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NOT IN THIS HOUSE, SATAN! AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMING ANALYSIS OF BODY- POSITIVE POSTS ON INSTAGRAM

GLADYS MANA MOMADE

87 Pages

Scholars have associated the portrayal of idealized images of the body on social media with the negative body image of users, which manifests as several mental health problems such as eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, body dysmorphic disorder, depression, and anxiety in users. To tackle this issue, body-positive (BoPo) influencers on Instagram, having achieved a state of positive body image, post verbal and visual messages to advocate against normative ideologies that foster the negative body image of social media users. These messages have some implications for health communication and body image research. This study analyzes body-positive influencers' self-assertion and self-expression in body-positive posts using Dan's (2018) integrative framing analysis. In total, I sampled one hundred posts, including visual and verbal messages, from ten body-positive influencers. I found that body-positive influencers on Instagram, in both verbal and visual messages, use some form of self-assertion to put across messages. These messages serve to endorse positive body image features such as body acceptance, and self-compassion while invalidating normative ideologies surrounding beauty, diet and exercise culture, and fatness. Body-positive influencers in their quest to recommend products to subscribers commodify fatness and the body-positive movement. This study has implications for health and body image research.

KEYWORDS: body image, body positivity; body positive; fatness; health

NOT IN THIS HOUSE, SATAN! AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMING ANALYSIS OF BODY-
POSITIVE-POSTS ON INSTAGRAM

GLADYS MANA MOMADE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Communication

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2023

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NOT IN THIS HOUSE, SATAN! AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMING ANALYSIS OF BODY-
POSITIVE POSTS ON INSTAGRAM

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Body image researchers have focused on finding the link between exposure to social media representations of the body, social comparison, and their effects on body esteem, eating disorders, and other mental health problems (Hai & Yang, 2022). This focus is well warranted as contemporary social media are designed to enhance self-portrayal through picture and video sharing features, built-in selfie features, filters, and other facial or body-altering features (Beos et al., 2021). These features may lead to and reflect the view of one's natural self as undesirable and an increased desire to seek cosmetic surgery (Seekis & Barker, 2022). In addition to the design of specific social media, scholars have found that, like traditional media, social media content promotes the representation of idealized and normative conceptions of beauty (Cohen, 2020; Hill, 2021), which have been linked to decreased body esteem (Tiggeman et al., 2009).

At the same time, the design of social media also facilitates the creation of content that may benefit users (Naslund et al., 2019). Health influencers, health organizations, and social media users can easily share health information that may enhance users' knowledge about health issues. This design has enabled the formation of hashtag-based social media advocacy groups (Hill, 2020), which seek to dispel notions of a normative body form and preach acceptance of and love for oneself and one's body. Some of these advocacy groups include the body-positive movement, the "Health at Every Size" movement, and groups for disabled individuals, represented with hashtags such as #bodypositive, #selflove, and #DisabledandCute in social media posts (Hill, 2022). Communication scholars have explored body positivity movement content on Instagram and found its messages to be aligned with definitions of positive body image (Cohen et al., 2019). However, the extent to which these messages may benefit mental or physical health is still uncertain (Cohen et al., 2019; Cwynar-Horta, 2016). For this reason,

scholars such as Cohen (2019) have made calls for further research on the relationship between the social media content of body-positive advocates and health. It is, therefore, important that scholars draw a relationship between social media body-positive posts and health.

Additionally, research that has explored body image discourse on social media has focused on substantiating the effects of social media posts, photos, and editing on body esteem. Only a few studies have qualitatively explored body-positive content specifically to unveil their relatedness to health (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Among these few, none looks at the frames employed in crafting these messages. This study examines the content of these messages, specifically from social media influencers to determine the frames body-positive influencers use in constructing both visual and verbal body positive messages.

This study examines the framing of body-positive discourse on Instagram using key terms such as body, body image, and health to select posts. Specifically, this study draws associations between body-positive influencers' discussion of body image issues and health through their messages and self-construal. Further, the study examines how such content could undermine or enhance the well-being of its viewers. Examining the frames used in creating this content significantly increases scholarly understanding of body-positive discourse on social media by unveiling how social media influencers craft the messages and how this can be related to health.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide a brief discussion of health messages on social media and social media influencers' roles in shaping health behavior. I then explore previous body image literature to provide an understanding of the contexts that necessitate this study. I also delve into general research on social media and body image to examine associations between social media use with body image. I follow up with a review of studies on the emergence of the positive body-positive movement, and the positive and negative messages of the body-positive movement.

Social Media Use and Health Behavior

A study by Bannor et al. (2017) found that health professionals see social media as useful tools for influencing health behavior. Several studies have been conducted that confirm this assertion. Slomski (2018) discussed the integral role of social media in behavioral change in a three-phase study. First, he conducted a content analysis of Zika-related news stories on social networking sites between February 2016 and January 2017, which was followed by an analysis of the number of shares of these stories. He then conducted a thematic analysis of headlines and found that rumors were shared three times more than verified stories. Slomski concluded that misinformation on social networking sites can hinder disease prevention efforts and that health educators must maximize the use of online communication platforms to enhance health literacy and counter misinformation on social media, revealing the significance of media to health conversations. Social media facilitates health campaigns as they have a wider reach. In a visual and textual analysis, Cavusoglu and Demirbag-Kaplan (2017) investigated the commodification and “communification” of health messages by examining meanings of health as constructed through social media by lay social media users. They used the hashtag #health and produced four categories of commodified or “communified” health messages – food, fitness, fashion, and

spiritual or well-being. They found that three of the four categories were significantly related to body image issues, which suggests that health content on social media can either positively or negatively affect body image.

Social Media Influencers/Users and Health Behavior

Social media influencers play a role in influencing health behavior both positively and negatively. Social influencers can be ordinary citizens and established celebrities who share parts of their personal life, promote political views, or advertise services or products through their Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube accounts. Lutkenhaus et al. (2019) define the role of social media influencers as opinion leaders, relating it to Katz and Lazarsfeld's (2006) two-step flow model. This model states that ideas are transmitted from the mass media to opinion leaders who, in turn, further develop and disseminate them to their peers. The characteristics of opinion leaders in the model that social media influences demonstrate that opinion leaders rely on interpersonal communication to publicize their thoughts. In the case of social media, however, opinion leaders use mediated forms of interpersonal communication as channels to produce content to attract users' attention.

Social media influencers are integral in inciting behavioral change. For example, Kostygina et al. (2020) employed supervised and unsupervised machine learning and keyword algorithms to investigate how content and source features of Twitter messages about truth campaigns influence their popularity, support, and reach. They used keyword rules to gather tweets related to each of the six campaigns from the Twitter Firehose posted between August 2014 and June 2016. They found that campaigns in which social media influencers were message sources generated more campaign-branded and sharable content and a greater volume of tweets per day and reached per day. Bonnevie et al. (2020) confirm Kostygina et al.'s (2020) findings in

their study investigating how social media influencers increase knowledge and positive attitudes toward flu vaccination. They explored the feasibility of using health influencers in the promotion of flu delivering campaigns and how this impacts social norms about flu vaccine acceptability after the social media micro-influencer campaign. The researchers asked social media influencers to choose from selected messages and create their unbranded content to promote flu vaccination, which was posted to their social media pages. After this, the researchers conducted cross-sectional pre- and post-campaign tests within regions, where the campaigns were disseminated for potential campaign impact, overall, 117 influencers generated 69,495 engagements. Also, Bonnevie et al. (2020) found that the campaign significantly impacted the region in terms of increases in positive behaviors concerning the flu vaccine and significant decreases in negative community attitudes toward the vaccine. The above studies reveal the significant roles social media influencers can play in influencing social and health behavior.

Even though social media influencers can play a key role in health communication, the risk of bias in distributing information is high. Key beauty corporations have begun to utilize social media influencers' popularity to advertise beauty and fashion products. As social media influencers create content for commercial purposes, the tendency for them to share content that may not be helpful to users but increase their profit is high, which undermines their credibility.

Social Media and Body Image Research

Idealized body images on social media have been linked to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and eating disorders (Watson, 2022). Body image issues encapsulate body dissatisfaction, body dysmorphia, and other unwarranted concerns about one's body. Social Networking Sites (SNS), especially those that are centered around visual self-portrayal, along with their unique photo editing features, have been strongly linked to body dissatisfaction

(Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022), heightened body dysmorphia (Becker et al., 2022), and low self-esteem (Becker et al., 2022). Using a moderated mediation model, Duan et al. (2022) investigated photo activity on social networking sites and its relation to body dissatisfaction. They found that engagement with photos on social media is positively associated with thin-ideal internalization. Also, thin idealization is positively associated with body dissatisfaction, indicating that social media content portrays or emphasizes thin normative ideals, which can affect users' self-perception. However, Duan et al. (2022) found that body appreciation significantly moderated the relationship between social media exposure and negative body image, implying that social media content enhances appreciation of one's body. In the same vein, Watson (2022) examined the association between using filters, edited photos, and body dissatisfaction and found that selfie posting and appearance manipulation using social media tools such as filters led to decreased body esteem and increased desire for cosmetic surgeries (see also Beos et al., 2021; Boeriis, 2021; Scott et al., 2022). Watson (2022) concluded that social media content can be harmful to body esteem. In a literature review, Vandenbosch et al. (2022) emphasize the previous point by examining the current trends and future directions of social media and body image. They found that visual social media such as Instagram were unhealthy for body image and that taking and editing selfies resulted in negative body image. Their findings also indicate that social media content that promotes positive body image has more positive effects on body image. These studies substantiate the relationship between social media exposure and poor body esteem; thus, they contextualize the current study.

Social Comparison, Media, and Social Media

Aside from the design of social networking sites, social comparison triggers body dissatisfaction (Seekis & Barker, 2022). Social comparison is a theoretical concept communication scholars employ to examine media portrayal of beauty ideals. According to Festinger (1954), people desire to evaluate their abilities accurately and, thus, compare themselves with others to ascertain their statuses. In doing this, social comparison becomes individuals' most accurate source of information about themselves. Psychologists note that people use social comparison for three main reasons – self-enhancement, self-improvement, and self-evaluation. Self-evaluation occurs when one compares themselves with others to gather information about the differences and similarities between one's behavior, skills, and social expectations and others,' while self-improvement comparison occurs when an individual seeks to improve a characteristic or an attitude about themselves. Finally, self-enhancement refers to the desire to maintain one's self-esteem and self-worth, especially when one feels threatened or uncertain. It allows the individual to maintain a positive perception of themselves.

Researchers have conducted studies to determine the extent to which social comparison influences body dissatisfaction, especially concerning the portrayal of women in traditional media. Tiggeman et al. (2009), in an experimental study, investigated how women process and respond to thin idealized images of beauty. They sampled 144 women who viewed magazine advertisements comprising images of thin ideals or products. They found that, in terms of social comparison, exposure to thin ideals in the media led to negative moods and heightened body dissatisfaction. Another study involving the effects of the portrayal of the thin ideal in television music argued that television portrayals influence women's negative body image (Tiggeman and Slater, 2010). This finding substantiates the findings of an earlier study by Tiggeman and McGill

(2004), that the level of social comparison reported by participants resulted in an increased negative mood and body dissatisfaction, revealing that as social comparison increases, body dissatisfaction also increases.

Studies have also investigated social comparison in relation to news content, with younger readers preferring specific news content involving other young people and people of the same sex as themselves (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006). In terms of reality television, Reiss and Wiltz (2004) correlated reality television consumption with both individuals who had motivations for self-importance and those who valued status highly. Hall (2006) found that viewers emotionally identified with reality television characters who behaved appropriately based on their assessment and experienced heightened superiority when they perceived that a character behaved poorly. These studies affirm that comparative processes are at work, either through comparison tendencies of the viewers themselves (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004) or in the form of emotional responses from exposure to reality programming (Hall, 2006). Lewis and Weaver (2016) examined emotional responses to social comparison on reality television. These studies emphasize the role of contemporary social media and traditional media on body image issues.

On social media, where users are bombarded with textual and visual content promoting thin ideals in the form of weight-loss videos and challenges, there is heightened exposure to these ideals, which leads to an increased tendency for social comparison. Flynn (2022) used the self-discrepancy theory to investigate adult women's perception of body thinness and the ideal body thinness of their peers and found a large discrepancy between participants' actual thinness level and the thinness ideal on social networking sites. Flynn linked this discrepancy to body dissatisfaction, revealing the detrimental effects of social comparison. This assertion is also affirmed by Lewallen and Behm-Moravit (2016), who found that prolonged exposure to Pinterest

weight-loss content increased the need to engage in that behavior. Lewallen and Behm-Moravit (2016) also found that social comparison and intention to engage in a particular behavior resulted from an individual's approval of an ideal body type. Tiggeman and Anderberg (2019), however, averred that social comparison might have positive effects, in that positive portrayal on social media may motivate viewers to engage in behaviors that are beneficial to them.

Social Media and Body Dysmorphia

The effects of social media use and social comparison transcend influencing body image issues to sparking psychological disorders such as body dysmorphia. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a common but often underdiagnosed disorder. The prevalence in the general population has been estimated internationally between 1.9% and 3.3%.5” (Alsaidan et al., 2020). Alsatian et al. (2020) define body dysmorphic disorder as persistent and intrusive thoughts about illusory defects and flaws in one's appearance. They continue that “BDD is categorized under obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, and the etiology is probably multifactorial, including cognitive deficits, psychological impairment, and neurochemical abnormalities” (p. 1). Himanshu et al. (2020) interviewed 186 participants with an average age of sixteen about their perceptions of the appearance of their body parts. Most respondents perceived themselves as ugly and unattractive. Their view of themselves was influenced by exposure to ideal bodies on social media and social comparison. In a systematic review, Ryding and Kuss (2020) found a relationship between body dissatisfaction, body dysmorphic disorder symptoms, and increased social media exposure, further escalating concern about the effects of social media exposure and mental well-being.

Body dissatisfaction due to media exposure results in an increased desire for cosmetic surgery. Ramphul and Mejjias (2018) found a link between in-app filters on Snapchat and Instagram that permit users to alter their skin tone, soften fine lines and wrinkles, change the size

of their lips, eyes, and cheeks, and various aspects of their physical appearance and heightened body dysmorphic tendencies including the desire to alter their physical appearances medically. They introduced the term “Snapchat Dysmorphia,” which Rizwan et al. (2022) defined as the patients’ use of Snapchat-filter-edited images as a standard for requests regarding facial plastic surgery. The above findings are significantly proven and substantiated by Watson’s (2022) review of recent body image literature. They posited that appearance-based photo manipulation influenced decisions to obtain plastic surgery. Watson (2020) further called for more research exploring the effects of appearance-based manipulation on social media on well-being. Specifically, Watson proposed that attention should be directed to individuals’ cosmetic procedure attitudes and intentions after exposure to appearance-based photo manipulation. This finding presupposes that the affordances of specific social media may influence engagement with content and the effects specific content may have on users.

Korkomaz (2022), in an observational, cross-sectional study comprising 423 participants, assessed the association between body checking in terms of active and passive social media use and self-esteem, emotional eating, and stress as modulating factors. Korkomaz (2022) found that Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter were associated with increased body checking. Also, their results showed a positive correlation between body checking and active social media use, indicating that social media use influences users’ perceptions about their bodies. Further, Korkomaz again links the individuals’ number of online friends/followers and their interactions with them to emotional eating and stress. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that Maymone and Kroumpouzou (2022) advocate for the inclusion of social media behavioral questions in clinical body dysmorphic disorder scales indicating the significance of social media in influencing body dysmorphic symptoms.

Interventions for Body Dissatisfaction

Even though social media use has been associated with body dissatisfaction as well as body dysmorphia, little has been studied about interventions geared toward minimizing these issues (Garbett et al., 2022). Garbett et al. (2022), in an experimental study comprising 1800 young women, advocated for digital and e-health interventions, which they argue enhance the easy dissemination of health messages to people. They suggest the *Warna-Warni Waktu* intervention for body image issues, describing this intervention as comprising videos and reinforcer activities that illustrate strategies that young girls can use to reject appearance pressures using fictitious characters. Their study suggests the use of some form of edutainment or psychoeducation to counter social media's influence on body esteem. This suggestion is no different from what social media users are doing to tackle body dissatisfaction or body dysmorphic tendencies in the form of hashtag-based advocacies and movements.

Another intervention for images' effect on girls and women's self-esteem is using "disclaimer labels" on social media posts. Vandenbosch et al. (2022) examine disclaimer labels that have been enforced by governmental bodies in some parts of Europe—labels that mandate influencers to declare the status of unreal or idealized social media content or digitally altered images to enhance users' awareness of this. Vandenbosch et al. found that these disclaimer labels may not be an effective intervention for body image issues. However, little research exists on this; thus, scholars are yet to fully establish the effectiveness of such labels in countering beauty ideals.

The lack of research on interventions targeting the adverse impacts of social media on body image makes it unsurprising that Korkomaz (2022) emphasized the need for interventions regulating social media content to limit the spread of unrealistic beauty standards and media

literacy campaigns educating people may be helpful to decrease body-checking behaviors thus decreasing the risk of body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Although body dissatisfaction is not malignant, research has ascertained that it could be a predictor of several mental health issues, such as eating disorders, body dysmorphia, low self-esteem, and depression, as well as a high likelihood of engaging in addictive behaviors such as smoking and drug abuse. In this sense, body dissatisfaction could lead to adverse health outcomes. This signals the necessity for research investigating what interventions are available for social media users.

Body Positivity Movement

Body positivity can be considered one of the most prominent social media interventions for body image issues, as this content is widely used on social media to empower people about their bodies. Cwynar-Horta (2016) defines body positivity as:

Any message, visual or written that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body following beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one's self-image. Body positivity encompasses any individual or movement actions, which aim to denounce the societal influences and construction of body norms, and instead promote self-love and acceptance of bodies of any shape, size, or appearance, including rolls, dimples, cellulite, acne, hairy bodies, bleeding bodies, fat bodies, thin bodies, and (dis) abled bodies. (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 38)

Body positivity emerged from the fat liberation or acceptance movement, which is associated with the second wave of feminism that sprung up in the 1960s. The goal of the movement is to tackle unrealistic beauty standards, promote self-acceptance and build self-esteem by improving people's self-image and perception. The movement has taken many forms

and shapes since it began and now creates a space for disabled individuals. Even though the movement was created to advocate for people with non-normative body sizes, research has confirmed that people with thin bodies also use the hashtag on social media to show appreciation for their bodies (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Attention about the body-positive movement has grown significantly on Instagram as well as other social networking sites since 2012 when body-positive advocates began to challenge normative ideas about beauty and to encourage acceptance of all body types and sizes as beautiful (Cynar-Hortar, 2016). On social media, women who belong to non-normative body categories post selfies highlighting the “flaws” of their bodies, such as uneven skin and varying body sizes, to preach acceptance. The body positivity movement has received attention, not only from social media users but also from mainstream media, which disseminated messages across social media heralding the openness of the body-positive advocates about their experiences with mental health conditions and contending with negative social media body shaming challenges such as “bikini body myths” (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Today, many women participate in the body-positive movement using hashtags. The use of hashtags helps to categorize the various issues that these body positivity activists seek to address. Some of the most popular hashtags include the #effyourbeautystandards, with over 5.1 million posts; #bodypositive, with over 18.2 million posts; and the #bodypositivemovement, with over 494,000 posts (Instagram, October 2022). These positive depictions of the body are significant as they address long-standing problems communication scholars have identified about social media depictions of idealized bodies, social comparison, and their effects on body esteem.

Body Positivity and Health

As body image researchers have been concerned with the detrimental health effects of social media portrayals of the body, little has been researched about positive body portrayals and their relationship with health (Cohen et al., 2021). However, body positivity content on social media includes counter-presentations of portrayals of body ideals on mainstream and social media, which have been strongly related to several mental health conditions including low body esteem, depression, and body dysmorphia (Andrew et al., 2015). Additionally, body positivity has been associated with positive body image (Cohen et al., 2019b; Swami et al., 2018), which means that body-positive messages can significantly affect healthy behavior. This content, thus, can be said to counter these mental health conditions. Using grounded theory, Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) found that consuming positive information decreased women's attentiveness to their bodies which in turn resulted in positive body evaluations. They further argue that when women get to the stage where they appreciate their bodies, they become sources of motivation to others and tend to promote acceptance and love of one's bodies. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) used interviews with students and health experts, who self-identify as people with a positive body image to develop a definition of positive body image.

In a unique study, O'Hara et al. (2021) evaluated a "health at every size" student-led health campaign and its effect on body positivity and found that such campaigns are feasible and challenge negative conceptions of the body. Participants in this study were exposed to four stages of self-affirming conditions. First, participants weighed themselves on a "Yay!Scale™," a body weight scale developed by artist and fat liberation activist Marilyn Wann, in which the numbers have been replaced with "positive affirmations such as *amazing*, *beautiful*, *glorious*, *wonderful*, and *awesome* (p. 4)." Second, participants were given stickers with the same self-

affirming words. Third, pictures were taken of participants, and finally, participants were given cards on which they posted their pictures and stickers and wrote out things for which they were grateful. After exposure to these conditions, participants responded to self-appreciation questionnaires. O'Hara et al. (2021) found that students who wrote gratitude statements to themselves about their bodies had sustained positive body image immediately after ten weeks of exposure.

In a content analysis of hundred body-positive pages on Instagram, Kelly (2019) explored posts featuring #bodypositive, as Instagram allows users to search by hashtags, and found that many body-positive influencers on Instagram were also mental health advocates. Kelly (2019) concluded that online social support groups serve as a positive booster for mental health concerns, especially those related to body image issues. Kelly's (2019) findings are reiterated by Cohen et al. (2019b), who argued that body-positive content is in line with Health at Every Size® (HAES) principles, which focus on prioritizing wellness and well-being over weight loss. (Association for Size Diversity and Health, 2013). However, research that links body-positive content to health is sparse. Cohen et al. (2019b) made calls for more research investigating the relationship between body positivity and health.

Positive and Negative Body-Positive Content

To situate body positivity in its appropriate contexts, it is important to explain what positive body image is. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) define positive body image as,

An overarching love and respect for the body that allows individuals to (a) appreciate the unique beauty of their body and the functions that it performs for them; (b) accept and even admire their body, including those aspects that are inconsistent with idealized images; (c) feel beautiful, comfortable, confident, and happy with their body, which is

often reflected as an outer radiance, or a "glow;" (d) emphasize their body's assets rather than dwell on their imperfections; (e) have a mindful connection with their body's needs; and (f) interpret incoming information in a body-protective manner whereby most positive information is internalized, and most negative information is rejected or reframed. (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010, pg. 112)

Scholars have shown interest in examining the content of body-positive messages on social media (Cohen et al., 2019) to ascertain their relation to the theoretical ideas of positive body image. For example, Cohen et al. (2019) purposively sampled popular body-positive accounts on Instagram for the consistency of the messages with the definitions of positive body image (Wood-Barcalow, 2010). They affirmed that most body-positive messages conform to concepts of positive body image. Lazuka et al. (2020), to better understand the messages of body positivity in social media, examined the content of 246 body-positive posts from the broad Instagram community. They found that body positivity content comprises diverse physical appearances and that the themes of these messages are consistent with the definitions of body positivity.

However, body positivity on social media goes beyond just adopting a positive attitude toward one's body to advocating for acceptance of all body types. According to Cohen et al. (2019), mainstream media and social media messages are now shifting focus to body acceptance. Legault and Sago (2022) cite examples of mass media campaigns, such as the *DoveTM Real Beauty* and *Aerie Real* campaigns, which have integrated positive portrayals of non-normative body types and sizes. The body-positive movement is concerned with advocating against the acceptance of thin ideals and messages ostracizing bigger bodies on social media. Body-positive campaigns encourage social media users to accept and appreciate their bodies in whatever form

they may be in (Cohen, 2020). For instance, the movement seeks to shift attention from the negative portrayals of non-normative bodies to portraying all body types as perfect.

Even though body positivity campaigns or activists intended for the movement to assist individuals belonging to underrepresented body groups to overcome feelings of inferiority initiated through media depictions of the idealized body as thin and spotless, scholars have begun to question the extent to which the movement is solely contributing to its initial purpose. Legault and Sago (2020) suggest that while these messages may promote acceptance of one's body, little has been studied concerning the variations in these messages and how this might undermine the purpose of body positivity. Also, research has begun to raise questions about how these discourses emphasize or reinforce a society's focus on appearances instead of the functioning of the body (Lazuka et al., 2019). Other critiques of the movement have pointed out that there is a large representation of white women in body-positive accounts or content that marginalizes people from other races and ethnicities. Body positivity posts on Instagram include diverse body sizes and appearances (Lazuka et al., 2020). Moreover, forms of body-positive content on social media include thinspiration and fitspiration, which Vandenbosch et al. (2022) argue present idealized and sexualized bodies, which can harm eating habits and lead to body dissatisfaction.

One specific aspect of body-positive messages relates to the representation of people with disabilities. Hill (2022) conducted a textual analysis of Twitter content with the hashtag #DisabledAndCute and found that disabled people are using these hashtags and selfies to enhance their visibility on social media and to challenge normative and postfeminist beauty ideals, which represent disabled individuals as unattractive and incapable of meeting any set societal standards. Hill (2020) argued that the hashtag serves as a source of empowerment for disabled individuals and is opposed to traditional media, which portrays disabled people as

"inspiration porn," that is, the use of disabled people as a source of motivation for non-disabled people through their portrayal as high achieving even for ordinary achievements.

Another aspect of body positivity is concerned with how individuals with intersectional statuses advocate for acceptance not only for their bodies but also for their other minoritized identities such as Blackness, femininity, and religious affiliations. For instance, Johansson (2016) argued that body positivity activism thrives on visibility. However, on social media, Black women, while struggling for visibility in the body-positive movement are simultaneously minoritized as body positivity has become inundated with white women. In her research, Gibson (2017) focused on the images highlighted in the most popular posts under hashtags such as #bodypositive and #bodypositivity on Instagram and discovered that these images often depicted conventional body types. Specifically, out of the ninety-eight top posts, sixty-four showcased a slim and Caucasian woman, whereas only fourteen showed individuals of different races. Moreover, there were only nine images of overweight women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

At the same time, some messages that seem to be body positive contain a negative element. According to Cohen et al. (2019), in contrast to content on popular body positivity accounts, several posts hashtagged #bodypositivity from the broader Instagram community contain contradictory messages, such as the promotion of weight loss or the praise of extreme thinness. Body-positivity content has also been examined in terms of commodification. In content analysis, Cwynar-Horta (2016) investigated ten body-positive accounts on Instagram and how body-positive messages are commodified and found that corporations are taking advantage of body-positive hashtags and influencers to co-opt the movement, making it commercial, which can alter the intended purpose of the movement. Zavattaro (2020), however, argues that this could have a positive effect in that in that “advocates are experiencing power in the sense that

they have gained entry into a marketplace where they have control over whether or not they sponsor and endorse brands” (Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 53). Luck (2016) examined online advertising in body-positive accounts and found that the movement is increasingly being commodified resulting in a reduction of its influencers’ credibility. This assertion has implications for the objectives of the movement.

The Current Study

Body image research has been focused on finding the link between body image and social media. Scholars have focused on associating Instagram’s portrayal of the ideal body size or content with mental health problems, while others have focused on how positive portrayals on social media may improve body appreciation but may also have unintended detrimental effects. While all these studies are important, less focus has been placed on what frames social media health influencers use in discussing or addressing body image issues using the #bodyimage hashtag and how this content might relate to health. The current study seeks to understand better the visual and verbal self-representation of body positivity activists on Instagram, using the integrative framing approach. To this end, the following research questions guide this study.

RQ₁. What verbal frames are used in the construction of body-positive messages on social media?

RQ₂. What are frames used in positive body image influencers' visual self-construal in body-positive messages?

RQ₃. How do both visual and verbal frames interrelate?

Conclusion

This chapter discussed body image and social media research, identifying how social media use can be associated with mental health issues related to body image and the role of

social comparison in this relationship. The chapter also explored research on interventions for body image issues, looking at the body positive movement as a key advocacy group that has challenged normative ideas the media perpetuates about the body. Finally, the chapter examined research on social media influencers and the use of social media in discussing issues relating to health. The next chapter discusses the methods used in this study, including the sample size, and data collection and analysis processes.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Integrative Framing Analysis

This study is a qualitative integrative framing analysis (Dan, 2018) of body positive/image discourse on Instagram. Body image discourse in this study will refer to Instagram messages from known body-positive influencers with keywords such as body, health, diet, exercise, and self-love. According to Dan (2018), an integrative framing analysis enhances framing analysis through the study of “verbal and visual framing concurrently” (p.1). Dan emphasizes that people pay more attention to visuals and tend to prefer processing visuals to words. Also, Dan suggests that individuals are better able to recall and remember visuals than textual information. Yet, Dan further points out that multimodal messages can either increase or obstruct information recall. That is, when visual and textual information complements one another and are not in conflict, recall is increased. The integrative framing approach is ideal for this study as it enabled me to explore both visual and textual content of body image messages on Instagram for their health frames and establish how this content complements each other.

Dan (2018) propounded the integrative framing analysis as an advancement of the original framing analysis (Entman, 1998) due to the paucity of research that integrates both visual and verbal framing. Dan (2018) argues that messages that comprise both visual and verbal components are interpreted together by audiences and thus should be analyzed together by researchers. Dan, therefore, merges integrative analysis, which focuses on both visual and verbal aspects of a message, with framing analysis (Entman, 1993) to create the integrative framing analysis, which focuses not only on deriving frames from the verbal aspects of a message but also its visuals to determine their relationship. To better explain the need for integrative framing analysis, Dan (2018) first defines frames as the “rather enduring verbal or visual interpretations

of issues or people.” These may resonate with people whose frames of reference correlate with the frame. Frames categorize social reality in simple ways emphasizing some aspects of the message and disregarding others. Established frames explain the problematic nature of affairs, propose moral evaluations, pinpoint their root causes, and suggest solutions (Dan, 2018). These frames can be derived from either visual or verbal messages, which may or may not be related.

According to Dan (2018), three arguments support analyzing both visual and verbal messages together as visual and verbal frames are “necessarily fragmentary” (p. 6), emphasizing the necessity of exploring these frames in congruence/simultaneously. First, he discusses the ubiquity of multimodal messages citing Kress’s (2010) definition of multimodal messages as “the normal state of human communication” (p.1). This argument is valid, as in the age of social media, messages, and intertextuality, messages are mostly both visual and verbal. Second, Dan (2018) emphasizes increased attention and preferential processing for visuals over words, especially as our environments are saturated with messages. People select and pay attention to messages that capture their attention (Liu, 2005). Dan substantiates his arguments by citing research that argues the dominance of visuals in capturing attention (Blum & Bucher, 1996) as well as on information processing, indicating that visuals are processed before and faster than words (Pfau et al., 2006). He further elaborates how four theories—the Dual Coding Theory (DCT) (Paivio, 1986), the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) (Chen & Chaiken, 1999), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), and the Limited Capacity Model (LCM) (Lang, 2000)—speak to this phenomenon.

Finally, Dan (2018) discusses the importance of visual messages to recall, and memory of the information shared, indicating a higher recall for visual messages than words. For these reasons, Dan (2018) proposes congruently analyzing both visual and verbal messages to

determine the relationships that exist between them. As body-positive content on Instagram comprises both visual and verbal content, the integrative framing approach offers a unique method of deriving meanings from them, which makes this study necessary.

Sample

I derived the sample by searching Google or Bing using search terms such as "most popular body image influencers" or "most influential body-positive influencers." Ten influencers were selected from the results. The profiles of these ten influencers were searched for posts containing words such as body, health, fat, body image, mental health, and self-love on Instagram. I selected these keywords because they represent posts that are intended to send a message about body image. As of March 2023, #body is associated with 63 million posts on Instagram, #selflove is associated with 99 million posts, #health is associated with 160 million posts, and #fat is associated with 11 million posts, indicating the elevated level of their use on Instagram. Also, these hashtags represent how body image issues could be discussed in a health context and, thus, are more likely to be used in posts that relate to the health aspects of body image, which fits the purpose of this study. Ten posts were sampled from the Instagram accounts of each selected influencer. These posts were reviewed for their relatedness to the study's purpose, and in total, 100 were sampled. Other scholars have used the hashtag method of data collection. For instance, Cohen et al. (2019), in their content analysis of body-positive posts on Instagram, used search engines to derive a sample of body-positive influencers to find the relationship between body-positive posts and the concept of positive body image. Additionally, Hill (2022) employed the hashtag #DisabledandCute to study discourses of disability on Twitter, while Laestadius et al. (2016) conducted an exploratory study on electronic smoking promotion

on Instagram using the hashtags #vape and #ecig. These studies reveal the feasibility of using this approach in collecting online or social media-based data to explain phenomena.

Data Collection

Because Instagram is mostly a visual platform and based on the framing analysis methodology, I used an Instagram account to collect both verbal and visual data. It was important to collect both textual and visual data as it enabled me to explore not only the captions of posts but also visual content. I was then able to determine their congruence. In addition, I collected messages posted by these influencers over 12 months, thus from January 2022 to March 2023, which enabled me to purposively sample a substantive amount of data from which I derived themes. I also aimed to collect posts from influencers with at least 50,000 followers.

Data Analysis

I followed the process of integrative framing analysis in analyzing captions and posts. First, I identified visual and verbal frames by comparing individual frames to one another to determine their salience. Dan (2018) emphasizes the importance of identifying the frames and determining their salience in the text or the visual analysis (Entman, 1993). This involves ascertaining the importance of each appearing frame (Van Gorp, 2010) by comparison to the others. Since I took a qualitative approach, the identification and determination of the salience of the frames will be done manually. Thus, the final stage of the analysis involved manually drawing relationships between visual and verbal frames to determine their congruence. Dan (2018) states that the analysis stage is complete when the “researcher has identified a corpus of verbal frames and one of the visual frames, respectively, and when she or he has determined each frame’s salience in every text and visual” (p. 47). To preserve the voice of the participants, to maintain the ideas of the influencers in context, and to add “credibility” to the findings (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985), I do not alter the original posts. I analyzed most of the posts in their original form, making some of the exemplars in the results section lengthier than others.

Coding

Based on Dan's (2018) approach to conducting an integrative framing analysis, I inductively derived codes from visual and verbal messages. For verbal messages, I adopted the manual holistic approach to derive themes (Dan, 2018). The manual holistic approach allowed me to inductively derive themes from the posts. For the visual analysis, posts will be coded based on the structural features and the non-verbal behavior of the influencer. I coded visual and verbal messages separately to independently derive codes from each category. The study was guided by Devos et al.'s (2022) approach to qualitative framing analysis to inductively develop frames influencers used in sending their messages whether intentionally or unconsciously. One other coder independently coded the data to ensure adequate intercoder reliability after the coding process. After the coding process, I rechecked the consistency of the coding and made sense of the codes by exploring the categories to identify any relationships and patterns. For referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I will analyze 80% of the data to derive themes, which will then be applied to the remaining 20% of data to reveal redundancy.

Ethics

Instagram posts are public texts; thus, there was no need to seek approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB). There was no risk for participants sampled in this study aside from what they would normally face given the public nature of their posts.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methods employed in this study, including sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. I collected data from ten posts from ten influencers

and followed the process of integrative framing analysis to analyze them. The next chapter will analyze the data collected and show results in themes.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study using the integrative framing approach to analyze visual and verbal body-positive posts on Instagram. The goal was to explore these posts' visual and verbal frames and draw out the relationship between the imagery and words. The results specifically focus on the qualitative links between body-positive content and health messages and imagery. I begin with an analysis of the verbal messages. I discuss themes such as the use of assertive language as a means of self-expression, self-validation, body appreciation, invalidation, or rejection of normative ideologies, exposing disparities against fat people, and the commodification of the body-positive movement. I next turn to the visual analysis, taking an ethnographic approach to qualitatively examine visuals and derived themes such as self-assertion and exposure of body parts as resistance, the rejection of normative ideologies, and additional commodification of the body-positive movement. Finally, I address the interrelation of verbal and visual frames. I will begin with an analysis of verbal frames, which comprise a thematized analysis of selected verbal and textual frames from oral and written text in body-positive posts. The exemplars presented in this section are presented as close to exactly how they appear online, with little or no alteration as this enables me to holistically analyze posts to deduce frames from them. Also, some messages instantiate the frames better as they are, thus it was unnecessary to alter them. The section titled “visual frames” comprises an analysis of the pictorial aspects of body-positive messages on Instagram.

Verbal Frames

Assertiveness as a Means of Self-Expression

Assertiveness is defined as having or showing a confident and forceful personality in self-representation. Body positivity influencers portray an assertive personality to strengthen the

delivery of their messages and to assert their stance on an issue. Assertiveness is evident in the language used to write out the captions of posts, and this theme runs through several body-positive posts as influencers present their messages unflinchingly and directly. According to Baek (2015), persuasive campaigns frequently use assertive language because it is simple in its form and clear in its meaning. Assertive language is expressive of the influencers' stances while also acknowledging that people may have divergent opinions. Body-positive influencers, like marketers, adopt this language style in their advocacy to ensure the forcefulness of their messages. Body-positive influencers use assertive language in a variety of ways, including the opposition of normative or inconsistent ideas, validation of their stances, and stating their values and beliefs. For example, Marielle Elizabeth, an Instagram body-positive influencer, posted:

I wholeheartedly believe health is not needed. It doesn't make anyone more deserving of care and love nor is health a requirement for being treated with dignity and respect. This isn't a "health is moral" conversation. This is me trying to express caring for my body to best enable it to do the things it's capable of and that I want to pursue. These are my feelings. These are my experiences. I have zero interest in getting in a comment fight if you want to care for your body differently. I believe in bodily autonomy and trust you can decide what is best for you. I can choose differently for my body. I am sharing this because I don't see this narrative/experience being voiced, and I think if had I read these words years ago, maybe it would have helped me to get to where I am now, just a little faster. And what a gift that would have been, to have cared for my body with unconditional love, sooner. And I wish that for you too.

In the above example, Elizabeth expressively declares her position about health, indicating that health should not be used as a determinant of respect and dignity. Her statement “I

wholeheartedly believe that health is not needed” is assertive as she overtly opposes the idea of “health,” which goes against normative beliefs about health. For example, the World Health Organization, on its website, states that “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.” However, Elizabeth’s comment about health directly conflicts with the norms illustrated by the WHO statement and is even entrenched in the Constitution of the United States. The above exemplar does not only state the influencer’s opposition to health but also expresses her feelings about the idea of using health as a yardstick for showing respect. She states that “these are my feelings,” and “Knowing I’m indisputably hot,” which also show the use of assertive language in body-positive posts.

Another way assertiveness is used in body-positive posts is seen in instances where a body-positive influencer seeks to correct an ideology or make recommendations for “others” (e.g., people in smaller bodies who feel the need to suggest weight loss ideas to fat people). For instance, in another post, Elizabeth debunks the idea that fat people must lose weight to look beautiful:

lol @ telling me I need to lose weight to be hot...seriously?! IT'S REALLY EMBARRASSING FOR YOU. Not me though, too busy being hot and focusing on myself. You should REALLY TRY IT. (But truly, that "compliment" is such a problematic way of telling someone beauty is conditional on forcing their body to look a certain way, and just ick. Why? To what end? Just stop.

Elizabeth emphasizes, using capital letters, that people who make such comments should be ashamed of themselves. She vehemently resists the idea that beauty is contingent on body size and directs or advocates for an end to such comments. Finally, she recommends that others

should really focus on their bodies instead of making judgmental statements about fat people. Assertiveness is therefore used to present messages relating to the body and to oppose critics of their bodies or reject ideas that are inconsistent with their advocacy.

Self-Validation and Body Appreciation

Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2010) define positive body image as a state where individuals accept their bodies knowing that they possess other admirable qualities beyond their bodies. Body-positive influencers use validating expressions in their messages to show an acceptance of their bodies and affirm their comfort with the skin in which they live. Some indicators of acceptance in comments point to body autonomy, the embodiment (flaunting) of “flaws,” self-love, self-compassion, and body appreciation. For example, statements about one’s love for their body express self-love. Stephanie Yeboah, a Black body-positive advocate on Instagram states:

You can’t waste your life waiting for someone to come along and make you feel whole before you start living. All those things you wanted to wait until you had a partner first before doing? Do them NOW. Self-love is not just yoga and bubble baths. It’s self-acknowledgment. Self-validation. Self-knowledge. Learning how to be comfortable in your own company and finding out what your limits are. If you live with low self-esteem, doing things on your own is brilliant at increasing self-confidence too. You don’t need to start off in the deep end by booking a solo trip; you can perhaps spend the afternoon on your own, having a nice meal and seeing a show at the theatre. Baby steps.

In the above post, Stephanie advocates for self-validation for her followers. She encourages her followers to be independent and do things for themselves that they might be expecting to obtain from another person. She associates this behavior with self-love and self-knowledge, which she

believes increases one's self-esteem. Her post is therefore geared toward validating the experiences of her followers.

In making validating statements, these body-positive influencers model self-compassion. Neff (2003) defines self-compassion as an acknowledgment, connection, and acceptance of one's suffering. It is the avoidance of self-criticism and a nonjudgmental understanding of one's pain, inadequacies, and failures so that one's own experience is seen as part of human nature. Self-compassion has been linked to positive psychological functioning and health-promoting behaviors, (Neff 2003b; Neff et al. 2007). Braun et al. (2016) also agree that self-compassion is a protective factor against negative body image. Body-positive influencers express the need for self-compassion in their messages. For instance, Stephanie states in a post that self-love or self-compassion is not equal to self-centeredness, especially because "self-hatred" has become a "norm" in the world. She compares people who are against practicing self-compassion with "a dark malevolent spirit."

Repeat after me: practicing self-kindness, self-compassion, and self-love does not equate to selfish or narcissistic behaviors, and someone who tries to make you feel guilty or wrong for loving yourself loudly in a world that peddles self-hatred as the 'norm,' is a dark, malevolent spirit.

Elizabeth also adds that when people feel down, they need to bask in self-compassion instead of self-criticism. By doing this, Elizabeth does not only validate the experiences of her viewers, but she is also actively ensuring that people are encouraged to appreciate themselves and their choices.

This is the time to layer on self-compassion!!

There's no sense in kicking yourself when you feel down, this isn't your fault and

certainly not a choice. Take it one day at a time and hold on to hope because things can and will get better.

Body-positive influencers also validate their experiences through the embodiment of their “flaws”, which makes them appear more confident. Gailey (2012) found that people find fat (people in non-normative bodies) women attractive when they embody their fatness and show their pride for whatever parts of their bodies that conflicts with societal conceptions of beauty. In body-positive posts on Instagram, influencers embrace their bodies to validate themselves and/or their bodies. For example, Lizzo, a Black body-positive influencer and musician, captions a post on Instagram that “it’s giving fat on vacation” indicating an awareness and ownership of her fatness. Elizabeth describes fatness as a word she loves and accepts, while Stephanie, captions a photo in which she displays her stretch marks as “I love them.” Another influencer called; @Lovedisfigure on Instagram states an admiration for her burn scars. These comments validate their unique and individual experiences and show that these influencers are propagating similar messages when it comes to body validation.

Even though body-positive influencers consistently express validation for their bodies, indicating a state of positive body image, they admit that reaching a state of positive body image is a journey, thus they are transitioning from a place of mental colonization to a place of self-confidence. They, therefore, experience what Elizabeth describes as “nuances,” that is, the regular feeling inadequacy or reminder of not fitting into societal beauty standards. In that, they are reminded about their past slavery to normative ideas about weight, but as evident in the next exemplar, these influencers can identify – and use protective filters to counteract – the messages that conflict with their belief in the beauty of their bodies (Wood-Barcalow et al. 2010).

Elizabeth states:

Forgive the tenderness, because yes, I still think hurtful and truly unhelpful thoughts about my body and my worth. Like these. AND especially when I'm in a new space or revisiting old spaces where those thoughts ran rampant (or were outright encouraged). But I know it's ok because I know how to rewrite them. For me, self-love is the intentional work of replacing my old intrusive and hurtful thoughts with new ones, using the knowledge, empathy, and tenderness I have now. I used to get so angry at myself for not "being fixed", but maybe body image is more like tending a garden. Once you learn how to pull weeds, new ones aren't such a big deal, even the ones with deep roots. You don't get angry at a garden for having weeds, it's inevitable - part of life - but fixable with a bit of care and time. I am worth that care and time. I might make this a series, especially if they help other people feel better when their brains hold on to phrases or beliefs unintentionally. To remind us that we all are doing this work; tending, caring, unearthing the things that steal our joy, and replacing them so we can flourish. 🌷🌷🌷

Her statement reveals that even as a body-positive influencer, she is still prone to weighing her unique beauty against traditional beauty standards. She is, however, knowledgeable about the likelihood of these occurrences and is prepared to counteract them in their event. In the same vein, Megan Jayne Crabbe, a body-positive influencer shares her story about self-criticism and self-compassion in the post below. She states how she criticized herself for a perceived mediocre performance at a public event and shares how she quickly recovers from her self-criticism by using validating words about her performance to encourage herself:

Lemme share a self-kindness win from this week 😊 Recently I spoke at a conference - it was a beautiful audience all there to learn about eating disorders and what medical professionals can do to better support people in recovery. So important. And a massive

privilege to be part of it! I got up, spoke from the heart, told my story and what I've learned since. It wasn't my best public speaking, and it wasn't my worst. When I left, my brain pulled up its usual post-event pattern: Go back over everything we said. Point out every place we could've done better. Project criticism and disappointment onto everyone there. Feel like shit. Then I stopped. Why did I just go and speak about the possibility of life after recovery if I'm still using my own post-recovery life to be cruel to myself? Why do I bother to show up, give my energy and share with vulnerability if I'm never gonna feel good about it? When will it ever feel like enough? I caught the old thought pattern as it was forming and forced it around into a new one:

In Megan's narrative, she states that there are times when her past struggle with self-esteem issues creep into her thoughts. However, she counters these thoughts with validating statements such as:

We showed up today. We were honest. We connected to other humans. We did something meaningful, and we get to be proud. This is enough. This is something to feel good about. It's a different kind of recovery, learning to let go of self-punishment. But I'm doing my best every day - and I already know from experience: recovery is absolutely possible

Megan intimates that self-recovery is a process and letting go of self-punishment facilitates it. She again affirms the possibility of full recovery from self and body esteem issues through her self-disclosures.

Another post from Stephanie Yeboah emphasizes the interferences that body-positive advocates experience in the journey toward positive body image. In the posts, she admits that she has in fact in the past bought creams for the removal or fading of her stretch marks. She,

however, has come to accept her body in its current shape. She states that the journey to have a positive image of one's body may be long. However, the acknowledgment of what she describes as "small things" is helpful in healing negative body image:

We're all victims to some degree of the ever-changing body standards, and it would be hypocritical of me to say all this and not admit that I too in the past, would reach for products that claimed to 'fade stretchmarks' or get rid of cellulite. But sometimes I look at my body and I think "in the grand scheme of things, we are all so insignificant so what is the point of me disliking this part of me?" Then again, I have been leaning more and more recently into nihilism so many don't follow my lead. 😞 All I'm saying is, the road to loving ourselves honestly and thoroughly is long, there's no quick fix and it's easier said than done. But learning to acknowledge small things like the above can really kickstart the unlearning process.

Stephanie advocates that people can unlearn their obsession with the "flaws" of their bodies by acknowledging their bodies and accepting them as they are. By doing this, Stephanie takes a body neutrality approach. She acknowledges that body positivity or achieving positive body image is a long process that is actively being hindered by the enormity of idealized imagery in the media. However, it is important that individuals begin to see all bodies as insignificant to be able to appreciate their own bodies.

Invalidation/Rejection of Normative Ideologies

Tylka and Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010) aver that individuals with positive body image selectively filter in positive information while counteracting negative information. This process aids in fostering and maintaining a positive image and molds their body investment into a useful yet simple aspect of their identity. Wood-Barcalow et al. further explain that this disposition

helps these individuals to engage in non-obsessive self-care and promotes a focus on body functionality and their body unique features. These individuals are therefore able to influence others toward body positivity as they radiate inner positivity.

This conceptualization of positive body image is evident in body-positive influencers' communication about their bodies on Instagram. Body positivity influencers on Instagram are heavily invested in the rejection of normative ideologies, especially those relating to fatness, beauty, exercising, and dieting. Wood-Barcalow et al. (2010), however, state that the protective filter that these individuals adopt is not foolproof. People with positive body image might encounter negative information that could distort their views about their bodies. However, when individuals are actively aware of this occasional exposure to negative information, they are better able to effectively counter them using several readjustment methods.

Body-positive influencers on Instagram not only admit that the fight for body positivity is continuous, but they also engage in active protective filtering of negative information that may cause them to negatively self-evaluate. Below, I expound on how BoPo influencers protectively filter information by debunking normative ideologies about beauty, diet/exercise, health, and fatness. Body-positive influencers advocate against these ideas by ensuring that their pages are saturated with content that contends with one or more of the inconsistent ideologies discussed below. On several of the influencers' pages, there is an obvious abundance – even saturation – of posts related to varying body-positive ideologies. One of the influencers admits that the intentional saturation of these posts is to ensure that their messages are normalized. This strategy is a means to combat the saturation of ideal messages about the body, weight loss, and health that already monopolize the internet and mainstream media.

Beauty

Traditional ideas about beauty are one of the key norms that body-positive influencers seek to dispel. With the ubiquity of ideal portrayals of the body on social media and mainstream media, positive body portrayals serve as counter-representation, countering age-long ideas about beauty. Cwanyar-Horta (2016) states that body-positive influencers promote the acceptance and reclaiming of natural beauty, bodily hair, menstruation, and appearances of the skin that are considered flaws. In the example below, in response to a comment that said Sarah Nicole, a BoPo influencer over-exposes her stretch marks, Sarah explains that such a comment would never have been made on a picture of someone with a smooth stomach or to someone with a muscular body. She indicates that people's comments on her posts cause her to think, "probably too much." This comment shows her thought process about beauty ideals and the intentional posting of her "flaws" to resist these ideals:

The other day someone said I show my stretch marks too much. I thought about it. Probably too much. Am I too much? I landed softly on the realization that this comment would never be made to someone showing their smooth stomach. To a gym bro showcasing his abs. Or a woman baring her pregnant belly growing. I'll admit my saturation of it is intentional. I want this to look and feel so normal that it's never a surprise. I want stretch marks on billboards and bikini campaigns like they're a natural part of existence. Because for me, and many others, they are. And let's be honest, they're my signature look ⚡⚡⚡ So go ahead and be "too much" for some. It's worth it to be enough for you.

Sarah describes the showcase of her stretchmarks on her page as her "signature look," making it obvious that she wants to be known by the stretchmarks on her body. Her statements

that “I admit the that the saturation is intentional. I want this to look and feel so normal that it’s never a surprise,” and “I want stretch marks on billboards” further confirm that the exposure of her body is geared toward reducing normative perceptions about beauty and normalizing nonconventional beauty. In another example, Elizabeth uses both assertive language and validation to debunk the idea of maintaining one’s body size. She states;

You were hot before the panoramic. You will be hot after it. And the idea that we constantly doubt ourselves due to some archaic promise that we (GNB & women especially) will stay the same size, the same age, the SAME everything is ridiculous. Bodies are made to change, your beauty does not hinge on suspending your form in one way, forever. Think of what an impossibility that is!!! What a cruelty to expect that from a body that was evolutionarily made to adapt over the course of your lifetime? To ebb and flow, to keep you safe. What are you gaining by measuring your beauty against yourself - is it not just as possible that beauty is a constant across everybody iteration you exist in?

We need to stop this before, after, better, worse, BULLSHIT. It is exhausting, it is by design an unobtainable construct and there are no winners. There's is only a fleeting beauty standard with moving goalposts, we seem to never realize. Are you not tired? I am so so tired. What if instead we just offered our bodies the grace to BE? And (since I'm already overenthusiastically pleading with you) maybe a bit of gratitude? For carrying you through the last year.

For carrying you through whatever comes next. Your body is great. 💖

To Sarah, it is unnecessary for people to have before and after thinspiration content (content geared toward inspiring individuals to be thin) on social media. She describes this content as

“Bullshit” and “exhausting,” as it only propagates an ideal image of the body that may be unattainable for some people. Her posts serve as a direct counterargument toward any content that indicates the need for individuals to fit into certain body categories to be considered as beautiful.

Sarah again advocates for acceptance of mothers’ post-partum bodies, compares having stretch marks to the power the body has to stretch without breaking and expresses gratitude for them in her post below:

It’s 10:48 pm and this is likely algorithmically the worst time to post. Alas, sometimes we just need to breathe and write when we have the bandwidth to do so. It’s been a remarkable journey. And I think we sometimes get so stuck in what’s next we don’t take enough pause to see how far we’ve come. I sobbed at my first stretch mark. I bought the creams; I did everything I was “supposed” to. I hid them and had them blurred from maternity photos. I cursed the genetics that gave them to me. That’s where we started. And now? Oh, now...I feel nothing except gratitude for stretch marks. They did everything they were supposed to. I show them and showcase them in photos. I think about the amazing reality that I share marks just like the women of my family before me. This weakness I felt cursed me. Was actually my body showing me its power Not weakness of the skin. But the power of the body
To stretch
Without breaking.
I’ll never get over that.
I’ll never not be grateful for that.
That’s what’s next.

In her poetic post, Sarah describes the feeling of the devastation she felt at the realization of the changes in her body during her pregnancy. Her statement, “I sobbed at my first stretch mark. I bought the creams; I did everything I was ‘supposed’ to. I hid them and had them blurred from maternity photos. I cursed the genetics that gave them to me,” reveals the distress she, and by extension, others, go through when their body changes in a way that does not suit the normative descriptions of beauty that society depicts. She makes this statement, not to show regret, but to show that positive body image is a gradual process and is achieved through an everyday validation of one’s body parts. This assertion is evident in her concluding words about how she felt nothing but gratitude for her stretch marks and her commendation of her body for its power to stretch without breaking. Her post therefore serves to normalize changes in an individual's body over time and show how these changes, which are inevitable for some individuals, should not be seen as unattractive.

Diet/exercise culture

Diet and exercise information flood social media and have been linked to fitspiration or thinspiration content. According to Cohen (2019), this content heavily portrays idealized bodies to motivate people to adopt certain exercise or dieting behaviors that will enable them to look “better.” Body-positive advocates vehemently challenge this content on social media, by presenting counterarguments on the detrimental effects of adopting diet and exercise advice on the internet. Most of the advocates showed an acceptance of exercise that a person feels comfortable engaging in and a detest for strict and/or restrictive exercises or diets. A notable reason for these oppositions is the fact that diet and extensive exercise culture affirm normative ideologies that people with bigger bodies need to be a certain, lesser, weight to be happy. Another argument against diet culture is that it could be detrimental to one’s mental health to be

restricted to only certain foods and to engage in exercises that bring pain to the body. To body-positive influencers, putting oneself through pain to attain a specific body size does not show self-compassion. Alexis shares her sentiments on diet culture below:

I often hear from folks who say that they aren't restricting because they allow "all foods in moderation." They may feel like mindful eating or intuitive eating doesn't work for them because they still feel out of control with those foods even though they "aren't restricting." But when you tell yourself it's okay to eat a certain food as long as you don't eat "too much" of it or only eat it on a certain day of the week that is your "cheat day" or at specific times of day, that can be a form of restriction. It creates a restrictive mindset which often leads us to feel out of control around those foods! For example, if we tell ourselves, it's okay to eat ice cream, as long as we only have one scoop, we can feel like we've blown it, say "screw it," and feel out of control if we eat more than that one scoop. Similarly, if we allow ourselves to eat chips as long as we only eat 5 of them, we can find ourselves looping into a narrative that we can't be trusted around chips and shouldn't keep them in the house if we have that 6th chip and beyond.

In the above example, Alexis rejects the idea of dieting or eating in moderation and only at specific times of the day, stating that it is restricting, which only increases people's cravings for the foods they are rejecting. Below, she recommends the human body's "innate regulation system" against "food rules" and suggests that individuals should allow their bodies to guide their diet.

Food rules are no match for our body's innate appetite regulation system, developed through evolution to keep us alive. True mindful eating is about letting your body guide your eating, not making rules to control how much or when you are allowed certain

foods. Moving away from an “all foods fit in moderation” mentality doesn’t mean that we have to eat in ways that don’t feel good to us or ignore medical conditions that require dietary regulations. It just means that we trust our body to guide what and how much we are eating without imposing our rules on what “moderation” should look like.

She, however, acknowledges that one’s feelings should guide their eating. Thus, people should eat what feels good to them. She also indicates that she is not against the restrictions required due to medical conditions. In another post, Alexis strongly recommends engaging in activities that people feel comfortable engaging in. She insists that people should not necessarily go through pain to gain; indeed, some people may only be feeling the pain and not gaining anything in return as there is nothing to change about their bodies. Instead, body-positive advocates recommend embodying oneself and self-compassion. Below is an example of Alexis’ post which, vehemently discusses the idea of dropping fitness or diet ideas if they do not align with viewers’ feelings:

It doesn’t matter what workout class you signed up for — if you’re not feeling it, you can end at any time!! Diet and fitness culture teaches us that we need to ignore our body cues and push ourselves. After all, “no pain, no gain,” right? 😊 But that’s the opposite of being embodied and having compassion for ourselves. We get to stop working out at any time, as well as modify workouts so they work best for our unique bodies and skip or add in movement as feels right!

Alexis further substantiates her initial ideas in another post which focuses on debunking the need for a lifestyle change to achieve weight loss. She again explains that any form of restriction to one’s eating to determine one’s health or fitness level is dieting and not a lifestyle change. The example below from Alexis reveals sentiments about the above discussion:

I hear so many people say they don't diet, it's a lifestyle change, or a "weight loss journey" or whatever. But the simple fact is that if you are restricting what you are eating with the intention of shrinking your body and making lists of foods that are allowed or prohibited or judging foods as "good" and "bad" and judging yourself by extension of what you are eating then you likely are in fact dieting. In my opinion, "dieting" is much more about a frame of mind than even what you are eating. It makes us feel like we are constantly vacillating between feeling totally in control and then feeling completely out of control. Dieting (and diet mentality) can lead us down the path of disordered eating, eating disorders, body image dissatisfaction, weight cycling, and just feeling overall crappy.

In the above post, Alexis again describes diet mentality as a cause of disordered eating, and by extension, several eating disorders as well as body dissatisfaction. This statement links body positivity to health: people who can follow body-positive influencers' advice to achieve an elevated level of positive body image may be saved from complicated mental health problems related to disordered eating and low body esteem. Aside from the psychological effects of dieting, body-positive influencers express a distaste for the dieting industry because of its investment in corrupting the mindsets of people about their weight for profits:

The diet industry is billions of dollars invested in having us believe that we are flawed and in need of fixing. Systems of oppression have us believe that our value is tied to our appearance. Guess who profits from that? 🤔

The example above suggests that the dieting industry only takes advantage of fatphobia to earn its profits. Influencer, Alexis, describes the dieting system as a system of oppression, which means that, through its advocacy, the dieting industry inflicts unmerited or unwarranted pain on

its consumers, leaving them with psychological complications. In another example, below, Megan Jayne Crabbe compares diet culture to Satan, stating that, “not in this house, Satan” and captioned her second message “not today Satan,” indicating that diet culture can be metaphorically compared with an extreme evil (i.e., Satan):

Just in case diet culture still hasn't got the message 🙄👊... Here's to another year of rejecting the narrative that changing our bodies should be our main goal in life, not in this house, Satan. 💜 [#TeamPixel](#)

You've pissed me off for the last time DC! 🤨👊 No, I do not need to start working on my summer body, not this season, not any season. Bye bitch.

👩 [#DietCultureDropout](#) [#NotTodaySatan](#) [#IntuitiveEating](#) [#EatingDisorderRecovery](#) [#MeVsMe](#)

In the above post, Megan uses the hashtag, “#NotTodaySatan” referring to diet culture as an extreme evil. She rejects the idea of eating in moderation to obtain a “summer body” and registers her anger at “DC” (Diet culture) by calling diet culture “bitch.” This shows her displeasure for self-inflicted dietary restrictions and their effects on mental health.

Fatphobic Comments and Advice

Social media sites such as Instagram serve as double-edged swords, providing the opportunity for people to organize positive advocacy while also allowing other users to express their dissent over the same social issues (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Through posts on Instagram, people have access to register their discontent with fatphobic comments and express satisfaction with the condition of their bodies. Many posts on Instagram from BoPo influencers tend to advocate against comments that frame fatness as unhealthy. The influencers’ arguments center around the idea that even though bodies change, people do not need to be obsessed about

losing weight. Instead, people should be happy with the state of their bodies at every point in their lives. One influencer calls this comfort with fatness, being “embodied,” insinuating an acceptance of oneself. The excerpts below represent influencers’ sentiments about fatphobic comments. For example, in response to an art piece, NAME, an influencer, states that people do not need to focus on losing weight:

We love this reminder from [@art.brat.comics](#) that while bodies change throughout our lives, we do not need to focus on losing weight in 2023 or ever! Let’s spend our energy on being embodied instead of spending our time fighting our bodies.

In a second example, Alexis reveals resentment for the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines which associate obesity with depression. She explains that obesity does not cause depression. Instead, fatphobic comments and weight stigma toward people who are considered obese are the main causes of depression among children:

The American Academy of Pediatrics [@ameracadpeds](#) guidelines say that ob*sity is associated with increased risk of depression and that’s a reason we need to intervene “early and aggressively” with children. But it’s not ob*sity that is the problem, it’s our country’s “war on ob*sity” which causes massive weight bias, fatphobia, bullying and tormenting of fat people, etc...which *shocker, * is linked with depression. So instead of recognizing the harms that anti-fat sentiment causes, they blame fatness itself. Rather than working to eradicate weight stigma and make the world a safer place for fat kids to exist, they recommend exposing kids as young as two years old to weight loss interventions known to increase the risk of weight cycling, body image dissatisfaction, and lifelong cycles of eating disorders and disordered eating; recommend starting kids as young as 12 on weight loss medications that they are expected to stay on for the rest of

their lives when there is zero research on the long term risks and outcomes of these medications; and refer kids as young as 13 for bariatric surgery which leads to lifelong nutritional deficiencies, risk of complications (including death) and serious psychological risks including substance dependency and suicide. It's the cycle that never seems to stop repeating itself! 🙄

In the above example, the influencer, Alexis, rejects weight loss intervention recommendations for kids on grounds that these interventions foster weight stigma, which results in fatphobia, bullying and oppression of fatness and may not be well-researched. She cites body image dissatisfaction, among other mental health issues, as reasons for advocating against weight loss medications for kids. Her mention of national health institutions reveals how much she has been following these organizations' activities in relation to her advocacy. She continues:

If there's one thing that the eating disorder treatment community should be able to come together against, it's these awful AAP [@ameracadpeds](#) guidelines recommending “lifestyle interventions” for kids 2 and up, weight loss medications for kids 12 and up, and bariatric surgery for teens 13 and up. And yet, [@neda](#) issued a “statement” that was so vague it could be construed as supporting the guidelines and is working with the AAP to actually implement them! NEDA is an organization that has repeatedly dismissed the voices of fat, BIPOC, queer, and other marginalized folks so call me pessimistic but I'm thinking a NEDA-AAP collaboration is likely to do more harm than good.

And other organizations, notably IAEDP Foundation, have been completely silent about their stance. But given the [@iaedpfoundation](#) history of fatphobia and recent communications on email and social media sharing pro-bariatric surgery resources, their silence speaks volumes. Not only has [@iaedpfoundation](#) refused to issue a statement—

now over a month since the AAP guidelines were released and long after most other ED organizations issued statements speaking out against the guidelines—but IAEDP Foundation has also made their local IEADP chapters delete statements and social media posts that opposed the guidelines, in effect silencing local chapters of iaedp from voicing opposition. As Dr. Deb Burgard has said, we can't prevent eating disorders until we make it safe for fat people to exist in the world. These AAP guidelines make the world exponentially more dangerous for fat kids, will lead to deaths and lifelong medical and psychological issues, and increase the risk of eating disorders. The fact that any ED organizations could support them and not actively work to oppose them is frankly unconscionable.

Alexis' post calls out the IEADP Foundation guidelines that outline treatment and medication options for child obesity. She asserts that the organization has a record of being fatphobic and is silencing its local chapters from opposing its new child obesity treatment and medications guidelines. To her, these guidelines would only worsen obese children's mental health. She states specifically that they would make the world "dangerous" for fat/obese children and would lead to several psychological problems including worsened eating disorders and suicide.

Commodification of Bodies

In their advocacy, body-positive influencers introduce self-help products that they promote as helpful to other people aiming to have a positive body image. Some of these products include clothing recommendations, books, and sex toys. These recommendations are mostly geared toward advertising a product that (a) the influencer produces themselves as part of their advocacy or (b) belongs to other marketing companies. Examples of such messages include Alexis Conason's Instagram post which advertises another body-positive advocate's book titled

The Body Liberation Project. She states that the book is geared toward enlightening readers on the intersections between diet culture and racism. An important part of these recommendations is that they come with personal calls to action which direct the viewer of the post to where exactly to get the advertised products if they wanted to. This suggests that these influencers may be intentionally directing their audience's attention to their own products or other advertised products for profit. For example, Alexis Connason posted:

Also, [@iamchrissyking](#)'s book "The Body Liberation Project" is available for preorder! It's all about the intersection of diet culture and racism and from what we've been hearing, it's amazing! We can't wait to read it!

In the above example, Alexis advertises a book written by another individual, with the title *The body liberation project*, which suggests that the book is meant to enhance body liberation – one of the main advocacies of the body positive movement. Thus, the influencer, Alexis, is using her platform to suggest products to subscribers that may be helpful to them but would bring profit to the writer. In this case, she has not read the book, but may have been drawn to the title of the book since it references her advocacy. In another post, Alexis advertises her coaching group:

If you are ready to move away from diet culture and regain a sense of trust in your body, then check out my new coaching program! The Anti-Diet Plan Foundations Group Coaching program teaches the research-proven tools of mindful eating from a weight-inclusive perspective in a small group setting with lots of community support and guidance from me, a licensed psychologist with over a decade of experience working with people struggling with issues around food and body image. DM me to see if this program could be a good fit for you or apply now at www.theantidietplan.com/group-coaching.

In a different post, Elizabeth advertises a vibrator. She indicates that people should save money on getting one for the purposes of stress relief and self-love:

YES, this is another chance to snag a FREE VIBRATOR (and definitely save some money on one) because, at this time of year, we could all use a little stress relief and SELF-LOVE. 💖✨

She advertises the vibrator using words such self-love and stress relief, indicating that these should be the basis for buying the vibrator. She is therefore capitalizing on the tenets of body positivity to sell products.

Similarly, Megan advertises a GoogleUK Pixel 7 Pro for its authenticity in showing her real or original skin color. She states that the camera does not blur her skin tone, which insinuates that the camera is body-positive and thus would be useful for people interested in advocating for positive body image:

Had a blast doing this shoot with [@alex_cameron](#) and can't believe these are the results just shooting with my [@googleuk](#) Pixel 7 Pro 🤩 I especially appreciate the way Real Tone shows my *actual* skin without whitewashing or blurring over the details! ✨

In her example, she mentions (using a hyperlink) the company and product's name, indicating that she would like her audience to refer to the product and company for the same product if they wanted to purchase the items.

In another post, Stephanie advertises a lingerie set “gift” she received from a plus size lingerie retailer. She captions the post:

Getting into the Valentine's spirit with these gorgeous lingerie sets kindly gifted to me by [@curvykate](#) 😍❤️❤️

Stephanie does not state that other people should also purchase the product. Instead, she labels the product as “gorgeous” and links the retailer to the post. Thus, the commodification of the BoPo movement is not necessarily explicit, it is disguised as simple posts or in the form of product and brand placement. In the next section, I examine how body positive advocates discuss disparities relating to health, gender, and fashion.

Health and Fashion Disparities

A significant aspect of body-positive advocacy on Instagram are discourses geared toward exposing health disparities against fat people and unveiling other disparities that exist for minority groups that belong to the BoPo community. Posts from influencers like @Lovedisfigure, which read “Health at Every Size care is lifesaving. Weight stigma is deadly,” insinuate that people who have bigger bodies face stigmatization, which could be life-threatening. The comment thus creates awareness of the dilemma fat people face to ensure that stigma is reduced. To further substantiate this point, in the exemplars below, body-positive influencers show the sentiments about health disparities against fat people. For example, Alexis states:

A 2015 research study found that people who experienced weight-based discrimination were nearly 60% more likely to die during a 9-year study observation period than peers who did not experience weight-based discrimination. This association was not explained by BMI, disease burden, subjective health, depressive symptoms, smoking history, or physical activity. People of higher weights are less likely to have regular age-appropriate cancer screenings due to weight stigma. Doctors are more reluctant to perform procedures like pelvic exams on larger-bodied patients. Medical professionals often lack the equipment necessary to adequately examine, screen, and diagnose fat patients. For

example, many diagnostic imaging facilities do not have MRI scanners that accommodate larger bodies.

In the above example, influencer Alexis supports claims that people with larger bodies experience weight-based discrimination die earlier because of some mental health problem they may experience. Aside from this, the influencer intimates that doctors hesitate to conduct certain medical procedures such as pelvic exams on patients in larger bodies. This assertion indicates that for some reason, health professionals discriminate against their fat patients. The assertions, therefore, create awareness about the implicit disparities between fat people or that people with alternative bodies face in their daily lives and illustrate how these disparities affect mental health.

In another example, Stephanie Yeboah expresses how workers at a hospital ignore and wrongly judge her, possibly because she is fat and Black, until her pain worsens. She recounts how the doctor tells her to lose weight and that she “probably” has weight-related Fibromyalgia and prescribes only painkillers without any further examination. She hires a Black gynecologist who pays more attention to her and tells her that her fibroids are growing, hence her pain. Her narrative shows that disparities in hospitals are not only against fat people, but also against other minority groups. Body positive influencers belong to varied minority groups and thus recognize their intersectional status and not only advocate for the normalization of their body types but also for their minority groups. Stephanie’s post reads:

sigh One of the things that really grinds my gears when it comes to existing in this body, is the frequent exposure to medical fatphobia and misogynoir. Six years ago, I went to A&E with severe stomach pains and bleeding- I genuinely thought I was going to pass away. My pain was ignored by the nursing staff and after 4 hours, I was given

paracetamol for the pain after overhearing a white nurse telling another nurse that “she can’t be in as much pain as she’s making out.” After they saw me bleeding onto the floor from the bed and losing consciousness, they started to move, and eventually it turned out that I had fibroids, and that one of them had ruptured - hence the pain. After years of managing them via my contraceptive implant, things were looking good, until I started to get the same pains and discomfort six months ago. Fearing the worst, I went to the hospital AND my GP, and without them sending me away for tests, told me to “just lose weight” and that I “probably have weight-related Fibromyalgia, and to just take paracetamol for the pain.” Having my pain not being taken seriously left me furious, and disregarding my symptoms as being caused by my weight was the last straw for me. As much as I LOVE the NHS, the treatment I had been receiving was abysmal, which basically informed my decision to go Private and in turn, have a Black gynecologist who told me after testing, that more fibroids had been growing inside me, causing the pain.

In the same post, Stephanie continues that fat and Black individuals face gross disregard in hospital as medical practitioners take them for granted, which leads to death in some cases. She further associates these biases with a lack of respect for people belonging to minority groups, stating:

...but what I cannot fathom is the sheer disregard and dehumanisation of fat bodies and Black pain in the medical industry. Fat people die as a result of doctors overlooking crucial chronic symptoms and blaming it on our weight instead. Black women die due to our pain not being taken seriously, resulting in neglect and the withdrawal of pain medication/relief. Where is our respect? Are we not worthy of basic medical care? The

industry needs immediate reform: the lives of oppressed bodies & Black bodies should not be an afterthought.

In the above post, Stephanie indicates that the overlooking of severe health symptoms of Black people and people in “oppressed” bodies and the denial of adequate healthcare for these people needs “immediate reform.” To her, people in non-normative and marginalized body types and races should be treated as equally as every other person. Their reception of quality medical care should not be a reconsideration or an “afterthought.”


Body-positive influencers also discuss disparities relating to body size in terms of fashion. In doing this, the influencers point out the difficulties fat people face when trying to purchase clothes, especially online. They argue that brands do not have a universal size that individuals whose bodies change sometimes can fit into. Elizabeth discusses this issue in a lengthy post below:

It called NUANCE ✨✨✨ Being lectured about eco-fabrics and buying “better” like it’s easy to confidently shop online, like my size doesn’t shift DRASTICALLY from brand to brand, like my thighs won’t destroy linen, like non-stretch-fabrics-will-work (hah), and like my clothing isn’t going to be judged more harshly than my straight size friends even if I’m wearing the same damn thing....AND THAT’S BEFORE we even think about talking price, while in the same breath knowing fat people are paid less for the same job (AND JUST FOR FUN fat employment is rarely protected under discrimination laws). I’M NOT SAYING THAT MEANS WE CAN FULLY OPT-OUT. There is room for EVERYONE. But it does mean the conversation needs to be different. There needs to be NUANCE, and that repeating the same ethical fashion soundbites isn’t the answer. Watching stylists (or really anyone) act like plus size people “simply need to learn style

rules” to be fashionable. Like the problem is us and on us to fix, without a second thought to how the complete disparity in size availability is the driving force behind most plus size people’s wardrobe.

In the post, Elizabeth points out that fat people are unable to wear certain clothes such as eco fabrics which are said to be environmentally friendly because of the non-stretch features. She states that fat individuals are not unfashionable as society projects, but rather disparities in size availability are the major causes of fat individuals’ inability to wear the latest fashion trends.

In a different post, Elizabeth assertively asks critics to “shut up” if a fat person does not meet dress code standards as fat people have a different shopping experience from others. She states that fat individuals only wear what is made available to them and the disparities are more pronounced as one’s size increases. Her post encourages fat individuals to value presence over dressing:

So, I am dragging this over from  as a reminder that no, fat people aren't less stylish than thin people, we just have less selection. We are doing the most with the least available to us, and that that struggle magnifies exponentially when you wear above a 3X or a size 22. My sense of style hasn't drastically changed over the last 4 years, my options have. You can compliment someone's current outfit without comparing it to something else they wore. You can shut your mouth if a plus size person isn't wearing something to dress code or theme (especially this Holiday season). Our shopping experience is not yours, if you ask for a costume / dress code with less than a week's notice, it is absolutely not happening. (Truly, I believe dress codes suck. Stop asking people to buy new clothes so you can take a single theme group photo, it's the worst.) And if you're plus and holiday

dressing makes you want to cry (RELATABLE), try to remember your presence matters most, not the clothes you're wearing. And the people that matter, will get that.

Elizabeth asks critics to avoid complimenting people's outfits based on their previous outfits. She identifies with the fashion struggles of fat people and encourages other fat people to ignore dress codes. In the next section, I discuss selected visuals of influencers to elaborate of the visual frames derived from the analyses.

Visual Frames

In this section, I discuss the visual frames that emanate from the body-positive posts selected for analysis in this study. I utilized the process of ethnographic visual analysis to derive these frames from visuals. Some of these frames include the self-assertion or exposure of body parts as a form of resistance, rejection of normative ideologies about beauty, diet, exercise, fatness, and fashion and finally, the commodification of body positivity. In what follows, I elaborate on each visual frame using selected visuals from posts as examples. I use the captions of the posts to substantiate the interpretations of the posts and to show the congruence between visual and verbal messages (Price, 2016).

Self-Assertion via exposure of Body Parts as Body-Positive Advocacy

Self-assertion is a dominant feature of body-positive posts. Self-assertion is evident in influencers' confident and forceful expression or promotion of themselves, their views, or desires. In the visuals of body-positive posts, influencers expose aspects of their bodies that would normally have been considered flawed based on traditional beauty standards to counter these ideologies. Body-positive influencers expose these parts of their bodies to the world to show comfort, acceptance, and love for their bodies, which adds to their resistance against the stigmatization of people with bodies that society traditionally does not consider beautiful.



Figure 1: Lizzo laying down in a pool

In the above visual, the influencer, Lizzo, is pictured lying stomach down in a pool of water. She is wearing an orange bikini and sunglasses. The picture is taken from an angle that places emphasis on her upper thighs and buttocks. The reason for her choice of angle can be said to be that she wants to highlight the fullness of her backside and her skin. Her choice of bikini matches clothing traditionally worn by individuals with normative bodies. Thus, her wearing of the bikini and the camera angle point to the fact that she wants to expose parts of her body that might be considered fat, and how fat individuals can also do anything they would like to do with their bodies. Lizzo captioned this image “it’s giving fat on vacation,” insinuating that it is a lovely thing or an admirable thing to be fat while on vacation. Her show of her backside, thus, can be said to be meant to solidify her belief that fat is admirable.

This example expounds the idea that body positive influencers as part of the advocacy, assert themselves on the same level as people with normative body types to normalize their bodies and foster acceptance. They also do this to show their comfort with their body parts, which indicates that they do not only hold the title of body-positive influencers but are indeed people who have positive body image as Wood-Barcalow (2010) posits. The example below further solidifies this point. In the image, influencer Sarah Nicole Landry is pictured in a confident pose wearing a white shirt and black bikini bottoms. She is seen using her hands to pull up the shirt to reveal her post-partum stretch marks. She stares directly at the camera with her pinky finger on her lips. When examined structurally, the lighting, posture, fashion and framing of the image plays of the genre of classic photography, and the emerging style of contemporary influencers, further substantiating the above point.

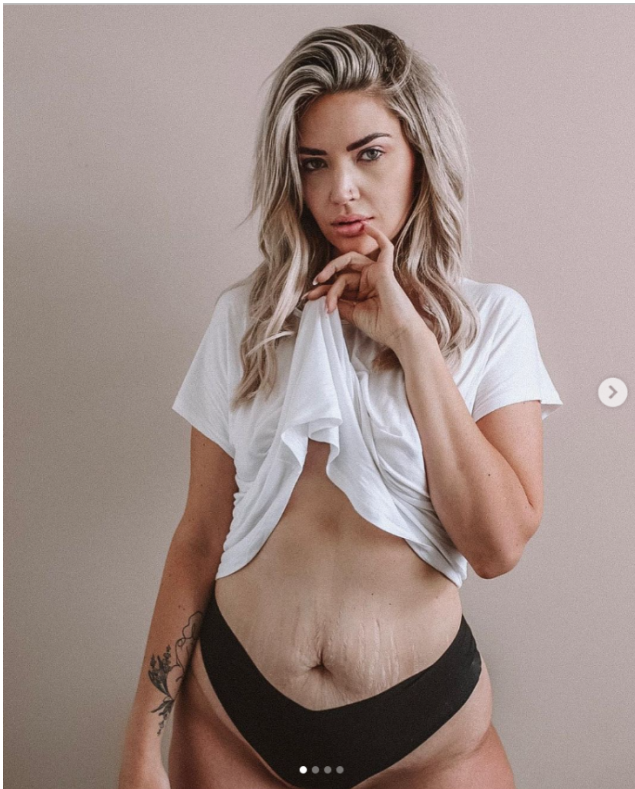


Figure 2: Image of Sarah revealing her stretch marks

In the caption for this post, Sarah discusses how unaware she was of the effects of aiming for an ideal that was not achievable. She states that “I wish there was a warning,” referring to how she grew up knowing the risks of engaging several behaviors such as taking drugs and cigarettes without knowing that dieting was one of the behaviors that could lead to her struggle with eating disorders. She states that “

It seemed like health. It seemed like wellness. It seemed like self-love.

It seemed... like my ticket to happiness.

When my bones started to show I felt validated. The smaller I got the more I had to document it. My photos were not moments of pride. They were moments of proof. That I was thin.

Her comments imply that even though she had no awareness about the effects on dieting on mental health, she is aware of these effects now and is advocating through her visual and verbal messages for other people to be aware of the risks of dieting. Her caption, thus, explains her posture in the accompanying image. In the same posts, she continues that;

Even with a 95% failure rate, the majority of people who diet don't experience a large negative long term impact, that I know of. Yet the National Eating Disorders Association reports that 35% of “normal dieters” progress to pathological dieting and that 20-25% of those individuals develop eating disorders. It is far too common that eating disorders start off as dieting. It is a risk. And I just wish there'd been a warning.

I just wish we viewed eating disorders and disordered eating with the same seriousness as we do nicotine, drugs, gambling, alcohol.

I just wish I knew the risks

Given her knowledge of the impact of dieting, her earlier comment about wishing she had known the risks of growing thinner is supported. The image therefore depicts her as unashamed about her body. Her pose and the lifting up of her shirt shows that she is unconcerned about who sees what society would typically consider as flaws on her body, which reveals her efforts to resist ideologies linked to body shaming. Below in Figure 3 is a picture of Elizabeth.

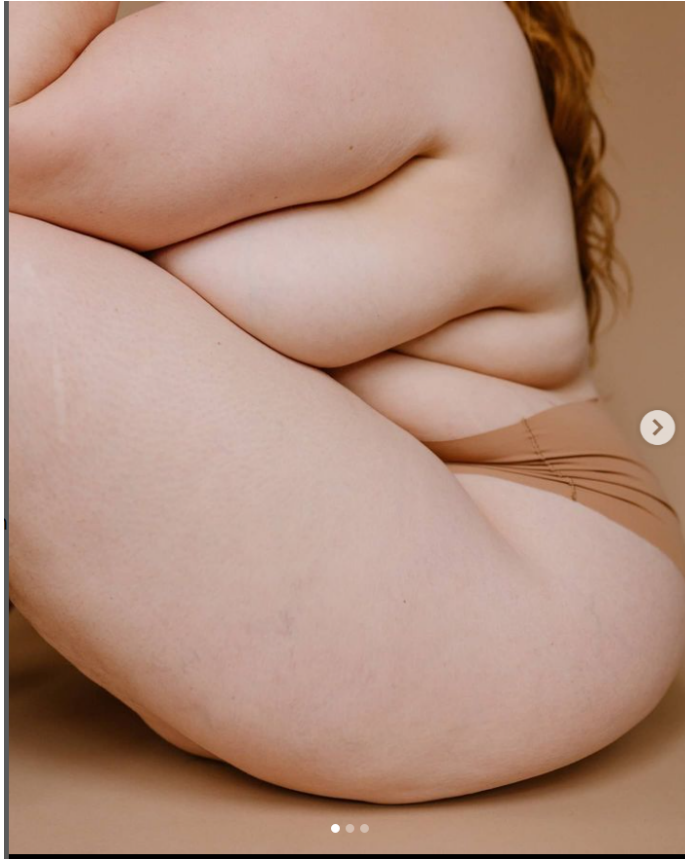


Figure 3: Image of Elizabeth Marrielle

In figure 3, the camera captures Elizabeth's body from a sideways view. She is seated wearing only bikini bottoms. It can be inferred from the pose that she wants to reveal the folds on her side and the fatness of her arms and thighs. This posture indicates a complete acceptance of her body regardless of what other people may think. Her posture uses exposure of her body parts as resistance to fatphobia. Her post also provides inspiration for other people with similar

bodies to practice body liberation and acceptance. The caption of her post reads, “The logic of using self-care as a step towards self-love is rather simple, if I invest time in caring for my body, the cascading rolls that make up my torso, if I am spoiling it with my attention and active care, it becomes harder and harder to question it's worthiness.” This assertion reveals that she is aware that others may question the worthiness of her body, but her picture is to show that the body is well taken care of so that people find it difficult to question its worthiness. She further asks the question, “HOW CAN I HATE SOMETHING I AM WORKING SO HARD TO CARE FOR?” which indicates that her exposure of her body is to show that she cares for and loves it. She will therefore not “hate” her body, in the name of following beauty or health standards when it is already well cared for.

Rejection of Normative Ideologies

Body-positive influencers use visuals to debunk inconsistent ideologies. Some of these visuals include text images, videos, or images of influencers in a position or doing an action, role-playing videos (especially for Megan Jayne Crabbe), and others that use photo comparisons to debunk ideologies that are inconsistent with their advocacy. The visuals serve to reject normative ideologies about beauty, body size and fashion, and health, as discussed in the verbal analysis. Below, I elaborate on the evidence of rejection of social norms in body-positive visuals using selected images from the sample.



Figure 4: Image of Disney Princess and Sarah with child in arms

Diet

In figure 4, influencer Sarah Nicole Landry is pictured on the right holding her baby in her left arm. She is wearing a black bikini set, which reveals stretch marks on her stomach. She has her phone in her right hands and is presumably taking a picture of herself and her baby. The picture on the left is an animated version/replica of Sarah Nicole's picture with her baby.

However, the woman in the animated picture seems to be a Disney princess – perhaps Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* – with stretch marks. This picture challenges normative ideologies on beauty, especially because it alludes to Disney, which is traditionally known to portray idealized body sizes in its films. Thus, for a Disney princess to be portrayed as having stretch marks reverses the traditional narrative of beauty and embraces reality, which is that mothers may develop stretch marks from carrying their children. The image therefore serves to normalize reality. Similarly, Figure 5 also illustrates a normalization of reality:



Figure 5: Alexa standing in front of a donut shop

Figure 5 is a picture of Alexis Connason, who runs the page, the Antidietplan on Instagram. She is standing in front of a donut shop and has her back turned to the camera. Inscribed on her sweater are the words, “I don’t care about your diet.” In figure 6 below, she is seen in another picture, holding two donuts- one close to her mouth. These pictures represent her main advocacy, which is against dieting. She is seen to not only be purchasing carbohydrates and sugar but also is holding these foods, which would typically be banned in diets, to her mouth, showing that she is about to eat them. The donut shop imagery serves as a form of revolt against dieting as inscribed on her shirt. She provides proof from her pose in the pictures that she truly does not care about dieting.



Figure 6: Image of Alexa holding donuts

Alexis, holding a donut in each hand, with a broad smile on her face. On her shirt is the inscription, “I don’t care about your diet,” which could mean that she does not care about the diet industry in general or that she does not care about others’ diet, and so others’ should not care about what she is eating either.

Fatness



Figure 7: Tattooed image of a fat woman

It is a widespread practice for individuals to make resolutions for every new year. Maintaining weight or losing weight is one of the key new year's resolutions of fitspiration and thinspiration advocates. Alexis posted Figure 7 above at the beginning of 2023 to communicate the message that fat individuals will not make losing weight a goal in 2023. In the picture is a fat woman in a red swimsuit. Tattooed on the skin of her right hand is the statement "sry not sry," which means that she is not apologizing for staying fat in 2023. On her right thigh are the words, "RIP DIET CULTURE," engraved on a grave. Beside this is a knife that has what looks like blood on it. The word BABE and heart and food symbols are tattooed all over the skin of the individual. The image in its totality communicates an advocacy of body positivity, which

includes body autonomy, self-love, rejection of diet and exercise culture, and acceptance of all body types and sizes. For instance, the heart symbols indicate a love for one's body. The tombstone with the words "RIP DIET CULTURE" symbolizes the death of dieting and other messages that foster weight stigma and negative body image. The images on the person's skin, in their entirety, symbolize body autonomy in that people have control of their own bodies and should decide what they eat and what goes onto or into their bodies. Figure 7 reiterates these messages:

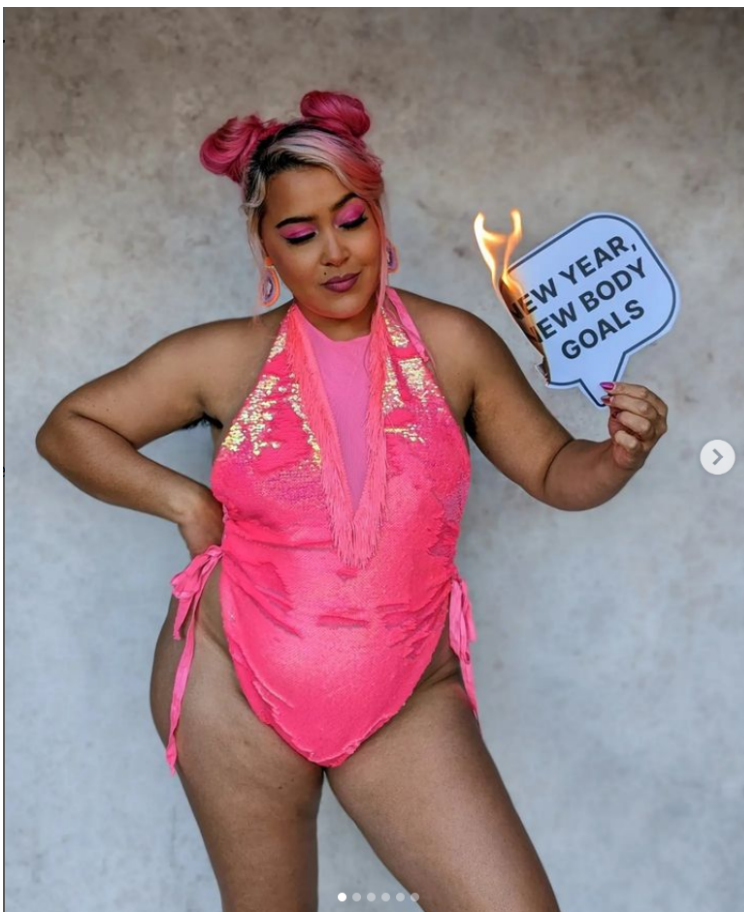


Figure 8: Image of Megan

Figure 8 shows Megan Jayne Crabbe in a bright pink bikini holding an actively burning card that reads: New Year, New body goals. She is looking at the card and smiling to herself in a pose. Evidently, the photo has not been heavily edited. Thus, her original skin color, stretch

marks, thigh dimples, and armpit hair can easily be seen in the image. The image symbolizes Crabbe's detest for diet culture as she is watching the words on the image burn out without any remorse. This image shows an advocacy against diet, exercise culture, and fatphobia. Other influencers have expanded upon this advocacy by taking intersectional approaches (Johanson, 2020), as in the Figure 9 image of Lizzo:

Intersectional Discourse



Figure 9

Figure 9: Image of Lizzo in an American Flag pattern top

Posts by Black body-positive influencers, mainly those by Lizzo, Stephanie, and Jessamyn, point to their intersectional statuses as Black, female, and fat women and therefore seek to challenge not only health disparities against fat people but general gender and racial

disparities. In figure 9 above, Lizzo poses wearing an American flag-patterned top. The picture does not appear to be heavily edited, even though she is wearing make-up. Her left hand is touching her hair while she stares with a straight-faced and confident look at the camera. Her wearing of the American flag patterned top symbolizes her ownership of her country. Given the history of racism in the U.S, the image does not only show fat liberation, but also Black liberation. To support the picture, Lizzo captions figure 9 as “Auntie Sam realness - RECLAIMING MY TIME, MY COUNTRY, MY RIGHTS” indicating the assumption of an identity of which she may have been deprived. In another post of Lizzo wearing the same outfit, she states,

“This is my 3rd time voting in my whole life. When you think about how few and far in between that is it really puts things into perspective! I believe this is the beginning of making voting ACCESSIBLE and FAIR so that this country reflects its people... Let’s get our vote in so we can get back to the good fight for true liberty and justice for ALL. Have YOU voted yet?”

Her post reveals sentiments about voting inequalities and inaccessibility that existed in the past. It also shows her attempt to contribute to the fight for equality for all. She does not explicitly state the specific groups for which she is advocating. However, her use of words such as “accessible” and justice for all is indicative of an advocacy for historically minoritized groups.

Commodification

However, even amongst the liberatory spirit of many influencer’s posts and accounts, body commodification is alive and well in visuals as much as in verbal texts, as evidenced in the Figure 10 image of Lizzo:



"YITTY is Body autonomy.
We don't just liberate our
bodies through clothing.
We liberate bodies by
raising our voices."

LIZZO
She / Her
Singer, Songwriter,
YITTY CEO

Figure 10: Lizzo wearing a branded underwear

Scholars have found that the body-positive movement has become commodified. Commodification results from the need for influencers to recommend products that work for their bodies to subscribers who may be interested in purchasing them. In Figure 10, Lizzo is pictured wearing the “Yitty” brand. Her denim flap is open to reveal the brand name on her underwear. Inscribed on the top right corner of the post is “Yitty is body autonomy. We don’t just liberate our bodies through clothing. We liberate our bodies by raising our voices.” This statement capitalizes on body positivity to sell the influencer’s brand.

The Integration of Verbal and Visual Frames

From the analysis, it is evident that visual and verbal frames are congruent: the visual messages directly connect with the verbal messages, and each enhances the other. Both visual and verbal messages seek to communicate the core advocacy of body positivity and embodied acceptance, and both are therefore tailored to suit the advocacy. The visual messages, however, are more elaborate and eye-catching, as they portray the pictorial advocacy of the body positive movement.

The first verbal frame identified assertiveness as the language typically used in body positive posts. This frame pointedly aligns with the first visual frames, which is about visual self-assertion as a form of resistance in body positive visuals. It can therefore be concluded that assertiveness, which manifests through confident language or posture, is one of the methods through which body-positive influencers disseminate their messages. This assertiveness is geared toward strengthening the import of the message.

Second, in their verbal advocacies, body positive influencers use both validating and invalidating comments in terms of advocacy; these influencers validate their experiences and stance about their bodies while invalidating ideologies that are inconsistent with body-positivity. This frame is evident in visual imagery as body-positive influencers through their posture, poses, and creativity in visuals, validate their experiences and bodies while invalidating or rejecting any ideas that interfere with their goals (as evident in figures 1-10). Through their visual self-representation, body positivity activists are not only challenging inconsistent ideologies but also are appropriating the iconography of fashion and fitness to make divergent claims about body positivity and health.

From the above analysis, it can be inferred that verbal messages are elaborative of the visual, while visual messages present the general idea an influencer would like to tackle in a particular post. There is therefore a prominent level of congruence between verbal and visual frames of body-positive posts, which makes the combined advocacy a strong message. Indeed, body-positive influencers seem to understand that people are more drawn to the visuals of posts than their verbal messages (see Dan, 2018, for elaboration of visual versus verbal message impact). In body-positive posts, the visuals portray strong messages that are reflected in the verbal messages; thus, it is unlikely that messages would be missed. The influencers are capitalizing on the affordances of the visual platform, Instagram, to send messages that have the propensity for virality so further their activism.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed data collected from ten body-positive influencers' posts on Instagram. The first part of the chapter analyzed verbal and textual data from body-positive posts while the second part examined selected visuals in body-positive posts. In the next chapter, I will present a discussion of the findings from this chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This study examined the frames used in visual and verbal messages in body-positive posts on Instagram. I sampled posts purposively to reflect messages that discuss health, well-being, and the body. From the results, first, a central feature of body-positive posts is the use of assertiveness as a means of self-expression. Body-positive influencers use strong language in their advocacy as this helps them to debunk long-standing ideologies about the body that are in the media and that critics level at them. The use of assertiveness is significant as it impacts the persuasiveness of the body-positive advocacy. According to Searle's (1969) speech acts taxonomy, assertiveness in a message enhances the viewer's ability to form or attend to a belief. This means that body-positive influencers, due to their use of strong and assertive language can catch their audience's attention with their advocacy. This could lead to improved well-being, given that scholars such as Cohen et al. (2019) have found the key tenets of the body-positive advocacy to be aligned with Wood-Barcalow et al.'s (2010) definitions of positive body image. Moreover, assertive language ensures not only that messages reach the right audiences in a way that would impact their well-being but that the attention of the perpetrators of body standard is drawn to the advocacy of BoPo, leading to general increased awareness about the ideas that are inconsistent with the BoPo advocacy.

It is noteworthy that the use of assertiveness as a means of self-expression makes all messages in the BoPo advocacy persuasive, which means that if there are any contradictory messages in the body positive advocacy, such as those that may foster a negative self-concept including fitspiration and thinspiration content, messages from people belonging to normative body groups who also practice body positivity (Cohen et al., 2019) or messages that are only

geared toward commodifying audiences (Cwynar-Horta, 2016), these messages may negatively impact the audiences. This is because they may be emphasizing normative body ideals. This assertion confirms Cavusoglu and Demirbag-Kaplan's (2017) finding that the commodification of health messages may undermine its effectiveness in modifying health behavior. It is therefore important that media literacy guides the followership of BoPo content on social media. Aside from enhancing the persuasiveness of messages, assertiveness renders certain BoPo messages provocative, which in turn enhances the virality of the body positivity activism (Carah & Angus, 2018).

Second, body positive influencers focus on sending validating messages including messages that enhance self-compassion, body acceptance, self-esteem, body neutrality and body autonomy. BoPo influencers contextualize these messages by connecting them to their individual experiences or journey toward positive body image and using self-disclosures. In that, they admit that given the overwhelming concentration of normative beauty ideals in mainstream and social media, there may be lapses in one's journey toward self-acceptance. These self-disclosures enhance the relatability of and, by extension, the audience's trust in BoPo messages, thereby fostering a community of acceptance and support for people with underrepresented or marginalized body types. This strategy is used by most influencers, as their messages are designed to align with algorithms of the medium (in this case, Instagram) to attract attention.

While influencers' self-disclosures may be beneficial to BoPo followers through the creation of a community of support, they have the propensity to be beneficial to the individual influencers as they obtain moral support from followers, which encourages them to keep up their advocacy. This assertion is in line with Derlega et al. (1993), who contend that when people share their feelings of distress or difficult circumstances with others, it opens the opportunity for

listeners to provide helpful information, advice, and guidance on dealing with the issue. He continues that even if the problem cannot be easily solved, the listeners can still provide encouragement and motivational support. A limitation that may result from these self-disclosures is that they may open opportunities for criticisms of the influencers and the advocacy, which may negatively impact the influencers and the advocacy. More research is necessary to fully explore this.

A third finding of this study is that BoPo posts convey messages geared toward rejecting inconsistent or normative beauty ideologies through protective filtering (Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2010). These ideologies encapsulate beauty standards, health standards especially relating to dieting and exercising, and fatphobic comments or advice. In terms of beauty standards, BoPo influencers' self-expression both verbally and pictorially challenges traditional definitions of beauty. The influencers aim to saturate their platforms with images and words about the uniqueness of their individual bodies. Through the intentional saturation of these posts, influencers normalize their body types and perceived flaws, thereby enhancing body-positive advocacy. Body-positive influencers strategically use visuals to counter beauty standards through the intentional exposure of parts of their bodies that would traditionally be considered flawed. For example, BoPo influencers flaunt their bellies, stretchmarks, scars, and fat body parts using validating captions such as "all bellies are beautiful" or comparing stretchmarks with the power of the belly to stretch without breaking. Another way body-positive influencers challenge beauty standards is by creatively emulating or adopting these standards and implementing them in their posts. For instance, in the visuals of body-positive posts, most influencers wear bikinis, which is not considered traditional clothing for people in bigger bodies. This finding confirms Cwynar-Horta's (2016) assertions that body-positive imagery on Instagram typically consists of images

that conform to conventional standards of femininity, as seen in advertising and pornography, with posters using photo editing and provocative poses (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Aside from beauty standards, body-positive posts are focused on rejecting intense weight loss-focused diet and exercise ideas on social and mainstream media. Body-positive influencers categorize dietary and fitness information as restrictive and leading to an uncontrollable appetite for restricted foods. The food restriction is detrimental to mental well-being. In terms of exercise culture, body-positive influencers believe that exercises that are a discomfort to an individual are also harmful to their mental health. They therefore advocate that people allow their bodies to dictate their eating and exercising tendencies. In this regard, body-positive messages oppose fitspiration and thinspiration content, which, according to Cohen et al. (2019), cultivates mental illnesses such as eating disorders, anxiety, body dysmorphic disorders, and depression in heavy users of such content. Recent assessments of body-positive content on Instagram have revealed that while many of the images are focused on appearance and objectification, such as through posters wearing revealing clothing, this content still portrays a positive body image through diverse body sizes (Cohen et al., 2019; Lazuka et al., 2020).

In body positive influencers' attempt to expose their bodies to counter narrow conceptualizations of beauty in the media, their visual messages tend to be sexualized. This sexualization has implications for the body positive advocacy and its followers. First, the advocacy is undermined by sexualized content. According to Vendemia et al. (2021) in an experimental study, viewers of body positive posts perceived sexualized posts as attention seeking, which undermines the original goal of the advocacy. This assertion is again substantiated by the exponential level of the visual-verbal congruence body positive messages. Dan (2018) argues that highly congruent visual and verbal messages improve recall (Dan, 2018)

which means that people are more likely to recall the only the salient aspects of the messages such as how bodies are sexualized, and disregard other critical issues which may be hidden in the verbal aspects of the message. This tendency may affect the health impact of body positivity on Instagram. Conversely, sexualized content is algorithmically appealing especially for Instagram and thus, body-positive messages that are sexualized are more likely to achieve virality (Carah and Angus, 2018), which could potentially be beneficial for the influencers if they have any products, they are advertising. This algorithmic advantage also poses potential benefits to like-minded individuals who may need a community of support such as the body positivity advocacy.

Body-positive advocacy not only promotes positive body image but also capitalizes on these advocacies to advertise products to audiences. This means that, despite the positive messaging noted above, the advocacy is commodifying its audiences, which raises questions about whether the influencers' daily posts are solely meant to help others improve their body image or whether their posts are geared toward drawing attention, which enables them to have large audiences to which they sell products. If the latter is the case, this undermines their recommendations to audiences about the process to attaining a state of positive body image (Luck, 2016). Hence, one cannot tell whether what they are recommending will lead to the results that they preach since their self-portrayal may be—or seem to the audience to be—feigned. Further research may explore other approaches to collecting data from body-positive influencers to determine the intention behind the advertising as part of body positivity.

In addition, body-positive influencers belonging to other historically minoritized groups recognize their intersectional statuses and advocate for acceptance of their bodies and their minority groups. As Johannson (2020) puts it, body-positive influencers display how the interplay between race, gender, sexuality, and religion influences the forms of body shaming,

and how individuals can take pride in their bodies without apologies. They assert their body identities by contextualizing them within power relations and modes of resistance and engaging with diverse audiences through "talking back" (Hooks, 1990). Through this approach, they foreground the ways that bodies are not just gendered but also racialized, thereby underscoring the inequitable nature of body positivity as a global community of affiliation.

Implications of the Study

This study significantly advances body image and body positivity research. Body-positive scholars have been concerned with examining body-positive advocacy on Instagram and how this advocacy aligns with the definitions of positive body image. This study adds to the ongoing discussions by elaborating on the frames used in expressing body-positive advocacy messages relating to body and health. This study revealed that as part of the advocacy, body-positive influencers are challenging normative ideologies about health and fatness, beauty, and fatness, exercising or dieting and health. This study, therefore, draws a significant association between body positivity and health.

In terms of methodology, the study provides a unique perspective to studying positive-body image discourse of social media. I utilized the integrative framing approach, which means that I analyzed not only textual or verbal data, but also, visual, or pictorial data of the advocacy. Given that Instagram is a multi-modal platform, this analysis provides a holistic view of the body positive advocacy. Previous content analysis and quantitative studies have been conducted on the body-positive advocacy (Cohen et al, 2019), yet limited studies examine the frames utilized in expressing these messages both verbally and visually. This study fills this gap. The integrative framing analysis is useful for determining the congruence between visual and verbal messages.

This approach can therefore be used to examine other social media content, especially that which has implications for health, to determine what frames are used in crafting health messages and how this impacts the audience's interpretation of the messages. The integrative framing analysis has implications for the study of social media content. It brings attention to the complementary nature of social media content. Given that social media are increasingly becoming multimodal, this approach is useful for studying varying messages and groups of people on social media to holistically derive an understanding of their messages.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not free of limitations. One limitation of this study is that the study does not engage influencers nor viewers of body-positive content to obtain their interpretations of the own posts. The study interprets what has been posted specifically on Instagram by 10 body-positive influencers. More research is necessary to examine how influencers discuss or interpret their own posts or how audiences would see these messages. Their interpretations of body-positive messages would further substantiate the findings of this study. Second, this study focuses mainly on women who self-identify as fat, or as having some form of 'flaws' such as scars, stretchmarks, or Black skin, leaving out BoPo advocates belonging to other body groups such as disabled individuals and men. Third, because the study takes a qualitative approach, some might argue that the results of this study are not generalizable to their entire population of BoPo influencers. However, since qualitative studies are not meant to be generalizable, the study provides some insight into the body-positive advocacy on Instagram.

The study thoroughly explores these emergent themes in the body positive advocacy, which advances research relating to positive body image. Although studies are advancing research on positive and negative social media body image discourses (Luck, 2016), more needs

to be done. First, body image researchers have made exponential progress in associating the consumption of positive portrayals of the body with positive body image (Cohen et al, 2019). However, more studies are necessary to substantiate the effects of positive portrayals on psychological well-being. Also, more research should be conducted on the representation of men in positive body discourses on social media. Further, I suggest that scholars examine counter-advocacy against body positivity, especially fatphobic discourses and their effects on body image. This research can be done using experimental methods or by examining the experiences of body-positive advocates on counter-advocacy. These features also need more extensive examination in research studying positive social media content. Although scholars have made progress in examining the implications social media features have for body image (Backer, 2020), many other features such as the ephemerality of social media content remain underexplored. Research is necessary to explicate how these feature compound or benefit body image. Finally, it is important that the body-positive movement is examined more thoroughly for its gendered representation and its inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Conclusion

In this study, I utilized the integrative framing analysis approach to study body-positive posts on Instagram. Body-positivity advocacy counters the portrayal of normative body types through body-positive influencers' creative self-assertion. As this advocacy has been found to portray messages that align with scholarly definitions of positive body image, I conducted this qualitative study of visual and verbal body-positive messages to discover the frames used in the construction of these messages. Body-positive influencers use assertive language in their message construction to validate their bodies and marginalized body types while invalidating beauty, diet, exercise culture, and fatphobic ideals in mainstream and online media. Body-

positive influencers expose disparities against fat people and people belonging to other marginalized body types, in terms of health and fashion.

This study is important as it enlightens us about the health effects of stigmatizing people belonging to unique body groups. It also provides an avenue for people belonging to marginalized body groups to find a community of support to which they can belong on social media. Finally, the study is important as it provides recommendations for health organizations to incorporate messages into their guidelines geared toward empowering individuals to accept and love their bodies, which fosters the reduction of stigma surrounding fat or marginalized bodies.

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