

A s s i g n m e n t # 1

Title:

The Formation of Communities on TikTok to Diminish Stereotypical Beauty Standards

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Abstract: Social media has taken the world by storm in the past decade, and it has also risen the beauty standards to an all time high. Photos are no longer a beautiful original image, but are completely manipulated by photoshopping tools and filters. These manipulations of photos are affecting the youth's body image and confidence as they are constantly seeing false images in their everyday life, believing that they are the standards they should meet. The new social media app, TikTok, has brought in some new movements and new realistic expectations of men and women's bodies. People have started connecting on this app and creating communities and networks which spread love and positivity about body image and insecurities in order to diminish the idea that 'size 6 is the ideal body'.

The rise of social media over the past few years has created many new opportunities, new communities and new ways to network with people all over the world. The emergence of social platforms, such as Instagram, was originally created to share raw content to your audience, but it has rapidly taken a turn for the worse. Instagram now as we know it, is filled with unauthentic, photoshopped images which create a false standard of beauty. As expected this has affected the beauty standards of men and women drastically, and has made young adolescences believe that manipulated Instagram photos are realistic body standards. This has affected millions of people's confidence and body image, and in the past year people have come together to fight against these stereotypes created from photoshopped Instagram posts (Avalos, Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). Millennials all around the globe have come together on the new social media app, TikTok, to raise awareness of the unrealistic beauty standards which are pursued on social media. They have utilised this app as it has become a space in which people feel comfortable sharing their perspectives on certain topics and issues, due to the culture of the app being more accepting of everyone than other apps such as Instagram and Twitter.

Instagram has now been around for ten years, it once started off with people posting harmless, unedited selfies with the possibly of an original Instagram filter to make it look "cooler" and to spice up the lighting of the picture. Flash forward to today and millennials wouldn't dare take a photo and place an Instagram filter over it. The process now is to take hundreds of photos and spend hours choosing the perfect one with the perfect angle. After that process has taken place, then the long operation of editing starts (Kleemans Et Al, 2018). With the use of Photoshop, Colourtone, Whitagram, and Airbrush, user's perfect their photo and before they know it, it looks completely different to the original. When people are endlessly and mindlessly scrolling through their feeds, they tend to forget that almost 100% of the photos they are seeing are heavily photoshopped and that the people don't look like that in real life.

The photo sharing Giant has captivated over 1 billion users to their site with the majority of users between the ages of 18-34 (Tanovska, 2021). Today's society has recently been putting the blame on celebrities and 'influencer's' who seem to be the main culprit when it comes to creating unrealistic beauty standards by constantly using photo enhancing apps to alter their images (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). The millions of fake images being spread around the internet daily has affected young adolescences immensely, as they are now obsessing over the "perfect body", which in reality is just a photo of a regular person, but has been manipulated into this false image (Sullivan, 2014).

There has been many recent studies surrounding the effects heavily edited photos have on the minds of men and women, especially the younger generations, as they are exposed to these images at a young age, and they are now growing up believing that these are the

standards which should be withheld (Cohen, Newton-John & Slater, 2017). Research on body image has been heavily investigated within the depths of Instagram, with studies showing that thin bodies have been heavily idealised (Fardouly & Holland, 2018). This has created a negative stereotype to any girls body over a size 8, leading women and girls to have low self-esteem and body satisfaction (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). In the current day, seeing manipulated photos while scrolling on Instagram is unavoidable as it will uncover 100's of photos of perfectly shaped women with absolutely flawless features (Tiggermann M, Anderberg, 2019).

Just when we thought there would never be any other social media app that could compare to Instagram, another comes to the surface. The emergence of the new social media app, TikTok, has blow up over the past 2 years, and created a third space for people to connect, network and create content. You can create up to 60 second videos, on what ever you desire, using all different effects, music and sounds. The short videos capture people's attention, keeping people interested for hours on end. This app now has a whopping 524 million users per day (Hughes, 2019). Influencers and celebrities have of course made their way over to this app too, which has brought over the previously discussed idea of the 'ideal body type'. This app is also flooded with face changing filters, and unrealistic beauty standards, which seems to be the new trend when it comes to social media apps, but on TikTok you are able to see whether a filter is being used as it says it on the screen, which is maybe why TikTok has become a sort of "safe space" for people to talk about body image topics.

As well as all other social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, TikTok is a platform where people from all around the world can connect with likeminded people in order to talk about their beliefs, or even network with people in a similar industry to you. And although there is a lot of negativity surrounding beauty standards on the mentioned social media platforms, there has been a recent movement counteracting these developed stereotypes which has completely changed the dynamic of social media. One of the first movements in the direction of diminishing the idea of 'size 6 is the ideal body size', was a 16 year old TikToker named Brooklynne, who went viral on the app after receiving comments about her "needing to lose some kilo's" (Rosenblatt, 2020). Initially, the young teen was offended and hurt by the hate comments she was receiving, (which were very common throughout the app before this movement) but she decided to rise above the haters and show people that beauty is not one size fits all, it comes in many different shapes and sizes.

Brooklynne received more and more hate comments, the more videos she posted with her midriff showing, but these didn't stop her, they only fuelled her more to end this stereotype and make people love themselves for who they are again. The more hate comments this young teen received, the more videos she posted. She eventually started an amazing movement in the social media scene, with girls all around the globe posting videos more confidently with their unedited photos and their bare, unedited stomachs showing. Charlotte Markey is a professor of psychology and health sciences at Rutgers University and said, "They're showing what a normal body looks like, and none of us are really used to seeing that in the media. ... When we see these sorts of videos online, they're kind of breaking the illusion that everyone is perfect except us," (Rosenblatt, 2020). Charlotte's comment on TikToker's positive body image movement outlined the positive impact it has had on people's confidence, as everyone expects other peoples bodies to be perfect because that's what they see on social media, but in reality every one has 'normal' bodies, social media just shows the perfect angle, with the help of photoshop and filters (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Brooklynne was one of the first to break the stereotype, and many others saw the insanely positive response she was receiving, and decided to follow in her footsteps and spread more awareness of 'normal bodies' and the film which has been placed over our eyes this past decade. From young teenage school girls all the way to big celebrities such as Lizzo, if you scroll through TikTok you are likely to see a body positivity video from someone. People see Lizzo, an American Singer, as a leading force when it comes to body positivity and is known for her realness and inclusivity to people of all shapes, sizes, gender and races. Like Brooklynne, Lizzo is known for, and has gone 'viral' on the app, for showing society her body in its natural form and still being amazingly confident. For adolescences and people who struggle with their image and confidence, seeing a celebrity and an idol for some, be completely real with her audience and get involved in this movement, has been a big help for many people (Rosenblatt, 2020).

Another user of TikTok, in which her account has gone viral for her relatable content and the way she spreads body positivity to young girls, is American 16 year old, Sienna Mae Gomez, who's following has grown to an extensive 15 million followers on her TikTok account alone. Sienna started posting similar content to Brooklynne, sticking her stomach out and doing skits for her enormous following to see (Jennings, 2021). This caught the attention of many, her videos landing on people's For You Page (the explorer page on TikTok) and she now inspires millions of people to feel confident in their own bodies. Her videos have no sign of filters or photoshop, allowing her followers to connect with her on a personal level, as there is no barrier between her and her followers. In an interview, Sienna explained her experience she had with some young followers, "a group of young girls came up to me with tears in their eyes, telling me how much I mean to them and thanking me for inspiring them to be more confident and not care so much what people think of them" (Jennings, 2021).

This social media platform, has not only brought light to the unrealistic body standards, but also the other 1000's of insecurities human's have within themselves, which are never talked about on social media these days (Cohen, Fardouly, Newton-John & Slater, 2019). There was a viral trend going around which people did a close up video of their main insecurities, and people would get thousands of positive and supportive comments (Slater, Cole & Fardouly, 2019). Communities are created in the comments, describing their similar insecurities (Beams, 2020). This was a positive movement in the social media scene, with people connecting even if they hadn't met before and sharing the love around the internet and creating a safe space for people who don't feel like they have one in their real life.

There is a counter argument to the body positivity movement, that women of sizes 16+ aren't getting the same amount of attention on the app as girls which are sizes 8-10 showing body positivity. Users of the app such as Hannah Fuhlendorf, Lizzo and @sheismarissamatthews have spoken out about this argument and have began creating their own videos which now are shown on the For You Page, expressing body shapes in ALL different shapes and sizes (Jennings, 2021).

Although there are strong movements like the body positivity movements I have spoke about above, people may argue that there is still content out there on Instagram and TikTok that extremely effects their body confidence, which is completely true. At the beginning of this movement, before Brooklynne blew up on this social media giant, the algorithms of these apps, stopped users from seeing these posts and in fact just shows the skinny and the rich, in attempts to make their app look better. There has been many

studies made over the past decade in relation to the correlation of scrolling through your social media feed - mainly Instagram and TikTok - and the high dissatisfaction of you own body (Jennings, 2021). In the current day, the algorithms have been altered so that we see more of the content which promotes confidence and body positivity, so that our feed isn't flooded with unoriginal, edited content.

I strongly believe that this app has brought a lot of positivity to the social media scene, without this app society still may have been in the same cycle of seeing unrealistic images day in day out. The false images and the over edited photos are of course still there, but it is refreshing to have another platform which people can express themselves and communicate with likeminded people, without the pressure of having to look like something they're not. There are still plenty of accounts on this app that flood the For You Page with posts that can negatively effect people's body image and confidence, but it has been very refreshing in the past year with the movement which has evolved on this app.

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