification, particularly across digital media. In her analysis of three popular body positive websites, Sastre (2014) found that all three had commercial associations with their sites. The initial site that analysed was Lady Gaga's Body Revolution, the debut of which inspired Sastre's (2014) study and the other two were chosen from Google search results for body positive content. All three purported to be explicitly body positive and enabled direct user engagement and interaction. Sastre (2014) noted that all three required commercial consumption by their very nature, through access to an internet capable device, but also often promoted the purchase of commodities marketed as aiding the process of loving and feeling positive about one's body. Dean (2003) and Van Dijck & Poell (2013) have also argued that instead of enabling greater distributions of information and wealth, new media technologies, by their very nature, are anchored in capitalism and actually maintain the economic and of the most privileged members of society, primarily young, white men.

Further to this, feminists have argued that this commodification dilutes the movement's original political intentions (Baer, 2016; Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Brathwaite & DeAndrea's (2022) study found that body positive content which included self-promotion, including asking

viewers to like and follow them both on Instagram and on other platforms, was less effective at promoting body appreciated then posts without this type of promotion. In addition, those who benefit from commercial body positive accounts and websites do so by leveraging their relationship with their body for monetary gain, often with a transformational tone. This is problematic as transformational agendas contradict the body positive narrative; it's not about loving your body if you have to change it in order to love it. The majority who profit from these ventures also exist within the boundaries of Western definitions of beauty, being conventionally attractive with socially acceptable curves and flawless skin, yet again marginalising those who contributed to the uprise of the movement in the first instance (Yeboah, 2017).

Whilst at face value the body positive movement appears well-intentioned, others have also argued that it actually perpetuates a deficit model; if you don't love your body, there is something wrong with you (Weiss, 2017). Gill & Elias (2014) noted that brands and companies who engage in body positive discourse tend to have a central theme which implies that an individual's relationship with themselves is inherently bad or broken. This perpetuates the commodification of the movement, as inevitably the brand has a solution for this 'broken relationship', readily available for purchase. Upwards comparison on social media can aggravate this deficit narrative. If individuals who experience body dissatisfaction follow body positive content which features larger people than themselves appearing to love their bodies, there is a risk that this may still generate feelings of comparison and self-doubt, for example "if they can love their bodies which are larger than me, why can't I love mine?".

Furthermore, Gill & Elias (2014) highlight the subconscious messaging that is at the centre of the body positive (or Love Your Body) movement; a beautiful appearance must now be accompanied by a beautiful mind and affirmative mindset. This extends self-surveillance and self-discipline from women's bodies, to both their bodies and their minds, neglecting to

consider or recognise the additional labour involved in maintaining positive feelings towards both (Gill, 2007).

The commodification of body positivity has also meant that brands' adoption of more diverse representations of beauty is often met with cynicism. Global lingerie brand Victoria's Secret have also recently experienced this cynicism, announcing a move away from use of 'Victoria's Secret Angels' as brand representatives (Maheshwari & Friedman, 2021). For decades their 'Angels' have promoted feminine beauty as white, thin and flawless, leveraging this to market lingerie to women worldwide. Their move away from this definition of femininity has been both lauded as a step towards inclusivity and broader representations of diversity, but they have also been criticised for being too late to change (Bellstrom & Hinchliffe, 2021).

Many brands who have aligned themselves with the body positive movement engage in editing techniques which contradict their supposed body positive objectives, including the use of retouching software (Gill & Elias, 2014). This reinforces Lena Dunham's claim that the body positive movement is contradictory, with access to the movement only available to those with appearances that are deemed socially acceptable; one can have curves, as long as they are smooth curves and not too curvy (Friedman, 2021). Others however, have highlighted how commodity feminism and activism have instead played an instrumental role in the development of greater fashion choices for people in larger bodies, potentially benefitting some of the community for which the movement was originally founded (Peters, 2021). These examples highlight the complexity of what occurs within the body image space and how nuanced individuals' responses to body positive content can be.

Arguably the most well-known brand to align with the body positive movement, beauty brand Dove, began their adoption of the movement in 2004 with their global marketing campaign, 'Campaign for Real Beauty' (Johnson & Taylor, 2008). Whilst purporting to be

frustrated that societal beauty standards have been narrow and stifling, and positioning themselves as champions for challenging these standards, critics accused Dove as being performative, citing the campaign's commercial success and celebrity endorsement as evidence that the brand's intentions were inauthentic and self-serving (Johnson & Taylor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016). Sastre (2014) agreed, arguing that displays of body positivity online are performative, as they have an underlying objective of ensuring that the act is recorded digitally and disseminated for consumers to see.

This perspective on motive has been shared by feminists who have highlighted the hypocrisy of body positive activists using social media. Anchored in capitalism which profits off immaterial labour, feminists have argued that social media sites leverage underpaid creators to drive profitability of the platform for corporate gain (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Contradicting the original political roots of the body positive movement, feminists argue that social media perpetuates the objectification of women's bodies, promotes consumption culture created by patriarchy and continues the devaluation of women's labour. Others however have viewed the reclamation of control over establishing new societal norms and the centring of women's perspectives in these spaces as empowering women, enabling autonomy over their own bodies, decisions and experiences and simultaneously rejecting enforced standards of the patriarchy (Gill, 2007; Johnson & Taylor, 2008). It has also enabled them to benefit from the commercial labour market from which they had previously been excluded.

Celebrities have also been criticised by the body positivity community, despite at times appearing to meet the supposed criteria for body positivity. Actress and comedian Amy Schumer was scolded by feminists and media commentators for her role in the recent film, 'I Feel Pretty' (Alford, 2018; Harpers Bazaar, 2018). Despite her previously well-documented body dissatisfaction, Schumer and her character were criticised for appearing to experience body image concerns despite Schumer being able-bodied and still fitting within Western

sociocultural standards of beauty (Callahan, 2018; Leaver, 2018). This criticism reinforces the unspoken exclusionary criteria that some feel must be met in order to align with the body positive movement and risks alienating those who may wish to align with the movement but don't in fear of criticism and invalidation.

Other celebrities such as musician Lizzo, an outspoken advocate of body acceptance, have been criticised for engaging in behaviours which some of the body positive community believe to be weight-loss centric (Betancourt, 2020). Lizzo recently went on a 10 day smoothie cleanse, with several fans claiming that she had succumbed to the pressure of dieting and diet culture. Arguing that she never asked to be a pin up body positivity role model, Lizzo stated that she is sick of being viewed as an activist just because she is fat and black (Salem, 2020). The position of influence within the self-empowerment and body positivity movements has been given to Lizzo by default, as woman of colour in a larger body, once again highlighting the contradictory nature and blurred inclusivity boundaries of the body positive movement. Other critics have challenged Lizzo's position however, claiming that she has cultivated this position for herself, through the sharing of body positive content via her Instagram account (Obell, 2019; Van Paris, 2020).

Members of the body positive community have also documented experiences of exclusion that they have felt from within the community if they have lost weight, even when that weight loss has been attributed to medical conditions (Preston, 2021; Scott, 2020). Preston (2021) expressed the internal conflict that they found themselves facing when realising that their weight was a significant factor in the development of concerning health issues. Fearful of being seen as succumbing to pressure from the weight loss industry and fearful of harassment from online bullying, they described not wanting to consider weight loss to address some of their health concerns because they feared that in doing so, they would lose the support of the

body positive community within which they had found strengthen and comfort whilst navigating the development of their identity.

Preston (2021) also posited that few within the body positivity community are willing to acknowledge that larger bodies can be unhealthy and can require individuals to lose weight in order to survive. Commenting on their personal experiences, Preston (2021) found that the body positivity community tended to respond to weight loss with exclusion, claiming that any weight loss is harmful and ostracizing anyone who disagrees from the community. This uncompromising perspective demonstrates the contradictory nature of the movement and could potentially be harmful to those who may be more vulnerable. It also perpetuates feelings of exclusion and invalidates the experiences of others, something which the movement's original political roots first sought to challenge. Acknowledging that it is both impractical and impossible to define body positivity as a one size fits all movement, they argued that instead the body positivity movement should perhaps be considered an intersectional spectrum, one that doesn't exclude those who don't fit its predetermined criteria.

The body positive movement is premised on the idea that exposure to diverse body content will impact on people's individual feelings about their own body, however this relationship is made complex and opaque by research that suggests that, while media does have an influence on people's body image for the construction of societal norms, comparative looking and expectations to work on the body, whether body positive content will have a positive impact is unknown because of the complexity in the relationship between viewing other bodies and how individual's perceive their own body image, and the complexity of the economy of images being circulated under the body positive banner.

Research aim

Body positivity is often perceived as part of the solution to body dissatisfaction, through its rejection of societal norms about how bodies should look and a promotion of diverse representation (Stamp, 2019). However, given the complex relationship between viewing images and an individual's own thoughts and feelings, and the wide variety of images which labelled body positive, it is important to understand how women make sense of body positive content in relation to their own body image. Whilst the complexity of body positivity is evident throughout existing literature, there is opportunity for further research that uses qualitative methods to explore how individuals are making sense of this complexity as they encounter it on Instagram in real time.

The aim of this research project is to consider how millennial New Zealand women make sense of body positive content on social media and how the meaning of body positivity content is negotiated and constructed. It seeks to discover how these women navigate their way through, and respond to, body positive messaging that may be encountered in their Instagram Explore feeds. It asks, how do women experience, and make sense of those experiences, when looking at images tagged as body positive on their Instagram Explore Feed.

Chapter Two: Method

This chapter outlines the study's research design, methodological theory and method.

Design

The study consisted of 11 semistructured interviews based on a walk-through method that was used to explore participants responses to body positive content on Instagram. A qualitative research project, this study engages qualitative techniques and is derived from qualitative values, an approach known as a 'Big Q' (Kidder & Fine, 1987). 'Big Q' qualitative research design requires the researcher to hold a number of assumptions; including a clear philosophical understanding about how research is undertaken, that research itself is a generative and creative process and that the researcher is an active participant of this process (Braun et al., 2019a). Adopting a 'Big Q' approach enables researchers to consider new questions as they gather data (Kidder & Fine, 1987).

Methodological theory

This study sought to understand how 11 millennial New Zealand women make sense of body positive content on Instagram. As body positivity is a subjective interpretation of a socially mediated phenomenon, a critical realist approach was taken as it combines both traditional positivist and interpretivist positions and seeks to examine the ontological foundations of social reality (Archer et al., 2016). Critical realism treats qualitative data as real and observable phenomena, whilst recognising that categories are produced through interactions between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative data is intentional and reflects the participant's unique perspective, their interpretation of their lived experience, and attempts to communicate these to the researcher as accurately as possible. A critical realist

approach allowed me to frame my analysis in an attempt to understand what the participants really thought.

Critical realism is a branch of philosophy that emerged in the 1970s, developed by Roy Bhaskar. A meta-theory which can be challenging to attribute a singular definition to, it seeks to explore how science understands the world and considers how epistemology interacts with ontology (Bhaskar et al., 2017). Critical realism recognises the existence of three domains; the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1975). According to Bhaskar, the real domain reflects the deepest level of reality, the causal mechanisms which create phenomena. The actual reflects these phenomena and observable events and the empirical reflects our experiences of these phenomena and events, which in turn contribute to the development of scientific theories (Yucel, 2018). This study focuses on the empirical, through the observation of experiences of millennial New Zealand women as they encountered body positive content on Instagram.

Located between positivism and social constructivism, critical realism attempts to make sense of, rather than simply describe, experiences and phenomena (Yucel, 2018). It seeks to understand how epistemology and ontology interact and recognises that cultural lenses shape the way in which the researcher interprets an event. Ontology is concerned with the classification and explanation of entities, such as body positivity (Smith, 2012). Epistemology, sometimes referred to as the theory of knowledge and justification, considers how we know what we know (Audi, 2010). Critical realism considers how the relationship between these two theoretical frameworks.

Within the context of research, critical realism acknowledges the researcher's view of the world and that the researcher's perspective strongly influences their interpretation of a study's data. Through this lens, this study considers the cultural context of understanding body positivity as a phenomenon within the context of New Zealand society. As a country that was colonised more than 180 years ago, societal body ideals and standards of beauty in this country

have been, and continue to be, shaped by Western influences. My own perspective and understanding of body positivity also contributed to my interpretation of the participants' experiences of making sense of body positive content on Instagram.

Method

Body positivity is a multifaceted sociocultural construct, with subjective interpretations of its definition, use and purpose, both debated and applied (Ali, 2021; Dalessandro, 2016; Darwin & Miller, 2021; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). To account for this layered complexity, and explore the subjective interpretations, a qualitative research design was chosen as it allows for open ended questions to be asked and provides time and space for participants to reflect and respond. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews as they enable the researcher to modify and adapt the pace and flow of questioning, in an attempt to capture comprehensive and rich data. Spoken interviews are often engaged in qualitative research because, as a tool, language enables a researcher access to an individual's meaning making (Riley & Chamberlain, 2022). They allow participants opportunity to respond in their own unique ways, using language and thought processes that make sense to them, and frame their experiences on their terms (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Interviews that are ethically sound and generate good quality data require the establishment of rapport between the interviewer and the participant. This is particularly salient when discussing sensitive topics such as body image, body positivity and concepts of self.

Despite these perceived advantages, the dominant use of interviews within qualitative research design collection has recently been debated. Braun & Clarke (2019b) postulated that interview methodologies can create one lens by which data is reviewed and analysed, noting that interviews are often engaged by white feminist researchers who purport to offer marginalised voices a platform to share their perspectives, and who then neglect to analyse the

data through the same critical lens they would for participants who are less marginalised. They also argued that a prioritisation of one method, such as individual interviews, potentially limits knowledge production by other methods, as they can generate similar types of data and fail to consider the diverse range of data collection methodologies available (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Whilst acknowledging this critique, I chose to engage interviews to capture the study's data as, as a tool that orients to the concept of self, they aligned with the study's purpose and mapped onto the aim of understanding individual interpretations of experiences of self.

Critics of interview methods in qualitative research also argue that providing participants with affirmative responses can bias responses as the researcher can be perceived to be directed the interview (Seidman, 2006). However, this risk must be balanced with providing a safe space for the participants to share their thoughts and feelings and to ensure that the study was ethically sound. To manage this, I developed a reflective interview style that sought to map the needs of each participant to be able to talk about their interpretations in a way that they felt safe to do so and meant that I could adapt my responses in real time. For some participants this meant that a number of affirmative comments were needed to reassure them that it was safe for them to say things that were sometimes quite difficult for them to say, for example when that they felt that it was socially desirable for them to say that something was positive when they actually they found it very unpleasant. For other participants who were able to talk about their interpretations of these issues with less difficulty I was able to hold back and allow them to express their perspectives freely. These different approaches to engaging allowed me to flexibly met their needs, as well as meet the needs of this study, and enable them to be able to share with me their interpretations of the issues as closely as possible.

Interviews are often utilised because of their perceived culturally universal application (Riley & Chamberlain, 2019). Participants typically experience interview situations within a variety of real-life situations, from their own job or school interviews to reading journalism

interviews in the media, meaning that their format is generally familiar and universally understood. However, Atkinson & Silverman (1997) also posited that individual interviews rely heavily on an individual's ability to reflexively consider their concept of self and express this through language, a phenomenon which is culturally constructed. Whilst it is important to recognise that this study involved interviews conducted within a multicultural society, in the context of this study it made sense to still use interviews as a tool because I was interested in exploring the concept of individualised self as it is lived and experienced by the study's participants.

Given that the study's aim was focused on making sense of the experience of viewing body positive content, I engaged a media go-along interview method to ground the study in the processes of these experiences. Media go-along tools are an adaptation of Kusenbach's (2003) go-along ethnographic method which sees researchers accompany participants as they engage in physical environments, such as their local neighbourhood. The researcher is literally walked through the participants lived experiences as they happen in their natural settings. Media go-alongs have expanded on this qualitative approach to include digital environments and social media (Jørgensen, 2016). The adapted technique involves asking participants to engage in a digital task and then explores their experiences within that media environment, as they happen. The collaborative process requires both the researcher and the participant to engage with the digital environment together and simultaneously.

Engeln et al.'s (2020) study on the relationship between appearance comparison on Instagram and body dissatisfaction in college women suggested that future studies on social media and body satisfaction analyse descriptive data that examines the content of individual's Explore feeds and overlay this with how the users make sense of this content. It also proposed that to do this, future researchers use screen captures to assess what imagery is being served in participant's feeds. This research project addresses both of these recommendations. In

employing the media go-along interview method, an experiential orientation to the data was taken in this study, with participants expressing their reactions, thoughts and feelings and describing how they made sense of these as they encountered body positive content on Instagram.

Once the interviews had been completed, the transcripts were then analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic analysis framework. Thematic analysis is the method of understanding and interpreting meaning within qualitative data. It involves identifying, analysing and summarising patterns within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six phase process involves; familiarisation with the data, generation of codes, generation of initial themes, reviewing initial themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report.

Thematic analysis is a dynamic process, which requires the researcher to play an active role in the identification, generation and reporting of themes, each theme underpinned by a shared key concept (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Recognising the active role that the researcher plays acknowledges that the researcher bring their own beliefs, constructs and perspectives into the data and provides a richer, more contextual understanding of the study's findings and implications. Using Braun & Clarke's six step approach, this study examined latent levels of themes, examining underlying concepts and assumptions which shaped the semantic data that was generated by the study's participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun & Clarke (2019b) assert that, undertaking reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher must be aware of the philosophical frameworks and theoretical assumptions that underpin their use of thematic analysis and make these explicit. A phenomenological approach was taken to this study as phenomenology considers the participants' lived experiences and attempts to understand and describe phenomena (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). I chose this framework as I am studying to be a psychologist and am interested in people's experiences. We also live in a society that prioritises individualism, so it made sense to consider individual

experiences. My own understanding of body positivity has been shaped by years of exposure to thin, white, unattainably beautiful women across several media platforms. I have strong memories of reading Dolly, Girlfriend, CLEO and Cosmopolitan magazines as a young teenage girl and remember feeling that I never quite looked like the girls in the magazines did.

I also watched popular television shows and movies in the late 1990s and early 2000s, almost all of which portrayed thin, attractive women as the epitome of beauty and the very definition of a successful life. Many of these films and television shows were American, which exacerbated these standards of beauty, as living in New Zealand during this time, American popular culture was idolized and revered. It was cool, mature and sophisticated, in a way that I felt New Zealand popular culture wasn't. These body (and life) ideals were perpetuated thousands of times throughout my formative teenage years, and despite being of standard size myself, have contributed to occasional feelings of inadequacy about my own body. It is not something that has had a significantly detrimental impact on my life, but is something that I am mindful of.

As a millennial woman who has grown up with the development of Instagram, I also remember beginning to see body positive content creators sharing photos of bodies that challenged these Western stereotypical definitions of beauty. I was interested and intrigued in the reclamation of control over how they expressed themselves and showed their bodies to the world. These experiences have formed my epistemological assumptions about body positivity, that it is about appreciating and including all bodies, but that it is also a complex construct which is influenced by an individual's own culture, experiences and perspectives.

I came to the study with a preconceived understanding of how knowledge is known, located within a critical realist perspective. Acknowledging my own white female privilege, I held the assumption that diverse experiences contribute to greater knowledge about unseen structures that influence real events in shared social realities. Whilst I anticipated that there

would be common unspoken structures, such as dominant Western ideals of beauty, I also believed that multiple realities, anchored in the diverse experiences of the participants, would exist.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via a paid advertisement on Instagram (see Appendix 1). The advertisement was promoted over two campaigns, each lasting five days. The first was targeted to women aged between 25 and 34, a generation defined as millennials (Vogels, 2019), and was initially geotargeted to Auckland and Queenstown so that the interviews could be conducted in person. The target demographic of millennials was chosen as the study's participant criteria as they grew up with social media and are the first generation to experience a lifetime of social media imagery. The majority of New Zealand social media users are aged between 25 and 34 years old, which suggests that this population is most like to be exposed to body image content (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021b).

However, during the recruitment process, New Zealand was placed into level four lockdown due to a Covid-19 outbreak, which meant that in person interviews were not allowed. Requiring a pivot in the interview approach, all interviews subsequently needed to be conducted online via Zoom, a video meeting software application, which broadened the geographical restrictions that had previously been in place for participants. A second advertisement flight was conducted, also via Instagram, targeting women between the ages of 25 and 34, but widened to include potential participants across the country. The original advertisement was amended to remove these geographical requirements and include a prospective participant's willingness to be interviewed via Zoom (see Appendix 2). The advertisement invited people who identified as female, were aged between 25 and 35, were currently living in New Zealand, were able to meet via Zoom, had an active account on

Instagram and were willing to talk to a student researcher about body positive content for up to 45 minutes, to email a specifically created email address for further information. Exclusion criteria was also included on the advertisement, which noted that if interested prospective participants were currently receiving treatment for, or if mood disorders or eating disorders have been an issue for them, I advised them not to take part.

Recruitment was also undertaken by snowball effect, with some participants and myself sharing the Instagram advertisement with friends or with their wider social media network. Once interest had been registered prospective participants were sent an Participant Information sheet (see Appendix 3) and a Participant Consent form (see Appendix 4). The Participant Information sheet outlined the context and interview dates and times were arranged via email communication, with a Zoom invitation being sent to participants once their consent form had been received. To gain further insight into the different types of content that participants perceived to be body positive, participants were also invited to send me any imagery which they themselves identified as body positive, in the week leading up to their interview. All participants were allocated a pseudonym to protect their identities. A record of this was kept on the researcher's secure OneDrive.

Each interview followed a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 5) which began with them being asked to open their Instagram account and go to the Explore feed. The Explore feed is a collation of publicly available content that Instagram's algorithms think that a user may enjoy. Access to the Explore feed was explained by clicking on the magnifying glass icon at the bottom of the Instagram app.

Due to the interchangeable nature of the terms body positive and body positivity, I chose to ask the participants to search both hashtags to ensure that I was capturing a comprehensive sample of the variety content tagged under the body positive movement umbrella. Participants were asked to scroll through images that were tagged with either the

hashtag body positive or body positivity in their Explore feed and find an image that they responded to, with participants searching first under the body positive hashtag, before the participant was asked to go up to the search bar and change the hashtag to body positivity. This process meant participants could explore the range of images that Instagram served each hashtag. This approach was deliberate and is considered a strength of the research design, as it meant that I could explore responses to a variety of content served under both labels; #bodypositive and #bodypositivity. However, this design does mean that participants did not necessarily discuss only images that they liked, with several participants finding images that they objected to. I was therefore not solely evaluating body positive imagery that the participants liked.

Once the participant had found an image, they showed the image to me via their computer camera and I then found the same image so that I could see the content that the participant was referring to. I took screenshots of each image for record keeping. A series of open-ended questions were then asked, including; how did you react to this image initially, what made you stop and look at this one, how does the image make you feel, why do you think that they have used the body positive hashtag, who has made this image (a brand or an individual), how does this image make you feel about your own body and do you come across images like this often? (see Appendix 5).

Using open-ended and Socratic questioning, I gave each participant time and space to respond to the questions. The number of images reviewed by each participant ranged from four to eight, with an average of seven. A total of 74 images were looked at, 43 under #boydpositive and 31 under #bodypositivity. The majority of images were photos (60), with the remaining 14 being a mixture of graphics and illustrations. 14 images were of conventionally attractive and slim women and four images were of men. Ethnicities of the people featured in the photos were not recorded as it would require a significant amount of assumption on my part. None of the

photos of people were chosen by more than one participant, however three of the graphics were selected as images to be discussed by more than one participant. Whilst some participants observed that their #bodypositive and #bodypositivity feeds appeared to serve different types of images, at a wider sample level, there were no notable differences observed between content that was chosen across the two hashtags.

The interviews concluded with me thanking the participant and noting that I would be in touch to check in with the participant within the following week. This was to ensure that no lasting feelings of discomfort had been generated, with an offer of recommending support services if required.

Participation in the study was voluntary and koha was offered in the form a 20 dollar supermarket voucher in recognition of the participants' time. All participants were given the opportunity to provide their postal address for the voucher, either verbally at the conclusion of the interview or via email. Four participants declined, with seven participants accepting the offer. Each interview was then downloaded and transcribed using Express Scribe. Once all interviews had been transcribed, I began analysing the data.

Participants

There were 11 participants, all identified as female and all were living in New Zealand (See Table 1). Five were located in Auckland, one in Wānaka, four in Wellington and one in Dargaville. Four participants identified as Pākehā, three identified as Māori, two identified as Māori/Pākehā, one identified as Pākehā/Niuean and one identified as Indian. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 33, with a mean age of 27. All participants had an active Instagram account, with almost all agreeing that they access the application several times a day. Participants spent a varying amount of time on Instagram, ranging from one and half hours to six hours. The average time spent on Instagram was two hours a day. Participants' typical

session use varied from scrolling for a few minutes whilst doing another activity, such as making a coffee or watching television, to sitting and scrolling for up to 30 minutes.

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Daily Instagram use	Search out body positive content specifically	Follow body positive content creators
Jane	27	Pākehā	1 hour	No	No
Ruth	27	Māori	2-3 hours	No	No
Sophie	27	Pākehā	1 hour	No	No
Olivia	27	Pākehā	4 hours	No	Yes
Ava	29	Māori	0.5 hour	Yes	Yes
Emma	25	Pākehā	2 hours	No	Yes
Sarah	27	Māori	2-3 hours	Yes	Yes
Mandy	26	Māori / Pākehā	1.5 hours	No	Yes
Juliet	31	Māori / Pākehā	1 hour	No	No
Mollie	26	Pākehā / Niuean	6 hours	Yes	Yes
Jess	33	Indian	0.5 hour	No	Yes

Ethical considerations

A full ethics application was submitted to Massey University's Human Ethics Committee, Southern B branch, and approval was given (see Appendix 6). Body image can be a sensitive topic, so several steps were taken to ensure that any possible harm to participants was minimized and mitigated. This included ensuring that participants met relevant inclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria was also outlined, noting that if prospective participants were currently receiving treatment or a mood disorder or eating disorder, or if either had been an issue in the past, it was advised that they do not take part. This was outlined in the advertisement and in the Participant Information Sheet that was emailed to participants. I also

checked this again verbally before each interview began. Confidentiality of participants was also a priority, with all identifiable data being stored on my secure OneDrive account, along with the corresponding transcripts in a separate folder so that data and identifying information was separated.

In recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, I undertook a number of steps to ensure that the study honoured the treaty's three core principles. Prior to the study commencing, I met with a key member of my local Māori community to ensure that the study was culturally appropriate and relevant for any potential Māori participants. I explained the proposed recruitment and interview processes, and implemented feedback that was given on further steps that could be taken to ensure that the experience was culturally sensitive, inclusive and appropriate. I also asked them to read over my interview questions to ensure that I wasn't framing the concept of body positivity in a manner that was Eurocentric. By inviting the participants to self-select body positive imagery that they responded to, I reduced any risk that I may have chosen culturally biased representations of the construct. Participants who identified as Māori were given an opportunity to share their pepeha, of which one participant did. I also shared my pepeha, establishing whakawhanaungatanga with this particular participant.

As a Pākehā woman who is only in the preliminary stages of reclaiming her whakapapa, there was the potential that my own cultural background could have influenced my perspectives and understanding of sociocultural phenomenon, particularly body image and body positivity. Fundamental to meaningful thematic analysis is an awareness and understanding of these potential biases, with researchers encouraged to take steps to address these potential limitations throughout the duration of the project (Nowell et al., 2017). I took several steps to address any potential subconscious, including keeping a reflexive research journal to note my own personal reflections throughout the study.

Given the sensitive nature of body image, I was particularly attentive to any signs of discomfort or distress within the participants and reiterated that participants could stop or take breaks at any time. One participant displayed signs of uncertainty within her answers, as evident in her hesitancy in some responses, giving long pauses when considering how to frame her responses and taking extended periods of time when selecting relevant imagery. In this instance, my focus was that of primary care for the participant, so significant efforts were made to reassure her that her thoughts and feelings were not wrong or something to be ashamed of. For example, I refrained from asking probing questions that I may have asked of more confident sounding participants and I increased the affirmative sound of my responses.

One of the challenges of working with online video conferencing software such as Zoom, is that an element of variable control can be missed. In this study, one of the participants misspelt the hashtag body positive, instead using #bodypositive. I realised this half way through the interview, as the imagery that the participant was viewing was very dated, with many of the images having originally been posted a few years ago. This became apparent to me as I struggled to find the corresponding image that the participant was looking at, when I was given the name of the account which had posted the content. However, wanting to respect the participant's dignity and protect them from any feelings of embarrassment or distress, this was not addressed until the interview moved to look at the body positivity hashtag. I spelt the word positivity out, under the premise of making sure that I was spelling it correctly myself, which ensured that the participant spelt the phrase correctly moving forward.

Written consent was given by all participants who returned signed consent forms via email. Verbal consent was again then checked before each interview commenced and once it had been given, data was collected via 35-45 minute interviews conducted on Zoom. All interviews began with an informal greeting and introduction, followed by an overview of the project, its aim and the procedure, confirmation that the participant met the relevant inclusion

criteria and confirmation of the participant's age and ethnic identity. Participants who identified as Māori were given the opportunity to share their pepeha. All Zoom meetings were recorded both visually and audibly so that transcription could be undertaken after the interview was completed. I reiterated that no identifiable connections would be able to be made and that the audio and video recording would be deleted as soon as the transcription had been completed. I also restated that the participants could take breaks or cease the interview at any time and that support services could be provided if the participant felt these were necessary.

Reflexivity and validity

Braun & Clarke (2006) encourage researchers to keep their own reflexive research journals as a way of recording of their own perspectives, thoughts and pre-determined ideas throughout their project. Adopting this recommendation, I made notes after each interview and kept a journal which recorded my reactions, thoughts and feelings as each interview was completed. I made notes on common phrases, themes and perspectives and considered my own role in each of the interviews. Throughout the interviews, I found myself reflecting on the emotional heaviness that can sometimes accompany discussing body image and self-esteem, with my own feelings ranging from sadness to anger and frustration.

I found hearing the participants describe the people in the images as brave quite disheartening as it made me aware of just how deeply ingrained Western centric beauty ideals are. To be brave is to face and endure danger or pain, so the notion of someone being perceived as risking pain or discomfort to step outside societal ideals when expressing themselves made me feel uncomfortable and frustrated that society has facilitated such a circumstance. At times I also felt sorry for some of the people in the images that were discussed, particularly if they were smaller people or people who declared that they were living with eating disorders, as I

felt that it was unfair for them to be excluded from using body positive hashtags and be prevented from celebrating their bodies in the same way that others can and do.

As a feminist and a junior postgraduate researcher, I came to the project with my own understanding that body positivity was about challenging traditional thin ideals and Westernised standards of beauty and had assumed that the content that we would view would have been people in larger bodies. As the participants encountered images of people of all sizes, I sometimes felt torn between wanting to support anyone who wishes to declare that they are body positive, irrespective of their size, to also feeling staunchly protective of those who wish to reclaim that space, in response to them being excluded from mainstream media because of their size.

I am a moderate Instagram user myself and as a millennial woman who grew up in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I was also heavily exposed to the thin, white and flawless definitions of beauty that mainstream media so readily promoted. Acknowledging this similarity between myself and my participants is important as it addresses the risk of my own beliefs influencing the participants' responses. This similarity allowed me to build rapport with the study's participants, however I refrained from sharing my perspectives with them. Body image is a theoretical construct which comes with assumptions and cultural norms embedded within it, so being mindful of my own perspectives on body image and body positivity, I attempted to maintain impartiality throughout the interviews, by balancing support and validation of participant's feelings and experiences, with awareness of my own bias.

The influence of social desirability bias was also a potential concern. Body image is a very personal and subjective topic, which requires varying levels of description and judgement, both about ourselves and about others. As a result, there are a number of culturally developed socially acceptable ways of thinking and talking about bodies. For example, there has been recent discourse within fat advocacy groups around the reclamation of the use of the word fat

(Saguy & Ward, 2011). I was aware that these socially determined rules may have influenced whether the participants chose certain images over others, whether they voiced their thoughts and feelings about the content with genuine authenticity, and if they did, how these unspoken rules influenced the language that they engaged to do this. As a researcher, I was mindful that they may have been consciously or unconsciously attempting to ensure that I viewed them favourably.

To mitigate this risk, I regularly reminded participants that their identities would remain confidential and that their answers could not be attributed back to them. Taking an affirmative approach, I also reiterated throughout the interviews that there were no right or wrong answers to the interview questions and that there was no judgement from me with respect to their answers. This appeared to appease several of the participants who had previously demonstrated hesitancy when answering questions about some of the more socially controversial imagery.

Whilst all participants were invited to voluntarily send me any imagery which they identified as body positive in the week leading up to their interview, none of the participants took up this invitation. There may be a number of reasons for this, including that participants simply forgot, or that they became too busy, especially given that the country was in level four lockdown for almost all of the interviews, or because the participants may not have come across any imagery which they identified as body positive in the week leading up to their interview. It could also be that for the majority of the participants, the consumption of body positive content appeared to be a passive experience. As a proactive request, the invitation to send body positivity imagery to me prior to their interview may have been too far outside the participants' normal patterns of engagement with body positive content on Instagram, in order to be actioned.

I checked in with each of the participants one week after their interview, to ensure that no lasting feelings of discomfort had been generated and to signpost additional support services

should they be required. All feedback was very positive, with several participants describing pleasure at having participated, desire to have helped with the project and expressing interest in reading this thesis upon its completion. No experiences of distress were noted.

Chapter Three: Analysis

Analysis

Body positivity is a complex and contested concept, with a significant portion of the participants' data centred around its definition, "there's almost an argument of what body imagery is, and or positivity" (Mollie) and what does and doesn't classify, "I don't know if it's body positivity" (Olivia, in reference to an illustration that stated 'My gender is not yours to decide'). At times, how participants defined body positivity was contradictory, both across the sample and within individual participants, demonstrating its complexity and confusion. A broad selection of body image related topics were discussed and these showed the variety of ways in which body positivity was both understood by the participants and how it impacted on their own sense of body image. Four key themes were generated;

- Body positivity is accepting and normalising difference
- Body positivity doesn't have enough empowerment power
- Body positivity reproduces normative appearance ideals
- Body positivity on Instagram facilitates problematic looking

Body positivity is accepting and normalising difference

Whilst there is considerable complexity surrounding body positivity, all participants generally agreed that it encompasses feeling good or positive about one's body, irrespective of its shape or size. An acceptance and showing of so-called flaws and a focus on being 'real' were also noted as defining features, making visible 'authentic' bodies, "...she's wearing pants that you can kinda see her...like tummy. And so many people like, hide it, so it's kind of refreshing to see" (Sarah). Several participants commented that the body positivity movement was a way of normalising and including all bodies, small or large, abled or disabled, "it

normalizes curvy people” (Jess) and “it’s just nice seeing someone that isn’t super skinny wearing a bikini and...in public and not caring” (Sarah). There is implicit messaging within Sarah’s comment, as it suggests that she felt that there are norms that exist about what types of bodies are and aren’t acceptable to be shown in public and that these unspoken rules can generate feelings of self-consciousness and self-censorship if one’s body doesn’t fit within this socially determined criteria. Sarah’s interpretation that the woman doesn’t care about the fact that her body doesn’t meet these criteria indicates that she interprets being body positive as pushing back on these rules, liberating women, and challenging conventional standards of beauty and the feeling rules that go with them.

Societal beauty ideals are not solely limited to weight and size however, with several participants choosing to discuss images depicting acne, birthmarks and burns. When asked why it was these particular images that they chose, many explained that it was their difference that had intrigued them; that in a plethora of images about body size, fitness, large bodies and before and after weight loss images, it was these unexpected photos of cystic acne, severe burns and large port wine stains that had drawn them in, “...how different her body looks” (Olivia). The notion of difference is also dilemmatic; on one hand, all participants agreed that we’re all the same, we’re all human and we all have bodies, but on the other, it is difference that attracts us to something and draws us in.

From this perspective, seeing body positive imagery can make individuals realise that they are not alone and that there are other women who look like them, “...it just validates that oh yep, no matter how I look, you know, I’m the same as everyone else” (Jess). This example demonstrates Jess’s process of making sense of body positive content in relation to her body and suggests that she experienced feelings of recognition and affirmation about herself when viewing someone who looked like her on Instagram. On the other hand, other participants also supported the idea that humans are all unique and different, and that difference is what attracts

us and what stands out, it is what people notice, “I think the full nude kind of caught me by surprise, which is what stood out on the timeline” (Emma).

Body positive content was described as feeling relatable and genuine, “yeah I think she’s just trying to share a very genuine image of herself where she feels good” (Olivia) and “most people could probably relate to that image, cause obviously most people have had acne in the past” (Ruth). It was also associated with internal feelings of confidence and happiness; “feeling positive about your body”, “feeling confident”, “being happy in your own skin” and being “proud”.

Showing one’s body, despite any perceived flaws, was described as being brave and being confident, particularly in a highly critical culture which places disproportionate value on appearance, “I think she’s very brave putting a photo of herself up, with no makeup and showing her spots” (Jane) and “...like if you’re happy and confident, awesome” (Ruth). Building on the construct of bravery, several participants described body positive content as a tool for encouraging and empowering other women to be confident in their bodies, which was often experienced by participants themselves, “And then it actually makes me feel a bit more confident as well, which is kinda funny but... yeah I dunno. It just makes me feel better seeing people that look like me” (Sarah).

Being body positive was viewed by one participant as being an active process requiring effort in a body-normative world, “...he doesn’t need to actively be positive about his body” (Ava), which not only suggests that being positive about your body requires effort, but that also it is something that people need to do and that certain people are excluded from partaking in it. In her example, Ava was referring to an image of a topless man, who was very muscular and posing in way that accentuated his muscles. Making an effort to being body positive about your body was also described by Olivia, upon learning that one of the body positive images had been created by a woman with a physical disability, “obviously she’s got some more

challenges, but yet she's still soldiering on in this body image space". Olivia's choice of language, "soldiering on", also implies that existing within the body image space, particularly in this instance for a woman with disabilities, is difficult and requires significant effort, conjuring association with war and a battlefield.

Challenging someone's right to be body positive, or use the body positivity hashtag, was a common contradiction for many of the participants. Perspectives on inclusivity included, "any shape or size is a positive body" (Juliet) and "every person has the right to positivity" (Ruth), which conflicted with other participants who felt body positivity didn't apply to certain groups of people, including smaller people, people with eating disorders and models. When people within these groups tagged their content as being body positive, feelings of conceitedness arose, with participants not only questioning the poster's intent, but also determining that this was unacceptable, "But my first reaction was someone with an eating disorder is posting as body positivity" (Emma). Emma's response suggests that she feels that in a world where there is a valuing of a particular slim body, appreciating your own body through the lens of body positivity has to occur in a context where that body isn't already appreciated; it must stand against normative ideas of ideal bodies. Often in circumstances where participants were conscious of socially acceptable ways of talking about bodies, what was not being said was just as important as what was said. In Emma's example, there was an implicit suggestion that people who have eating disorders can't be body positive.

Contested interpretations about what is and isn't body positive often included acknowledgement of other people's perspectives. Some felt that body positivity was often accompanied by fitness-oriented imagery, particularly transformational images such as 'before and afters', whilst others associated having a positive body image with being slim. Mandy described a situation where other people's perspectives and judgements of a family member's physical appearance were contradictory to the individuals' state of mental health at the time.

“People’s idea of body positivity content is different too. Cause if someone has been suffering with an eating disorder for years, which my Aunty did and she was skinny as, she looked, you know, the part of someone who was in peak health, but she had really bad bulimia. And so, her now, with no eating disorder and in a good mental health state, but maybe not in the body that people associate with health, is a really good position for her, but it might not be for someone else. So it’s hard to govern...what it means for each person.” (Mandy)

Other participants felt confident in their definition of what wasn’t body positive, “I definitely wouldn’t say that this is body positive content, which is possibly why it stood out to me as kind of an abnormality” (Emma). This image depicted a very slim and conventionally attractive woman in a bikini, kneeling on a beach in the Middle East.

Appreciation of one’s body also featured heavily, particularly when participants experienced feelings of downwards comparison when engaging with content that depicted people with flaws that they themselves didn’t have, such as acne, burn scars or disabilities. Gratitude was abundant, “grateful that my skin is not as bad as that is” (Ruth), “grateful that my body...I don’t have a disability, so I don’t have that challenge to overcome” (Olivia) and “I’m lucky that I have clear skin” (Jane), but at times the gratitude evolved into remorse, “I think I’m usually a bit hard on myself” (Juliet) and “I’m feeling really appreciative of my body and also sort of like goddamn, why do I ever have like negative thoughts you know? When there’s people out there having to overcome this, or constantly talk about this or educate other people about their bodies” (Olivia). Participants who had recently been pregnant also expressed appreciation for what their bodies could do, “...my body also had carried a child and you know, I’m proud of where it is” (Mollie) and “a little bit more accepting about the changes that happen or have happened” (Juliet).

A number of participants supported the role that Instagram can play in educating people, promoting awareness of other people's experiences and broadening exposure to different perspectives and points of view. Olivia reflected on Instagram's ability to educate people on social issues, acknowledging that she learns from people who share their views, but feels that she will never be in their position, "I think sometimes I really enjoy hearing these very high intense voices in certain sort of like activism areas that are like all about it. Like I know I'm never going to get to that stage, but I think listening to those opinions. I can then kind of meet them halfway or something." Educating others was discussed often and was considered a tool that can facilitate acceptance of perceived flaws. Jess spoke of feelings of gratitude when discussing an image that showed a woman with ulcerative colitis, "...by putting photos like this on social media, people that don't know anything about this disease, they can learn about it...". Olivia and Jess expressed that learning about conditions like this can help to normalize and destigmatize them and in turn help those who live with these conditions feel accepted.

Developing empathy for others was also discussed, particularly in reference to people who had either endured terrible tragedies such as severe burns, or undergone major transformational life changes such as gender reassignment surgery, "I think body positivity doesn't only help you but it sort of like helps you to see people around you and also accept their different experiences or empathize with their different bodies and how they might experience life through their bodies" (Olivia). Participants felt that these bodies were often not seen in mainstream media and so encountering them within the context of body positivity was welcomed, "it's not a body that you often see, like this".

All participants were appreciative of body positive content, even if they themselves would never post it, or they have never actively sought it out. Many felt that content that was body positive was doing an act of duty for people in larger bodies in a sizeist world, "...they're almost doing a service, cause there's people who literally can't find a skirt that suits their body,

so if they see someone out there who's like them and they've got their tried and tested clothes, then that's a good thing" (Ava). Others felt that sharing body positive messaging invites others to love their bodies, adding that this was beneficial to wider society in normalizing different bodies and challenging traditional standards of beauty.

Body positivity doesn't have enough empowerment power

Body positive content gives people permission and reassurance to be themselves, to love their bodies and to be more accepting of others' bodies, "...so when I see photos that include women of different sizes, it's just like, yeah that could be me. That could be my sister. That could be my brother. That could be anybody" (Mandy). Participants who saw themselves reflected in body positive content felt seen and included, because this imagery was different to what they were used to seeing in traditional media, "It makes me feel better about like how I look. Because it's seeing someone that is similar, kind of" (Sarah). Whilst acknowledging that body positive content was inspiring, many participants also acknowledged that they themselves wouldn't create content like this, suggesting that there are limits as to how inspirational body positive content actually is, "I personally don't have the confidence to post something like that on my Instagram, so I kinda take my hat off to people who do" (Jane).

Challenging societal norms about body and beauty ideals takes effort on the part of the consumer. A few of the participants talked about the intentional changes that they had made about who they chose to follow on Instagram, in the hope that exposure to a more diverse representation of people and bodies would positively influence how they viewed themselves.

"I actually made a conscious decision on Instagram to just follow a bunch of influencer type people who just looked different and didn't fit like... a stereotype of what like beauty is according to Hollywood and stuff. Cause I felt like, if I was going to be seeing this content, I wanted to balance it.... Like if I was going to be

seeing all these ads for... with models and be exposed to so much, I wanted something to kinda like combat that and just see like bigger bodies or smaller bodies or disabled bodies or whatever... just to kind of life, try to rewire my brain a bit.”

(Olivia)

Body positive content is not easily found, unless specifically searching for it, “I don’t think that it’s necessarily something as easy access as finding like the Kardashians on Facebook or newsfeeds of supermodels or like Victoria Beckham, for instance” (Mollie). The majority of participants (73%) said that they don’t ever search out body positive content specifically, however 63% of them also said that they did follow body positive content creators. This raises an interesting perspective about the likelihood of body positive content being randomly discovered within Instagram. It appears less likely to be randomly discovered and is more likely to be encountered when a user purposefully follows someone who creates body positive content, which suggests that its potency as a mechanism for challenging societal norms is only effective if it’s being deliberately sought out. This is further supported by 55% of the participants stating that they do not typically scroll the Explore feed in search of new content.

Furthermore, because the Instagram algorithm serves content which is similar to that which a user has previously engaged with, users are unlikely to randomly come across body positive content if they have no previously shown interest in it. Some participants struggled to find images that resonated with them, or that they felt reflected body positivity as they understood it, under both of the body positive and body positivity hashtags, “...sorry I’m just trying to find one that’s actually like a...sorry this is taking far longer than I thought it would” (Sarah). Others recognised that they encountered body positive content because they interact with it normally, acknowledging that Instagram’s algorithms probably registered this and served them similar imagery, “I probably view a lot of sort of body positive stuff just naturally. I think because I’m interacting with it” (Emma).

Several participants felt that body positive content wasn't as potent as it could be, with some describing being aware that viewing and normalizing different bodies was good, and that it was nice to know that people look like this, but also noting that it was not being enough to change their own perspectives or actions.

“It doesn't really affect how I feel about my own body. I find that a lot of the time, these quotes all sound great, but sometimes...reading a quote doesn't really have an effect on the way you think. Yes, they are inspiring, and they can reaffirm maybe how you should think...but sometimes I don't think they change a lot...” (Sophie)

This suggests that there is a disconnect between inspiring people to accept and love their bodies, and facilitating a change in how they feel about themselves. In many instances participants said that the images had no impact on how they felt about themselves, good or bad, “It doesn't really make me think of my own body” (Jess). In response to an image of cystic acne, Ava implied that there are limits as to how inspirational an image can be, “It's so brave. But not inspired to the point where I would want to do that. It's almost like it's not having the effect to be body positive.”

Several participants also referred to instances where they celebrated others' confidence, but that didn't initiate confidence in themselves, “Like that is so cool. But oh my god, I'd never wear it” (Juliet), “I mean, it makes me feel like I wish I could do that. Because I wouldn't” (Mandy) and “I would never post a photo of me wearing clothes like that and posing like that... I would never post anything like that in public” (Jess). Use of the word never was common, which gave a sense that no matter how much they loved or appreciated their bodies, the rules for themselves would mean that posting these types of images were not an option for them. For some, this translated into real life examples too, “...when I look at her, I don't think anything about why she's wearing short shorts or that she couldn't, but when I wear something that

short, I'm like oh I shouldn't" (Ava). This suggests conflict between her thoughts and feelings as Ava states that she didn't think about the length of shorts on the woman in the image and simultaneously acknowledges that she feels like she shouldn't wear shorts that length herself. Sometimes the implicit rules were contradictory, however, with Ava acknowledging that some images gave her confidence to post a photo like that, whereas others didn't, "...the other one didn't make me feel like I could do that that. This one does." (Ava). There was no rationale given as to why this particular image inspired Ava and the other didn't, highlighting that the criteria for what does and doesn't empower women can be conflicting and complex.

When asked how their chosen images influenced how they felt about themselves, almost all participants agreed that the more relevant to them and their circumstances an image was, the more likely it was to have an impact. They also found it easier to compare their bodies when the subject was closer to themselves, either a similar age, the same gender or a similar size, "it sounds bad, but I'm in my late 20s and she's like a lot older... I think it's not on a comparable level.... I'm probably harsher on myself if I see someone who's relatively my age" (Jane). Some participants described finding comfort in seeing women who looked like them, "she's got little hip dips, I have those... she's got big boobs... I have big boobs..." (Olivia). When the subject was further away from the participant's reality however, the comparison was much less likely, "I'm not really having any reflection to myself, I guess because he's so different to me." (Emma) and "I don't feel connected to this image, because I don't see myself in this experience" (Olivia).

Whilst being appreciative of one's body regardless of what it looks like is a virtuous ideal, it can also be laden with unspoken and undermining obligation, as evident in several participants frequent use of the phrase 'should'; "you should be comfortable in your own skin" (Ruth), "it should be about how happy you are, rather than how you look" (Jane) and "...regardless of how you look, everyone should be positive about their body" (Jess).

Statements which include the phrase should indicate common negative thought patterns, placing additional undue pressure on ourselves and creating feelings of guilt and anxiety if one doesn't meet these 'should' criteria. 'Should' statements were often accompanied by 'shouldn't' statements, such as "you shouldn't be self-conscious" (Ruth) and "you shouldn't really care about what you look like. As long as you're having fun" (Juliet). These add to the list of socially constructed rules and are another example of conflict between participants' thoughts and feelings. They know that they don't need to be self-conscious about their appearance, but they still are. Participants felt that they shouldn't care about what they look like, "You shouldn't really care about what you look like" (Juliet) and "I shouldn't have an expectation of how my body should look or how I should look after it" (Ruth), but they do. Jess explained, "...regardless of how you look, everyone should be positive about their body. Whether you're, you know, short or tall, fat or skinny, anything."

Several participants described experiencing several internal dilemmas between how they wanted to feel and how they actually felt, "But yet, what I think and what I feel are different" (Sophie). Even within the context of viewing body positive imagery, participants still felt their feelings being challenged by historical thought patterns, "Again it made me feel like yo, I could wear pants like these and know it's all good. Know it's acceptable, kinda thing. Not that it's not, but you know... mindset tells you otherwise". Here, Sarah demonstrated insight into how her thoughts still conformed to unspoken rules about what she could and couldn't wear, based on how she believed her body looked in something. Her response indicated that it takes considerable cognitive effort to overcome stories that individuals tell themselves about their bodies.

The concept of internalized rules appeared in a number of the interviews, evident in repeated use of the phrases 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts', "what you look like shouldn't define you", "we shouldn't be worried about looking younger", "I shouldn't just be constantly

comparing myself to someone that has a completely different body figure than what I do” and “we shouldn’t be ashamed of our bodies”. Within these ‘shouldn’ts’ are unspoken implications that the participants did. Often these socially constructed rules were communicated via what is not said. In reference to an image of a larger woman in a sundress, Sarah noted, “It’s nice to see someone of her size wearing a dress like that”. Whilst her appreciation appeared genuine, the implication within this statement is that someone of that woman’s size shouldn’t, or doesn’t typically, wear dresses that hug close to their body. Sarah’s experience of looking at that image appeared to be one of positive surprise.

The influence that clothing can have on how women look, think and feel was also discussed, with several participants acknowledging that clothing can change how bodies look, including making bodies more desirable, “I think the pants definitely help. Cause they cover your tummy and pull it in and make your butt look bigger too” (Ava). Jane reflected that clothing sizes shouldn’t influence how we feel about ourselves, in either positive or negative ways, whilst discussing a body positive graphic that featured the word ‘Clothes are meant to fit our bodies. Not the other way around.’ She described how she related to this particular image as she had experienced her own challenges around clothes fitting her body, recounting an experience she had had with different sized jeans;

“The Levi jeans I have. They’re a really stiff denim and they’re so tight. And I bought a pair in my normal size and I was like these are cutting off my circulation, so I sold them and bought a size bigger. But that made me feel awful. Cause I was like, why am I not a 26 in these pants?”

Her response when making sense of that particular image was that of agreement, but it also revealed an internal dilemma between thoughts that she had communicated to me earlier, “clothing should not influence how we feel about ourselves” and her feelings of contradiction in response to a historical lived experience, “that made me feel awful” (Jane).

As an image-based platform, Instagram is used by many to promote body positivity and normalize bodies that are different to what is often featured in traditional media. However, the platform has also normalized the use of filters, creating a dilemma for users and for the study's participants, as it enables and encourages them to apply filters, but then also carries messaging that advocates that they shouldn't need to use filters if they are positive about their bodies. This tension was demonstrated by one participant who declared that your looks and weight shouldn't correlate to your happiness, but this was in contradiction to her own use of filters, "...if I've got like an imperfection on my face, I'll tend to put a filter over it...I think it's pretty bad that a lot of people feel the need to resort to using a filter, cause obviously they're not happy with their skin or how they look..." (Ruth).

The use of filters was a source of conflict for some participants, "It is kinda a shit feeling (using a filter), like I feel like you should be comfortable regardless...But the flip side is that without those filters, you're not good enough" (Ruth). In this example, the participant felt torn between being honest with both herself and others and wanting to enhance her appearance, "...it's sort of just lying to yourself in a way, isn't it?...it depends on who I'm sending it to, like if I'm sending it to a boy I liked, I wouldn't care that it had a filter on it, as long as I looked good..." The implicit messaging here is that there is a socially acceptable prioritization of physical appearance over truth, a sentiment which contradicts the body positivity and its intentions of empowering confidence, acceptance, and appreciation for bodies as they are.

Feelings of obligation also generated feelings of shame and guilt when participants recognised that they didn't meet body positive standards of accepting their bodies as they are, or admitted that they wished to change certain aspects of their bodies. Juliet described a conflicting relationship between her thoughts and feelings when contextualizing a desire and attempt to lose weight whilst being also being body positive,

“...I kind of feel that I need to get to a back to a certain way. So I have been, you know, cutting out calories and dropping sugar and things like that. Not that I think that's right. I don't think that body positivity should be, you know, linked to weight loss.” (Juliet)

On one hand she stated that she had been removing food groups from her diet to lose weight, but then simultaneously acknowledged that she doesn't think that it's right for her to do so. The dilemmatic nature of her experience suggests that society hasn't significantly challenged norms about different body shapes and sizes, and instead may have simply added another obligation for women to meet; that they should love and feel positively about their body.

A few participants talked about wanting to make changes to their own bodies, such as getting fitter or losing weight, but implied that they felt shame in admitting this out loud and having to justify their feelings,

“...I want to motivate myself to keep continuing to go to the gym and learn new exercises and be positive about my... I am obviously positive about my body, but you know, like to a point where I feel confident and fit and healthy. Rather than... obviously how I am at the moment.” (Ruth).

There was hesitation in Ruth's voice as she described wanting to stay motivated at the gym and noted effort on her part to reassure me that she was positive about her body, despite simultaneously wanting to improve it. Jess expressed a similar sentiment and indicated that she felt a sense of betrayal to the body positive movement when voicing her own feelings, “I would also like to lose a bit of weight. But it feels actually anti body positive to try and lose weight? Which is weird” (Emma).

Body positivity reproduces normative appearance ideals

Perfection codes are constructs which represent bodily appearance ideals and can define “what and whose bodies have status and value (Rich & Evans, 2008, p. 60). This theme captured the relationship between body positivity, perfection codes and normative appearance ideals, and the role that body positivity plays in challenging these cultural norms. Societal ideals of perfection are still strong, with both the body positive and the body positivity hashtags reproducing hegemonic femininity body ideals in many ways, predominately featuring Eurocentric, slim, beautiful women, perpetuating cultural norms and stereotypical definitions of beauty, “being slim and remaining so has tradable value in a job market and economy where all such personal properties are subject to calculation” (McRobbie, 2015, p. 7). Mollie described feeling sad at the lack of diverse ethnic representation when scrolling body positive content, “a sad thing to notice on those things was colour. There wasn’t as many ethnicities on there, just from when you scrolled”. Her sadness was also evident in a change of tone of voice and demeanor, as her shoulders dropped, and her face displayed a look of disappointment. She expressed a sense of desire to actively find them, suggesting that significant effort must be made in order to find non-normative imagery, “it was quite hard to find them”.

Larger bodies are also still stigmatised, “...if I see a slimmer girl in a bikini, that looks great, but I dunno, there’s something confronting about when it’s someone who’s quite larger, in something skimpy” (Sophie). Here, Sophie described responding differently to larger bodies in smaller clothing than she how does with smaller people in the same clothing. Her use of the phrase “but I dunno” suggested that she felt somewhat embarrassed at her honest revelation, and that by creating an impression of uncertainty in her feelings, it may reduce any risk of her receiving a negative response in reply from me. Her interpretation of these bodies, and her feelings about her reactions, have likely been influenced by her culture and the environment

that she lives in, which prioritises and celebrates smaller bodies and Western-centric standards of beauty.

Whilst some participants felt that the body positivity movement has started to normalise larger bodies, they felt that even larger bodies had socially acceptable conditions applied to them, "...they're still manipulated somehow to look like the ideal big body" (Ava). Ava's understanding of the notion of an 'ideal big body' suggests that even if beauty standards have evolved from small bodies being praised and idolized, bigger bodies must still meet certain criteria in order to be accepted. The manipulation of larger bodies to still be able to conform to these ideals was a point of intrigue, "...they're like bigger in some ways, but then more desirable in terms of shape? I'm just like how?" and "...when I see ones that don't have pants on, it's like how can your skin look like that when you're big? Cause you'd get cellulite" (Ava). Juliet agreed, responding to an image created by a shapewear company noting that "some women feel more confident if things are smoothed out". Questioning how these bodies are being changed and edited implies that participants feel that, whilst larger bodies are now more socially acceptable, they themselves still don't meet these new societal definitions of acceptability.

Societal ideals are intensified on Instagram, where the majority of content depicts perfect lives, bodies and experiences. One participant described the feeling that posting on Instagram has to be purposeful, "...if I do it (post), it has to be like some glamorous photoshoot..." "It's got to be noteworthy" and "...I'd have to be doing something that is interesting or is worth posting" (Ava). Often described as a highlight reel of someone's life, participants demonstrated that they understood that Instagram is heavily edited and curated, "it's so good for people to see that Instagram isn't real life" (Jane). This perspective of Instagram reinforces McRobbie's (2015) description of the 'perfect' as "a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the 'good life'". They felt that body

positivity challenges these perfection codes, by countering the significant number of edited images with photos of normal everyday people, "...it's just like aaah a normal person that's on the internet. Like it takes Instagram from being like almost a shop of things that are unrealistic to you know... just someone like me on there" (Ava).

For the most part, societal body ideals occur within a heavily gendered context, as they are considerably worse for women, however one participant also described similar perfection codes that exist within the LGBTQIA community, "...the gay community are pretty ruthless when it comes to how they look physically" (Ava). She felt that social media apps intensify the importance of physical appearance for gay people, suggesting that as visual apps these prioritize how people look and play a significant role in how people attract sexual partners.

This theme also included the undertone that bodies are things to be improved and that it's normal to want to change your body in some way, as idealizing perfection codes requires people to engage with the transformation imperative to work on their bodies and alter them, "to gain weight is to 'let oneself down', to risk social disapprobation, to lose status and self-respect" (McRobbie, 2015, p. 7). The notion of needing to work on your body was evident in the large number of 'before and afters' that participants chose as their content to discuss, as well use of language that prioritises effort in maintaining our bodies, "I've been working on my stomach for ages... and it hasn't changed" (Ruth), "...with her age and everything you can very clearly see how hard she works." (Emma), "...there's people who are doing so much to have big butts and big boobs and tiny waists..." (Ava) and "...probably because she works hard to look like that too." (Olivia).

Working on one's body carries implicit messaging that their body is not good enough as it is and therefore must be improved. Effort and progress were praised, generating good and happy feelings and admiration for those who were brave enough to share their transformations, "good on her" (Jane, in reference to a before and after photo that depicted significant weight

loss). The praise of effort supports McRobbie's (2015) description of the pride found in pursuit of the perfect, "in seeking this degree of excellence in life the young woman is therefore doing herself proud" (p. 7).

Transformational photos required additional assumptions to be made, with several participants asserting that individuals in the 'after' shot now feel better about themselves, implicating that they didn't feel good about themselves in the 'before'. 'Before and afters' demonstrate that weight loss builds confidence and when women are seeking to build their confidence, this reinforces that weight loss is a means to achieve this. Weight loss was viewed as achievement that should be celebrated and the greater the difference between the before and after, the more interesting and engaging the content was found to be. Transformation photos were polarizing however, and not all participants viewed them favourably, "I'm so sick of seeing people posting before and after photos all the time...it makes me think, when you post photos like that on Instagram, you're looking for external validation" (Jess).

Questioning the content creator's intentions, this participant also voiced strong opinions about rejecting the association between body positivity and fitness, "It also makes me think it's annoying how people that go to the gym a lot are always just posting selfies to prove that they've spent so much time in the gym". Jess's expression of annoyance at people posting selfies from the gym suggests that she may be engaging in comparison and may be experiencing feelings of jealousy. Proving that someone has spent time in the gym also reinforces the notion that body are objects to be worked on.

With no policing of what can and can't be tagged as body positive, the Instagram Explore feeds of all the participants served a diverse range of images, however the majority of those images still depicted thin, white, conventionally beautiful women or women who didn't challenge normalized concepts of beauty and instead reproduced hegemonic femininity. Some images used conventional symbols of beauty alongside depictions of so-called flaws. Ava

responded to an image of woman wearing bright red lipstick and with cystic acne. Recognising that this was intentional in promoting acceptance of acne as part of being body positive, the language that she used in reference to remedying the acne implied that there was something broken about it in the first instance, ‘And it’s like why would you wear lipstick if you’re not gonna fix that? But’s that the whole point’ (Ava). Red lipstick symbolizes conventional standards of femininity and beauty, so it could be argued that image both challenges traditional beauty standards of perfect skin by revealing unretouched acne and simultaneously reiterates these same existing perfection codes with the inclusion of red lipstick. Ava also remarked that on Instagram, acne is often presented within a medical context, portrayed as something that people don’t need to endure and subsequently offering a variety of products which can be purchased to ‘fix’ this flaw.

As a result of the complex nature of body positivity, contradictions emerged. Transformation imagery can be both inspiring, but also problematic. It can be inspiring because of wider desires for transformation but can also be problematic because it feeds into perfectionist codes and normativity. There were conflicting responses from different participants with regard to how they perceived some of the body positive content too. Whilst several loved the ‘before and after’ fitness transformations and found them inspiring and motivating, others rejected them expressing disdain at the images depicted in the before image. Jess gave descriptive and emotive responses to these transformational images,

“When I look at it, I’m like, well you’re quite slim in your first picture (laughs).

It makes me think like, do you actually see what you looked like? Because you looked quite good in the first picture anyway” and “...I don’t know if this is her intention or not, but it makes me think, you know, people that are bigger than you. If they look at that photo, and then they read what you wrote, they’re gonna be like, well, if you think you’re fat from looking at that photo, then what am I?” and

“...it’s kind of like an insult, but she hasn’t actually written anything mean but it’s like a subtle insult to people that are bigger than that photo on the left”.

She raised the implicit notion that content creators can’t influence how their images are received, or how consumers chose to respond to them, and that comparisons can be made upwards or downwards depending on the viewer’s personal experiences, regardless of the poster’s intent. Herein lies a further dilemma; even with the best of intentions in challenging societal ideals, by inviting others to gaze at our diverse bodies, body positivity’s magnitude of influence will always be subject to the lens through which the consumer views it.

Understanding the dynamic between content creators and content consumers on Instagram, all participants recognized that, through the reproduction of normative body ideals, body positivity provides a vehicle for commercial opportunity. Instagram enables the promotion and sale of consumer goods and facilitates the commodification and sale of the self, “...that (the body positive hashtag) would be your place to sort of promote yourself” (Ava). The unregulated nature of hashtags interferes with how body positive images can be represented and understood, resulting in both normative and anti-normative images being tagged as body positive, adding to the movement’s contested meaning and further diluting its potency for driving social change.

Hijacking the movement’s intentions and diverting them away from social activism towards individual, and at times financial, gain questions of authenticity were raised by almost all participants, with many unsure of the content creator’s intent, “I think sometimes people just use the hashtags to get likes” (Sarah). This required participants to engage in nuanced analysis and interpretation to decide whether images counted as authentically body positive and thus had value and legitimacy. Several participants navigated this by reviewing other hashtags that also accompanied an image that they were discussing. At times the body positive and body positivity hashtags were used alongside other hashtags that appeared to be in

contradiction with the movement, “why would you tag that with model as well?” (Ava) and “...it’s a healthy recipe...supposedly a healthy chocolate muffin recipe. Cause the hashtags say fit, health, diet, fitness girl, top, body, booty” (Mandy). Both Ava and Mandy’s examples suggest that they were unable to rationalize the use of models and health and fitness with being body positive. In contrast however, the use of similar and complementary hashtags often increased feelings of authenticity towards an image, “...she put like self-love and self-care and stuff as well...” (Sarah).

A sense of cynicism was felt at times, with participants questioning whether original posters were genuinely advocating for body positivity, or were trying to attract new followers, or were trying to reach a body positivity audience but for inauthentic reasons or were attempting to gain the attention of brands who may be looking for brand ambassadors. This scepticism was often anchored in assumptions, with participants overlaying their interpretation of the poster’s intent, “like they know that they’re hot, why do they have to put body positivity?” (Ava). Ava’s perspective also implies that body positivity is for people who aren’t conventionally “hot”. Distrust of a poster’s intent was amplified if the hashtag was hidden in the comments section of the post, rather than in the caption that accompanied the image, as this generated a sense that the creator was being dishonest in their intentions and simply using the hashtag to attempt to increase their audience reach. Ava also considered whether this was an attempt to minimize his achievement in weight loss,

“He’s got to make it not about being successful and being proud of what he’s done, he’s got to make it about something that’s like watered down...he can’t just be proud of how he looks now. He’s got to make it about...oh I’m doing it for a wholesome reason.”

Ava’s perspective was that the poster was concerned that they may have been accused of showing off or being narcissistic about his muscular transformation, but that by adding the

body positivity hashtag, it would prevent that criticism because the notion of being body positive is perceived to be good.

The need to carefully interpret content often created feelings of skepticism and distrust among some, who felt that some content creators were capitalizing on a social movement, to sell their own products and services, without genuinely trying to challenge societal definitions of beauty, “I’m kinda like you don’t need to do that. It’s kinda like they’re taking up space that sort of belongs to other people” (Ava). Ava’s reaction was in response to an image of an attractive and slim woman, in her underwear, lying on her stomach in a way that revealed her bottom. She went on to explain that she felt that people who don’t challenge conventional definitions of beauty use hashtags such as body positivity to attract brands in the hope of becoming a brand ambassador or influencer, “I reckon it’s purely for... financial gain... I feel like that’s all it is. I don’t feel like there’s anything genuine about it”. Feelings of deceit were common too,

“I think sometimes like Instagram influencers use the tag for body positivity... so you know how when there’s really like small people and they bend over and they’re like ‘oh I’ve got fat too’ kind of thing? And it’s like while I appreciate what you’re doing, it’s not the same thing as bigger people posting body positive content... so at times like that, I think it’s kind of like taking the piss.” (Sarah)

Ava agreed with this sentiment of deceit, noting that it was a post that didn’t appear to fit within her expectations of body positive content that made one particular post stand out, “I think because everything was like ‘oh yeah this belongs in here because these are people who are minority or you know, wouldn’t normally get to be in these types of posts... but then he’s tagged himself as this...”. The implicit messaging here is that body positive content is for minority groups who aren’t typically seen in mainstream media, including Instagram.

Almost all participants were aware of how hashtags can be used to reach defined groups of people as a form of marketing promotion, “They might also just want to use this hashtag as a way to connect with people who they think might enjoy their content or want to buy their stuff” (Olivia). One participant felt that it was acceptable for people in larger bodies to use the body positive hashtag for commercial gain, but felt that it was inappropriate for smaller people to do the same (Ava). Whilst this reinforces a division between who can and can’t participate within the body positive space, other participants felt that this unspoken rule was justifiable because people in larger bodies are doing a service to others who have been previously excluded from mainstream society, simultaneously doing two things at once, benefiting them financially and also educating others about different options that are available to them, “... it’s interesting because obviously she’s going to profit from it, but at the same time, it’s kinda helping seeing bigger clothing brands... people that do bigger sizes and stuff” (Sarah). Olivia expressed disappointment but also resignation, in reference to an image that depicted two girls and was tagged #bodypositivity but which was also promoting a discount code for sweat proof jewellery, “...maybe a little disappointed that they’re trying to sell something... but that’s not unusual these days.”

Several participants touched on body positivity and it’s connection to sexualisation, underpinned by the general feeling that large bodies in sexualised positions are negative and that people in sexual positions seek a different type of attention or validation, “...it kind of makes me think like ewwwww, like what are you trying to prove by posing like that?” (Jess). In this example Jess was referring to an image of a large woman in fishnet tights, lying on her front with her bottom arched up and facing towards the camera. Jess’s interpretation of this particular image was both a sense of disgust, as evident in her ewwwww comment but also demonstrated an underlying belief that people in large bodies must be trying to prove that they are worthy and just as valid sexually, as people in smaller bodies. Conversely, Emma felt that

body positivity plays a role in the normalisation of the larger bodies, “I think acknowledging all bodies as, not sexualizing them, but acknowledging that all body types are...or can be sexual beings, is important.” These conflicting perspectives highlight the subjective nature of how people individually make sense of different types of body positive content and how their attitudes towards sexuality are deeply personal and multifaceted.

Participants felt that sexualised content was not often encountered on Instagram, so when it experienced within a body positive context, it was unexpected, problematic and often perceived as inappropriate. All agreed that friends and family don’t post sexualized content, reinforcing its unorthodoxy when it was experienced. Ruth and Juliet both conveyed strong feelings that sexual positions aren’t body positive, noting that some were “too graphic for my liking” (Juliet) and “...it looks quite like um a sexual position? (laughs) so like the reason I was drawn to it is cause like that’s not really body positivity. It is, but not how I perceive it, I guess” (Ruth). Here, Ruth demonstrated reflexive insight, revealing awareness of her own perception of what is and isn’t body positive and implicitly recognising that other’s opinions may differ. Referring back to the body positive movement’s intentions of encouraging women to feel confident, one participant felt that sexual positions don’t support other women in being confident, so therefore aren’t really body positive (Juliet).

Strong emotive language was often used when discussing sexualised poses, “she’s trying to normalise that someone that’s curvy can also do slutty poses like this, that models normally do” (Jess). This perspective highlights the contradictory unspoken boundaries that exist for larger women; it is acceptable for models can pose in sexual positions, and that it’s normative for them to do so, but when curvy women do this, it’s “slutty” and “gross”. It also reflects reference to the ‘sexualisation of culture’, a perspective that argues that Western societies are becoming increasingly sexualized, with sexual representation and pornography normalized in mainstream music, television, film and advertising (Gill, 2012). Within the

context of body positive content, Jess's reaction to a larger woman in a sexualized posed suggested that she felt that it is only women who meet traditional heterosexual norms of attraction who are allowed to participate in this sexualisation of culture.

There were also different levels of socially acceptable sexuality, with Emma proposing that it is possible for full nudes to not be viewed in a sexual manner, "...it's not like extra overtly sexual. It's not posed in a way to be.... it's just a naked woman, who's standing probably quite similarly to how she would stand if she were probably clothed." (Emma). The use of the phrase "extra overtly" suggests that some levels of sexuality are more acceptable than others. Sophie referred to similar levels of acceptability when discussing larger women in their underwear, "I find when larger people share images in their underwear, I find it quite confronting", her interpretation reinforcing the contradictory responses to different sized bodies in similar items of clothing.

Body positivity on Instagram facilitates problematic looking

Sharing photos of one's body invites looking at a body that may otherwise not be looked at. As a visual platform, Instagram exists to share photos of oneself, however this process also invites judgement, with some participants acknowledging their own shame in responding to some of the images that they viewed, "as mean as it sounds, I probably noticed the flaws first" (Jane, in response to an image of a woman's face with cystic acne) and "you know, cause the first thing I'm really seeing is what she has experienced" (Olivia, in response to an image of someone with severe burns). Jane's description of acne as a flaw reflects societal beauty standards which prioritise clear skin. Her perspective that she felt mean noticing these flaws first implies a level of conflict, as she attempts to make sense of being invited to look, but then expresses a sense of guilt when she perceives her reaction to looking to be problematic.

Looking also invites comparisons between images and the self. All of the participants described experiences of this, including a variety of upwards comparisons in reference to a least one image. Comparisons included “makes me feel a little bit fat” (Ruth), “makes me a little bit jealous” (Ava), “...I wish I could wear that sort of thing” (Juliet), “makes me feel conscious of it (my body)” (Olivia) and “It made me feel really overweight...cause I would have been that size before I got sick. Yeah, it makes me feel a little bit insecure, and self-conscious” (Mandy). These examples indicate that despite being aware that body positive messaging is telling them to accept and love their bodies as they are, they feel differently when consuming this content themselves. Even those who had previously done a considerable amount of work on their own body image, still found themselves engaging in comparative behaviours when looking at some of the body positive content, “...not great. I’m pretty comfortable with myself. But it still doesn’t make me feel great... I’m definitely noticing that I’m like comparing and yeah, she just seems very unattainable” (Emma). Sarah described a similar dilemma, “I still love myself, but it’s also kind of like oh shit, maybe there is something wrong with being overweight. You know? So it’s like contradictory feelings I guess.”

Chapter Four: Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion

This study provides insight into the diverse and complex nature of the multifaceted construct body positivity and its findings contribute to a growing body of literature that considers how individuals make sense of body positive content on Instagram. All of the study's participants agreed that the body positive movement was about normalising and empowering people and encouraging them to feel good or positive about their bodies, however when it came to viewing body positive images the participants often experienced contradictory feelings and thoughts, both amongst themselves as a sample and as individuals. This included whether images qualified as body positive, what the original posters' intent was and whether or not the imagery actually made the participants feel more positively about their own bodies.

All participants agreed the body positive movement was a needed and beneficial movement, and that it plays an important role in the normalizing of different bodies as a mechanism for challenging societal perfection codes and ideals. Despite unanimous agreement on this, many struggled to translate the acknowledgement of other body shapes as normal, to their own bodies, suggesting that as a movement, body positivity doesn't have enough empowerment power as there are limits to how inspirational it is. This finding challenges Cohen et al. (2019)'s results, which found that brief exposure to body positive content was associated with improvements in young women's body satisfaction and appreciation. The difference between these findings may be attributable to the variability and a lack of consistency in what defines body positive content, and further highlights the complexities that women face when attempting to make sense of it.

The study revealed a wide range of feelings experienced by the participants as they looked at a variety of body positive content. There was a sense of confidence, pride and hope

that at times transitioned into guilt and shame, irritation and disgust. The feelings of guilt and disgust support criticism that the body positive movement reproduces hegemonic femininity and body ideals and perpetuates perfection codes which contribute to creating feelings of guilt if one is not body positive (Jennings, 2021; Oltuski, 2017). I was surprised at how quickly one participant fell into negative body image talk, comparing herself to the images that we were discussing. It appeared to come naturally and quickly to her and gave me valuable insight into just how difficult it is to in challenging deeply ingrained societal standards of beauty and how powerful the promotion and celebration of the thin ideal has become. As each participant described their feelings and reactions to the images, it highlighted the nuance and subjective experiences of individuals when responding to different bodies.

The notion of appreciation of one's own body was interesting, as I felt that at times this was anchored in downwards comparison theory. Participants expressed gratitude that their bodies didn't look like others who they perceived to be in a worse situation than them, a process which still requires the objectification of bodies and encourages comparison between ourselves and others and supports O'Brien et al.'s (2009) assertion that engaging in downwards comparison can enhance self-esteem and body satisfaction. Furthermore gratitude slid into remorse and guilt, as some participants realised that they may not have appreciated their bodies as much as they believed that they should. This finding supports Gill & Elias' (2014) assertion that Love Your Body discourse capitalizes on producing positive affect, proclaiming on one hand to be telling women that they should feel appreciative about their bodies and that they are beautiful just the way they are, but actually facilitating yet another regulation of women through adapted postfeminist perspectives of the self.

At times this directive felt like an obligation which maintained a deficit model; if participants weren't feeling positive about their bodies, especially when they were comparing themselves to others who they perceived to be worse off, then there must be something wrong

with them. This supports Riley et al. (2018)'s assertion that the obligation to feel confident and appreciative of their bodies despite societal pressures telling them otherwise further reinforces historical perspectives that positioned women as psychologically flawed. However, as Riley et al. (2018) noted, in a postfeminist era, women are now also responsible for fixing this themselves.

Whilst social media has challenged the democratisation of content creation and allowed the perspectives of marginalised groups to be heard, it has also become a tool that exacerbates a neoliberal capitalist society, leveraging individual labour in order to encourage consumption and achievement (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). It prioritises the individual and reinforces representation of societal ideals of success. Several of the participants were aware of brands and individuals capitalising on social movements such as the body positive movement, with only one participant expressing that she had expected to encounter more brands using the body positive hashtag.

Co-option of the body positive and body positivity hashtags by slim people or by individuals with commercial objectives was discussed by all participants, at times creating feelings of distrust and a dilution of the movement's potency. This finding supports the results of Lazuka et al.'s (2020) study, which also found that several Instagram posts which claimed to be body positive also contained contradictory messaging, often the promotion of weight loss. The majority of images that were viewed in this study had been created by individuals, or micro influencers, rather than large corporations, which suggests that the commodification and commercialisation of one's life has become somewhat normalised and expected.

The majority of participants who chose to discuss images of a sexual nature within the context of body positivity expressed similar responses, primarily that larger bodies in sexualised positions are viewed differently, and more negatively, than those in smaller bodies in the same poses. This contributes to Perloff's (2014) claim that women scrutinize other

women, viewing their bodies as objects to be looked at. All felt strongly about their perspectives on whether or not larger bodies in sexualised body positions was a demonstration of body positivity, contradicting earlier statements about body positivity being inclusive for all body types. At the time that this study was undertaken there was limited literature that explored individuals and their sense making processes in response to larger bodies in sexualised positions within a body positive context, so future research could explore this area further.

Much of the language used to describe body positive imagery was centered around being brave and confident, with the participants interpreting that these content creators had experienced feelings of fear and overcame this to post photos of their bodies. Whilst it was intended as a compliment, it also shows how much pain was involved in challenging societal beauty ideals. Being positioned as brave is an individual response to a toxic culture and highlights the limits of an individuals' psychological response to a wider social environment. It continues to locate the problem of a 'lack of confidence' within women, rather than addressing societal structures which may contribute to this (Riley et al., 2018).

The debate about what classifies as being body positive was complex and at times it felt contradictory, especially given that all of the participants had agreed that the movement was about encouraging people to love and accept their bodies. The contradiction came as some expressed that they felt that certain content wasn't body positive, reinforcing notions of inclusion and exclusion, which were determined by criteria that they, as viewers, had decided.

The inclusion of people in smaller bodies and people with eating disorders, chosen by the study's participants as body positive content that they wished to discuss, made me reflect that if the participant's agreed purpose of the body positive movement was about encouraging people to love their bodies irrespective of their size, then arguably people in smaller bodies shouldn't be excluded from this. Acknowledging that this counters the inherently political objectives of a movement born from the Fat Acceptance Movement, my own perspective of

the movement was challenged by some of the participants who felt that smaller people should not be allowed to identify as being body positive. It made me wonder whether the movement, whilst originally intended to advocate for the inclusion and acceptance of people in larger bodies, has now evolved into something that is inclusive of all who wish to feel positively about their bodies. It also reinforced my own perspective that making assumptions about someone's journey and lived experiences based solely on an image does them a disservice. Many of the body positive content creators in smaller bodies noted that they had previously been in a place where they were not happy with their bodies for a variety of reasons, including some who referenced eating disorder recovery. It felt unfair for them to be excluded from now feeling positively towards their bodies if this was something that they had experienced.

The use of filters was discussed on multiple occasions, with all of the participants aware that Instagram is a heavily curated and edited snapshot of what the content creator wishes for people to see. Many felt torn between not wanting to use filters, but simultaneously acknowledged that they felt better when they did. The attraction to use filters to improve one's appearance supports Riley et al. (2018) assertion that societal expectations of appearance are unprecedentedly high with perfection expected, and through such filters, readily available. Ruth's revelation that she used filters when sending images of herself to prospective partners demonstrated the contradiction that many felt. She had earlier agreed that she supported the body positivity movement's aim of promoting the acceptance of all bodies as they are, but struggled to translate this to her own circumstances when engaging with prospective partners online. This supports both McRobbie's (2015) notion of competitive femininity and the pursuit of the 'perfect', as well as Rich & Evans (2008) perfection codes which suggest that certain body shapes have status and value. It also suggests that the act of viewing others' body positive imagery is less likely to have a tangible and positive effect on how individuals feel about their

own bodies, demonstrating just how pervasive and normalised Western centric beauty standards and thin ideals have become in modern society.

The body positive movement's original political intentions did not seem widely known, with only two verbalising their understanding of its power in challenging Western centric beauty ideals. Most of the dialogue across all of the participants discussed body positivity in relation to challenging the thin ideal and its potential in normalising other body sizes and shapes. There was limited reference to its ability to promote diverse ethnic representation and beauty ideals with only three participants discussing a lack of ethnicity within the Explore feed.

A key implication of the study was the impact of comparison on how the participants viewed themselves. As a user-generated content platform, Instagram offers its users millions of opportunities to compare themselves to others. However, as digital natives, millennial women are acutely aware of how much editing and manipulation goes into Instagram photos, both temporarily through posing, clothing and digital editing, and more permanently through surgical treatments and enhancements. As a result, the participants appeared to find it easier to distance themselves from large scale influencers and celebrities, understanding the work that goes into these images and subsequently determining these bodies as unattainable.

However, it transpired that they found it much easier to compare themselves to people who were more like them. When the subject was closer to them in age, gender and size, upwards comparisons became easier and much more prominent. Many of these content creators were influencers of varying scale. Some, known as micro influencers, had a few thousand followers, others had hundreds of thousands. As Instagram is a platform with over 900 million users, there are significantly more opportunities for individuals to be exposed to micro influencers due to the sheer volume of them. This suggests that using Instagram may be associated with greater opportunities for bodily comparisons, which may have a detrimental impact on users, especially as studies have shown that comparisons to other bodies is linked to

poorer body image and decreased positive affect (Engeln et al., 2020; Fardouly et al., 2015; Wells et al., 2021).

Several of the participants reported that being on Instagram was part of their own job, not as influencers, but in marketing based roles. As social media becomes a more readily accepted part of everyday life, the proliferation of content creators who benefit financially from this is also becoming more readily acceptable. Furthermore, the hybrid use of Instagram for both personal and work purposes increases the overall amount of time spent within the app, potentially increasing the amount of exposure to content that is both beneficial and detrimental to an individual's overall sense of self and their body image.

One participant was cognisant of the role that Instagram's algorithms play in the distribution of content within the platform, "I'm probably in a very small bubble where I'm seeing people who were very similar ages to me and similar bodies to me. Which is probably why that stood out as being quite different" (Emma). This demonstrates one of the challenges that body positive movement still faces when challenging mainstream media; that despite a significant amount of body positive content being produced on Instagram every day, without the mechanism to reach significantly more people, its ability to effectively challenge societal definitions of beauty is inhibited and diluted.

As the study focused on body positive imagery that Instagram's algorithms served each of the participants at random, future studies could replicate this project and focus exclusively on body positive images that appeal to the participants, ones that they actively like, rather than ones which may generate a range of different emotional responses as this could provide further insight into the different elements of body positive imagery which may help body positive content creators to create content that is more effective. In addition, it would be interesting to explore responses to body positive content when undertaken with a researcher who isn't a

Pākehā woman, and who didn't embody the slim, white norms that the body positivity movement seeks to challenge.

The study's findings suggest that to counter Western centric definitions of beauty, Instagram users would benefit from deliberately and purposefully seeking out diverse content creators to normalise exposure to a variety of different bodies, shapes, sizes and appearances and ensure that their Explore feeds are reflective of diverse representation. This supports Tiggemann et al.'s (2020) study which proposed that presenting a more diverse selection of women's bodies on Instagram may be more likely to foster body satisfaction and appreciation.

The participants who responded most favourably to body positive content which did challenge societal norms, were those who had previously been on journeys of addressing their own thoughts and feelings about body image and how this influenced their identities, whether that was through therapy, deliberately choosing to follow body positive content creators or diverse representations of bodies, or having addressed body image issues within their families. This observation supports Thompson et al. (1999) Tripartite Influence model, indicating that exposure to body positive imagery in media can be more effective if also combined with other influences and supports a multifaceted and integrated approach to addressing body image concerns and supporting positive self-image.

Other issues that emerged but which weren't included in the analysis

The topic of spirituality and its relationship to being seen and heard was discussed by one participant, but this was not covered by anyone else so was not considered a consistent theme across the data. Tiggemann & Hage's (2019) study did however find that spirituality is associated with a positive body image so this could be something that future studies examine further. In addition, another pattern in the data was that those who are mothers appear to have greater appreciation of their bodies and what their bodies could do. The pattern wasn't relevant

enough for this study's research aim, however future research could consider the experiences of mothers or undertake a comparison between those who have given birth and those who haven't, given that the ability to grow a baby appeared to be connected to body appreciation and resonance with some of the body positive imagery.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study is the dynamic nature of Instagram, particularly with regard to what content is served and when. It can be challenging to both account for and record the variety of content served to one individual in their Explore feed, within a controlled environment (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Content on Instagram changes every day, sometimes within minutes, as the Explore feed can be refreshed and new content can be served within seconds (Fardouly et al., 2015). Instagram's multiple algorithms have been designed so that the Explore feed serves users content based on similarities that it has to other content that the user has previously engaged with (Mosseri, 2021).

As a result, searching for hashtags within the Explore feed will return content within the confines of the hashtag, that are similar in nature to content that the user has previously interacted with. It has been argued that this effectively creates an echo chamber, where filter bubbles ensure that users are repetitively exposed to similar concepts and perspectives, many of which are biased towards the user's own opinion (Walasek, 2019). Whilst this could be viewed as beneficial for the user by serving them content that they are more likely to find interesting or appealing, it can inadvertently reinforce confirmation bias, particularly when it comes to socially constructed phenomena such as body positivity.

Social media networks are notoriously secretive about how their algorithms work, challenging the replicability and reliability of any study which uses content served by an algorithm, as it is impossible to recreate what has been served in any particular instance

(Urbelis, 2021). In addition, many Instagram accounts are private and therefore their content will never feature within the public domain of the Explore feed. This removes any possibility of their content being served to the participants, which could be viewed as a limitation of the content variable. Furthermore, allowing participants to scroll Instagram's Explore feed removes an element of experimental control from the study, however the process attempted to recreate an experience which most accurately aligned with real life experiences of engaging with an individual's Explore feed.

Understanding how individuals make sense of multifaceted sociocultural concepts such as body positivity requires time, however within a research setting this must also be balanced with the study's requirement of commitment from participants. An assurance was made to all participants that the interview process would take no longer than 45 minutes, as this was determined to be an appropriate level of time to review several images, but also wasn't asking for too much time from the study's voluntary participants. However during several of the interviews, I felt that if time had allowed, some participants could have talked for much longer than 45 minutes. This was often because they chose to elaborate further on the last interview question, which asked if they had any other thoughts or comments on body positive content on Instagram. Taking this into consideration, future studies could potentially focus on fewer participants but could include scope for longer interviews which allow for the discussion of broader body positive content on Instagram to occur.

My visual presentation as a Pākehā woman may also have inadvertently introduced a cultural bias to the research data as my own ethnicity may have influenced some of the participants' responses. Several of the participants also appeared to assume that I understood their perspectives and viewpoints, as evident in their repeated use of phrases such as "you know" (Ruth, Olivia, Sarah, Mandy), "do you know what I mean" (Jane) and "obviously" (Ava, Sarah).

My own body shape and size may have also influenced which images the participants chose to respond to and influenced how they responded. I am a standard slim body size, neither small nor large, and this may have had an impact on whether participants chose images that were relative to me and my size. For example, if I was larger, they may have felt more comfortable choosing imagery of larger people to talk about. Conversely, my standard size may also be a limitation as participants may have felt that I may have a limited understanding of their feelings and experiences. The interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom, which reduced this risk slightly, as participants were only ever exposed to my head and chest.

Conducting the interviews via Zoom could also be considered a limitation of the study, as responding to nonverbal communication can be more difficult when not face to face in person. Technical difficulties could have also arisen, including issues of lag which could have resulted in me interrupting or speaking over participants. To mitigate this potential limitation, I ensured that I allowed enough time between asking the participant's an interview question and their response. In some instances where we both spoke at the same time, I stopped speaking, apologised for interrupting and allowed the participant to finish what they were saying.

The study also required participants to be willing to talk to me about body positive imagery, which could be considered a limitation, as they are likely to have had a predisposition towards body positivity as a social movement. Future research could therefore focus on regular everyday people to gain their perspectives on body positive content too.

Conclusion

As a social movement, body positivity aims to challenge the standard Western-centric definitions of beauty and encourages people to love and accept their bodies as they are. This study's findings have shown that there is unanimous agreement that the body positive

movement is beneficial in normalising a variety of bodily shapes, sizes and presentations. However, the findings have also demonstrated that body positivity is a subjective construct with multiple influences and interpretations, with many of the study's participants expressing contradictory feelings between the movement's intentions and its ability to change how they perceive themselves, demonstrating the complexities involved in making sense of body positivity as a phenomenon and highlighting the limits of its inspiration. This is potentially attributable to a number of factors including a lack of solidarity around what does and doesn't constitute as body positive messaging, co-option of the body positive movement by thin, white, conventionally attractive women and the fragmented nature and distribution of content on Instagram which has diluted the movement's potency as it is not being seen frequently enough to counter decades of thin ideal messaging that has been perpetuated through mass media. In addition, visually saturated social media platforms such as Instagram invite and perpetuate 'the gaze', which maintains the objectification and commodification of bodies and provides millions of opportunities for its users to engage in bodily comparison.

At an individual level, the study's findings suggest that to strengthen the efficacy of viewing and engaging with body positivity content, individuals could purposefully follow and seek out body positive content and content creators to diversify the range of bodies and definitions of beauty to which they are exposed. Furthermore, to reduce exposure to the ongoing reinforcement of the thin ideal that occurs via the co-option of the movement by thin white women, individuals could also reduce the amount of time spent on Instagram as this would reduce the number of opportunities for bodily comparison. Whilst these recommendations propose initiatives that can be actioned by individuals, ongoing work is still needed at a societal level to challenge the Western centric beauty standards and thin ideals that continue to be perpetuated by mainstream media. Mass media outlets have begun to diversify their ethnic representation and make greater efforts to promote gender and sexuality inclusivity,

however body size representation remains a challenge and must be addressed if a variety of body sizes are to be genuinely considered socially acceptable.

References

- A short history of the internet*. (2020). Science and Media Museum.
<https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/short-history-internet#the-growth-of-the-internet-1985%E2%80%999395>
- Alford, S. (2018). *'I Feel Pretty' is superficial feminism with an ugly secret*. The Daily Californian. <https://www.dailycal.org/2018/05/02/i-feel-pretty-superficial-feminism/>
- Ali, M. (2021). *'Body Positivity' takes on a whole new meaning*. <https://happiful.com/body-positivity-takes-on-a-whole-new-meaning/>
- Andsager, J. L. (2014). Research directions in social media and body image. *Sex Roles*, 71(11-12), 407-413.
- Archer, M., Decoteau, C., Gorski, P., Little, D., Porpora, D., Rutzou, T., Smith, C., Steinmetz, G., & Vandenberghe, F. (2016). *What is critical realism?* ASA Theory. <http://www.asatheory.org/current-newsletter-online/what-is-critical-realism>
- Atkinson, P., & Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera's immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 304-325.
- Audi, R. (2010). *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge*. Routledge.
- Baer, H. (2016). Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(1), 17-34.
- Bellstrom, K. & Hinchliffe, E. (2021). *Is the Victoria's Secret Angels rebrand too little, too late?* Fortune. <https://fortune.com/2021/06/17/is-the-victorias-secret-angels-rebrand-too-little-too-late/>

- Betancourt, B. (2020). *Lizzo reminds us that no one can tell her what to do with her body*. Harpers Bazaar. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a34974814/lizzo-shuts-down-diet-critics-on-instagram/>
- Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. Verso.
- Bhaskar, R., Danermark, B., & Price, L. (2017). *Interdisciplinarity and wellbeing: A critical realist general theory of interdisciplinarity*. Routledge.
- Botta, R. A. (2003). For your health? The relationship between magazine reading and adolescents' body image and eating disturbances. *Sex Roles*, 48(9), 389-399.
- Brathwaite, K. N., & DeAndrea, D. C. (2022). BoPopriation: How self-promotion and corporate commodification can undermine the body positivity (BoPo) movement on Instagram. *Communication Monographs*, 89(1), 25-46.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2019a). Feminist qualitative methods and methodologies in psychology: A review and reflection. *Psychology of Women and Equalities Section Review*, 2, 13-28.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019b). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Terry, G. (2019). *Foundations of Qualitative Research 1*. University of the West of England. <https://www.slideshare.net/VictoriaClarke15/braun-clake-hayfield-foundations-of-qualitative-research-part-1>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic Analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 843-860). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103

- Brown, J. D., & Bobkowski, P. S. (2011). Older and newer media: Patterns of use and effects on adolescents' health and well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 95-113.
- Bucchianeri, M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2014). Body dissatisfaction: An overlooked public health concern. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 13(2), 64-69.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-11-2013-0071>
- Bursztynsky, J., & Feiner, L. (2021). *Facebook documents show how toxic Instagram is for teens*, *Wall Street Journal reports*. CNBC.
<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/14/facebook-documents-show-how-toxic-instagram-is-for-teens-wsj.html>
- Byrne, C. (2021). *Why 'before and after' photos are more problematic than you think*. Huffington Post. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/before-and-after-photos-weight-loss_1_61252851e4b07fee0cb266a3
- Callahan, M. (2018). *Amy Schumer deals another blow to feminism with 'I Feel Pretty'*. New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2018/04/18/amy-schumer-deals-another-blow-to-feminism-with-i-feel-pretty/>
- Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019a). #BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women's mood and body image. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), 1546-1564.
- Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2019b). #bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram. *Body Image*, 29, 47-57.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.02.007>
- Cohen-Rottenberg, R. (2017). *Where are all the disabled people in the body positivity campaigns?* The Body is Not an Apology.

<https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/where-are-all-the-disabled-people-in-the-body-positivity-campaigns/>

- Cooley, E., & Toray, T. (2001). Body image and personality predictors of eating disorder symptoms during the college years. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 30(1), 28-36.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8). University of Chicago Law School.
- Cummins, E. (2021). *Bodies are cancelled*. Wired. <https://www.wired.com/story/instagram-mental-health-psychology-body-image-science/>
- Cwynar-Horta, J. (2016). The commodification of the body positive movement on Instagram. *Stream: Culture/Politics/Technology*, 8(2), 36-56.
- Dajani, T., Bryant, V., Sackett, D., & Allgood, J. A. (2021). "Your wellness program is interfering with my well-being": Reducing the unintended consequences of wellness initiatives in undergraduate medical education. *MedEdPublish*, 10.
- Dalessandro, A. (2016). *15 definitions of body positivity straight from influencers & activists*. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/165804-15-definitions-of-body-positivity-straight-from-influencers-activists>
- Darwin, H., & Miller, A. (2021). Factions, frames, and postfeminism(s) in the Body Positive Movement. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(6), 873-890.
- de Vries, D. A., Peter, J., de Graaf, H., & Nikken, P. (2016). Adolescents' social network site use, peer appearance-related feedback, and body dissatisfaction: Testing a mediation model. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(1), 211-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0266-4>
- Dean, J. (2003). Why the net is not a public sphere. *Constellations*, 10(1), 95-112.

Deloitte Global Limited. (2019). *The Deloitte global millennial survey: Societal discord and technological transformation create a “generation disrupted”*.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/nz/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>

Eagly, A.H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Engeln, R., Loach, R., Imundo, M. N., & Zola, A. (2020). Compared to Facebook, Instagram use causes more appearance comparison and lower body satisfaction in college women. *Body Image*, 34, 38-45.

Eveland, W. P., Jr. (2006). A “mix of attributes” approach to the study of media effects and new communication technologies. *Journal of Communication*, 53(3), 395-410.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb02598.x>

Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 1-5.

Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body Image*, 13, 38-45.

Fardouly, J., Willburger, B. K., & Vartanian, L. R. (2018). Instagram use and young women's body image concerns and self-objectification: Testing mediational pathways. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1380-1395.

Fletcher, D. (2009). *The Fat-Acceptance movement*. Time.
<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1913858,00.html>

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, 7(2), 117-140.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. *Psychological Science*, 13(2), 172-175.

- Freedman, R. (1986). *Beauty Bound*. Lexington, MA: Heath.
- Gabarron, E., Oyeyemi, S. O., & Wynn, R. (2021). COVID-19-related misinformation on social media: a systematic review. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 99(6), 455-463A. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.20.276782>
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147-66.
- Gill, R. (2012). The sexualisation of culture? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(7), 483-498.
- Gill, R. (2017). The affective, cultural and psychic life of postfeminism: A postfeminist sensibility 10 years on. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), 606-626.
- Gill, R., & Elias, A. S. (2014). 'Awaken your incredible': Love your body discourses and postfeminist contradictions. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 10(2), 179-188.
- Grabe, S., Ward, L. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: a meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(3), 460.
- Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., Krug, I., & McLean, S. A. (2018). The contribution of social media to body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms, and anabolic steroid use among sexual minority men. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 21(3), 149-156.
- Gunnarsson, L., Martinez Dy, A., & van Ingen, M. (2016). Critical realism, gender and feminism: Exchanges, challenges, synergies. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 15(5), 433-439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2016.1211442>
- Haagenson, K. (2022). Body neutrality: a realistic approach to healthy body image. Femmepower. <https://www.femmepowerblog.com/chronic-illness/body-neutrality>

- Haboush, A., Warren, C. S., & Benuto, L. (2012). Beauty, ethnicity, and age: Does internalization of mainstream media ideals influence attitudes towards older adults? *Sex Roles*, 66(9-10), 668-676.
- Halliwell, E., Diedrichs, P., & Orbach, S. (2014). *Costing the invisible: A review of the evidence examining the links between body image, aspirations, education and workplace confidence*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.4751.0082>
- Harpers Bazaar. (2018). *Amy Schumer faces huge backlash over new movie 'I Feel Pretty'*. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/culture/entertainment/a18192099/amy-schumer-backlash-i-feel-pretty/>
- Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2009). Putting your best face forward: The accuracy of online dating photographs. *Journal of Communication*, 59(2), 367-386.
- Hastings, C. (2022). *What losing my legs taught me about body neutrality*. Stylist. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/body-positivity-amputee-kat-hawkins/337079>
- Hobson, J. (2019). *The 'in-between' generation: What technological change means for millennials*. WBUR. <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/06/17/technological-change-millennials>
- Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of the use of social networking sites on body image and disordered eating outcomes. *Body Image*, 17, 100-110.
- Hootsuite & We Are Social. (2021a). *Digital 2021 - global digital overview*. <https://wearesocial.com/digital-2021>
- Hootsuite & We Are Social. (2021b). *Digital 2021 – New Zealand digital overview*. <https://wearesocial.com/digital-2021-new-zealand>
- Iqbal, N. (2020). *Instagram 'censorship' of black model's photo reignites claims of race bias*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/aug/09/instagrams->

censorship-of-black-models-photo-shoot-reignites-claims-of-race-bias-nyome-nicholas-williams

Instagram. (2022). *What is Instagram?* <https://help.instagram.com/424737657584573>

Jennings, R. (2021). *The paradox of online “body positivity”*. Vox.

<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22226997/body-positivity-instagram-tiktok-fatphobia-social-media>

Johnston, J., & Taylor, J. (2008). Feminist consumerism and fat activists: A comparative study of grassroots activism and the Dove real beauty campaign. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33(4), 941-966.

Jørgensen, K. M. (2016). The media go-along: Researching mobilities with media at hand. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 32(60), 32-49.

Keery, H., Van den Berg, P., & Thompson, J. K. (2004). An evaluation of the Tripartite Influence model of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance with adolescent girls. *Body Image*, 1(3), 237-251.

Kessel, A. (2018). *The rise of the body neutrality movement: ‘If you’re fat, you don’t have to hate yourself.’* The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jul/23/the-rise-of-the-body-neutrality-movement-if-youre-fat-you-dont-have-to-hate-yourself>

Kidder, L. H., & Fine, M. (1987). Qualitative and quantitative methods: When stories converge. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1987(35), 57-75.

Kusenbach, M. (2003). Street phenomenology: The go-along as ethnographic research tool. *Ethnography*, 4(3), 455-485.

Lazuka, R. F., Wick, M. R., Keel, P. K., & Harriger, J. A. (2020). Are we there yet? Progress in depicting diverse images of beauty in Instagram’s body positivity movement. *Body Image*, 34, 85-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.05.001>

- Leaver, K. (2018). *Amy Schumer's latest 'body positive' film I Feel Pretty seems so offensive and morbid it's frankly exhausting*. The Independent.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/amy-schumer-i-feel-pretty-body-positivity-women-size-image-offensive-a8206901.html>
- Levine, M. P., & Harrison, K. (2009). Effects of media on eating disorders and body image. In *Media Effects* (pp. 506-532). Routledge.
- Lin, L. Y., Sidani, J. E., Shensa, A., Radovic, A., Miller, E., Colditz, J. B., Hoffman, B. L., Giles, L. M., & Primack, B. A. (2016). Association between social media use and depression among US young adults. *Depression and Anxiety*, 33(4), 323-331.
- López-Guimerà, G., Levine, M. P., Sánchez-Carracedo, D., & Fauquet, J. (2010). Influence of mass media on body image and eating disordered attitudes and behaviors in females: A review of effects and processes. *Media Psychology*, 13(4), 387-416.
- Luff, G. M., & Gray, J. J. (2009). Complex messages regarding a thin ideal appearing in teenage girls' magazines from 1956 to 2005. *Body Image*, 6(2), 133-136.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.01.004>
- Lupton, D. (2017). Digital media and body weight, shape, and size: An introduction and review. *Fat Studies*, 6(2), 119-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2017.1243392>
- Maheshwari, S. & Friedman, V. (2021). *Victoria's Secret swaps angels for 'What women want'*. *Will they buy it?* New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/business/victorias-secret-collective-megan-rapinoe.html>
- McComb, S. E., & Mills, J. S. (2021). Young women's body image following upwards comparison to Instagram models: The role of physical appearance perfectionism and cognitive emotion regulation. *Body Image*, 38, 49-62.
- McRobbie, A. (2015). Notes on the perfect. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(83), 3-20.

- Meier, A., & Schäfer, S. (2018). The positive side of social comparison on social network sites: How envy can drive inspiration on Instagram. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 21(7), 411-417.
- Modica, C. (2019). Facebook, body esteem, and body surveillance in adult women: The moderating role of self-compassion and appearance-contingent self-worth. *Body Image*, 29, 17-30.
- Morris, A. (2019). Fat Activism and Body Positivity: Freedom from Dieting? In *The Politics of Weight: Feminist Dichotomies of Power in Dieting* (pp. 143-179). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13670-3_5
- Mosseri, A. (2021). *Shedding more light on how Instagram works*. Instagram. <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/shedding-more-light-on-how-instagram-works>
- Myers, T. A., & Crowther, J. H. (2009). Social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 118(4), 683-698. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016763>
- Nichols, H. (2017). *How modern life affects our physical and mental health*. Medical News Today. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318230>
- Nemeroff, C. J., Stein, R. I., Diehl, N. S., & Smilack, K. M. (1994). From the Cleavers to the Clintons: Role choices and body orientation as reflected in magazine article content. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 16(2), 167-176.
- Neumark-Sztainer, D., Paxton, S. J., Hannan, P. J., Haines, J., & Story, M. (2006). Does body satisfaction matter? Five-year longitudinal associations between body satisfaction and health behaviors in adolescent females and males. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39(2), 244-251.

- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Obell, S. (2019). *Lizzo twerks to the beat of her own bop*. Essence. <https://www.essence.com/feature/lizzo-talks-cuz-i-love-you-album-body-positivity/>
- O'Brien, K. S., Caputi, P., Minto, R., Peoples, G., Hooper, C., Kell, S., & Sawley, E. (2009). Upward and downward physical appearance comparisons: Development of scales and examination of predictive qualities. *Body Image*, 6(3), 201-206. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.03.003>
- Oltuski, R. (2017). *Please stop telling me to love my body*. Repeller. <https://repeller.com/body-neutrality-movement/>
- Osborn, T. (2021). *From New York to Instagram: The history of the body positive movement*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z2w7dp3>
- Parker, S., Nichter, M., Nichter, M., Vuckovic, N., Sims, C., & Ritenbaugh, C. (1995). Body image and weight concerns among African American and White adolescent females: Differences that make a difference. *Human Organization*, 54(2), 103-114.
- Paxton, S. J., Eisenberg, M. E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2006). Prospective predictors of body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls and boys: a five-year longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(5), 888.
- Pearl, R. L. (2020). Weight stigma and the “Quarantine-15”. *Obesity*, 28(7), 1180-1181.
- Peters, L. D. (2021). Discourses of discontent: fashion, feminism and the commodification of fat women’s anger. *Fat Studies*, 1-14.
- Perlis, R. H., Green, J., Simonson, M., Ognyanova, K., Santillana, M., Lin, J., Quintana, A., Chwe, H., Druckman, J., Lazer, D., Baum, M. A., & Della Volpe, J. (2021). Association between social media use and self-reported symptoms of depression in

- US Adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 4(11),
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.36113>
- Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social media effects on young women's body image concerns: Theoretical perspectives and an agenda for research. *Sex Roles*, 71(11-12), 363-377.
- Perrigo, B. (2021). *Instagram makes teen girls hate themselves. Is that a bug or a feature?* Time. <https://time.com/6098771/instagram-body-image-teen-girls/>
- Potter, W. J. (2004). *Theory of media literacy: A cognitive approach*. Sage Publications.
- Preston, A. M. (2021). *The body positivity community can be toxic too, we just don't talk about it*. Harpers Bazaar.
<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/health/a35162869/body-positivity-community-and-weight-loss/>
- Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), 238-264.
- Quintero, S. & Long, J. (2019). *Toxic positivity: The dark side of positive vibes*. The Psychology Group. <https://thepsychologygroup.com/toxic-positivity/>
- Ravary, A., Baldwin, M. W., & Bartz, J. A. (2019). Shaping the body politic: Mass media fat-shaming affects implicit anti-fat attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45(11), 1580-1589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219838550>
- Raypole, C. (2021). *How to shift from 'Body Positivity' to 'Body Neutrality' – and why you should*. Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/body-neutrality>
- Reid, R. (2017). *Felicity Hayward explains why it's okay for 'plus-size' women to call themselves 'curvy'*. Metro. <https://metro.co.uk/2017/12/14/felicity-hayward-explains-okay-plus-size-women-call-curvy-7159114/>
- Rich, E., & Evans, J. (2008). Learning to be healthy, dying to be thin: The representation of weight via body perfection codes in schools. In S. Riley, M. Burns, H. Frith, S.

- Wiggins, & P. Markula (Eds.), *Critical Bodies: Representations, Identities and Practices of Weight and Body Management* (pp. 60-76). Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom.
- Riley, S., & Chamberlain, K. (2022). Designing qualitative research in psychology. In U. Flick (Ed.), *SAGE handbook of qualitative research design* (pp. 1113-1128). SAGE.
- Riley, S., & Evans, A. (2018). Lean light fit and tight: Fitblr blogs and the postfeminist transformation imperative. In *New Sporting Femininities* (pp. 207-229). Springer.
- Riley, S., Evans, A., & Mackiewicz, A. (2016). It's just between girls: Negotiating the postfeminist gaze in women's 'looking talk'. *Feminism & Psychology*, 26(1), 94-113.
- Riley, S., Evans, A., & Robson, M. (2018). *Postfeminism and health: Critical psychology and media perspectives*. Routledge.
- Rivers, N. (2017). *Postfeminism(s) and the arrival of the fourth wave*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Robertson, E. (2017). *Intersectional-what? Feminism's problem with jargon is that any idiot can pick it up and have a go*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/30/intersectional-feminism-jargon>
- Rome, A. S., O'Donohoe, S., & Dunnett, S. (2020). Problematizing the postfeminist gaze: A critical exploration of young women's readings of gendered power relations in advertising. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 40(4), 546-562.
- Rottenberg, C. (2014). The rise of neoliberal feminism. *Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 418-437.
- Salem, M. (2020). *The double standard driving criticism of Lizzo's smoothie detox*. Junkee.
<https://junkee.com/lizzo-detox-diet-culture-adele/282701>
- Saguy, A. C., & Ward, A. (2011). Coming out as fat: Rethinking stigma. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 74(1), 53-75.

- Sarkar, S. (2014). Media and women image: A Feminist discourse. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 6(3), 48-58.
- Sastre, A. (2014). Towards a radical body positive: Reading the online “body positive movement”. *Feminist Media Studies*, 14(6), 929-943.
- Scher, A. (2019). *Are sexy gay Instagram accounts fueling disordered eating?* NBC.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/are-sexy-gay-instagram-accounts-fueling-disordered-eating-n974036>
- Scott, M. V. (2020). *I’ve found 3 reasons a person can be body-positive and still lose weight...* <https://medium.com/@michellevscott/ive-found-3-reasons-a-person-can-be-body-positive-and-still-lose-weight-d1a84a175dc7>
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Shadijanova, D. (2019). *Calling time on Jameela Jamil and her toxic brand of feminism*. The TAB. <https://thetab.com/uk/2019/05/03/calling-time-on-jameela-jamil-and-her-toxic-brand-of-feminism-98460>
- Sherif, M., & Hovland, C.I. (1961). *Social judgment: Assimilation and contrast effects in communication and attitude change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Smith, B. (2012). Ontology. In L. Floridi (Ed.), *The furniture of the world* (pp. 47-68). Brill.
- Stamp, N. (2019). *Does the body positivity movement actually promote better health?* Sydney Morning Herald. <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/does-the-body-positivity-movement-actually-promote-better-health-20190918-p52sh2.html>
- Statista. (2022). *Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022*.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

- Stronge, S., Greaves, L. M., Milojev, P., West-Newman, T., Barlow, F. K., & Sibley, C. G. (2015). Facebook is linked to body dissatisfaction: Comparing users and non-users. *Sex Roles, 73*(5), 200-213.
- Swami, V., Horne, G., & Furnham, A. (2021). COVID-19-related stress and anxiety are associated with negative body image in adults from the United Kingdom. *Personality and Individual Differences, 170*, 110426-110426.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110426>
- Taylor, J., Johnston, J., & Whitehead, K. (2016). A corporation in feminist clothing? Young women discuss the dove ‘Real beauty’ campaign. *Critical Sociology, 42*(1), 123-144.
- Thompson, J. K., Heinberg, L. J., Altabe, M., & Tantleff-Dunn, S. (1999). *Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image disturbance*. American Psychological Association.
- Tiggemann, M. (2003). Media exposure, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating: Television and magazines are not the same! *European Eating Disorders Review: The Professional Journal of the Eating Disorders Association, 11*(5), 418-430.
- Tiggemann, M. (2005). Television and adolescent body image: The role of program content and viewing motivation. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 24*(3), 361-381.
- Tiggemann, M. (2011). Sociocultural perspectives on human appearance and body image. In T. F. Cash & L. Smolak (Eds.), *Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice, and Prevention* (pp. 12–19). The Guilford Press.
- Tiggemann, M., Anderberg, I., & Brown, Z. (2020). #Loveyourbody: The effect of body positive Instagram captions on women’s body image. *Body Image, 33*, 129-136.
- Tiggemann, M., & Hage, K. (2019). Religion and spirituality: Pathways to positive body image. *Body Image, 28*, 135-141.

- Tiggemann, M., Hayden, S., Brown, Z., & Veldhuis, J. (2018). The effect of Instagram “likes” on women’s social comparison and body dissatisfaction. *Body Image*, 26, 90-97.
- Tiggemann, M., & Miller, J. (2010). The Internet and adolescent girls’ weight satisfaction and drive for thinness. *Sex Roles*, 63(1-2), 79-90.
- Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2013). NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 46(6), 630-633.
- Tiggemann, M., & Zaccardo, M. (2015). “Exercise to be fit, not skinny”: The effect of fitspiration imagery on women's body image. *Body Image*, 15, 61-67.
- Tiggemann, M., & Zaccardo, M. (2018). ‘Strong is the new skinny’: A content analysis of #fitspiration images on Instagram. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(8), 1003-1011.
- Tylka, T. L., & Wood-Barcalow, N. L. (2015). What is and what is not positive body image? Conceptual foundations and construct definition. *Body Image*, 14, 118-129.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2015.04.001>
- Uhlmann, L. R., Donovan, C. L., Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Bell, H. S., & Ramme, R. A. (2018). The fit beauty ideal: A healthy alternative to thinness or a wolf in sheep’s clothing? *Body Image*, 25, 23-30.
- Urbelis, A. (2021). *Social media platforms must abandon algorithmic secrecy*. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/39d69f80-5266-4e22-965f-efbc19d2e776>
- Vall-Roqué, H., Andrés, A., & Saldaña, C. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on social network sites use, body image disturbances and self-esteem among adolescents and young women. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry*, 110293.

- van den Berg, P., Thompson, J. K., Obremski-Brandon, K., & Coover, M. (2002). The Tripartite Influence model of body image and eating disturbance: A covariance structure modeling investigation testing the mediational role of appearance comparison. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 53(5), 1007-1020.
[https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999\(02\)00499-3](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999(02)00499-3)
- Van Dijk, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication*, 1(1), 2-14.
- Van Paris, C. (2020). *Lizzo wants to redefine the body-positivity movement*. Vogue.
<https://www.vogue.com/article/lizzo-october-cover-story-body-positivity-inclusivity>
- Vogels, E. A. (2019). *Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generation also embrace digital life*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/>
- Walasek, A. (2019). *Algorithms, filter bubbles, and how personalization can change your perception*. E-Point. <https://www.e-point.com/blog/algorithms-filter-bubbles-and-how-personalization-can-change-your-perception>
- Warwick. (2020). What is critical realism?
<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/socialtheory/maps/criticalrealism/>
- Webb, J. B., Thomas, E. V., Rogers, C. B., Clark, V. N., Hartsell, E. N., & Putz, D. Y. (2019). Fitspo at Every Size? A comparative content analysis of #curvyfit versus #curvyvyyoga Instagram images. *Fat Studies*, 8(2), 154-172.
- Webb, J. B., Vinoski, E. R., Bonar, A. S., Davies, A. E., & Etzel, L. (2017). Fat is fashionable and fit: A comparative content analysis of Fatspiration and Health at Every Size® Instagram images. *Body Image*, 22, 53-64.
- Wells, G., Horwitz, J., & Seetharaman, D. (2021). *Facebook knows Instagram is toxic for teen girls, company documents show*. Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739>

- Wojnar, D. M., & Swanson, K. M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 25(3), 172-180.
- Woo, E. (2021). *Teenage girls say Instagram's mental health impacts are no surprise*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/05/technology/teenage-girls-instagram.html>
- Wood, J. V., Elaine Perunovic, W., & Lee, J. W. (2009). Positive self-statements: Power for some, peril for others. *Psychological Science*, 20(7), 860-866.
- Weiss, S. (2017). *4 problematic trends I see on body positive Instagrams*. Everyday Feminism. <https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/03/problematic-body-posi-instas/>
- Winch, A. (2015). Brand intimacy, female friendship and digital surveillance networks. *New Formations*, 84(84-85), 228-245.
- Xiang, M., Zhang, Z., & Kuwahara, K. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents' lifestyle behavior larger than expected. *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases*, 63(4), 531.
- Yeboah, S. (2017). *The body positivity movement is being commodified. It's time to fight back*. Stylist. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/body-positive-positivity-movement-commodified-louise-thompson-book-stephanie-yeboah-nerd-about-town/177199>
- Yeboah, S. (2020). *The enemy isn't Lizzo, it's toxic diet culture*. Gal-dem. <https://gal-dem.com/lizzo-diet-toxic-culture-teatox-juice-cleanse/>
- Yucel, R. (2018). Scientists' ontological and epistemological views about science from the perspective of critical realism. *Science & Education*, 27(5), 407-433.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-018-9983-x>

Zavattaro, S. M. (2021). Taking the social justice fight to the cloud: Social media and body positivity. *Public Integrity*, 23(3), 281-295.



Instagram and body positivity

*Do you identify as female?
Are you aged between 25 and 35?
Are you based in Auckland or Queenstown?
Do you use Instagram?
Would you be willing to talk to a student researcher about
body positive content on Instagram?*

*If you would like to be part of a research project that looks
at body positive content on Instagram and you meet the
criteria above, please email your interest to
nzbodypositiveproject@gmail.com*

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/40. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz. If you are currently receiving treatment, or a mood disorder or eating disorders have been an issue for you, we advise you not to take part.



MASSEY
UNIVERSITY
TE KUNINGA KI PŌREHURŌ
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND



Instagram and body positivity

*Do you identify as female?
Are you aged between 25 and 35?
Do you use Instagram?
Would you be willing to talk to a student researcher
via Zoom about body positive content on Instagram?*

*If you would like to be part of a research project that looks
at body positive content on Instagram and you meet the
criteria above, please email your interest to
nzbodypositiveproject@gmail.com*

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/40. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz. If you are currently receiving treatment, or a mood disorder or eating disorders have been an issue for you, we advise you not to take part.





Body, Positive? How New Zealand women in young adulthood make sense of body positivity content on Instagram.

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher(s) Introduction

My name is Portia Campbell and I am postgraduate student who is completing a Masters of Arts (Psychology) at Massey University. Part of my postgraduate qualification involves doing a research project. I have worked in social media for a long time and I am interested in the body positive movement, so I have decided to do my project on this topic to understand more what women think and feel when they look at body positive tagged content on Instagram. I'm supervised by Professor Sarah Riley who also has a long-term interest in doing research on gender, body image and digital technology.

Brief Project Description

The aim of this project is to better understand how 10 to 15 New Zealand women in young adulthood (aged between 25 and 35) make sense of body positivity content on Instagram and how these interactions impact your lived experiences as young adult women.

It is intended that these insights may contribute to greater understanding of the role that body positive content plays in how young women make sense of themselves and their bodies. The project is also part of my training, and I hope that it might be an enjoyable experience for you to talk to me about your experiences of social media.

The research study consists of a 45-minute in person interview via Zoom (an online video meeting app), where participants will be asked questions about what they think and feel when they look at body positivity posts on their Instagram Discover feed. I will take a photo record of the images that we look at in your Instagram Discover feed so that I can analyze the different body positive content that the Instagram algorithm serves after our interview has finished. There will be no identifiable visual recording made of you, however audio will be recorded so that I can transcribe the interview later. If you would like, you will have the opportunity to receive a summary of the study's findings by email.

The study's findings will be condensed into an Instagram post, which will be shared on the @bodypositiveprojectnz Instagram account with the accompanying hashtag #bodypositive. The findings will also be shared with a New Zealand based anti-bullying charity, which works with New Zealand youth on a number of relevant mental health subjects, including how to look after yourself online.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

You are invited to take part in this study if you meet the criteria below:

- You identify as female
- You are aged between 25 and 35
- You are currently living in New Zealand
- You are able to meet online via Zoom
- You have an active account on the social media platform, Instagram
- You are willing to talk to me for up to 45 minutes about how body positive content makes you feel

If you are currently receiving treatment, or a mood disorder or eating disorders have been an issue for you, we advise you not to take part. If you have previously experienced an eating or mood disorder and would like to participate, please check with your doctor / healthcare provider that it is safe for you to do so before proceeding.

Project Procedures

If you meet the relevant inclusion criteria, we will meet online, via Zoom, for an interview. During the interview, which will take approximately 45 minutes, I will ask you to open your Instagram app and scroll through the hashtags #bodypositive and #bodypositivity in the Discover feed. I will ask you talk to me about how you feel as you come across different body positive imagery and content. You will be asked to identify and describe your reactions, feelings and thoughts as you encounter body positive content. The audio from the interview will be recorded so that I can transcribe it at a later date. You will receive a copy of the transcript after the interview and will have two weeks to make any changes to your data should you wish to.

I will take a photo record of the images that we look at on your Discover feed during our interview so that I can then review the body positive content that we looked at. The interview transcripts and the body positive imagery will then be coded by me using descriptive labels, which will allow me to identify reoccurring themes or meaningful patterns in the data. At this point I will take stills of some examples of these patterns, delete the videos, and stills used in my report will remove any identifiable features, for example blurring out faces of people who are not public figures.

I will contact you one week after the interview just to make sure that you are ok because sometimes talking about body image can be upsetting. If that happens, I will signpost you to some support services. These include:

- 1737 – free call or text counselling support - <https://1737.org.nz/>
- Eating Disorders Association of NZ - <https://www.ed.org.nz/>
- Depression Helpline – free call or text support - <https://depression.org.nz/>
- Lifeline Aotearoa – free call or text support - <https://www.lifeline.org.nz/>

You will be debriefed after the project has been completed, where I will talk you through the study's findings and you will receive a copy of the finished report when it has been completed.

Potential discomfort or risks to participants:

Body image is highly personal and can be a sensitive topic for many people. In this project, I want to make this a safe and enjoyable experience for you. To do this, I will be careful and sensitive when talking about body image and do this in a non-judgmental and open-ended manner. You will be fully informed about the research before providing consent to participate. This will include the purpose of the research and the types of questions that will be asked. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to; you are able to exit the interview at any time without giving a reason; and your interview will be stopped immediately if you become uncomfortable or upset at any stage. If you do become upset, I will provide you with information on how to contact support services. These will include organizations such as 1737 – the National Telehealth Service, Lifeline Aotearoa and EDANZ listed above.

Data Management

All participants will be given pseudonyms and will remain unidentifiable in the research findings. You will also be unaware of the identity of the other participants, unless you have personally recommended this study to someone and have chosen to discuss your experience with each other. Any identifying information captured within the video recordings will be anonymized when transcribed by the researcher and the supervisor will not be privy to this information. Any publication following the research will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. All video data will be deleted at the end of the project.

Any audio and video data, consent forms and transcribed interviews will be stored on my Massey University OneDrive account, which is a secure server.

Identifiable data such as contact details or audio recordings will be kept until the thesis has been assessed (estimated February 2022). Anonymized written transcriptions of the interviews and stills of the videos will be kept for five years on a secure Massey University OneDrive which is stored there in case my project is chosen for an audit which checks veracity of research project claims. Should I seek to publish this research in an academic journal I may need to upload anonymized data onto a data archive which hosts research data such as anonymized interview transcripts for other researchers to review or use for their own work, for example if they were doing a bigger project on people's views of body positivity. You can still participate in this project without agreeing to your interview being stored in the archive folder though, you just need to let me know on the consent form. If you do agree with it, I will let you know if it's going ahead so you can confirm that you're still happy.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study up to one month after participation (after this, the interview data will be embedded in the analysis and will be unable to be removed)*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*
- *ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.*

Project Contacts

- Portia Campbell, Researcher – portia.campbell.2@massey.ac.nz
- Professor Sarah Riley, Supervisor - S.Riley@massey.ac.nz
- Please feel free to contact the researcher and/or supervisor if you have any questions about this project.

MUHEC APPLICATIONS

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 21/40. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Gerald Harrison, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83570, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix 4



Body, Positive? How New Zealand women in young adulthood make sense of body positivity content on social media.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree that I meet the inclusion criteria, as outlined in the Information Sheet in Appendix I.
2. I agree to the interview being sound recorded.
3. I agree to the scrolling of my Instagram Discover feed being visually recorded.
4. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
5. I agree to have the data placed in an official archive so that it may be potentially be published at a later date. I will be notified before this occurs.
6. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____



Body, Positive? How New Zealand women in young adulthood make sense of body positivity content on Instagram.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Greeting / opening

My name is Portia Campbell and I am postgraduate student who is completing a Masters of Arts in Psychology at Massey University. As you know, part of my postgraduate qualification involves doing a research project. The aim of this project is to better understand how 10 to 15 New Zealand women in young adulthood (aged between 25 and 35) make sense of body positivity content on Instagram and how these interactions impact your lived experiences as young adult women.

Today I would like to ask you some questions about how body positive content that may appear in your Instagram Discover feed makes you feel. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes, but we can stop at any time if you are feeling uncomfortable or would like to take a break. Images from your Instagram Discover feed will be recorded so that I can analyze the different body positive content that the Instagram algorithm serves after our interview has finished. There will be no identifiable visual recording made of you, however audio will be recorded so that I can transcribe the interview later.

Can you please confirm that you meet all of the criteria required in order to be able to participate?

Participation Criteria

- You identify as female
- You are aged between 25 and 35
- You are currently living in New Zealand
- You have an active account on the social media platform, Instagram
- You are willing to talk to me for up to 45 minutes about how body positive content makes you feel

The researcher will again check that the participant is not currently receiving treatment for a mood disorder or eating disorder.

Can you please confirm your age and your ethnicity. If the participant is Māori, invite them to share their pepeha and you share yours.

Project commences

If the participant has sent through imagery / content to the project's Instagram account, the researcher will start with these images, beginning with questions such as:

- Can you describe what was it about this image / content that made you feel that it was about body positivity?
- What are your thoughts when you look at this image? What elements do you notice? How did this image make you feel?
- How does this image / content make you feel about your own body?
- (Do you know) Who created this image / content? (eg. Was it a family member? Influencer? Friend? Celebrity? Brand?)

- How does this content make you feel about that particular brand / person / entity?
- What context did you come across this image in? (eg. Was it in the participant's main feed? Did a friend send it to them? Was it in the participant's Discover feed?)
- How often do you come across imagery / content like this?

If the participant has not sent through any imagery prior to the interview, the researcher will ask them to open their Instagram app and head to the Discover feed. They will then be asked to scroll through both the hashtags #bodypositive and #bodypositivity, one hashtag at a time.

As they encounter images and content, the researcher will ask questions as follows:

- *How did you react to this image initially? What did you notice first? What caught your attention?*
- *How did this image make you feel?*
- *Can you describe why you think this image / content has been tagged as #bodypositive or #bodypositivity?*
- *Who created this image / content? (eg. Was it a family member? Influencer? Friend? Celebrity? Brand?)*
- *How does this content make you feel about that particular brand / person / entity?*
- *How does this image / content make you feel about your own body?*
- *How often do you come across imagery / content like this?*
- *How often do you access Instagram?*
- *On average, how long would you spend on Instagram in one session?*
- *Do you ever scroll the Discover feed? If so, how long would you typically scroll for?*
- *Do you ever search out body positive content specifically?*
- *Do you follow any body positive content creators? If so, who? And why?*
- *Do you have any other thoughts or comments on body positive content on Instagram?*

Please let me know your address so that I can send you the New World voucher as koha.

Closing

Thank you so much for your time today, I really appreciate it. I hope that you enjoyed our session. I will email you a transcript of our interview in the coming few days and you will have two weeks to make any changes to it, before I begin to analyze the data from all of my interviews. I will be in touch in one week just to check in and see that you are ok. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to email me at nzbodypositiveproject@gmail.com. Thanks again.