One-Dimensional Body:
The Homogenized Body of Instagram's
#BodyPositive

by

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Abstract

This project examines the Body Positive movement on the social media platform Instagram. The approach is influenced by the work of Herbert Marcuse on consumer culture and media systems. and Susan Bordo and other feminist scholars on the representation and subsequent commodification of the female body. The project examines how Instagram and its algorithms affect the public representation of bodies and the Body Positive social movement. The method is a single-image analysis of Instagram posts in the #bodypositive space. In a sample of 150 posts, analysis of body types shows that bodies reflecting mainstream characteristics in terms of shape, ability and disability, and skin tone and markings comprise 60% of all posts, with marginalized bodies occupying the other 40%. It is concluded that Instagram prioritizes a certain type of body over others therefore restricting the ability of a movement such as the Body Positive movement to alter mainstream body images via this platform.

Keywords: body positive; Instagram, false needs; media system; public perception

This work is for my Mom and Dad, who have given me everything, merci.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1.   Introduction

I stopped shaving my legs when I was 17 years old. The reasons for this were not few. Mainly, I was exhausted by the process of carefully shaving, heavily moisturizing, only to wake up with bloody legs the next day because of terrible eczema. My legs, though perfectly hairless, were covered in scabs and scars from endless scratching and picking.

The winter of my 12th year of school, I decided to stop shaving for the season to give my skin a break. As months went by, I realized that my now full-length leg hairs were thin and golden, distributed protective oils, and overall, contributed to healthy glowing skin that had once been dry and raw; making it impossible to go back.

It's now been six years since the decision, and aside from a few events which required smooth skin, I've stopped removing hairs from the skin of my legs. Further, secondary reasoning has dawned on me over the years. Mainly, I've realized how much money I've saved by not buying razor blades, shaving cream, moisturizers, etc. I also like that it is one area of my life where I've been able to cut out waste comprised of thick plastic packaging and products, sharp blades, etc. With the financial and environmental benefits of this decision, paired with the multitude of social discourses, particularly in feminist communities with which I relate and agree, shaving my legs is not a habit I envision myself ever picking up again.

You can imagine the many conversations I've had my friends and romantic partners about the striking sight of my hairy legs. The most striking conversations were with my friends, more so than the people with whom I was intimate. When my girlfriends started noticing my leg hairs throughout summer, I had the same conversation multiple times:

"Why don't you shave?"

"It hurts my skin, plus, it makes more sense economically and helps the environment. And plus, when you think about it, why are men allowed to have hairy legs but not women?"

"Well… I shave because I CHOOSE to"

That's always how it ended, they all affirmed that they shave their legs because they chose to. And a faint voice — which felt more like a whisper at first, and has slowly become an incessant yell — has been adamantly asking "but is it their choice?"

Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* outlines how a society might be tightly integrated in its existing system through the consumption of mass media like television, radio, newspapers, etc. Individuals would be so assimilated to the media culture that they believe their wants and needs are truly the same as what the system is promoting to its population; Marcuse calls these false needs.[1] Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* constructs the body in its relationship to and representation in western culture. She finds that customs involving the body have tendencies of obsessions, manipulations, modifications, and extreme criticism. She argues that these behaviors are not necessarily "bad," but are rather logical symptoms that result from the system in which bodies operate. This system would commodify, homogenize, and standardize bodies and normalize these phenomena through dominant ideology mainly found in media.[2] This project will use Marcuse's theoretical framework and apply it to a modern case study: in a new framework of the body, supported by Bordo.

Mainly using Marcuse's conceptualization of false needs and Bordo's homogenization of the body in media, I pair these two theoretical frameworks and link them to a case study related to media studies. I argue that false needs surrounding the body may be created in modern media systems of social media. To find answers, I look to the Body Positive movement and its representation on Instagram. The Body Positive movement (BoPo) is a social movement championed by individual activists and advocates for representation of all bodies in media in order to foster acceptance of all body types and features. Instagram is a social media platform centered around photo sharing of one's life, body, and interests; where multiple hashtag spaces related to the Body Positive movement can be found. This project uses gender-neutral language and approaches, but Bordo, other feminist writers, and bodies found in Instagram samples

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[1] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 2nd ed. (Boston: University Press,1964), 4-5.

[2] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body,* 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

feature women's and girls' bodies, thus centering them throughout the whole. This case study gives insight into what narrative, perspective, or needs may be pushed by media systems in our day and age. This could contribute to choices individuals make about their bodies, especially aesthetic and grooming choices. This project is in the hopes of furthering the discussion of social media and the role it plays in society, particularly to the mental health and body image of young girls and women.

Chapter 2.   Democracy, the Body, and Social Media

"Liberty can be made into a powerful instrument for domination"[3] Herbert Marcuse introduces his One-Dimensional Man and Society by putting "freedom" into question. He argues that people might call themselves free, without truly understanding that that freedom may be fabricated by media systems like television, newspapers, and radio programs. In this media, and thus in the mediums through which the media content is channeled, systems of social control are embedded.

Marcuse, writing the bulk of these thoughts in the 1950s to later publish his book in 1964, probably never fathomed something as globally and culturally ground-breaking as social media, the media system of all media systems. During its development in the 2000s, social media was designed as a fun place to meet up with friends and communities a few times a week on the family computer. Now, we've seen it evolve to a quasi-necessary tool to use if one wants to stay socially and professionally relevant, and to stay informed.[4] We've seen it evolve from a fun, unregulated space to a place ruled by cookies, algorithms, with sobering talks of data gathering, information leaks, and cyberwarfare.

However, not everyone is aware or has the digital literacy to understand this tension. Andrew Feenberg, a former student of Marcuse and an expert on his work agrees that public perception of the Internet works in the media system's favor, "the rational character of technology served as its alibi, freeing it from responsibility and placing it beyond controversy."[5] Indeed, social media is often seen as an objective, neutral platform on which to communicate, but Feenberg reminds us that Marcuse contested the idea of "freedom."

> Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify

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[3] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 7.

[4] 500M daily active users were recorded on Instagram alone in January 2019. Josh Constine, "Facebook plans new products as Instagram Stories hit 500M users/day," TechCrunch, last updated January 30, 2019. https://techcrunch.com/2019/01/30/instagram-stories-500-million/.

[5] Andrew Feenberg, "Marxism and the critique of social rationality: from surplus value to the politics of technology," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34, no. 1 (2010), doi:10.1093/cje/bep006

freedom if these goods and services sustain social control over a life of toil and fear.[6]

Free choice between Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, does not take away from the fact that at least one is needed to show legitimacy to friends and potential employees. Free choice of social media platforms does not take away the fact that they are all channels that demand personal information to let a user become a member, that they keep track of clicks and user statistics, that they keep track of users' activity outside of the site to then show personalized ads that follow them from platform to platform. Further, Marcuse denounced the wrongful perception of neutrality surrounding media and technology, Feenberg describes that this neutrality "destined [technology] to serve the most powerful forces in society."[7] Indeed, questions of cyber security are becoming more prominent, breaking through to the "real" world into court cases, international relations, and more official channels, proving that social media is no longer a fun hobby to check once in a while.[8][9] Especially given the important effects of Covid-19 in this past year, social media has proven that it has become a way of life, a new normal.[10]

Social media and the Internet have culturally been established as a democratic space in the west. For the most part of the Internet, there are no monetary fees, there are no closing hours to websites, no one is forced to use certain social media platforms over others, and North American governments have a minor role in its regulation compared to other countries. While everything I've stated is technically true, there are fine print issues that lead way to loopholes in the "democratic space" of the internet. "Free" websites are usually crowded with ads, frequently use cookies and data gathering tactics, and some have even resorted to paywalls. Digital platforms have integrated everyday lifestyles; socially, it may prove difficult to navigate personal and even professional relations without having an account on some social media apps. Social media is present in real-life conversations, in ways of acquiring information, and if one

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[6] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man, 7.*

[7] Feenberg "Marxism and the critique of social rationality," 46.

[8] Reality Check Team, "Social media: How do other governments regulate it?" BBC, last updated February 12, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-47135058.

[9] Kutub Thakur, Thaier Hayajneh, and Jason Tseng, "Cyber Security in Social Media: Challenges and the Way Forward," *IT Professional* 21, no 2 (2019), doi: 10.1109/MITP.2018.2881373.

[10] Ryan Holmes, "Is COVID-19 Social Media's Levelling Up Moment?" Forbes, last updated April 24, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanholmes/2020/04/24/is-covid-19-social-medias-levelling-up-moment/#271fd07a6c60.

doesn't have a digital presence on these platforms, one might miss out on important events. While there is no hard-fast rule regarding the need for an online presence, social norms make the need to have a digitized presence difficult to ignore.

In fact, the question of needs and their relation to freedom concerns Marcuse. He asserts early on that media systems are ultimately a form of "warfare against liberation"[11] or social control. He introduces his idea of false needs, which are needs felt by individuals, but that would be artificially produced by external factors – the media. When satisfied, false needs bring temporary happiness, which will eventually be outshone by the next new thing seen in a never-ending stream of advertisements and trends. Bordo echoes his thoughts by calling for a new understanding of what social control might mean, suggesting that social control is now "a network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination."[12] I include in this network Marcuse's false needs, which he believes are what anchor the individual to their society.

Before diving further into a contemporary understanding of False Needs, I'll make some notes on language. Thinkers in this project use the framework of the larger "oppressor" and the singular "receiver;" a certain authority or hegemonic actor which exerts its power over the less powerful inferior actor. For Marcuse, this becomes the public realm of society, media systems, the "whole," whom depend on the individual's, or the "underlying population's" repression. For Bordo, it is the dominant ideology, norms, and culture, which exerts coercive power onto the subordinate marginalized bodies to conform. Ironically, in both cases, the subordinate class is more numerous in actual bodies than the ruling class.

So, False Needs (which I will capitalize from now on to indicate the importance of this concept to this paper) are an important key for Marcuse and will prove indispensable to this paper as well. Marcuse asserts that False Needs are outside the individual's control, and instead fabricated by external actors. This rings true in 2020 as we now have targeted ads and social feeds based on the platform's algorithm and our past activity within it. Ultimately, these needs unite the multiple singular individuals into a

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[11] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man, 4.*

[12] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body,* 167.

general "underlying population." Marcuse identifies material goods and commodities as the main manifestation of these Needs, but they can also be interpreted as the simple human need to belong. They are the need "to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate."[13] The cycle of chasing the Needs, satisfying them, and then moving on to the next is what Marcuse bleakly calls "euphoria in unhappiness."[14] There is a certain pleasure found in each need met, but according to Marcuse, this cycle will never bring true, long-lasting happiness, but instead "perpetuates toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice."[15] However, that pleasure is what Marcuse sees as the true anchor, that there is enough pleasure in these pockets of time and in these commodities that make it so that individuals truly think this lifestyle will keep them happy during their lifetimes. Indeed, the trust in the system is so deep that individuals base their sense of self in those very commodities and materialist systems; but Marcuse warns that buying into this cycle is to support a larger societal system which needs the repression of individuals in the underlying population to survive.

In her *Unbearable Weight,* Bordo uses a similar conceptualization of consumption as Marcuse, but she focuses it to the realm of the body. Where Marcuse limited his concept of consumerism and commodification to tangible goods like luxury cars or kitchen appliances, Bordo makes the case that bodies have become the new commodity, that to show wealth, status, and power, one must have the accompanying "perfect body." In this sense, the presence of the same body type in media means that populations only consume one type of body, and then try to replicate this homogenized body to their own. So, False Needs are present with Bordo as well; through the embodied lens, False Needs can be interpreted as that constant need to self-modify, to improve upon, to better our aesthetic bodies without true need for the modifications. In this sense, we operate with the assumption that in this new world of technology, public perceptions of commodities have evolved as well. We now live in a society that measures success beyond physical commodities. Michael S. Carolan explores this commodification of the body and concludes that "we are progressively striving to

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[13] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 5.

[14] Ibid., 5.

[15] Ibid., 5.

become the 'nice thing' itself."[16] In our needs for status and power, the body must conform to the idea of success as well: "plastic surgery, tanning sessions, gym memberships, personal trainers; these things too are consumed."[17] Echoing Bordo's overall message in her research, the body has become commodified in purchasing services and ways that modify it and make it ready for pictures and social media, a usually public audience. In all cases, the two thinkers agree that these systems of social control anchor the individual in the physical realm of their life. It focuses the masses on quantitative expansion of material goods rather than qualitative change in one's perhaps spiritual, emotional, or intellectual realm of living.

Given this, I argue that social media, and more importantly, photo-centric Instagram, contributes to the creation of False Needs. In the sense that Instagram's culture of solely posting pictures where our bodies look our best, this sends subliminal messages about bodies: what is accepted, what must be strived towards, and what is appropriate for media. Indeed, Bordo argues that the media shows a homogenized body, meaning that users and consumers are always and only seeing one type of body, repeated over and over in ads, movies, magazines, everything.[18] The homogenized body tells us it is the only marketable body. But what is a marketable body? I turn to the Body Positivity movement for further answers.

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[16] Michael S. Carolan, "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption," *Worldviews* 9, no. 1 (2005), https://www.jstor.org/stable/43809289.

[17] Ibid.,104.

[18] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 261.

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Chapter 3.   Body Positivity

The first time I became aware of the dissonance between bodies seen in media and bodies seen in real life was Dove's Real Beauty campaign first launched in 2004. The promotional campaign featured multiple women in a line-up, all in similar undergarments, showcasing the difference in the bodies, tall, short, fat, skinny, pale, dark, and different shapes I had never seen before on a TV screen. This individual promotional campaign is a sign of a larger social movement at play since as early as the 1960s: The Body Positivity movement.

It is difficult to pinpoint a specific source for the coinage or the start of the movement, more so taking shape as multiple individual actions and goals which contribute to a larger shared goal. Indeed, Alexandra Sastre investigates this phenomenon as well, and concludes that in the digitalization of this social movement, "it is not just a singular bodily performance, but the aggregate of many performances, that creates the movement's archive."[19] This aggregated mission is to normalize non-mediatized bodies and bodily features. Mediatized bodies, in this context, are Bordo's homogenized body type, we all know her; the white, flat stomached model, with long limbs and a careless attitude. Since this represents an overall societal shift in thinking, I look to an academic analysis of the movement by Jessica Cwynar-Horta, whose research centers around the movement, according to her, the Body Positivity movement (BoPo) promotes the "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."[20]

The roots of the movement took place in the realm of fat-activism,[21][22] it has now evolved to include all *kinds* of bodies, but also bodily *features,* highlighting the fact that

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[19] Alexandra Sastre, "Towards a Radical Body Positive," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no.6 (2014), doi: 10.1080/14680777.2014.883420.

[20] Jessica Cwynar-Horta, "The Commodification of the Body Positive Movement on Instagram," *Stream: Interdisciplinary   Journal   of   Communications*   8,   no.   2   (2016), https://journals.sfu.ca/stream/index.php/stream/article/view/203.

[21] In the 1960s, activists championed rights and acceptance of fat bodies which were marginalized particularly by the medical establishment.

[22] Lux Alptraum, "A Short History of 'Body Positivity,'" Fusion, last updated November 6, 2017, https://fusion.tv/story/582813/a-short-history-of-body-positivity/

the most striking feature of the mediatized body is its thinness, but even thin people must mold their bodies beyond their shape: they must also be hairless, smooth skinned, and able bodied. This expanding awareness of body requirements demonstrates the need for all types of representation, not just fat representation (which is important in itself). As the movement evolves, starting in traditional media where the advertisement industry received the most critique, the movement has expanded to social media and individual actions since the early 2010s. Influential social media creators have spearheaded the movement, creating hashtag spaces and community followings while promoting the BoPo mission.[23]

Thus, this is where my project's analytic and critical eye falls, Body Positivity represented in social media. Working on the assumptions outlined in the previous section, if we are to apply Marcuse's theory of False Needs in media systems, we can now work with the idea that Instagram is our media system. We then hypothesize that Instagram may participate in the production of False Needs somehow with their algorithm-generated content. Body Positivity is the case study on the platform, as the movement and its message are understandable and well-known to the general population and the users of Instagram. The movement has clear goals that pertain to the visual representation of bodies on social media, and Instagram's photo-centric content makes it the perfect test platform. Drawing back to Sastre's idea that a social movement is an aggregation of multiple bodies acting in accordance to a unified goal and not by a handful of leaders, activists, or champions,[24] the logical step is to look at many posts within the movement in a semi-randomized way. This is in the hopes of extracting visual themes and ideas that reflect the main messaging of the movement. Looking at Instagram's representation of the BoPo movement tests the extent to which Instagram and its algorithms may warp a social movement's goals, thus altering the movement's presence and promoting alternative goals to the public.

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[23] See Tess Holliday's work on Instagram as a first example.

[24] See note 19.

Chapter 4.   Methodology

The story of the unshaved legs at the beginning of this paper awoke something in me. After a year of graduate studies, I've now understood this serves as my Address, and that I have been working through this project in alignment with hermeneutical research.[25] A paper that beautifully encapsulates my process of producing this paper is Nancy J. Moules et al.'s article *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: The Address of the Topic.* Most of the paper could be quoted here appropriately, but I'll limit myself to this one citation: "An address functions to interrupt or unsettle our everyday taken-for-grantedness of things."[26] Hermeneutical research takes the form of questions that come from deep within, from lived experiences. In my case, seeing the emergence of social media, navigating cultural changes around the female body, and questioning my own ideas of gender and embodied experience were all phenomena that preoccupied me. These three lived phenomena all exist separately from one another, but interact with each other as well, and this intersection is the core of my project, and manifests in the technicality of the essay. My case study involves Instagram (sometimes referred to as IG or Insta), a social medium I've experienced since its birth in 2009 all through its coming of age with new algorithms in 2016, to now where it is one of the largest social media platforms in North America. Looking into the Body Positive movement and feminist literature helps me understand the issues I see happening around me, and Marcuse's False Needs help me understand my individual thoughts and analysis in this project.

Linda Finlay's *Debating Phenomenological Research Methods* describes hermeneutical research as the "aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived."[27] It should be clarified that I don't use actual hermeneutical research in the descriptions of phenomena, nor do I attempt to explain my personal experience on social media or within my own body. I have instead been unknowingly working in the style of hermeneutics, and by this I mean that the readings I

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[25] Dr. Katherine Reilly introduced hermeneutic research in our Summer Colloquium class as part of our module on different research methods.

[26] Nancy J. Moules et al., "Conducting Hermeneutic Research: The Address of the Topic," *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* 7, no. 2 (2014), PDF.

[27] Linda Finlay, "Debating Phenomenological Research Methods," *Phenomenology & Practice* 3, no.1 (2009), https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr19818.

have most resonated with throughout my studies – which have now become the primary literature in this project – are ultimately words that reflect my conclusions on my own feelings and reactions to my experiences. The literature used and the methodology that ensued have come from deeply personal questions and preoccupations that I desperately needed to answer. I'd like to go as far and take this space to recognize the gratitude I feel in being able to pursue this knowledge, it has truly been a self-indulgent project to be able to study whom and what I desired. Knowing my personal stake in this research, I recognize that my individual experience on social media platforms and the subsequent thoughts around my own body may not be an isolated incident. I use this approach with the hopes that the research of my own experiences may allow me to generalize perceptions into a broader context and validate other people who have had similar experiences.

Since the nature of this project largely focuses on the cultural normalization found in media systems, it calls for an analysis of the structural artefacts that give way to this normalization in the system. Any online website, search engine, forum, is a media system in itself. Its coding – and if it is sophisticated enough, its algorithm – acts as the rules of the system. Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths explore how computing and human decision making are a relatively similar, and how those two processes may learn from one another; they work under the assumption that algorithms are simple instructions and steps to be followed, like a recipe for a loaf of bread or knitting a sweater.[28] This project works under a similar assumption, that algorithms and codes are just that, numbers and formulas giving instructions to other pieces of technology, and nothing more. These tools of computing are not inherently good or evil, but the people writing them may come with their own sets of biases and prejudices. These biases may then leak into the work when writing how coding should determine what is beautiful, attractive, or popular. In fact, Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett, and Ben Light grapple with the humanity of online processes in *#NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*, and admit that organization of social media content may lead to "instability in how, (…) what kind of motives, things get tagged and flagged."[29] As social media is created by

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[28] Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decision* (Allen Lane: Penguin Canada, 2016), 4.

[29] Susanna Paasonen, Kylie Jarrett, and Ben Light, *#NSFW: Sex, Humor, and Risk in Social Media*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), 71.

humans for human use, it is not guaranteed that coders have extensive ethics training, to what extent the writing process undergoes ethics approval, so we can assume that some human error is present in the technology behind social media, potentially affecting other lives.

Beyond the ethical human question of Internet culture as a whole, social media apps ultimately run as business models. This introduces an aspect of profit, success metrics, and revenue to the algorithm in question. It is possible that certain features of the IG algorithm serve this purpose of engaging its users in the most efficient way, providing incentives for users to spend as much time on the app as possible to generate data, click traffic, and ad revenue. One question this project asks but does not explore, do beautiful bodies sell better on social media? It is impossible to provide an answer without further research, but it is something to keep in mind.

To provide applied social media insight to this project, the chosen medium is Instagram. Its main feature is photo-sharing, where users can easily share images and videos to their profile that aggregates these posts into a grid, to be easily catalogued and found later on. Users can follow other users, and users' new posts can be found in a feed to scroll through. Another feature which is important to this research is the Explore feed, where users can go explore other accounts or interests not found in their personal feed; there again, the dominant content to consume is the visual content in pictures and some videos. Part of the Explore feed are the hashtag spaces, where one can find like-minded users and posts related to almost any kind of theme. Whether it be food, nail art, manga series, luxury cars, ostentatious home decoration trends, there is a hashtag that caters to any interest. These hashtags can be followed by users, so those interests cross over to the Explore feed and to the Personal feed. However, there is also a separate feed for each hashtag, where users can find all posts on Instagram tagged with those key words related to the interest. Those hashtag spaces, which I also call communities to encompass users, posts, and expectations related to the space, will be the case study for this project.

The hashtag chosen is #bodypositive, over other possibilities like #bodypositivity, #bodypositivitymovement. The hashtag was chosen on the basis of number of posts. #bodypositive has over 13 million posts, compared to the rest which had around 5 million, or as low as 13 thousand or 20 thousand posts. The number of posts is a good

indicator for popularity, and it can be assumed that this is most likely where there will be the most visitors, and thus, more exposure. Hashtag feeds that are curated by the algorithm are the best way to gauge Instagram's algorithm, it therefore makes sense to look at the messaging with the largest platform.

Once in the hashtag space, there are two possible feeds to scroll through, labelled Top and Recent. These feeds feature different ways of organizing the now 13 million photos tagged with Body Positive.

Instagram's algorithm is notorious for its vague and everchanging nature, making it difficult to pinpoint true strategy or behavior. Instagram itself does not offer much detail, likening their machine learning algorithm to a Secret Sauce recipe from a popular restaurant. For the Recent column, the company only offers one explanation on their Help website: "photos and videos appear in the order that they were posted." For the purposes of this project, this column is too random. As Christian and Griffiths explain, if a problem is too complicated (or too random), it is better to simply *play the game*.[30] Inspired by this, I therefore interpret "playing the game" as going straight to the Instagram lion's den and looking at the Top category.

For a pointed analysis of Instagram's functioning, a critical look at the Top category provides a better window into the mechanism behind Instagram. The website claims posts in this category are "some of the popular posts tagged with that hashtag."[31] Yet, they do not provide details regarding what metrics are used to denote "popularity." It is unclear if the number of likes, shares, comments, on the post have any effect, or if the poster's follower count or their caption holds any weight. However, users have noticed that heavy use of multiple tags ensures a wider virtual reach, meaning the post will be found under more hashtags. It has also been noted that getting on the Top page on popular hashtags is one of the best ways to get more engagement with a post and more followers for the user.[32] So, it is clear Top columns in hashtag spaces are a premium real estate, while simultaneously being at the mercy of Instagram's infamous and

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[30] Christian and Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By,* 184.

[31] "Exploring Photos and Videos: What are Top posts on Instagram hashtag or place pages?" Instagram Help Center, Using Instagram, accessed August 13, 2020, https://help.instagram.com.

[32] Paige Cooper, "How the Instagram Algorithm Works in 2020 (And How to Work With it)" Hootsuite, last modified April 20, 2020, https://blog.hootsuite.com/instagram-algorithm/

unpredictable algorithm. For these reasons, the Top category is more interesting and relevant to this project, as the analysis of the images shown can be compared to analysing the messaging that Instagram's algorithm is pushing to its users.

With this choice comes the acceptance and even the exploitation of user-specific feed curation. IG's algorithm uses machine learning based on the data generated by individual users. The coding molds and shapes its post line up according to every picture liked, every story watched, and every interest explored by the user. It uses information like birthdates and gender identities to decide which "bubble" or "community" users belong to, once again affecting personal feeds.[33] My Instagram app knows I am a white, French bilingual, 23-year-old, female Zillenial (1997 babies – too young to be a millennial, too old to be gen-z), with a weakness for fashion, tattoos, and musical theatre.

We can also assume that social media app trends and activity are usually limited to the continent where the phone is located; for instance, being in North America, it is rare that I'll see posts from South East India, Africa, Europe, unless I seek them out myself or my activity directs the algorithm in that direction. So, this is another aspect of my project that limits itself to euro-centric, western, online spaces.

Though some claim the Top feeds in hashtag spaces are the same for everyone,[34] some also claim the Top category is not exempt from algorithm-curated content. Knowing this, I tried to counteract this by specifically following more activist-centric profiles, profiles on education, and profiles that represented a wider diversity of bodies, like POC creators, disabled creators, and organisms with similar goals woven in their content. Previously, my feed mainly consisted of people I had gone to school with for the past 15 years, in a predominantly white low-to-middle class region in New-Brunswick, Canada. Following more accounts that catered to these interests was my way of telling my algorithm "hey, I want more content like this!" By integrating activism and diversity in my social media feeds meant I would make my presence on social media more active and engaged with issues that truly matter to me as a person and as a professional about to enter the workforce. Finally, to cross reference if my previous

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[33] Kalev Leetaru, "How Instagram Democracy Is Leaving Accessibility and Inclusiveness Behind," Forbes, last modified January 22, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/#5421e4282254.

[34] Cooper, "How the Instagram Algorithm Works in 2020."

follow-spree with a specific target worked, I went on two friends' Instagram accounts that have similar age and gender profiles as me. Those two accounts also yielded the same Top results in the Body Positive hashtag. This led me to believe that the Top may very well be the same for large pockets of people.

This is pretty grassroots, a trial-and-error way of trying to alter sophisticated machine-learning technology, and there is no way of knowing what the impact of these actions was. Ultimately, I hoped it would let my algorithm know that when I look up things related to the Body Positive movement, I truly do want to see bodies that are not conventionally deemed "attractive;" I want to see the activist side of the Body Positive movement. While this may have been a confirmation bias, the results may indicate differently.

I'd like to conclude this section by pointing out that judging bodies in a space devoted for acceptance of all bodies – regardless of the media platform's role in the space – carries some issues. It may be pointed out that focusing on the visual aspects of bodies may limit what we can know and how we can understand bodies, an issue that photo-centric Instagram only reinforces. Further, it is impossible to know the motivations behind a person's choice to post a picture of their own body publicly. This is why I'd like to reinforce that this research and subsequent analysis focuses on the presentation of these photos by the platform, rather than the actual photos and people featured in them.

Chapter 5.   Method

The actual method consisted of going on Instagram at the same three times of day, recording 5 posts each time, for 10 consecutive days. So, five (5) posts, three (3) times a day yielded fifteen (15) pictures at the end of the day, to arrive at 150 posts at the end of the ten (10) days. The three times of day were 10AM, 2PM, and 7PM, these times account for user engagement trends which wax and wane as time zones affect how much traffic is present on the app throughout the day. The ten days accounted for more than a week's schedule, because like anything social, activity changes whether it is a weekday or the weekend, or if there are eventful days recorded. An example was the infamous #BlackOutTuesday during the first few weeks of June where the Black Lives Matter protests dominated online platforms.

The recorded items would consist of the first five (5) posts in the righthand-most column of the three columns in the feed to ensure some randomness.[35] They were saved in my Instagram folders, so I would easily be able to go back to the posts I had saved and could explore the profiles for follower counts and their other posts. However, posts can get deleted without warning, so a backup is necessary. I also took screenshots (a photo-capture of my entire phone screen) of same the posts which were saved in my personal storage.

Finally, when I was going down the first five posts on the righthand column, some of the posts had to be disqualified. Posts like videos, because this method is a single-image analysis; and pictures which did not feature a human body but instead had food, landscapes, or animals, also had to be discarded. In cases like this, I would skip the post and move down to the next appropriate post.

With the 150 posts gathered, there then had to be a categorization of the bodies found. This categorization system looked for different bodily features that the Body Positive movement is specifically aiming to normalize. The system worked as a binary, observing the pictures, and deciding if the specific feature was present or not. If the feature was present, it supports the Body Positive mission, and is given a green tag. If the feature was not present, it worked against the Body Positive mission, and received a

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[35] Christian and Griffiths, *Algorithms to Live By,* 195.

red tag. The analysis then had a visual component where it was easy to identify where posts fell in the scale of "represents" or "does not represent" the movement. The list of features and the justifications follow.

As this was mainly a photo analysis, we had to limit the observations to what was tangibly observable in the pictures presented. No assumptions were made as this falls dangerously into subjective territory. Eight (8) features were considered, each falling into one of three overarching categories: skin, ability, and size.

Features related to skin were skin tone, body hair, acne, stretch marks, and keloid scars. *Skin tone* was chosen instead of *race* because the Body Positive movement and primary discourse on body representations in media center around the *whiteness* of bodies. Further, "race" or "ethnicity" is a problematic term and category to use, only reinforcing uneven power dynamics in favor of the ruling class.[36] Though there has been some leeway in the media world in bringing in more Black people, there are many critiques that Black bodies that do find their way to mainstream media tend to have lighter skin tones, whereas darker bodies have a harder time piercing into mainstream media.[37] This project wanted to take this into account, looking specifically for darker skinned bodies. See Figure 1 for a visualization of which skin tones fell in which category.

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[36] Walter Allen, Chantal Jones, and Channel McLewis, *The Problematic Nature of Racial and Ethnic Categories in Higher Education.* American Council on Education, accessed August 19th, 2020, https://www.equityinhighered.org/resources/ideas-and-insights/the-problematic-nature-of-racial-and-ethnic-categories-in-higher-education/.

[37] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 265.
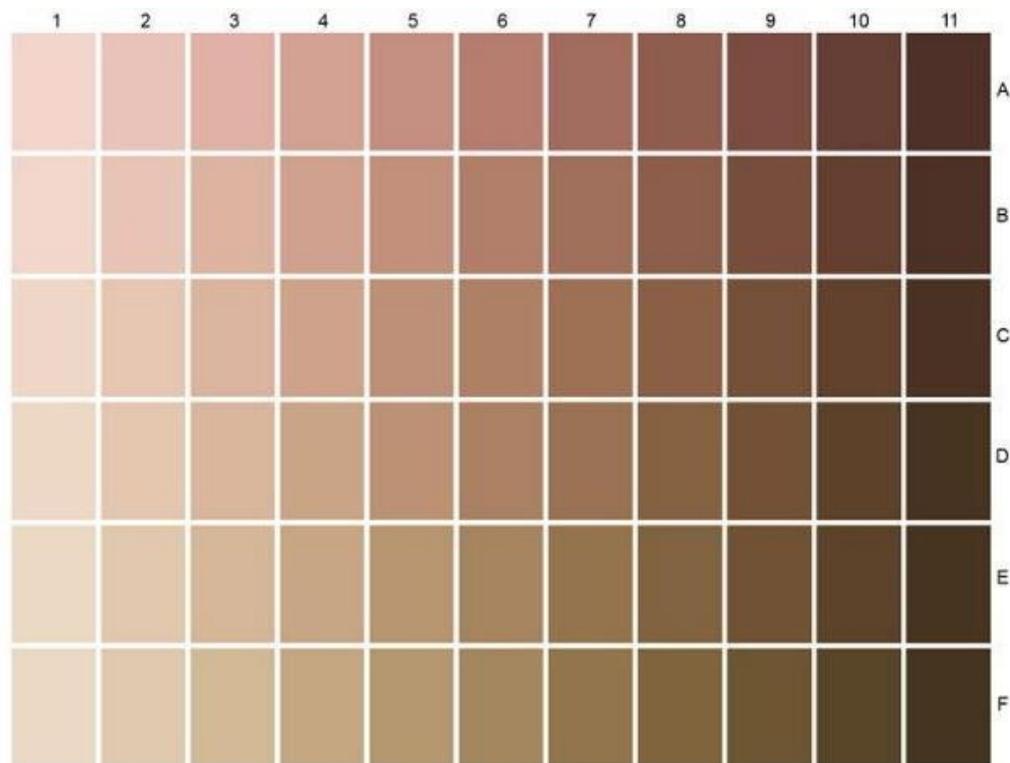
Figure 1   Skin tone range. Aleksandar Macasev, End Notes… Why That Color? (Munsell Color: Aleksandar Macasev Blog, 2020).
Shades 8-11 are considered "dark."

The Body Positive movement is trying to normalize *all* bodies with all kinds of *features,* and there is a gender aspect to the movement. BoPo also includes a denormalization of heteronormative gender standards,[38] where women's bodies must look a certain way, and men's bodies looks another way; features that belong in the "women's" category or the "men's" category must not cross over into the other category. BoPo therefore advocates for body hair on women, mainly on "abnormal" places, such as leg hairs and armpit hairs. This feature was therefore taken into account when observing these posts.

Finally, it is well known that mainstream media airbrushes and/or photoshops their bodies to give the illusion of perfect skin. Aside from BoPo, there has been large critique on the Internet regarding this, an example is the fashion model Gigi Hadid's beauty marks or moles being controversially covered up by big name fashion houses

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[38] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, "Reading the Slender Body," 185-212.

and magazines like Vogue and Victoria's Secret.[39] While this phenomenon started with mainstream media like magazines, billboards, and promotional campaigns, it has trickled down to Instagram and other photo-centric social medias as apps like Facetune and VSCO allow easy, accessible, and free photo editing. It is even possible that posts in the 150 gathered used photo editing like this to airbrush the bodies observed. For this reason, features like acne, keloid scars, and stretch marks were observed, and would represent action against hegemonic beauty standards. Freckles, which were once hidden in hegemonic ideals of beauty, were not included in this section because freckles have made a comeback and have been in fashion for the past few years in the beauty community, and so are no longer part of BoPo's mission in 2020.

Body Positivity also strongly advocates for the normalization and representation of disabled bodies in media. According to Statistics Canada, about 22% of the Canadian population aged above 17 years old have one or more disabilities.[40] This is a large demographic of the population, and most likely holds some reflection of the rest of the world. Disabled people are a large part of the population, yet are barely present in media, excluding them from popular narratives. BoPo attempts to normalize these bodies so that they may be better accepted in society and foster a better self-image in the community. In this project, this took the form of looking for *visual signs* of a disability on the body. This included signs like a wheelchair, cochlear implants, amputee bodies, and anything else in that vein. It must be highlighted that most disabilities are invisible, and it is very possible that some bodies in the 150 posts may have had an invisible disability. However, one can have a disability and purposefully conceal it, and this concealment is normalized. This is again what BoPo tries to counter, by encouraging people to embrace their disabled bodies and show them in media to have wider representation of disabled bodies. This project limited itself to what is shown in the picture and understands that showing one's disability falls in the "abnormal" behaviors on social media.

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[39] Sierra Marquina, "Gigi Hadid's Moles Are Constantly Photoshopped – and Her Fans Aren't Happy," *USMagazine*, February 2016, https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-body/news/gigi-hadids-moles-are-constantly-photoshopped-and-her-fans-arent-happy-w165079/

[40] Stuart Morris et al., "A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017," Statistics Canada, last updated November 18, 2018, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm

Finally, features related to *size* were difficult to outline. There is much discourse regarding which models should be considered "plus-size" in the industry, usually centered around clothing sizes and numbers. Some fashion houses consider a size 6 or higher to be plus-size, whereas some define plus-size as being over size 18.[41][42] However, BoPo advocates for fat bodies to be more normalized, and so this was an important aspect to analyse for this project. The two features that were decided to highlight this aspect are fatness and waist size. In the last twenty years, the modelling industry in particular has made some head way on representing a wider range of sizes in their models. However, there is still critique that though the models are plus-sized, their bodies still face a lot of conditioning before they can be shown as "plus-size models." Mainly, bodies may be fat, but must usually feature a traditionally hyper-feminized hourglass shape with a smaller waist, with fatness accepted in specific places like thighs, shoulders, upper arms, hips, butt, and breasts.[43] This is why it was not enough to simply account for a body's fatness, but also the waist of the body. A body that is plus size does still contribute to Body Positivity, but a larger waist size represents BoPo even more, compared to a smaller hourglass shape which would not count toward BoPo.

With the pictures tagged, a look into each individual feature and its occurrence, there was also a need for broader categorizations. Three distinct categories were created to get a better sense of the #BoPo space, and the 150 bodies found within it. First, there was the presence of the Normative Body, where the tags all showed red. These are bodies that feature none of the Body Positive features and were therefore representations of the homogenized body found in most other media spaces. Next, the Positive Body, which had two or more green tags, thus working towards representing the Body Positive mission. Finally, there was the Semi Body. It happened often that only the "plus-size" tag would show green with everything else red. With Figures 2, 3, and 4, providing picture examples, it can be observed that although these bodies are fat, which represents the Body Positivity movement, as mentioned above, these bodies have been

[41] Jessica Cwynar-Horta, "Documenting Femininity: Body Positivity and Female Empowerment on Instagram," (MA Thesis, York University, 2016), 268, PDF.

[42] Christy Zagarella, "What Size if Considered Plus Size Today?" BistroMD, last modified September 11, 2019, https://www.bistromd.com/womens-health/why-is-size-six-the-new-plus-size.

[43] Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick & Joshua P. Romero, "Body Ideals in the Media: Perceived Attainability and Social Comparison Choices," *Media Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2010.547833.

more normalized since the 2000s. It therefore does not feel appropriate to say that they *do* represent the movement when they are normalized, but it does not feel right to categorize them as purely normalized either. This third category will also prove useful in the results and analysis.
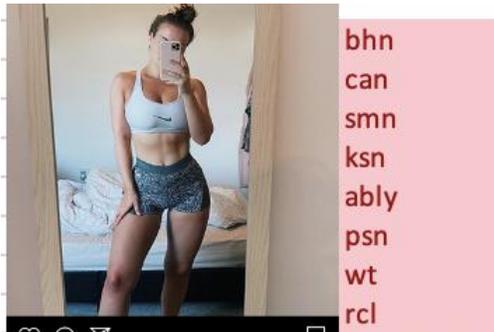
Figure 2   Normative.
(Photograph by Instagram user @carysmadie, June 9, 2020. Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBOWHGPDP6B/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

Figure 3   Semi.
(Photograph by Instagram user @isabelnichollsnall, June 17, 2020, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBiGmJ7gO4X/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

Figure 4   Positive.
(Photograph by Instagram user @curvy_nat_x, June 9, 2020, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBOU5tAgpt5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

Chapter 6.   Results & Findings

Finally, we can arrive at Instagram's idea of popularity in the Body Positive hashtag. Let's start with a look at individual features and their occurrences. There was one instance of "acne," which was a facial mole. There were four (4) instances of stretch marks, though it must be noted they were all barely noticeable and hidden behind tans and airbrushing tools (makeup or digital). There were no occurrences of keloid scars or body hair. There were 6 dark skinned bodies. There were no visibly disabled bodies.

The feature that had the most variations was size. There were 58 fat bodies, which comprises of 39% of all posts gathered. However, it is important to note that some of these bodies fell into the "hourglass waist" type of plus -size body, which is more on the "normalized" side of this analysis. Of these 58 instances, 22 had an hourglass figure, thus showing decent representation of different fat bodies.
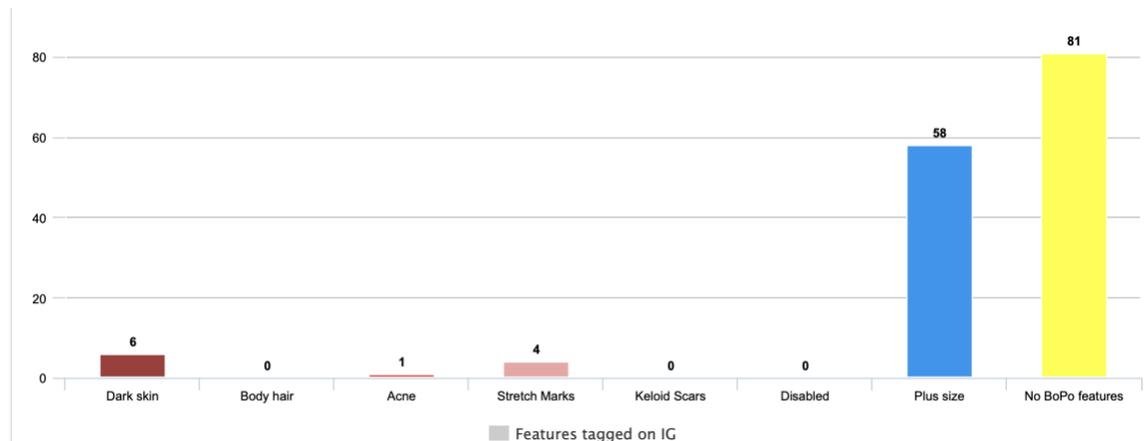

Figure 5   Occurrence of BoPo features

Looking at the three types of bodies, Normative, Semi, and Positive, categorized earlier tells an interesting story and shows the importance of the Semi Body category. There were 90 Normative bodies, 36 Positive bodies, and 24 Semi bodies. Looking beyond the fact that the Normative bodies outweigh the other two at a whopping 60%, the ratios are also interesting. If we ignore the Semi bodies, we can say that the algorithm shows one Positive body for every 2.5 Normative bodies. This means that already-accepted bodies take up more than twice the space of "abnormal" bodies, in a space designed for non-normalized bodies. This is where adding the Semi category gets interesting. As someone who has been following these issues and discourses before

even starting to look into it academically, my first instinct is to lump Semi bodies with mediatized bodies. Speaking personally as a user of Instagram, and being aware of social justice issues, if I visit the #bodypositive space, I expect to see mainly non-mediatized bodies. In this sense, I wouldn't count plus-size bodies with the beautiful hourglass figure, since I have already seen these bodies in media, rendering them somewhat normalized. If we calculate the ratios by adding Normative bodies and Semi bodies against Positive bodies, there is one Positive body for every 3 mediatized bodies. This drastic ratio is quite striking but may only tell a half truth. It is possible that people do not agree with summing up Normative bodies and Semi bodies together, as showing *any* kind of plus-size body is still better than the homogenized body, so it can be counted along with Positive bodies. In this case, for every Positive body with Semi included, there is 1.5 Normative body. The drastic change in ratios depends on the subjective opinion of the reader of this paper. I present all findings in Table x, and conclusions drawn may be up to the eye of the beholder.

Table 1   Ratios of the type of bodies found

| Positive to Normative	1: 2.5
Positive to Normative & Semi	1: 3
Positive & Semi to Normative	1: 1.5
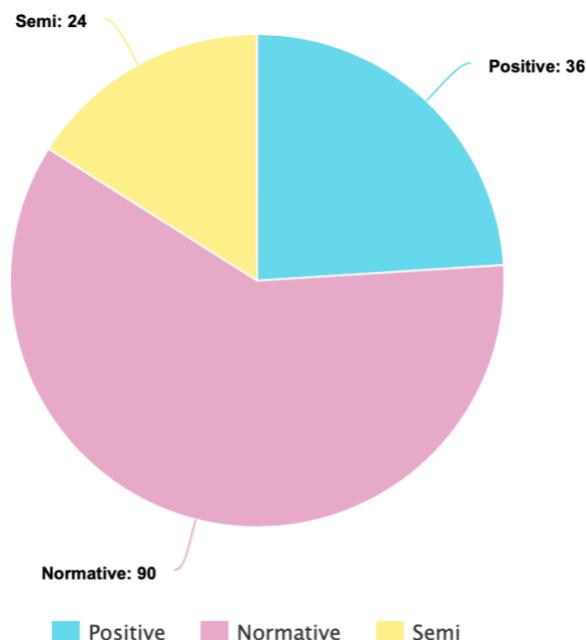
Figure 6   Occurrence of categorized bodies

Chapter 7.   Discussion

We can see that social media provides a constant output of Normative bodies, even the spaces where we would expect to see a de-homogenized space for Positive Bodies. Before social media existed, Bordo had identified this phenomenon in media from the 1990s in billboard ads, television programs, and magazine images. These featured a construction of the female body that was "always homogenizing and normalizing"[44] which Bordo warns can have psychological and cultural impacts in erasing people's lived and embodied experiences. Indeed, if this standardized body represents a traditionally feminine, able, slender, light toned and blemish-free body, people whose bodies do not enter these criteria are effectively erased from the popular narrative.[45] The results above show that this homogenization is not arbitrary, that there are visual themes that are pushed by Instagram's algorithm, building upon the dominant ideology of what constitutes an acceptable body.

We now have a constructed image of a Normalized Body that is promoted by Instagram. I want to recall Marcuse who asserts that "media products" may indoctrinate, manipulate behaviors and expectations of reality. The problem becomes when these media are accessible to the masses; to him, this signifies a shift for these products as they were first designed as publicity, but their availability have made them "a way of life."[46] We must now admit that social media has followed his prediction. Social media has integrated into everyday life,[47] it is no longer a hobby but a way of living in society – even more so since the global lockdown of the population in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.[48] If the body has become a commodity, and Instagram's greatest commodity is the body, then I argue that bodies seen on social media are no longer professionals trained in a certain physical shape ready for cameras but have now become the

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[44] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 169.

[45] Ibid., 208.

[46] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 12.

[47] Andrew Perrin and Monica Anderson, "Share of U.S. adults using social media, including Facebook, is most unchanged since 2018," Pew Research Center, last updated April 10, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/.

[48] Debra Aho Williamson, "Uptick in US Adults' Social Media Usage Will Likely Normalize Post-Pandemic," eMarketer, last updated June 22, 2020, https://www.emarketer.com/content/uptick-us-adults-social-media-usage-will-likely-normalize-post-pandemic.

dominant conception of what every day bodies should look like. Because of social media's profound integration in society, we can see that paired with Marcuse's False Needs and Bordo's homogenized body, these thinkers wonder to which extent these phenomena negatively impact society as a whole.

It is not enough to state that hegemonic ideals *oppress* the underlying population of individuals. Bordo asserts that "the realm of femininity depends on the willing acceptance of various norms."[49] This participation, and even enjoyment of, normalized behaviors may be interpreted as freedom, but Marcuse would remind us that consensual consumption of products that contribute to social control does not equate freedom of informed consent.[50] We can develop this further as Bordo finds through her studies that women have cognitively absorbed the media's homogenized body as a conceptualization of what their *own* body should look like. This conceptualization almost always reflects the idealized body of their time and culture.[51] These power dynamics are mostly subconscious, and so people unknowingly absorb and craft their sense of self around the normalized images they have been bombarded with, *after* thinking they are freely consenting to the enjoyment of social media. Bordo explains that people memorize their bodies in terms of what is or is not seen in media, what lacks, what is inferior, and what must be "improved;"[52] in this case, social media adds yet another, even more accessible playing field for people to find perfect looking bodies. Moreover, Bordo finds in multiple scenarios that women are "managing and disciplining their bodies more than ever,"[53] written in the 1990s, one can only assume that the case still reigns true and perhaps increasingly true. This management would be in pursuit of the attainment of this standardized body seen in most digital spaces. In her time, Bordo criticized medical experts for labeling women as "hysterical," "neurotic," or "having distorted attitudes," when faced with body dysmorphic patients; when in reality, the patients' cognitive dissonance between their real body and their idealized body usually reflected a "fairly accurate representation of social attitudes" regarding the "correct" body at the time.[54]

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[49] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 167.

[50] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 7.

[51] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 168.

[52] Ibid.*,* 166.

[53] Ibid., 166.

[54] Ibid., 58.

And so, Bordo found that people, particularly women, did not "misperceive" their body, but had rather learned *how* to perceive their own body according to the industry's homogenized standard.

So, if people are absorbing the standardized bodies seen on Instagram and then applying these perceptions to their own bodies, this ties back to Marcuse's idea that our civilization may socially control its population by making public culture "an extension of one's mind and body."[55] Again, Bordo asserts there is a certain obsession with the glamorized thinness seen in media, with the pursuit of the ideal body, meaning that people want their body to resemble the one seen in digital public spaces.[56] So, this points to a changing conception of what a body might represent in media today.

If these behaviors I've just described are so harmful, it begs the question as to *why* people actively engage and perpetuate them. One aspect this paper does not cover in depth is the different kinds of power embedded in the phenomena observed. While I've framed these issues negatively, it is important to remember that these authors saw an element of empowerment of the masses through this. Indeed, in his critique of Marcuse's industrial society, Allen R. Newman reminds us that powers enacted had external influence – what's been observed in this paper – but there is also an internal component to it, that perhaps "the workers did not view themselves as an alienated class in opposition to capitalistic domination."[57] Indeed, users may be earnestly posting with the #bodypositive hashtag, feeling empowered by the sense of accomplishment in their own bodies, from the feeling of being in a community. Bordo also touches on the types of powers that may contribute to this. In response to Foucault's repressive powers, she calls to constitutive powers, powers that do not oppress, but rather, power that grows, guides, and directs energy flows in people and in masses: "the subordinate may be disempowered but they are not powerless."[58] She further explains that the individual actions in society are not merely motivated by False Needs but may come from a simple want to participate in society and feeling empowered by certain channels offered by overarching media systems. However, positive feelings aside, it is not enough for the

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[55] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 9.

[56] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 167.

[57] Allen R. Newman, "Notes on Marcuse's Critique of Industrial Society," *Review of Social Economy* 34, no. 2 (1976), http://www.jstor.com/stable/29768818.

[58] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight,* 261.

mouse to be entertained by the chase of the cheese in the labyrinth. In her reading of the Body Positive movement, Alexandra Sastre reminds us that people may be feeling empowered by modifying their bodies to a certain societal standard but may simultaneously and unknowingly operate as "training for a lifetime of fulfilling self-surveillance."[59] So, there is some disagreement as to how *much* harm individuals are caused when engaging in these behaviors. Active participation in social movements on otherwise harmful media platforms may be viewed as an empowering reclaiming of one's body, or may be viewed as a self-oppression, I leave this decision to the reader.

In the face of Bordo's and others' thoughts of what behaviors and thoughts may be fostered by media systems onto the audience, it is social movements like Body Positivity that provide a beacon of hope. The movement emerges out of the population who sense there is wrongful representation of bodies in media, but is it possible to fight the media while still operating in it? Bordo reminds us of this reality: "Despite what we would *like* to believe in ourselves, however, we are always within the society that we criticize."[60] This is what this project attempts to understand. Results have shown that it is difficult to decenter mediatized bodies and normalize marginalized bodies in a system that reinforces the status quo. It then becomes difficult to understand the real intent of the social movement if it fights the status quo while operating in the status quo.

Moving forward, it's important to have a more critical eye towards the producers of these systems, instead of the users operating in it. In the case of social media, as mentioned earlier, algorithms are not an untouchable entity, they are pieces of code following a script written by human beings. In his critique of social rationality, Feenberg reminds us that Marcuse's conclusion argued for a "reconstruction of technological rationality around a life-affirming ethos."[61] I interpret this 'life-affirming ethos' as an ethical code of conduct that values individual lives, and recognizes the power that technology holds in these lives.

In any STEM discipline, it is important to remain objective, but personal bias and prejudice are the deep-running waters in which human beings make decisions. To a

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[59] Sastre, "Towards a Radical Body Positive," 939.

[60] Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 260.

[61] Feenberg "Marxism and the critique of social rationality," 46.

certain extent, bias and prejudice cannot be ignored or inhibited. However, we can control *whose* biases and prejudices are most present or are not present at all. If the coders are principally white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-aged men, the biases and prejudices present won't see much variation. But if the room was filled with coders of different races, sexualities, body types, and ages, elements of all societies and communities would be represented. In this situation, I'd like to imagine that biases and prejudices would not disproportionately disfavor marginalized bodies, but would instead even out the playing field, making the social media platform more democratic in this sense. Indeed, Marcuse implied a certain reform is needed, calling for a reconstruction of technical tools "in accordance with the needs of the free (people), guided by their own consciousness and sensibility, by their autonomy."[62] Indeed, this would form a more just workplace in a highly specialized STEM field, but would eventually completely re-shape the foundations of the media system.[63]

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[62] Herbert Marcuse, "Re-examination of the concept of revolution," *Diogenes* 16, no.64 (1968), https://doi.org/10.1177/039219216801606402

[63] Feenberg, "Marxism and the critique of social rationality," 47.

Chapter 8.   Conclusion

The Body Positive movement has provided a lot for the acceptance of bodies. Plus size bodies are the first to reap the benefits, as they are included more and more in media and advertisement. Its origins rooted in the advertisement industry, there is no doubt that social media has changed the political and mediatic landscape. Indeed, this change in platform comes with new rules and cultures, like algorithms, hashtag spaces, and personalized user metrics, such as number of likes and "follower to following" ratios.

The research shown here proves that media systems may meddle more than advertised in social movements. Particularly, it was found that the Instagram algorithm prioritizes mediatized bodies in the #bodypositive hashtag space. What this shows is that social media has the ability to skew public perception of the Body Positive movement, actively working against the movement's goals. This continues to skew public perception of which bodies are accepted in media, and also skews what users may think is an accurate representation of all bodies offline. Even in a designated space for othered bodies, social media does not prioritize those bodies. The media system instead promotes yet again more mediatized bodies. This homogenization contributes to the need for the "perfect body," proving that Marcuse's theories may be extended beyond the era of the 1950-1970s.

In a set of reflections philosophical context inspired by Bordo, constantly seeing these mediatized bodies may be harmful to teenagers and young adults. The fact that only a few types of bodies are represented in media gives the subliminal message that these are the *only* bodies acceptable for media. The body of the individual user then becomes the "odd one out," the comparison then creates the need to mold one's body to fit the media's idea of the successful body. Marcuse reminds us that these are not real needs, and that buying into the media's body is one other way that media systems of control hypnotize individual agency, and sedate one's drive and motivation to work on another aspect of one's life.

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