

Changing the narratives of marginalised bodies - a study about body positivity

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explain and analyse the body positivity movement in the social media platform Instagram, as well as its empowering effects on women active in this movement. The phenomenon based on visibility, body positivism, has more than three million pictures on Instagram, hashtagged under two popular hashtags examined in this thesis: #bodypositivity and #bodypositive. The goal of this movement is to show diversity in the portrayal of women, as well as to encourage acceptance of all body types, skin colours and body flaws - especially marginalised bodies that are often invisible in the current society. The research is conducted with methods of visual content analysis and interviews with women participating in the body positivity movement. This study is framed in feminism theory and this study includes theories of gender-norms, Western beauty standards, the male gaze and questions about identity and body image. The results of this study show that most of the people participating in the movement are white women and are pictured often in their underwear. In the pictures hashtagged with body positivity related hashtags, there are, however, not that many flaws visible - such as cellulite or stretch marks. Nevertheless, after interviewing the women active in this movement - active as picture publishers, conversation holders and as body positive Instagram-user followers - this movement is empowering to the women and helps develop a positive body image and better self-esteem. In addition, this phenomenon can change the narratives of the people with marginalised bodies and modify the image of how women are represented and portrayed in society.

Keywords: body positivism, beauty standards, feminism, social media, Instagram

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1. Introduction

“I feel more powerful. I feel that there is worth in who I am and what I do. I can post a selfie and look in the camera with a powerful look - and I do not have to smile or look pretty or pose in a certain way.” (Answer to the question if this phenomenon is empowering to you and how, Hultin 2017)

Body positivity is a growing movement and an online community in social media, based on visibility. This research examines how the body positivity movement empowers and portrays women.

Body positivity is a term lacking an academic definition and is not yet defined by the big dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster or the Oxford dictionary (5.3.2017) - and was recently added to Wikipedia. Body positivity means that all bodies should be seen and should be able to do anything. It means accepting all bodies as they are and that a person does not have to fit in a certain model in order to be beautiful or accepted. Body positivity includes not judging yourself so much, as well as forgiving yourself and being gentle to yourself. (Hultin 2017, Kalenius 2017)

The roots of the movement are in the fat acceptance movement. However, the usage of the term body positive can be traced back to the 1990's, when “The Body Positive” was a feminist movement in the United States of America (thebodypositive.org). Nowadays the movement exists largely in social media and is based on pictures. For instance on Instagram there are millions of pictures that are hashtagged with some of the hashtags used in the movement. The two large hashtags examined in this study, #bodypositive and #bodypositivity, contain currently over three million pictures. In addition to these, there are many other hashtags that are used in the movement.

In the online community each individual can feel supported and empowered by others in the community and by the fact that they have encouraged themselves to publish a body positive - often norm-critical - picture. The pictures published within the body positivity movement are

all self-defined as body positive. Therefore there is a lot of variation in the types of pictures, especially when going through popular hashtags that have millions of pictures. The idea of the movement is, however, to embrace the body as it is and not portray women as they often are portrayed: with male gaze, gender-norms and Western beauty standards. In this body positive online community women post pictures of themselves without makeup or flattering clothes, without caring if their stomach is not flat or even if it is huge. In the pictures within this movement women can be seen as fat, as well as skinny, tattooed or with a shaved-head, with unshaven armpits or legs, showing cellulites or stretch marks from a pregnancy or just from body-changes.

1.1. Aim and the research questions

The aim of this research is to examine how diverse bodies are displayed and how the current Western beauty standards of women are challenged in body positive hashtags on Instagram. This study contributes to the idea of women's empowerment through participation and actions in the body positivity community online. Two methods are used to conduct this research: a visual content analysis of pictures on Instagram, as well as interviews with women participating this movement on Instagram. The data collected in the interviews will be examined in relation to the data collected on Instagram to facilitate a discussion of how body is presented in body positive hashtags.

The body positivity movement online is a relatively new social phenomenon. Academic research is lacking in the field, in which this study contributes to. Besides providing knowledge and in-depth understanding of the movement, this study traces the history of the movement and discusses the problems that the movement is currently facing. Furthermore, this study sets a platform for further related studies, such as male body positivity and body positivity as a tool for eating disorder recovery.

This research has two research questions, which are the following:

1. What are the characteristics of a body positive picture: who is displayed and how?
2. How does body positivity in social media affect self-image and identity of the women who are participating the online movement?

These questions will be answered with a combination of two methods, quantitative and qualitative. The first question will be answered with a visual content analysis (quantitative method) and the second one with interviews (qualitative method).

1.2. Thesis structure

After the introduction this thesis begins with a background that takes a look at the social media platform used in this study, Instagram, the concept of a hashtag and the history of body positivism that can be found in the fat acceptance movement. The background chapter also summarises the thin ideal concept which is then continued in the theory part that examines Western beauty standards. The theory part presents first relevant terms for this study such as a flaw and empowerment, moving then to the theories used: the male gaze, norm-critic and Western beauty standards for instance. The next part presents the methods and materials used in this study, which is followed by the results, discussion and criticism. Finally, the conclusion part summarises what has been discussed, and presents the questions remaining, as well as possible directions for further studies.

2. Background

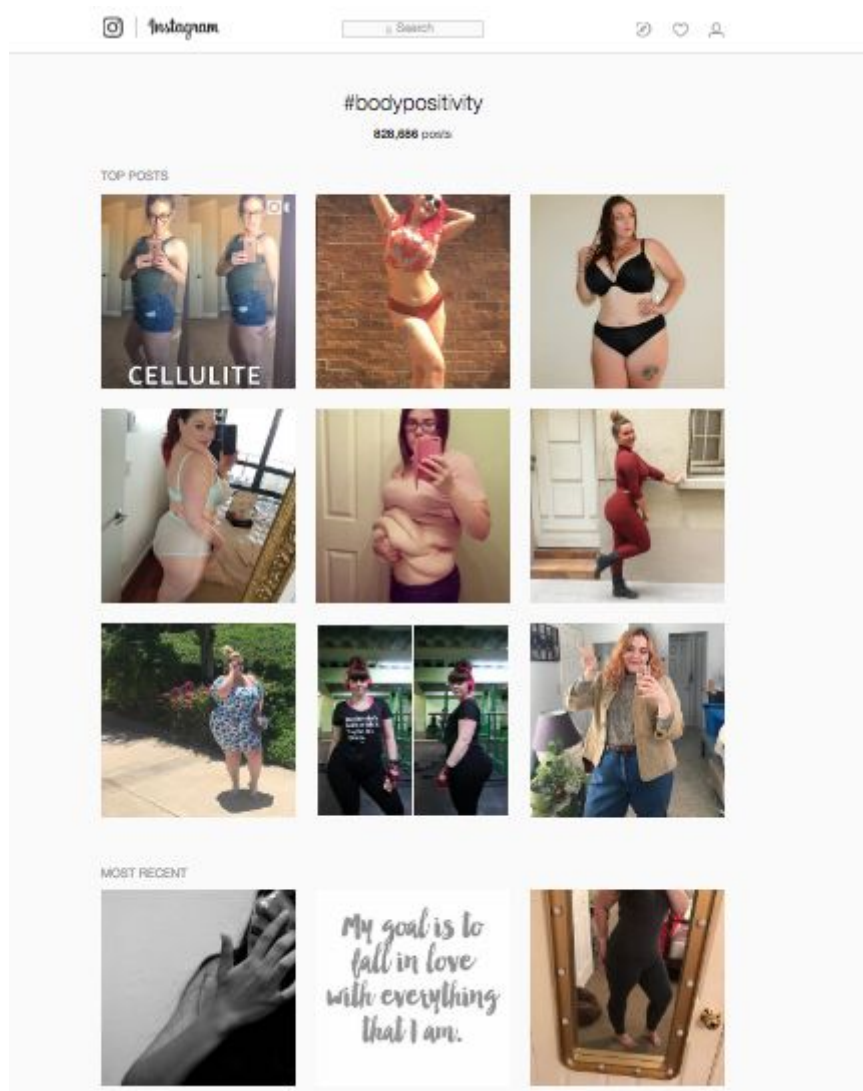
2.1. Instagram and hashtags

Instagram, a global photo sharing social media platform founded in 2010, has currently more than 600 million users - 300 million of them active daily. During a time period of six months (the last six months of 2016) the growth was 100 million new users (Instagram, 2016). As Instagram is a mobile application mostly - web-viewing is possible but photo-sharing is not - it goes well with the fact that people use the internet on their mobile phones more and more. For instance in Sweden 78 percent of the population uses internet on their phones, 65 percent of the population every day. (Svenskarna och Internet, 2016) Even though Facebook is still the largest social media globally (Statista, 2017), Instagram is rapidly growing. In Sweden, for example, 44 percent of all internet users use Instagram - even though the usage is almost only available on smartphones, not on computers. (Svenskarna och Internet, 2016).

Instagram is not only a relevant platform for this study because of its popularity and growth but also because it is a platform for visual body positivity. This is noticed in previous studies. For example Lisa Ehlin writes in her study *Becoming Image*:

“(Through Instagram) -- female bodies are represented that are not photoshopped, waxed and perfect. Instead, images are alternative and marginalized bodies explore femininity, identity and gender ideals --” (Ehlin, 2015:15)

When looking at hashtags on Instagram, the platform shows all the pictures with a searched hashtag, in chronological order. In addition to the image feed where all photos are in a chronological order, showing the most recent ones first, Instagram has a feature of “top photos”. (See picture 1.) This feature shows the currently most popular pictures within the searched hashtag: the most liked and commented ones. These features were used when conducting the visual content analysis and collecting a sample for this study.



Picture 1. Instagram features: top photos and the most recent ones. A screenshot 12.5.2017.

A fairly new term ‘hashtag’, added in the Oxford English Dictionary in June 2014, implies to the figure #. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014) According to the OED, a hashtag is a “word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used in social media websites -- to identify messages on a specific topic” (OED, 2014). In this study the used hashtags on Instagram are #bodypositive and #bodypositivity which have altogether over three million pictures (3.5.2017, Instagram).

Schlesselman-Tarango, who has studied hashtags on Instagram, describes hashtags as “unique user-generated tags called ‘searchable signatures.’” (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2013) She emphasises that hashtags are not only meant to describe a picture posted but also for

Instagram users to “assert online individual and group identities” (Schlesselman-Tarango, 2013) and therefore a hashtag becomes “a searchable signature”.

In terms of the body positive Instagram posts, adding for instance a hashtag #bodypositive can therefore indicate to the person’s identity and motivation to publish on Instagram - not necessarily to the content of the picture. In addition, as Schlesselman-Tarango mentions that the hashtags are user-generated, a picture published on Instagram with a hashtag related to body positivism might not be at all something that the body positivity community generally thinks as a body positive picture. This is discussed further in this study. Overall, all the body positive Instagram pictures are self-defined and user-generated and are therefore a subjective definition of a picture.

2.2. Body positivity - a movement, community or just a hashtag?

When thinking of Instagram and the usage of hashtags, using a hashtag does not automatically make one a member of a community or create a movement, but it can indicate a feeling of belonging in one. Sometimes a hashtag spreads wide and creates a movement or a community, besides the body positivity, examples can be found in the Arab Spring and the Ferguson case in the US. In the interviews conducted for this study, all interviewees described themselves as body positive. For this phenomenon they used words such as community and movement. Many of the interviewees also criticised the wrong usage of hashtags related to body positivism, such as in hope of getting new followers or fame. As body positivism is existing mostly online and majorly in one application, Instagram, there is no list of members, but instead self-defined evaluations of whether the picture should or should not be hashtagged with a body positivity related hashtag. This is discussed further in the results and discussion part of the thesis.

2.3. Fat acceptance movement - the roots of body positivity

The fat acceptance movement can be seen rooting the body positivity movement, as their goals appear to be similar - accepting a body as it is. Even though it is more of a political

movement and acts in a completely different way - the fat acceptance movement holding demonstrations and demanding the end of discrimination in society, whereas the body positivity movement largely exists in social media and is more individual based - the history of the fat acceptance is also the history of the body positivity movement. And where the fat acceptance movement naturally concentrates on the fat body, the body positivity movement concentrates on all bodies.

The history of the fat acceptance movement dates back to the late 1960's in the US, when there began to appear different kinds of actions around the idea of fat acceptance. In the year of 1967 there was a manifesto in Central Park in New York, US, where 500 people demonstrated for fat acceptance and for not feeling guilty for being fat - with banners such as "Think Fat" and "Fat power" (New York Times, 1967). In the year of 1969 the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) was founded in the US. The organisation started fighting for the rights of fat people, as well as for improving the quality of life of fat people (NAAFA, 2017). In the early 1970's the "Fat Liberation Manifesto" (1973), by Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, was published. The list of 7 statements consisted of following statements for example: "We believe that fat people are fully entitled to human respect and recognition" and "We demand equal rights for fat people in all aspects of life, as promised in the Constitution of the United States. We demand equal access to goods and services in the public domain, and an end to discrimination against us in the areas of employment, education, public facilities and health services." (Freespirit, Aldebaran, 1973)

Fatphobia, then, refers to the negative attitudes towards fat people, as well as stereotypes about fat people. In practise the fat phobia can appear in forms of bullying fat people, as well as discrimination in terms of employment, education or health care. Negative prejudices are connected to fat people, such as stupidity, poor hygiene and passivity. When looking especially at women, fat women experience negative attitudes from men when considering dating and sexual activity (Bacon, Scheltema, Robinson, 2001:1).

The academic field of the fat studies began in the early 2000. For years the fat studies were not a consistent field but individual academic researching the topic: the weight stigma, fatphobia, fat acceptance and weight-based discrimination (Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:xi).

2.4. The thin ideal

The thin ideal of women in the Western societies developed between the decades 1880's and 1920's when the idea that a fat woman was both rich and fertile started to change. The question of health risks of being fat came up, too (Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:11). The reasons behind this change can be defined in economical and industrial changes in the Northern America: farming and growing food became less common, new occupations in the cities appeared that demanded less physical activity, food became accessible easier (Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:12). While all this happened, the question of fatness began to appear. Meanwhile in Europe, slenderness had been considered as a class distinction for a long time - already in the 18th century tuberculosis had made many famous artists sickly thin and slenderness started to connect with intellectualism and glamour. In Northern America people connected thinness not only to a higher societal class but also to morality: the denial of flesh was a way to be closer to God (Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:13). By the end of the 19th century, it had become possible to measure the body and calculating eating in a totally new way: by counting calories and weighing the body. When the fashion industry also took part of the new thinness ideal in the early 20th century, the concept of thin ideal was ready: a desire for a thin body, especially as a woman, as the thin body represented economic status, modernity and morality (Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:13). In the Western societies the thin ideal is still valid today.

“By the 1930, American woman knew how very important it was for them to be thin.”
(Rothblum, Solovay, 2009:14).

3. Previous findings, key concepts and theory

3.1. Previous findings

When writing this study, the body positivity movement is lacking an academic definition, as well as studies about the movement. Most studies scraping this field are related to eating disorders, such as a study conducted by a bulimia organisation - a small study called Body Image Empowerment on Instagram.

Even though this study is not a selfie study, a large amount of the material consists of selfies. Self-representation implies to “a conscious belief or potential conscious expression of “me” that may be symbolized in words, images, or bodily tensions such as posture, gait, muscle tensions, and gestures (Horowitz, 2012). Selfies, therefore, published in social media are a tool for female subjectivity, as Ehlin writes: “In the selfie, the subversion lies in being seen, not being looked at, to experience oneself as real.” (Ehlin, 2015:44)

Previous studies of teenagers in social media show that teenagers do not only choose photos to represent themselves looking good, but also pictures that express self-sexualization and self-commodification (Herring, Kapidzic, 2015:5). This is not surprising, as especially women in popular media are more often than men portrayed with links to intimacy and sexualization of the female body (Hirdman, 2010:5). Suzannah Stern (2006) has also suggested that girls in particular are ‘experimenting’ with sexual ‘self-commodification’ online (Gill, Scharff, 2011:101).

As also previously studied, “social media has an impact on overall body image concerns and anxieties” (Klein, 2013:18). But when looking at the body positivity phenomenon, it is instead about celebrating and promoting different kinds of bodies, skin colours and flaws on a female body.

3.2. Key concepts

This part introduces and defines the central key concepts used in this study: a flaw, empowerment, a feminine pose, identity and self-image.

The first term to define is a flaw. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a flaw is “an imperfection or weakness and especially one that detracts from the whole or hinders effectiveness.” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). This is a complex term in a context of body positivism, as body positivity promotes that all bodies should be accepted and that everyone is good and worthy as they are. The word flaw, therefore, gives a negative reflection. In this study the word flaw is, however, used to define things on a body that are not usually or often seen, when picturing women. (See also: Western beauty standards) Examples of this can be stretch marks, visible cellulite or skin problems - something that is not a norm for a woman to show, as women, especially in the fashion advertisements are shown usually flawless. (See: gender norms, Western beauty standards and the flawless woman)

The second key concept is empowerment: “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). Conducted from the word power, empowerment is a word often associated with the women’s rights and feminism. (Oxaal, Baden, 1997) It is argued that empowerment is intimately related to participation and actions, therefore in terms of feminism, “women must empower themselves” (Oxaal, Baden, 1997), empowerment is not something that can be given. This is noted by The Human Development Report, as well as Oxfam:

“Empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights” (Oxfam, 1995, in Oxaal, Baden, 1997)

When examining the body positivity movement in social media, the notions of action and participation are clear. In the interviews conducted, the question of the empowering effect of the body positivity movement was discussed and can be found in the results part.

The third concept is a feminine pose. When thinking about portrayal of women, some poses and postures are traditionally seen as either masculine or feminine (Box, 2009, Mulvey, 1975). The feminine pose and breaking the rules of a traditional feminine posture are important for this study, as the theoretical framework and the content analysis discusses these issues as well. The features of the traditional, classic feminine postures are for instance that the body weight is shifted back to the rear foot as the front foot is pointed more towards the camera. Usually the body is also turned away from the light but the face is turned towards the light, head might be slightly tilted. (Box, 2009, Zeltsman, undated) Essential for the feminine pose is the so called “S-curve” which is meant to highlight the female body shape, as Zeltsman writes, “S-curve, --, the core of the Feminine Composition”.

When thinking the portrayal of women especially in social media, there are some trends that can be added to this feminine pose and to the sexualization of female figure and the female body parts. Examples of these are a thigh gap, collar bones and midriff. (Klein, 2013:95, Dines, Humez, 2014:255) Especially a thigh gap - a concept with a meaning that a woman’s thighs are not touching each other when standing feet together, implying to skinniness - has become popular especially on pro-anorexia (pro ana) websites and in social media. (Klein, 2013:102) The admiration of a thigh gap is connected to both self-objectification and self-destruction, as argued by Kendyl M. Klein:

“The thigh gap image, although produced for a female audience, is, indeed, a form of self-objectification that women have learned from cultural norms, eventually leading to self-destruction.” (Klein, 2013:104)

The final concepts presented in this part are identity and self-image. Identity is a conscious or intuitive sense of sameness over time. (Horowitz, 2012) Originally the word identity refers to a “set of definitive characteristics that made a person a ‘natural self’”, as Bailey (2003:384) writes. The term identity can be narrowed down when describing for instance gender identity

or national identity. A term close to identity, also discussed in this study, is a self-image - answering to a question “Who am I?” (McLeod, 2008) Self-image can include social roles, personality features and physical description (McLeod, 2008). As emphasized by researchers, self-image is subjective, one’s mental picture of themselves and not necessarily a realistic or objective picture of a person. (Bailey, 2003:382, McLeod, 2008)

When analysing identity, self-image and things that have effects on them, it is important to take into account the gender aspect. This was supported by Mascia-Lees and Black as well:

“Despite differences among researchers, early feminist anthropologists did agree on one thing: that it was essential to take gender into account when attempting to understand how a society operates or how an individual’s identity and life experiences are shaped.”

(Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:10)

In this research it was studied how posting body positive publications on Instagram affects the identity and self- and body image of the ones posting. The interviewees were asked about how their self-image has changed after they have discovered body positivity, as well as what kinds of effects body positivism has had on their self-image.

3.3. Theory

The theoretical framework of this study is based on feminism: to the idea of social, economical and political equality of the sexes (Adichie, 2012). This theory part examines four feminism-related concepts that are framing this study.

3.3.1. Social norms, gender norms, norm-criticism

Starting from the concept of social norms, meaning “the customary rules that govern behaviour in groups and societies” (Bicchieri, Muldoon, 2014), that gives base to the other, more specific social norms such as gender or sexual norms. Social norms can be described and therefore better understood also as “grammar of social interactions”, (Bicchieri, Muldoon, 2014) as well as a solution to the problem of “attaining and maintaining the social order”. (Bicchieri, Muldoon, 2014). The original purpose of social norms draws to the society - research suggests that social norms are serving a purpose of achieving social welfare, preventing market failures and cutting social costs (Arrow, 1971, Akerlof, 1976, Coleman, 1989, Thibaut and Kelley, 1959, Homans, 1961 in Bicchieri, Muldoon, 2014).

Gender roles or norms, therefore, are a part of social norms. Gender roles are “a set of expectations associated with the perception of masculinity and femininity” (Vláčil, 1996, in Monda.eu) Gender norms, then, is “a type of socio-cultural regulation to encourage socially desirable behavior” (Monda.eu).

“Culture constructs definitions of masculinity and femininity that have consequences for how each of us is treated in innumerable ways during our lifetime.” (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:2)

When looking at gender roles or norms, the roots and the possible original purpose of them can be traced in history. It is argued that in the Western world gender roles were to “ensure male rights and male dominance” (Spencer, 1884 in Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:23). Women in the Western society were seen as subordinate to men, due to the “biological necessities rendered them physically and intellectually inferior. Male dominance was thus seen to have

evolutionary origins grounded in the biological differences between the sexes, especially those related to women's reproductive functions" (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:24). The supposed ideas of the natural differences between the sexes is thus something that historically has been used to "to rationalize and further systems of oppression and even to determine social policy" (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:3).

As gender can be defined as a cultural construction, meaning that gender is not constructed by biological or natural actors, but "due to nurture or cultural practices and ideas" (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:2). Therefore gender roles and norms are something vital when talking about gender in general.

"Yet, shaping the sexual body in terms of beauty could be repressive and reinforce gender stereotypes at the same time as it liberated men and women from certain social constraints." (Hastings, Magowan, 2010:25)

Norm criticism, then, is about analysing, understanding and challenging, as well as de-structurizing or dismantling the norms and the power structures in society (IGLYO, 2017).

3.3.2. Western beauty standards and the flawless woman

Women and men in the Western societies face very different expectations in terms of appearance - as Naomi Wolf writes in her theory Beauty Myth, described as usage of "images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" (Wolf, 2002:10). The Beauty Myth is something above how a woman should look but more about "prescribing behavior" (Wolf, 2002:14) where the notion of beauty is something learnt and sought:

"Women's identity must be premised upon our "beauty" so that we will remain vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to the air." (Wolf, 2002:14)

Wolf notes (2002:152-152) how the Beauty Myth is different to women and men: for instance stretch marks in a body are something that makes a woman ugly, even though men experience the same features. Woman should have symmetrical breasts, although no one is demanding a man to have symmetry in his genitals.

Besides the thin body ideal discussed in the background chapter, there are many characteristics of what makes a Western woman beautiful. A light skin is desirable, as the women of colour are in the Western world seen as “exotic or deviant” (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:86) Other features for a beautiful, feminine Western women are blond, long hair, big symmetrical breasts, thin waist, light skin, pink lips - as well as the genitals, shaved in the right places. Beyond the physical features a beautiful, feminine woman is also connected with passivity and sexual modesty (Hastings, Magowan, 2010:25-28, 30, 33, Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:87, Mulvey, 1975:5, Wolf, 2002:152). A beautiful woman has to be also able-bodied, as disabled bodies are often desexualised (Mascia-Lees, Black, 2000:87). These are also characteristics of a sexy woman, too, as beauty and sex has in the Western world come closer to each other (Hastings, Magowan, 2010:25).

These beauty ideals can be seen in society in many ways: fat people face discrimination (see background: The fat acceptance movement: the roots of body positivity) and according to Stephanie Williams (2015) women face evaluation and stereotyping based on their looks in the labour markets: employers might discriminate against or for the beauty, when it is seen equated with reduced or increased competence or authority. In the films, women are often presented through the male gaze (see also Male gaze), in the advertising, especially in fashion, women are pictured flawless (Conley, Ramsey, 2011).

The notion of beauty is also strongly connected in the whole concept of being a woman and feminine, as “-- being beautiful, as defined by the norms of a society -- and working towards achieving those conventional standards are an accepted (and expected) part of what women do by virtue of being ‘women’” (Gill, Scharff, 2011:37). The idea of a flawless woman is pursued when beauty advertising define things such as bodily hair as “beauty concerns” and promotes the idea that a woman cannot wear for instance small clothing if she has visible body hair (Gill, Scharff, 2011:39). The Western beauty trends such as push up bras, dieting,

cosmetic surgery has even been contrasted to the Muslim veiling practices in terms of oppression:

“Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen claim that both girls wearing headscarves and those dressed in ‘porno-chic’ are ‘submitted to the meta-narratives of dominant discourse’ which define their everyday practices as inappropriate and deny them the power to define their own action (2006, p. 103).” (Gill, Scharff, 2011:188).

3.3.3. Male gaze

“In Western societies, the male gaze has defined women’s sexual status and desirability and in so doing subjected women to male ideals of feminine sexual beauty, --” (Hastings, Magowan, 2010:25)

Presented by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in the field of film research, the male gaze is another vital term when looking at the pictures that are defined as body positive. According to Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze, the pleasure of looking is divided firstly into an active and a passive and into a male and a female (Mulvey, 1975:5). Women are passive, male are active. Women are to-be-looked-at and women are displayed as sexual objects. Women are the images whereas men are the ones bearing the look (Mulvey, 1975:5). Therefore woman ends up being “passive, raw material for the active gaze of a man” (Mulvey, 1975:11). Men are the ones reflecting their fantasies to the “female figure which is styled accordingly”, meaning that women are displayed for the gaze (Mulvey, 1975:5,8). Their bodies are styled for wanted poses, their body is filmed with close-up camera angles that make women’s body fragmented (Mulvey, 1975:9). Cinematically, the male gaze is created with a combination of the narrative, filming and editing - with the control of dimension of both time and space (Mulvey, 1975:11).

Even though Mulvey was writing a film theory - and the examples of the male gaze were from the film history, such as display of the classic film stars Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe, the theory of male gaze can be seen in the display of women in general

(e.g. Miller, 2010, Hastings, Magowan, 2010). This idea is supported by Wolf, too, as she writes about beauty pornography and how women are often portrayed in advertising for instance: a lot of nudity and portraying only a torso of woman without a face. Wolf goes back to the idea of male gaze when writing about the suppression of female sexuality:

“Women’s bodies are portrayed as attractive packaging around an empty box; our genitals are not eroticized for women. Men’s bodies are not eroticized for women. Other women’s bodies are not eroticized for women. Female masturbation is not eroticized for women. Each woman has to learn for herself, from nowhere, how to feel sexual (though she learns constantly how to look sexual).” (Wolf, 2002:154)

3.3.4. Representation and gender performativity

Representation implies to “performative statements which seek to bring about what they state, to restore at one and the same time the objective structures and the subjective relation to those structures, starting with the claim to transform them --” (Bourdieu, 1992:224). Thus it can be said that a practise of publishing body positive pictures on Instagram is a representation more than a simple act, it is an intentional statement. This goes back to the question of whether posting a body positive hashtagged picture is being a member of a community or just a picture with hashtag - as discussed earlier. According to the quote of Bourdieu, the picture with a statement - whether it is visual, such as showing something against Western beauty standards and the flawless woman - strengthens the idea of participating the movement.

In addition to representation, gender performativity is something to examine in terms of body positivism. As femininity is connected often with materiality, the question of a body and representation comes up also with Butler. The traditional binary division connects a body to female and materiality, a mind to male and rationality (Butler, 1993:12). Butler, however, sees gender as performative representation that constitutes the materiality of bodies and materialize the body’s sex (Butler, 1993:xii). As sex is understood in its normativity, Butler argues that the materiality of body “will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm.” (Butler, 1993:xii). In addition, Butler argues (1993:xii) that a sex is a

cultural norm which “governs the materialization of bodies”.

4. Methods and materials

This part explains the methods used in this study, as well as presents the materials used. The sample of materials is available in the appendix.

4.1. Visual content analysis

The first method used in this study was a quantitative visual content analysis. This was conducted in order to gain knowledge of the movement, as well as to identify who is represented in these pictures. The content analysis conducted was also done in order to receive statistic information about the movement, as the goal of a content analysis is a “numerically based summary of a chosen message set.” (Neuendorf, 2002:14). The content analysis in general can be defined as “systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002:1). For this study the content analysis was chosen to be visual content analysis, because the platform Instagram is based on pictures. Another reason to concentrate only on the content of images was to be able to code all pictures without language-boundaries - as Instagram is a global application, the descriptions of the pictures posted, as well as comments are in various languages, as well as in non Latin alphabet. The final reason to do the content analysis visually was the feasibility factor: a popular picture on Instagram may have thousands of comments in one picture. Even though Instagram is based on the combination of pictures and texts - a possible caption of a picture, as well as comments received - including text analysis would have brought feasibility problems in terms of language for instance. If text had been analysed, there would have been additional advantages to this study, too. During the pilot study the captions were studied in order to understand the picture, but this way of analysing changes the concept of visual analysis. However, the pictures exist on Instagram as they are and can be visually analysed without considering the captions or comments possibly explaining the picture more.

In order to strengthen the validity, generalisability, reliability and replicability, the typical features of a content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002:12), a pilot study was conducted in a similar

way in November 2016. This helped to understand what kinds of problems might rise when gathering a sample - such as a following question: what to do in terms of videos posted?

In total 381 pictures were collected and coded for the sample. In the appendix there is an overview of the pictures collected and the author of this thesis has the original collection of all the pictures. The pictures were collected under two hashtags, #bodypositivity and #bodypositive. The hashtags, #bodypositivity and #bodypositive were chosen first of all because of their straightforward wording. These words are not connected to any person, celebrity, brand or campaign, as many body positive hashtags are. One of the most popular body positive hashtag at the moment, for instance, is #effyourbeautystandards that has 2,198,790 photos. (Instagram, 3.5.2017) That hashtag, however, is created by a plus-sized model Tess Holliday, therefore implying to a person and a celebrity but also to being plus-sized (Instagram, 2017).

The hashtags are not chosen only based on the clear meaning but also statistics. These two hashtags are among the popular hashtags in Instagram in general (Top Hashtags, 2017), as well as among the popular ones in the body positivity movement (Bulimia, 2016). Currently these hashtags have following amounts of pictures on Instagram:

#bodypositivity - 807 843 pictures (3.5.2017)

#bodypositive - 2 575 657 pictures (3.5.2017)

The sample was gathered daily during a month, 16.1.2017-15.2.2017, in the evening time. The daily sample consisted 12 screenshots of Instagram pictures: three top photos and three most recent photos of both hashtags, #bodypositivity and #bodypositive. The method of gathering the sample can be described as a combination of two different sampling methods: a systematic random sampling and a multistage sampling (Neuendorf, 2002:86). The sample gathering method was tested firstly in the pilot study to be proven to work practically and to be representative. During the gathering of the sample, double photos were ignored always when noticed. Sometimes a picture becomes so popular that it stays in top photos for days, sometimes the same picture is among top photos in both hashtags. Video posts were also ignored for this study. These issues were learnt from the pilot study sample gathering.

The visual content analysis was done by sorting out the screenshotted pictures for the different coding categories that were chosen in order to learn, who is included in these pictures. The codebook explaining the criteria for each point and the full results are available in the appendix. The pictures were coded with four sets of variables: a person in a picture, gender representation, ethnicity, content of image. The pictures were first coded about representation of people and gender representation: how many pictures include a human, how many of those, therefore, are women? The pictures of women, then, were coded for the ethnicity, in order to learn who is included. Ethnicity is a difficult to define, but it felt relevant to gain some statistics in this area, too, even if only directional. At the end the pictures of women were sorted out in three groups: white women, women of colour and those pictures where the identification of a skin colour was impossible to make. These cases were for instance in pictures where a strong filter was used or a picture was black and white.

Finally the content of the pictures of all the women were coded in following five steps. The following steps were chosen in order to understand the phenomenon, as well as to connect the theoretical framework to this part as well. Whereas a traditional feminine pose and a flaw connects to Western beauty standards, the male gaze and how women traditionally are portrayed, before and after photos therefore are something that are in contradiction of the idea of body positivity. With before and after photos it is meant those pictures were in one Instagram picture it is combined two different pictures of a person: one before and one after some changes, such as training or weight-loss. A full explanation and definition of each category is available in the appendix.

The content analysed was:

1. A traditional feminine pose
2. Only a body part showing
3. Full nudity, underwear, swimwear/bikini or other small clothing showing a lot of skin
4. A visible flaw, such as stretch marks, cellulite, body hair (full listing in the appendix)
5. Before and after photos

4.1.1. Reliability and generalisability

As the sample is small compared to the original amount of pictures on the hashtags studied - over two millions at the time of gathering - the sample is naturally directional more than fully accurate. Nevertheless, the pilot study conducted the same way on November 2016 showed the similar results as now conducted content analysis of a typical Instagram body positivity publisher.

In terms of reliability, it must be noted that all the pictures are self-defined as body positive - meaning that a person posting a photo has decided to use a specific hashtag, without a guarantee that it fits to the idea and the concept of body positivity. This was also brought up by the interviewees who criticised the chosen hashtags for this quality - that they are “wrongly” used. This discussion continues in the discussion part.

Another issue to consider is general anonymity in social media, and possibility that someone is posting pictures of someone else or holding a fake account. The identities in content analysis were not proven - because of feasibility. However, when studying the portrayal of women, the pictures still exist, whether the actual publisher is someone else than thought.

4.2. Interviews

The second method used in this study was qualitative interviews. After the content analysis was conducted and the numerical information about the movement was received, it was important to understand the movement more in-depth and discuss it with participants, as well as bring the study to an individual level, too. Semistructured interviews were the second method that was conducted in order to understand the phenomenon, to gain subjective understanding as the in-depth interviews seeks to “understand the lived experiences of the individual.” (Hesse-Biber, 2014:188-189). As the topic of the thesis, body positivism, is not yet researched academically, interviews felt the best method to gain wide amount of information about the movement and to learn the stories and experiences of women participating in the movement.

For this study, five interviews were made with women who represent the picture sample gathered and identify themselves as body positive. The interviewees were chosen among those who actively post body positive publications on Instagram. Some of them were picked after using the hashtags in the sample gathering - the vital issue was that all interviewees are representative for the sample and the results of the visual content analysis. As content analysed indicates, a typical body positivity poster on Instagram is a white woman. No limits were set for the language, except the interviewer's language skills, so English, Swedish and Finnish were considered as options. It was particularly important that the person being interviewed considered themselves as body positive.

The interviews were semistructured, thus a specific interview guide - a set of questions to be asked (Hesse-Biber, 2014:186, 193) - was prepared. This way to conduct the interviewees was chosen in order to have a clear agenda for interview but still leave a room for interviewees, as well as add follow-up questions in order to fill possible gaps interviewee leaves. The questions were prepared aiming at receiving as wide and in-depth picture of the situation as possible, covering both basic facts of person's history, as well as deeper thoughts about identity for instance. The essential theoretical framework was part of the interview guide planning, so questions about body image, identity and empowerment were included in the questions.

The interview questions were sent to all interviewees beforehand, so they had time to prepare if they wanted to. Some changes were made before the interview, such as re-formulating questions. All interviews were run through with the same interview guide and the same questions, but as the interviews were semistructured, some additional questions were added during the interviews to clarify the point interviewee meant or to ask follow-up questions based on what the interviewee had said. The interviewees were also told that they can add or comment on any point of the interview, if they want to add something that is not asked. The ones interviewed were also sent the transcription afterwards, in order to let them add if something was missing - and also as a symbol of trust and to strengthen the informed consent. The interviews with Swedish people were done in English, an interview with a Finnish Instagrammer was done in Finnish with an English summary of a transcription. One

of the interviews was done face to face, all others were done via Skype, due to geographical reasons. The interview guide is available in the appendix, the author of this thesis has the transcribed interview materials.

4.3. Ethics

This thesis uses images of women in order to clarify the results and the coding criteria of the content analysis. It felt necessary to use images, as it is a visuality based study. All images are from Instagram and they are public for anyone - no need to register to Instagram first. The pictures used in this thesis are discussed in a respectful way.

The women interviewed for this thesis are referred in this text with their real names, with their permission. The interviewees have also seen the complete transcription of the interviews. The nature of the research was explained already in brief to them when requesting for an interview. More explicit explanation of the research and especially the purpose and structure of the interview was explained then when a participant had agreed on the interview. It was taken care of that the interviewees knew what they are signing up for, as well as what is included in this process of the interviews. The informed consent, therefore, was carefully taken care of, as suggested in the book of Feminist research practises. (Hesse-Biber, 2014:193). This was done in multiple ways: from telling the participant that the interview will be recorded and asking the permission to do so, to encouraging participants to contact the researcher in any point if they wanted more information about the process.

5. Results

5.1. The content analysis results

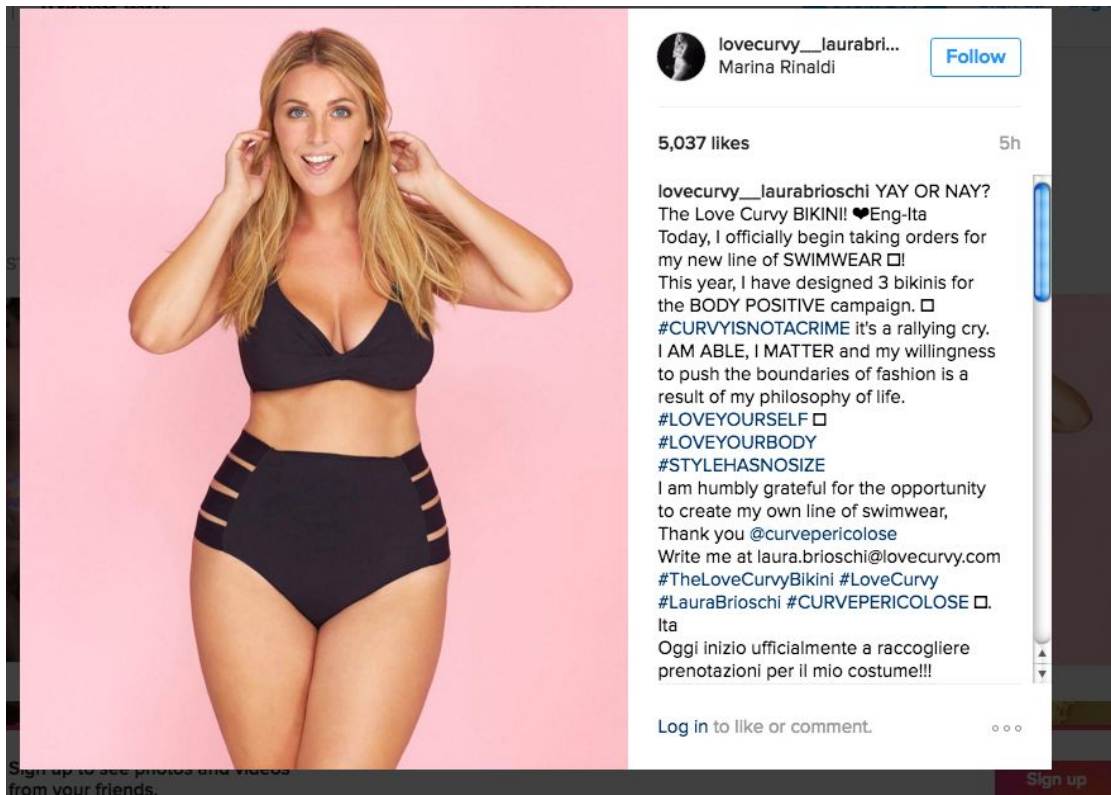
This part presents the major findings of the visual content analysis and answers the first research question: what does a body positive picture look like, who is displayed and how? This part also presents the results of if and how diverse bodies are displayed in the body positive hashtags. Full findings and the codebook explaining each coding criteria more explicit is available in the appendix. Total of 381 pictures were coded. For clarity, the results are rounded off to integers. The original values of the percentages are in their decimal form and can be found in the appendix.

5.1.1. A movement of white women

The visual content analysis shows clearly that the body positivity movement on Instagram is a phenomenon of white women. Based on the content analysis, women appeared in 92 percent of those pictures that include people pictured photographically. The amount of men in the sample was 6 percent. One percent contained pictures where both genders were represented in equal amount, and one percent of the pictures contained a person whose gender was not possible to identify. When coding pictures that had many people in them, the gender majority determined the coding to either woman, man or an equal representation. As this was only a visual analysis, the possibility of mistaken gender obviously exists. When conducting the pilot study earlier in a similar way, the gender distribution was then (with a smaller sample) 94 percent women, 4 percent men. Thus, these results support each other and strengthen the validity of the content analysis.

Out of all the pictures of women, 91 percent are pictures of white women. When excluding those pictures that were not possible to identify to this category (strong filters or black and white photos for instance), the amount of women of colour was at the end 7 percent. Even if this category of white women and women of colour is only directional as skin colour is difficult to define, it shows the big majority of white women. Even though directional results,

it is clear that the amount of women of colour is small. The religious signs were not part of the study, but afterwards noticed when discussed with the interviewees that women wearing hijab or veil of some kind are almost totally missing when studying body positivity on Instagram. In this sample there is a one picture where a woman wears a hijab. This is discussed more further. A typical picture for the body positive hashtags can be seen in the picture 2.



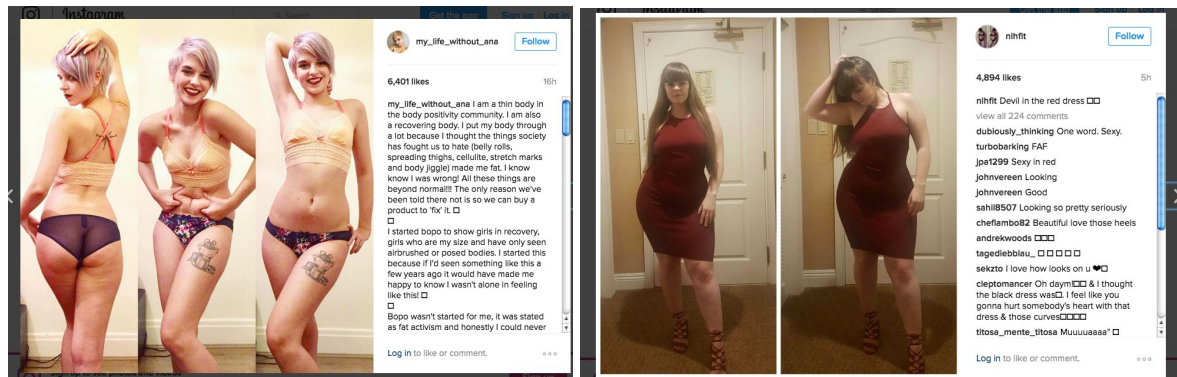
Picture 2: A typical picture of body positive hashtags: a white woman in her underwear or bikini, no visible flaws in the photo. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

5.1.2. The content of the pictures: feminine poses and underwear pictures

The results show that over a half of the pictures of women were underwear pictures: 59 percent. This group included pictures where women are in their swimwear, in underwear, nude or in a training clothing that shows a lot of skin. The question of showing a lot of skin is discussed further in the discussion part.

A traditional feminine pose - weight shifted to back, front foot pointed towards the camera, S-shape curve in the figure - were found in the 42 percent of the pictures (see pictures 3 and 4

for examples). Although other poses were not identified in the coding, many poses can be described as neutral, for instance a mirror selfie without a specific posing. Other poses seen were for instance a yoga position or a simple head shot or a selfie where only a head is visible.



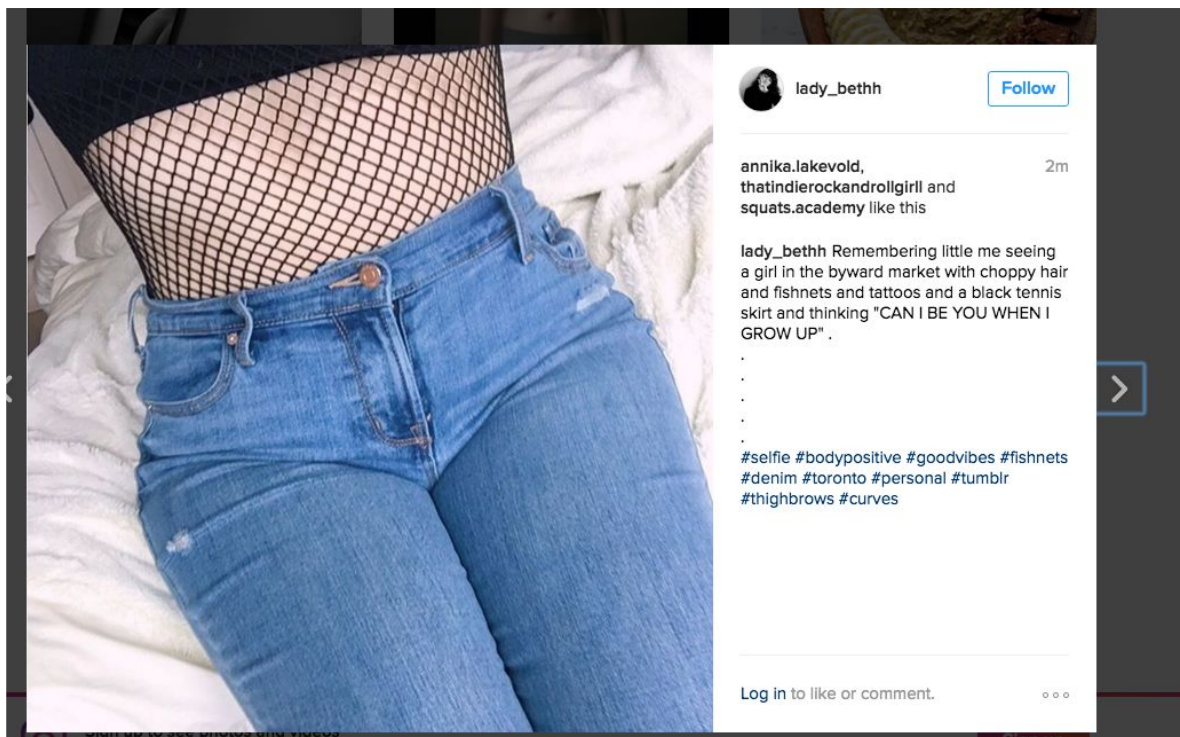
Pictures 3 (left) and 4 (right), examples of a traditional feminine pose: front foot pointed more towards the camera, weight shifted back, a slight S-curve in the figure. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

Visible flaws were found in the 31 percent of the pictures (see a picture 5). Examples seen in the sample are stomach rolls, cellulite, loose skin and skin conditions such as acne. Many of these flaws are related to skin and the idea of flawless skin. In the coding the weight itself was not counted as a flaw, as it felt too vague to evaluate by the picture when a person is overweight - especially when not all pictures show a full body. However, when a person pictured was notably overweight, often some flaw listed was noticed, too, such as back or stomach rolls or cellulite.



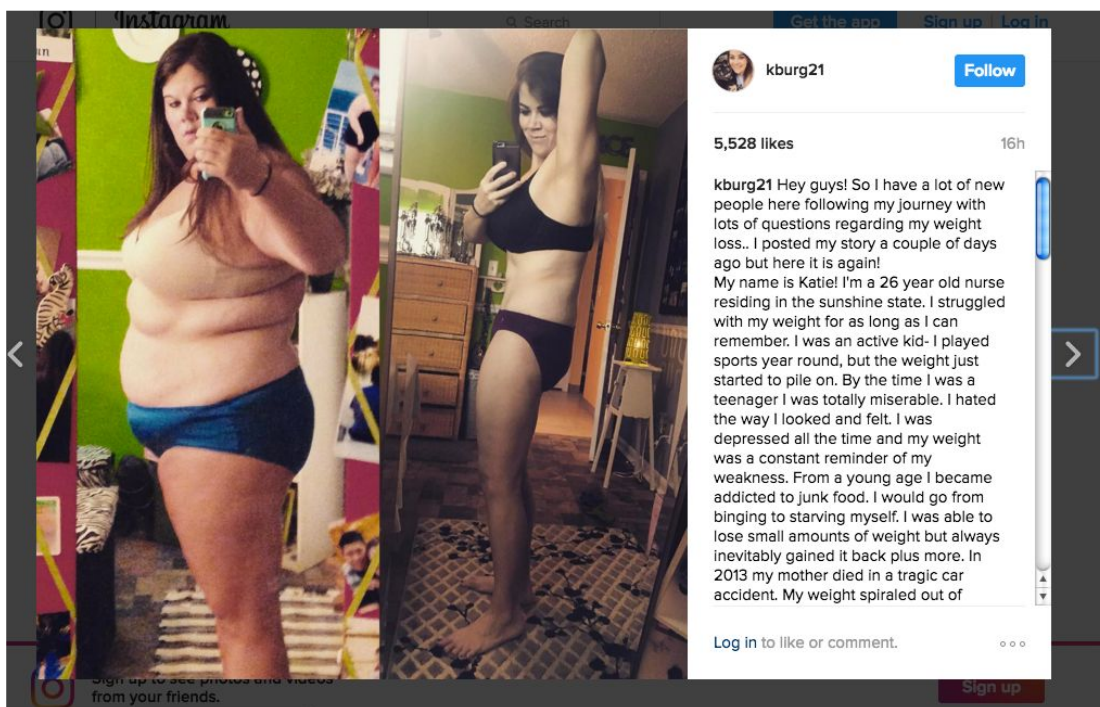
Picture 5: an example of a flaw: a skin disorder. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

The pictures with only a body part was showing were in minority, 6 percent of all the pictures of women (see a picture 6). Example of these body parts are for instance a close up picture to lips, stomach or legs.



Picture 6. An example of only a body part in the picture. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

A before and after photo was seen in the 10 percent of the pictures (see picture 7 for example). This category was originally counted with a name “progress and transformation”, but changed to more descriptive name. This category includes photos which show how a body has changed - in different ways such as after a childbirth, or with a results of training, weight-loss or weight-gaining. This category was important for the research topic, as these photos often represent something different to body positivity: these photos show “old” and “new” body and often only the latest one is seen in a positive light and as the acceptable one - whereas body positivism encourages to accept all bodies. As a counterforce to these before and after photos, however, there are this phenomenon called 30 seconds transformation photos, which are explained and discussed in the discussion part.



Picture 7. An example of a before/after picture. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

To conclude the visual content analysis results, these results show that typical body positive pictures under the large, popular hashtags contain a lot of nudity but not so much flaws visible. Although the movement has been described even as a “movement made of flawed people” (Gibson 2017), these hashtags show a different image. Diverse bodies are presented, but not majorly. Even though in the interviews the women wanted to show another kind of image of women and challenge the beauty standards and the male gaze, a traditional feminine

pose was found almost in the half of the pictures. These results show that the traditional beauty standards, the idea of a flawless woman and gender-norms are rooted deep even when thinking of Instagram posting with body positive hashtags. The intersections of the content analysis categories were not examined in this research.

5.2. The interview results

This part presents the results of the second method, interviews, and gives answer to the second research question: How does body positivity in social media affect self-image and identity of the women who are participating the online movement?

The theories presented in the earlier part of this study - social norms, the male gaze, Western beauty standards and discussions of identity and body image are something that the women had experienced or thought. The women interviewed had experienced perceptions of social norms for women, as well as beauty standards and the male gaze - how they have learnt to pose in pictures, how they have learnt that flaws are something to hide. Each theory is connected to the interviews in this part, but first there is the background stories of the women.

5.2.1. Journey to body positivism

The five women interviewed identify themselves as body positive. All women are about in their 30's and live in the Western countries (Sweden, Finland, the United States of America) They were found by using the body positivity related hashtags and then contacted with an interview request, either via Instagram direct private messages or via email if that was provided in the Instagram account biography. The personal body positivity stories were collected in order to learn the background and the starting point of a person, as well as learn which are the different roots that can lead to body positivism. The women had a little different stories and background about how they did find body positivity - for most of them the idea of body positivism had started to grow slowly. Sometimes there was a meaningful life-event in that point when they discovered the body positivism - life-event such as a break-up, moving to another place or leaving a religious community. All of the women

emphasised the importance of Instagram and the body positivity community in social media, especially when they started their personal body positivism journeys.

“I feel supported and uplifted by the (body positivity) community. Even though I don’t know these people, I just follow them, we can help and support each other.” (Hultin 2017)

“I go through other people’s posts (about body positivity) all the time, it is so helpful to me. Especially when I was getting started, it was so important to me being able to see other people’s bodies - because that helped me to feel more normal in my own skin. Like all those people have cellulite, all of these people have stretch marks. It is not just me feeling like this weird alien I have felt my whole life.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

For each women it was a little different how they defined and felt about body positivism. For some it was a strong political choice in society, for some it was a helper in their way to accept their body and develop a stronger, more positive body image. The interviewees were also asked to tell their definition of body positivity. This was done in order to reach better understanding of the movement and to be able to define and describe it better. The women described the movement as something that is about treating the body in a good way, not judging yourself that much and that all bodies are allowed to be seen and to be able to do anything. It was also lifted up that the idea of body positivism is to dismantle the oppression and stigmas of marginalised bodies.

These are the shortened versions of each interviewee's' definition for body positivism:

“To be positive with your body, to treat your body in a good way and do not judge yourself so hard. All bodies are good bodies and all bodies are allowed to be seen and to be able to do anything, both online and offline.” (Hultin 2017)

“I read this somewhere, but ‘Don’t let your mind bully your body’ and that is something I am trying to achieve. I am my body, this is me, all parts are me.” (Haglund 2017)

“It is forgiving to your body and self. There is no one model everyone should fit in - everyone

are just good as they are. Body positivism is about accepting yourself, whether one is fat or skinny. And about building the self-esteem. (Kalenius 2017)

“Living your life and not having your body be the main focus of your life. Be a good person and do good things instead of changing your body, because that is not the most important thing a person can do.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

“Body positivity is a movement to dismantle a practise, institutions and stigmas against marginalised bodies, gender, race, body size, ability primarily - but any sort of body that is marginalised. It is dismantling the system of oppression that say that some bodies are better than others. It (body positivity) also releases us individually and allows us to move beyond the body insecurity and to show ourselves loved and/or accepted.” (Gibson 2017)

5.2.2. The flawed woman fighting against the beauty standards

For the women interviewed the body positivism represented a place where also marginalised bodies can be seen and can have a voice, can be heard. They described that through social media they reach a voice they otherwise are lacking in society.

“I do identify as a fat person and I see the world through that identity. Being able to be in social media allows me to talk more openly and to back other people who feel the same way. It allows me to be really accepted and to have a voice that is unencumbered by other people.” (Gibson 2017)

As women so often are presented as flawless (Conley, Ramsey, 2011), the women interviewed told they had felt they are the only ones having flaws or that they felt weird in their body in general. Learning that other people have flaws as well had given the women interviewed confidence, when seeing these photos in body positive related hashtags on Instagram.

“When I was growing up, I thought I was the only one who had cellulite, stretch marks and

love handles. Now I know that pretty much everyone has those features in their body, but people always hide them. It is important to show them, so that the kids nowadays growing won't think they are the only ones.

People have flaws. People look like people, not like models or plastic mannequins. It has given me security and confidence in myself, through knowing that everyone has flaws.”
(Hultin 2017)

And not only by showing flaws but showing *themselves* in general was important. The ones interviewed were happy to see especially more plus-sized women pictured as confident, beautiful and sexy in the body positivity movement. It was also important for the women to be able to see bodies on Instagram that represented their bodies or were similar to theirs. This point worked for everyone the other way around as well: they received positive feedback from their pictures and posts as they were role models for other body positivity community members:

“When I post these things (body positive pictures) online, just like going to the beach in bikini, people write me long emails about how after I posted my picture they feel a little more confident to go to a beach as well.” (Hultin 2017)

“I realised people were getting empowered just by seeing someone like me in the clothes that I wear. Like just posting a selfie and people will contact me and say that ‘you look so good in that dress, I have a dress like that too and I never wear it, instead I just hide in these other kinds of clothes.’” (Haglund 2017)

Other things mentioned related to Western beauty standards were for instance fatphobia and fat-shaming and body hair shaving as a norm for a woman. These things are examples of the norms that these women try to dismantle by showing themselves as they are, whether their bodies have something society defines as a flaw.

With body positivity, women had also learnt away from the idea that a woman should look or pose a certain way in a picture - be seen through the male gaze.

“I can now post a selfie and look in the camera with a powerful look and I don’t have to smile or look pretty or cute or pose in a certain way that I have learnt that that is how women are supposed to pose to look feminine” (Hultin 2017)

Clothes were something everyone mentioned - that they now feel, with the help of body positivity, that they can dress actually how do they want and not hide their flaws or the whole body. This is discussed in the next part, about representation.

5.2.3. The representation of the body positivity outside social media

It is not that the body positivity movement would only exists in social media. But as a movement, it is hard to notice in daily life, as it is individual based in the real life. The women interviewed told that body positivism shows in their real lives, outside of social media, in many ways. Wearing the kind of clothing they really wanted was one thing everyone emphasised, but other things were mentioned as well, such as confident in general.

“I wear the clothes I want to wear. If I post a selfie about myself in a crop top or tight dress, then I actually wear it outside, too. It is not like taking a selfie and then dressing up for something more modest. Body positivity is about taking place and not making excuses for yourself in society. If I go to a party, I am not like ‘I am sorry I am so fat in this dress’”. (Haglund 2017)

For some interviewees, they saw the real life representation of body positivity as an actual idea of the whole movement, reducing the importance of Instagram community more to a tool and supporter to be able to do this. For many the participation and action first in social media had helped them to bring body positivism in their actual, offline lives.

“My body positivity exists outside of social media and that is obviously the whole point of it, if it actually changes your life and the actions in your life. While I gained a lot of confidence and body positivity through social media, been able to use that off from social media, is what really has changed my life.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

“The actual changes happen inside your head. Even though the body positivity community has been a support to me, no one can change you but you.” (Kalenius 2017)

5.2.4. Identity and body image

“Body positivity has affected my whole life. My demeanor, the way I carry myself, the way I dress, the way I present myself.” (Gibson 2017)

The results regarding to the identity and body image were clear: all interviewees said body positivism had effected in a positive way to their identity, strengthen their self-esteem and changed in a positive way their body image.

“Honestly it (body positivity) has changed everything. I used to think horrible things about myself and I would go bed crying all the time, just hating myself. People would tell me I look beautiful and would say they love me and I just did not believe it at all. Now I finally feel beautiful and believe that I am. I can see also beauty in so many other people and other ways I would have never seen before. The body positivity has changed my self-image completely.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

“When I was younger, I had self-esteem issues. I did not think that I was good-looking, I even thought I looked ugly. Today I accept myself as I am. I feel that I am more beautiful than I have ever felt before. I believe this sentiment is so strong that it is visible to other people, too.” (Kalenius 2017)

5.2.5. A political and an individual way to empowerment

The body positive women interviewed all said that this movement is empowering to them. The empowerment of the movement became from different things and areas. For some this whole movement was more political, for others more individual. The first extracts are more political approaches to empowerment:

“The society is telling us to hate ourselves and to act and look a certain way - and if you do not follow that norm, you should be ashamed and embarrassed. Especially the fat acceptance movement but also body positivity movement is telling us to fuck that, we are going to like ourselves anyways. That is the empowering part to me: I can wear this and be awesome and I have all these people behind me in all this.” (Haglund 2017)

“It is super empowering to be able to exist in my body so that I am not playing by the rules that society tells I should play because I am fat. People have problems with me existing in the clothes that I wear, in my confidence and loving myself. The reactions that people face proves me every single day that it is a political choice.” (Gibson 2017)

For some women interviewed, the approach to body positivism was more individual based. The questions of discrimination and society are still there, but firstly it was about woman's own well-being and acceptance. More individual approach to empowerment is this for instance:

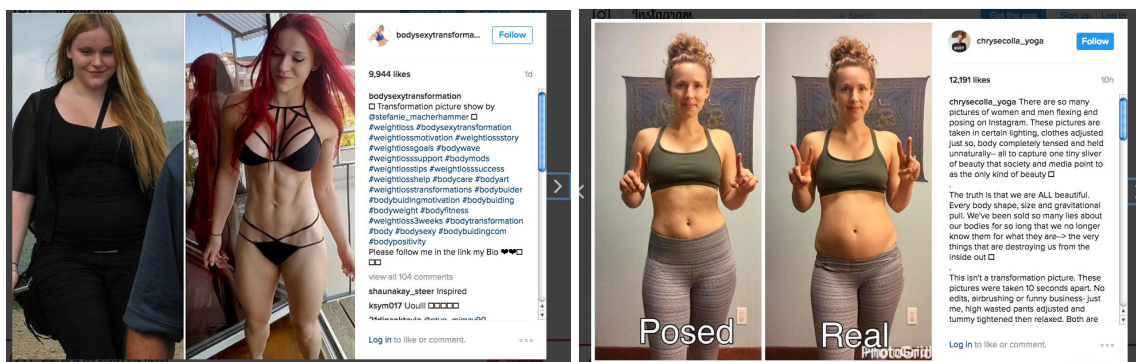
“One of the biggest ways I feel empowered is that I can put on a bikini and go to the beach, be surrounded by the people and feel great. Before I would have spent the whole day miserable and hiding under t-shirt and towels and do everything I could to minimize myself and disappear and not draw any attention on myself.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

The empowerment of this movement rises not only through participation and action: scrolling through other people's body positive pictures and posting their own ones, but also through interaction with other members of the community. The women told the empowering effect of someone writing a personal feedback and thanking a poster for their encouragement, as well as just receiving a lot of positive comments and likes to their own pictures.

6. Discussion and criticism

6.1. Transformation Tuesday - how the hashtags are “wrongly” used

The content analysis for this thesis contains pictures from two popular body positivity hashtags: #bodypositive and #bodypositivity, with more than two million pictures in the time of sample-gathering. Based on the interviews and all the personal research done about the topic, some of the pictures included in the sample are, nevertheless, something against the idea of body positivism. A case and an example of this would be a popular Instagram trend, with more than 10 million pictures (2.5.2017, Instagram) a #TransformationTuesday (see a picture 8). This hashtag shows pictures of people who have done changes in their body - a weight loss, training, a weight loss surgery - and now they present their “old” and “new” body side by side in the picture. These before and after photos were seen in 10 percent of all the pictures of women in the content analysis sample.



Picture 8: an example of before and after picture. Picture 9: An example of 30 seconds transformation, a counterforce to actual transformation, before and after, pictures. Pictures from the content analysis sample 2017.

This issue was discussed in the interviews, too, as the interviewed women were asked about their thoughts regarding to the pictures under these hashtags studied.

“It is common that popular movement is getting hijacked by other people. When I went into these hashtags (#bodypositivity, #bodypositive) it was a lot of exercise pictures and diet pictures, like this is my new body, I am now body positive, because I changed my body. --

Concerning weight loss or exercise or forming your body, changing your body, you are kind of missing the point totally.” (Haglund 2017)

As a counterforce there has appeared a trend to the side of the before and after pictures - a “30 second transformation” pictures (see picture 9). In those pictures women have again two pictures side by side, the other one looking more flawless and thinner, the other one showing flaws. These pictures are done, however, in the same moment and the point is to show how much difference can be made in just seconds: by changing the lighting and the pose for example. Sometimes these photos are called, thus, “posed and reality” photos. These pictures show that a flawless looking woman can have stomach rolls and be missing a thigh gap when she is just posing differently.

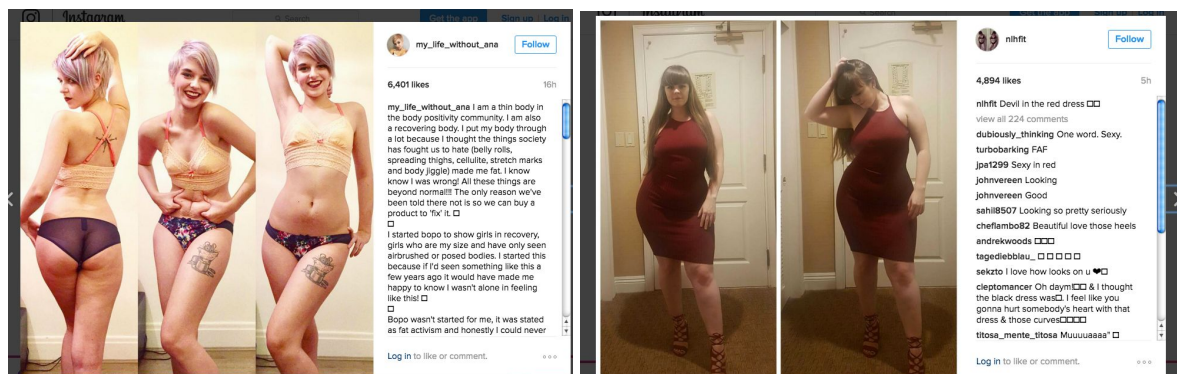
Another issue regarding to the hashtag-usage in a “wrong” way was the amount of the traditionally beautiful women. The ones interviewed mentioned how often the most popular photos are of stereotypically beautiful women. Also the content analysis shows that only a 31 percent of the analysed pictures has some kind of a visible flaw. The interviewed women admitted that of course a body positive person can be also a stereotypically beautiful and flawless, and that even the most beautiful person can have body-insecurities and have a low self-esteem and negative body image. However, when standardly beautiful, white women get most of the attention, it has negative effects on the movement, such as diminishing the voices of women with marginalised bodies:

“It (the large popular hashtags) definitely brings people who are privileges to the front, and it makes people who are marginalised to feel that they are not welcomed, and their voices are not amplified. It amplifies those voices who are privileges and diminishes the other ones.”
(Gibson 2017)

6.2. Feminine pose - unintentional or a choice?

In the results of the content analysis it appears that more than 40 percent have a traditional feminine pose pictured in the Instagram photo (see examples in pictures 10 and 11). As the

feminine pose (described in the previous parts) often makes women look more beautiful and thin, in the body positivity movement it could be something that would not appear so often, as the women are supposed to show them as they are, flawed.



Pictures 10 (left) and 11 (right), examples of the traditional feminine pose: front foot pointed more towards the camera, weight shifted back, a slight S-curve in the figure. Picture from the content analysis sample 2017.

The question about the feminine pose could have multiple answers. As it came up also in the interviews, the women felt they had learnt how to pose “like women” (Hultin 2017). So perhaps this pose chosen is unintentional, just something women are used to when they are taking pictures of themselves or being photographed. Another possible answer is to actively choose to pose a traditional feminine styled pose - but with flaws (see picture 10 for an example). Therefore a picture becomes more of a statement, such as saying ‘I can be beautiful, sexy and feminine even though I do not look like a traditional, flawless woman.’

6.3. The health criticism

As anyone is allowed to publish and take part of body positivity, there are a lot of variety in the pictures. They also include pictures of seriously obese women, as well as anorectic women. Even though it is of course nearly impossible to evaluate the health situation of someone just by the picture (and without any qualification about health), it can still be said that not all can possibly be healthy. Obviously everyone should be able to feel good about themselves, but are these extreme ends promoting unhealthiness?

When looking at the pictures hashtagged under body positive hashtags, it is visible that many

women are overweight, some even obese. As also a majority of pictures present white Western women, it makes sense to fight against the ideal of thinness - as the thin ideal is not universal but Western phenomenon mostly. As Shuriquie writes (1999:1), whereas “many non-Western societies show a positive relationship between increased body weight and higher social class, the opposite relationship is found in Western societies.” When looking further, the fat acceptance online community uses body positivity hashtags, whereas pro anorexia community does not (Marcus, 2016). Even though a fat person can be healthy whereas anorexia is an illness, and even though these two movements are not that comparable as their ideologies and purposes differ majorly, it is clear that if simplifying, fat people are more common in the body positivity community than extremely thin. When looking through the popular hashtags of body positivity, there are, however, hashtagged pictures of women, who seem to be seriously underweight, too.

As WHO points out, there are more than 1.9 billion overweight adults in the world, more than 600 million of them obese (WHO, 2016). According to WHO (2016), the amount of obesity has more than doubled in the world in last three decades. Raised BMI (Body Mass Index) is according to WHO a “major risk factor for noncommunicable diseases” such as cancer, heart diseases and stroke (WHO, 2016). When having a look on the eating disorders, according to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, eating disorders have for instance the highest rate of mortality of all mental illnesses (ANAD, 2017).

Normalizing health and mental problems can be a good thing if it means reducing a stigma and for instance helping women to be more open about the problems without being afraid of being judged. But if normalizing means that there are no health risks to be obese, anorexic or bulimic, the body positivity phenomenon might actually be harmful.

This issue was brought up in the interviews, too. The women mostly judged the idea of promoting unhealthiness, and many emphasised that this movement is not about health at all. A fat person can be healthy and thin unhealthy - that is something impossible to evaluate from the pictures, in many cases. Concerns about health of an overweight person was said in the interviews to be more fat-shaming than actual concerns. The discrimination of overweight people in society came up as well - the health concerns are useless, as overweight people face

so many troubles in society already (Haglund 2017). Overall the women got back to the questions of acceptance of a body and oneself - that should not be about health.

“You can be super unhealthy and just eat fat all day and that is ok I think - because it is not about health but being ok with your body. It is easy to hide your fat-shaming to saying you are taking care of their health. That is shaming bodies.” (Hultin 2017)

“Even I think health is important, it does not mean that you are a good person if you are healthy and bad if you are unhealthy. Being healthy should not be a qualifier to whether you are accepted or not.” (Wettlaufer 2017)

6.4. The diversity criticism

“There is very little representation of transgendered people, the people of colour and the people who are disabled. To be honest, I was sometimes on those hashtags in the top photos. And still, I am white, I have an hourglass shaped figure - I have all these other privileges even though I am fat. It is privilege of privilege and it continues to perpetuate that instead of dismantling the marginalised people. It does change the discourse of what body positivity means.” (Gibson 2017)

Body positivity on Instagram rarely includes women of colour, Muslim women or disabled women. This is seen in the content analysis, as the amount of women of the colour was 7 percent out of all women. In the whole sample, there was a one woman wearing a hijab (or any Muslim veiling), making the percentage 0.4. Originally this was not a category, but was marked down afterwards.

Body positivity has a great chance of representing women in a way they are not seen in advertising, media and in society in general. Still, when looking at the sample, not everybody is represented. Majority of pictures are, based on the results of the quantitative analysis, white women. While some amount of flaws is seen, such as breast cancer scars and

pregnancy/stretch marks, still a lot is missing. Whereas for instance disabled bodies are rarely seen, but they are also not that common in life, either. WHO estimates that of world population about 15 percent has some form of disableness, but of course not everything is visible, either (WHO, 2017).

But what are missing, too, are women wearing hijabs. This cannot be explained with the rareness, as for example estimated 23.3 percent of population in the world are Muslims (The World Factbook, 2017) - even if not all Muslim women wear a hijab or other veil. Access to technology, internet and social media cannot be anymore a valid reason behind this. Though, the whole body positivity on Instagram is based on each individual user wanting to post and share their picture. What is it that makes women wearing hijab not wanting to participate?

This came up also in the interviews with some of the women. One of the women told they had just discussed this issue with a Muslim woman, who had said she did not agree on the idea of taking your clothes away to show body positivity. This reason seems logical, as Islamic culture is not often associated with small clothing or nudity. Even though all the women now interviewed said it is not mandatory to show nudity or wear small clothing for pictures, it is typical for the movement. In the content analysis the pictures that represented women, 59 percent were pictured in a small clothing: underwear, bikini, full nude or another clothing equivalent to previous mentioned. The reason behind this was explained as a natural reaction for being used to hide the body that does not suit the society's norms:

“It is a lot of nudity and showing skin and being in your underwear, because if you are fat or bigger - or just not the norm, you are so used to hiding yourself. I think it is a natural reaction, to having hidden yourself all night long and I think that is why we see a lot of nudity in the community: because we have not seen it before.” (Haglund 2017)

6.5. The clash between the content analysis and the interview results

When comparing the results of the visual content analysis and the interviews of the women, there are two different descriptions of the movement. The first one, based on the visual content analysis, shows that a majority of the participants in this movement are white women that show no flaws in their pictures. Marginalised bodies and women of colour are rarely included. When looking at the interview results, however, the women say that this movement is a tool to dismantle the discrimination of marginalised bodies and that this movement is truly empowering to them. This part discusses and explains what this clash between the results is about.

Already learnt from the chapter 6.1., Transformation Tuesday was an example of how a hashtag can be “wrongly” used - against the original or main idea of a specific hashtag. Whereas body positivity is encouraging to acceptance of all bodies, Transformation Tuesday encourages acceptance of the body after it has been changed to a better one, with different methods used, such as weight-loss surgery or training. I see that this is exactly the same phenomenon that also explains the clash between the big hashtags and the experiences of the women interviewed. Many of them said that they prefer to follow specific people they have chosen to follow, not go through big hashtags, such as the ones studied in this research. They told that this way they can see pictures and bodies that are truly empowering to them, when the big hashtags contain images they might not find empowering or that might even make them feel bad about themselves. In the big hashtags related to body positivity the most popular pictures are usually close to the traditional Western beauty standards. This, therefore, tells us how strongly rooted the gender-norms and beauty standards in society are, as well as what is considered as beautiful.

For these women interviewed, the body positive pictures look different to what has been studied in this research. Academically thinking it was still relevant to do the study this way, to gain knowledge of the biggest hashtags used. This made it possible to argument and to create a repeatable sample. And the results show diversity in bodies, but the women

interviewed just see that much more, when they choose the people they follow themselves and do not look to the hashtags.

This clash is something to understand through social media in general: anyone can post anything and no one chooses which photos can be included under a hashtag. The women interviewed used the word “hijacked” when describing what is happening to the big body positivity hashtags. For me the reasoning behind this clash is divided into two parts: to those, who intentionally use specific hashtags to gain popularity, more likes and comments. In addition there are then those, who genuinely think that the idea of body positivism is for instance Transformation Tuesdays and diet pictures. As there are no movement rules or leaders, it is in the end everyone’s own consideration, if their picture should be hashtagged with body positivity. This brings back the discussion about whether this phenomenon is an online community or just a hashtag. For some people using these hashtags, it is possibly just a hashtag, whereas for others it is a community. These people may experience this phenomenon differently, which then projects to the whole idea of body positivism. In addition, of course there are those people who agree with the idea of acceptance of all bodies and dismantling the oppression of marginalised bodies but themselves happen to look like Western beauty standards. All these groups active on Instagram and body positive hashtags are what causes the clash in the movement and reflect in the whole image of the movement.

To conclude, the reasons behind different results are 1) usage of popular hashtag to gain popularity, 2) strongly rooted gender and beauty norms in society, 3) individual right and access to participate in the movement any way wanted and 4) experiencing the phenomenon differently.

7. Conclusions: Changing the narratives of marginalised bodies

This study has researched the phenomenon called body positivity. As previously lacking academic research, this study has explored the movement, defined and described it. The body positivity movement is an individual based movement, active in social media. Each individual publishes self-defined body positive pictures, and all the members of this phenomenon create an online community. As the visual content analysis conducted shows, a typical member of this virtual community is a white woman, typically publishing a photo in her underwear or similar clothing. A pose is almost in half of the pictures a traditional feminine pose but this can be used also as a statement against the stereotypical Western beauty standards and the idea of the flawless woman. Even though the movement can be described as “a movement made of flawed people” (Gibson 2017), in the popular, large hashtags, containing over two million pictures, the flaws are not always seen in those pictures.

When describing the movement, based on the interviews done for this research, the movement can be seen either - or both - as a political movement or personal tool to develop positive body image. The interview results show that the movement has an empowering effect - both for a person publishing the pictures, as well as for the one looking at the pictures. The feeling of empowerment can also rise when receiving positive and even emotional feedback after posting a picture. For all the women interviewed, this phenomenon had been a positive factor in terms of self-esteem, identity and body image.

Beyond personal self-development, the movement is, however, changing the way women are portrayed. As women still are often pictured as flawless, through a male gaze and in typical feminine poses, these pictures give another perception of what does a woman look like. A woman can be seen flawed: with cellulite, with stretch marks, body hair and stomach rolls. A woman can pose the way she wants, and she does not need to think whether the pose makes her look the most flattering. And even if she wants to pose in a traditionally feminine way, it can show, therefore, that a beautiful, sexy woman can have flaws and still look good.

“The body positivity has been like a journey and it continues to be a journey of learning about my body and how to resist the narratives of what it means to be fat and to be body positive. How do I see and fight for all marginalised bodies. It has just been this crazy journey that has taken me to do my masters degree and bunch of other different things through Instagram.

We should do more showing our life authentically and using that to dismantle the stigma (of marginalised bodies). To show who we are, different people and identities we have, to actually understand what it means to be black, what it means to be in a wheelchair, what it means to be a transwoman. It is important to us to capture our lives because that is what is going to change peoples’ minds of what our lives are like.” (Gibson 2017)

As the interviewee says, the body positivity is a way to change the narratives of marginalised bodies and how women are portrayed in our society. When combining all those individual body positivity journeys of better self-esteem and more positive body image, the journeys that show how a flawed, fat, skinny, black, trans or disable woman can be happy and loved and accepted in the personal life and in society, when combining all these stories and pictures, the image of how a woman looks like can be changed.

7.1. Limitations and problems

The main problem during this study was the lack of academic sources related to this specific topic. Most academic work about body positivism was related to eating disorders, which was not included in the aim and purpose of this study. Body positivism is being discussed a lot in social media and online magazines, but without the academic content. The lack of academic resources, however, makes this study more relevant and important, when setting a platform for the field of body positivism studies.

This study now conducted has limitations, such as number of interviews done, as well as conducting the content analysis without analysing textual meanings of pictures on Instagram. This sets possibility to continue the study and opens possibilities to further studies.

7.2. Further studies

Since body positivism previously lacked an academic research, this study sets a platform for further studies about body positivism. Besides expanding the study to include analyses of Instagram captions and number of interviews made, there are many possibilities to continue this field in terms of content. Possible directions for the further studies are for instance the role of men in the body positivity movement. Even though the majority of the movement members are women, there are men who define themselves as body positive. The amount of men in the content analysis of the sample was 6 percent. When thinking of a male body, for instance a fat man is often displayed as funny and the fat male body is often desexualised (Haglund 2017).

Another gender related future study could be a study about transgender or non-binary people in the movement - what does the movement look like for them? Which challenges do they face when it comes to beauty standards and body?

The third direction for the future studies in this field could be related to eating disorders. The body positivity movement includes many eating disorder recoveries, which could be studied further, too. Social media, body image and eating disorders are already being researched, but when connecting to body positivism, the research is still lacking. How does the body positivism effect the process of eating disorder recovery? Can it be a tool on the way to recovery?

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APPENDIX

The content analysis: the codebook

CODEBOOK FOR VISUAL CONTENT ANALYSIS

COLLECTION

1. The pictures are gathered on Instagram daily in the evening during a time period of 16th January 2017 till 15th February 2017.
2. The pictures are gathered from two hashtags: #bodypositive and #bodypositivity.
3. Each day, 3 “top photos” and 3 “latest photos” are collected from both hashtags.
4. Videos are excluded.
5. If the same photo is noticed to appear in both hashtags the same day, the double is excluded.

VARIABLES AND DESCRIPTIONS

Variables 1.

Is there a person in a picture? All photos collected are coded with these variables.

1. **No person in a picture:** Text, food, memes etc. Also pictures of people if it is a drawing of a person or painted etc.
2. **Person in a picture:** If there is a photographic picture of a person, even if it is only a body part. Also groups of people.

Variables 2.

Gender representation: only the pictures with people in the pictures are coded for these variables.

1. **Woman:** Visually recognised as woman. Pictures of birth are counted without the baby's gender, so woman + baby is counted in a category “woman” but woman + man + baby is counted as “both”. Also if there is a group of people, but majority is women.
2. **Man:** Visually recognised as man. Also if there is a group of people, but majority is men.
3. **Both/As many men as women:** If there is equal representation of genders.
4. **Cannot be identified:** If the gender is not visually possible/clear to identify.

Variables 3.

Ethnicity representation: only the pictures of women are coded with these variables.

1. **White:** Visually recognised clearly as a white.
2. **Person of colour:** Any other ethnicity/skin colour than white. If there is a group of women that represent other than white women, it is counted here.
3. **Cannot be identified:** All non-clear examples, also when black/white pictures or strong filters that make it impossible to identify the skin color.

Variables 4.

Content of images: Only the pictures of women are coded with these variables. Each picture can be counted in many content categories, therefore the amount of total is more than 100 % if counted everything together.

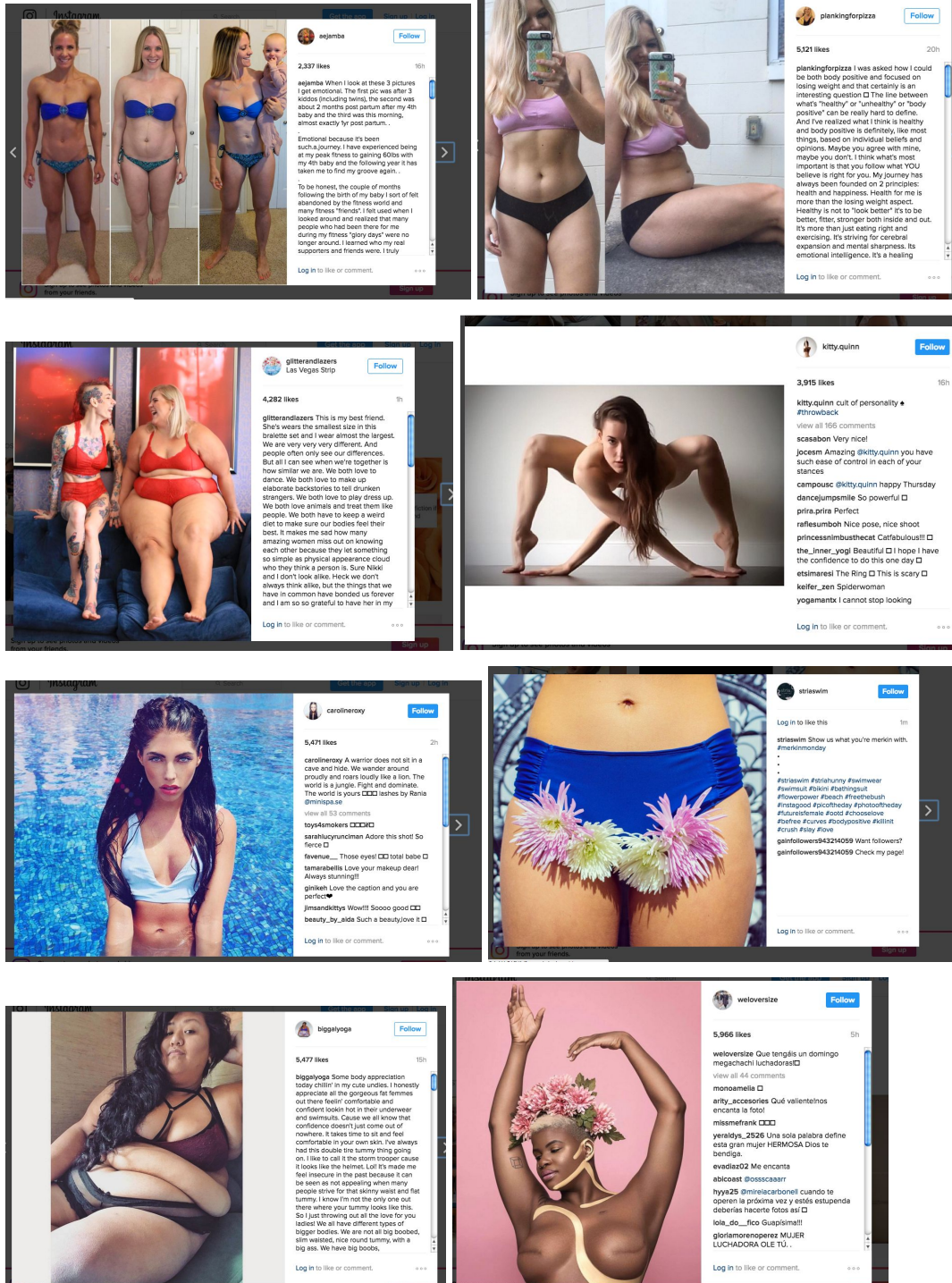
1. **Traditional feminine pose:** A frontal foot pointed towards camera, weight shifted back, S-curve. At least two of these things needed in order to categorise as traditional feminine pose.
2. **Only a body part showing:** no face, no full body but only a part of a body or close-up to a specific area of body.
3. **Underwear/swimsuit/bikini/small training clothing/nude:** All pictures where is a lot of skin showing. Small training wear/small clothing in general when it is comparable to underwear. Also full nude pictures with no clothing at all.
4. **Flaw:** cellulite, scars, love handles, stomach rolls, side rolls, back rolls, skin conditions (pigment disorders, acne, rash, other skin conditions), stretch marks, loose skin, body hair (armpits, legs, pubic hair etc), breast cancer scars, arm fat
5. **Before/after:** before and after pictures after weight loss, training results, also gaining weight etc. Transformation from “old body” to “new body”. No “30 seconds transformation” or “posed and reality” pictures.

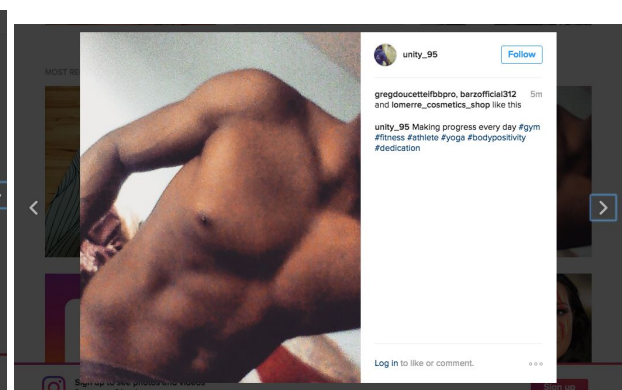
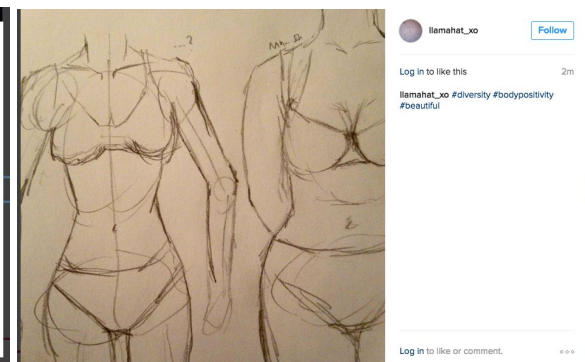
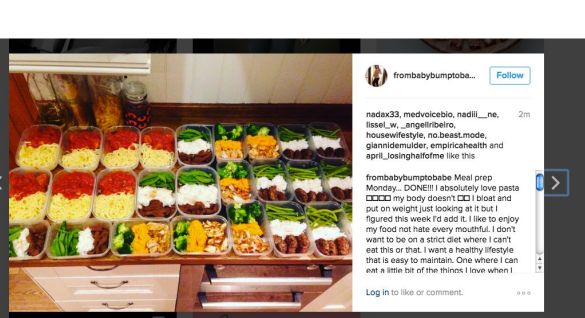
The content analysis: the coding

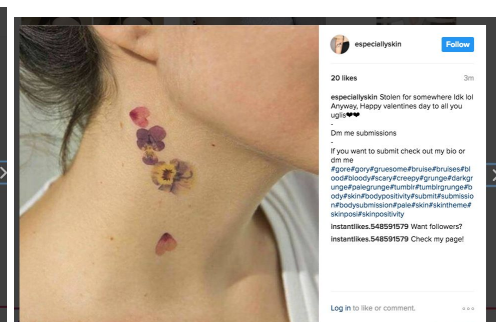
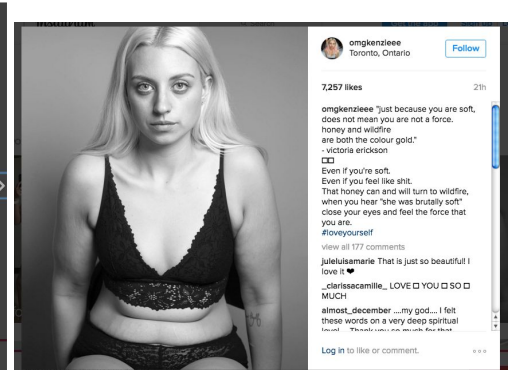
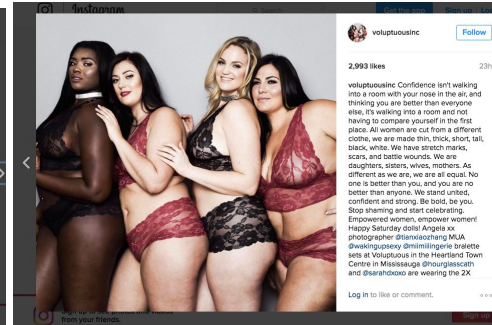
TOTAL NUMBER OF PICTURES	AMOUNT	%
#bodypositive	192	50.39
#bodypositivity	189	49.61
videos	0	0
TOTAL SAMPLE	381	100
GENDER REPRESENTATION	AMOUNT	%
no person in a picture	77	20.21
person in a picture	304	79.79
woman	279	91.78
man	18	5.92
both/as many men as women	4	1.32
cannot be identified	3	0.98
total	381	100
ETHNICITY	AMOUNT	%
woman in picture	279	91.78
white	253	90.68
woman of colour	20	7.17
cannot be identified	6	2.15
total	381	100
CONTENT	AMOUNT	%
traditional feminine pose	117	41.94
only a body part	16	5.73
underwear/bikini/small training clothing/nude	164	58.78
flaw	86	30.82

before/after	27	9.68
all pictures of women	279	100

The picture sample, examples







The interview guide

PART 1: PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Tell about your body positivity story: how did it start and when, how did you think before?

Does your body positivity exists outside social media, how?

What is your own definition about body positivity?

What are the reasons for you to publish body positive pictures on social media?

How does BoPo on social media affect or has effected on your identity?

How does BoPo on social media affect or has effected on your self-image?

How much you go through others' posts about body positivity? How important that is to you?

Is this phenomenon empowering to you - how?

PART 2: PICTURES:

Questions regarding to the sample and hashtags:

Please have a look on pictures on following hashtags:

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bodypositive/?hl=en>

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/bodypositivity/?hl=en>

What thoughts these pictures bring to you?

What kind of a portrayal these pictures give about a woman?

Who do you think is not represented, do you have thoughts why that would be?

PART 3: STATEMENTS

How well the following statements suit for you/what do you think:

For me body positivity on social media is empowering and I can see the change in my life it has done.

Body positivity on social media does not include everyone.

Body positivity on social media is a fat acceptance movement.

Body positivity on social media empowers self-esteem and positive body image

Body positivity on social media can normalize health and mental problems.