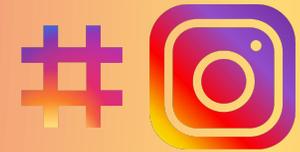Micaela Nimmo
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Censorship and Regulation of Fat Women's Bodies: A Hypertextual Content Analysis of the Instagram Hashtag #FatIsNotAViolation

How do posters in the Instagram hashtag #FatIsNotAViolation frame their experiences of selfies being removed by the platform?

So what?

There are gaps in the literature that point to a failure to address many aspects of Fat people's lives, especially Fat women. Social media is ubiquitous and often a very personal and intimate part of someone's life. It impacts self-perceptions and reflections of larger sociocultural pressures (including body image).

This research is important because it acknowledges these dimensions of communication media, and adopts a feminist viewpoint to incorporate a gendered analysis. People use social media for a variety of reasons, and in a variety of ways (commercial, personal, etc). Posters in the hashtag use social media very personally, in an attempt to build or maintain community solidarity by challenging an aspect of Instagram's algorithm which exhibits a fatphobic bias.

Theoretical Basis

Peter N. Stearns' *Fat History* details the sociocultural changes in a North American understanding of the label of Fat, and construction of a Fat identity. "Commercial manipulation", religious iconography, and the rise in popularity of athletics and sport all contributed to current understandings. Disgust and notions of moral superiority have reinforced what is viewed as an acceptable body. Stearns also notes that policing of body size is often gendered, and women are disproportionately impacted. [1]

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is an essential text to many forms of feminist scholarly work. *Gender Trouble* is used in this research when applying framing analysis, especially in regards to analyzing bodily regulation. This type of control is relevant to the research, as the reason that the hashtag was created for the campaign was for this community on Instagram to speak against what they viewed as unnecessary censorship and regulation of their bodies. Butler notes that restrictions exist to keep power structures intact, and to reinforce prevailing norms. Here, the norm is relatively small or thin bodies - especially for women. Butler also incorporates a gendered analysis, as women's bodies are often the setting of corporeal regulation. [2]

Methods

This research is composed of a hypertextual Content Analysis, of which Framing is a key element. This method of research aims to analyse the collected texts (Instagram posts) in order to answer the initial question. [3]

- The first step of the research was to scroll back to the creation of #FatIsNotAViolation (October 2018), as I believed that earlier posts would be most directly related to the campaign (as opposed to the most current posts, which are less motivated in this way)
- I then gathered forty posts which I deemed relevant in answering the research question. Every element of the post was captured via screenshot. This includes the photo, the caption, and any accompanying hashtags or relevant comments
- I created six categories (with subcategories), based on language that appeared frequently throughout posts
- I examined each post and catalogued which categories were present in both the caption of the post and in the comments section
- A percentage was given to each category and subcategory to discover what the most common themes were throughout caption and comments. This information was then used to apply framing analysis [4]

Results

Findings were significantly different between the content of both the captions and comments. The captions tended to frame the poster's experiences in relation to broader cultural notions about Fat people and within the context of a Fat activism community on the platform. They also tended to view Instagram as generally reinforcing those negative views. Comments also framed Fatphobia as a larger social problem, but with an emphasis on specific examples of how Instagram's policies had harmed particular users, or themselves.

→ Mentions of the six categories in **captions**:
- ◆ Reference of removal: 55%
- ◆ Building or maintaining connections/community: 65%
- ◆ Reference of Instagram rules or algorithm: 74%
- ◆ Mention of societal pressures, discrimination, or fatphobia: 92%
- ◆ Self reflection: 12%
- ◆ Other: 0%

→ Mentions of the six categories in **comments**:
- ◆ Reference of removal: 45%
- ◆ Building or maintaining connections/community: 14%
- ◆ Reference of Instagram rules or algorithm: 27%
- ◆ Mention of societal pressures, discrimination, or fatphobia: 32%
- ◆ Self reflection: 0%
- ◆ Other: 4%

What's Next?

More research is required to continue addressing gaps in the literature where Fat bodies, and especially Fat women, are concerned. This research should not be wholly focused on aspects of physical health, as much of it tends to be. Rather, a concern with the person and various aspects of their daily life should be considered.

References
1. Stearns, P. (1997). *Fat history : Bodies and beauty in the modern West*. New York New York University Press.
2. Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble feminism and the subversion of identity* (10th anniversary ed., Ebook Central (Collection)). New York: Routledge.
3. Bryman, A. and Bell, E, 2016. *Social research Methods: Fourth Canadian edition*. Toronto, ON: Oxford.
4. Coward, F.L., Hamman, D., Johnson, L., Lambert, M., Indiatsi, J., & Zhou, L. (2015). Centrality of Enactive Experiences, Framing, and Motivation to Student Teachers' Emerging Professional Identity. Teaching Education, 26 (2), 196-221