

Don't read the comments:
understanding how women's body image
is affected by comment sections on social media

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Journalism and Media Studies
Practical Based Masters 1
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Practical Project
Production Report
6114 words

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Brian Garman, for the guidance, support and patience he exemplified throughout the many years I have spent under his leadership and especially during my Masters. Thank you for keeping me motivated, focused and for always doing more than you need to.

Introduction

The development of media throughout the last few decades has brought an increase in social networking sites that allow users to communicate and share content between both public and private spaces, depending on the platforms and the intended use (Miller et al., 2016). Online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are recognised for enabling socialising in ways that transcend space and time. With the growth of internet access and the interest in generating and sharing content online More platforms were created which fell under the category of ‘social media’ (Miller et al., 2016). Myspace, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tumblr, Whatsapp and 9gag are some of the networks that allow social activity online. Currently more than 2 billion people are estimated to be users of social media at this time (Statista, 2018). Social media is unique from other media since its premise is based on the notion of the users being the generators of content, whereas traditional media forms content for users to consume. (Highfield, 2018). It is also unique in that users shape the platforms and change its use frequently and radically. This can be seen through the change that 9gag has undergone, from a network for people who shared content about games, to users sharing memes, and ultimately about various different categories that are constantly shifting and changing. Since the platforms are constantly changing and popularity fluctuates, it is the “content rather than the platform that is most significant when it comes to why social media matters” (Miller et al., 2016; 1).

Since social media has become more integrated into society, research and studies around its effects have become more common. Facebook has become the most popular platform among a variety of studies including Social Comparison theory that evaluates how people compare themselves to others online (Cramer, 2016), psychological well-being (Burke, 2016) and its link to negative body image (Fardouly, 2015). In the more recent years, studies have extended to include more platforms such as Instagram or Twitter. It has been shown that images of women’s bodies in particular, can have an impact on audiences’ body image and self-esteem (Meier, 2014). These studies have argued for similar theories on social media’s contribution to wellness and body image when it comes to images of women and how these idealised versions of reality have contributed to the wellness and body image of users. However, what is often omitted from these studies is the comment section. A comment section is a feature on a website that allows users to comment on a published post. Comments sections appear beneath posts, most commonly as lists followed by a blank text box for

further comments to be made. Most comment sections showcase a selection of recently added comments but others may require users to press a button which ‘opens’ the comment section. Whilst comment sections became crucial to news outlets in order for publishers to receive feedback on their content, comment sections are included in every other aspect of social media and is a large part of the content that makes up various social platforms. The impact that comment sections can have on wellbeing or body image in particular, has only been investigated on a superficial level. What has intrigued me the most and has been the impetus of this project, is how women are spoken of within comment sections that appear under images of women. Women’s bodies in particular seem to attract comments about their appearances, and these comments often focus on appraising or criticising women’s physical features. Men and women may face the same amount of commentary on social media and “share struggles against name calling, personal attacks and general ‘trollishness’¹ in any online forum”, writes Jeff Sonderman. “But women too often face an additional layer of spite, insult and objectification” (Sonderman, 2011).

Therefore, this project examines the social media commentary on women’s bodies, and highlights images and comments on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and 9gag. The concept of this project is to mirror the overwhelming sensation of insecurity and self-doubt that derives from browsing through social media and being bombarded with commentary on women’s bodies that result in the criticism of one’s own body.

Context and literature review

Since the late 2000s, social media has become a popular method of communicating and interacting with people on the internet. Recently, social media has become integrated into society, with as many as 1,870 million users on Facebook and 600 million users on Instagram (Chaffey, 2017). The nature of social media is constantly evolving and can be described as “a collection of online systems that allow for the production, storage and distribution of user-generated content” (Chen, 2013; 71). Nowadays, social media carries more weight in advocating your professional and social life than simply sharing photos among friends. Actively using various platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and YouTube have become a

¹ **Troll:** in Internet slang, a troll is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting quarrels or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (Wikipedia)

livelihood for many people who have grown large followings² and who use their profiles to advertise products and services. Indeed, “with so much money to be made from social media, and many of the methods to grow your following mapped out in widely-available books and online guides, nurturing your social media presence has a professional incentive that often fosters a professional approach” (Eror, 2017; 1).

The manner in which users interact with social media has also changed since the beginning of social media. While sites like Facebook and Instagram were predominately used to keep in touch with people you knew, these platforms are commonly used today to gain access into the lives of strangers, often, celebrities. Social media sites have “evolved from being purely hedonic platforms for private use” and users often desire large followings on social media as a marker of popularity or to promote their brand or business (Krasnova et al., 2017).

Social media has various degrees of privacy and public visibility. Some social media sites are considered more private because the users can choose who sees their profiles or published posts, while other sites remain in the public for anyone with the access to see. It is common practice for these sites to allow for users to alter their privacy settings so that it remains the user choice whether they wish to have a public or private profile. Instagram and 9gag, for example, exist predominately in the public, as most users do not choose to make their profiles private. Instagram accounts are automatically set to be visible to anyone whether they have and Instagram account themselves or not. Strangers are more accepted on Instagram since one of the anticipated outcomes are for users to generate large followings that bypass their friends and family (Miller et al, 2016; 8). Celebrities such as Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift and Cristiano Ronaldo have the most followers on Instagram, with Gomez in lead with 130 million followers (Instagram, 2017).

With the heavy emphasis that Instagram has on photography, it has become customary for social media users to see images of celebrities and other social media influencers³.

² Definition: In social media, a follow represents a user who chooses to see all of another user's posts in their content feed. (Big Commerce)

³ Definition: A Social Media Influencer is a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media influencer has access to a large audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach. (Pixlee)

In the last decade since the popularization of social media, “an increasing number of scholars have speculated on and researched the pros and cons of online social media”, and “whether using social networking sites (SNS) and social networking technologies (SNT) has positive or negative outcome”, wrote Harris Hyun-soo Kim (2016). Studies have shown that the use of social media can have an effect on mental health and the development of personality (O’Keefe, G. S. et al., 2011). In particular, a study was conducted by Flinders University in 2016 that shows evidence linking social media use to body image concerns, dieting, body surveillance, a drive for thinness and self-objectification in adolescents (Holland, 2016).

Kim (2016) further noted that prior research has linked social media activity to mental health issues, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and loneliness. While mass media had been the subject of many studies relating to mental health and self-esteem (for example, Thompson J.K. et al)⁴, the effects of social media on self-esteem, wellness and body image was still largely uninspected by 2010. By this time, “scores of experiments have demonstrated that exposure to thin-ideal media images increases women’s dissatisfaction with their bodies” (Perloff, 2014). Social Comparison theory had also argued that people “often rely on how they stand relative to other people” and would view themselves as inferior or superior than others when comparing their social standing or physical attributions (Suls et al., 2012). Authors that researched the effects of social media on body image often refer to Social Comparison theory to justify the impact that social media can have on body dissatisfaction, although research about the “appearance-related comparisons users make on Instagram” has not been conducted in the way it has been with Facebook (Hendrickse, 2017).

While there are studies related to social media’s effects on one’s wellbeing and body image (Best, 2014), there is very little academic research specifically concerned with comment sections on social media and how they can contribute to social comparison and body dissatisfaction.

The majority of social media platforms such as Instagram, provide the option of leaving a comment on material that is posted and shared to the public. Certain platforms will provide the ability for images to be private or to remove the comment section, but for those images that are in the public domain, anyone can leave a comment or read the existing comments. It has been argued that the problem “presented by the public sphere is its tendency

⁴ Thompson et al., 1999. “Exacting beauty: Theory, assessment, and treatment of body image Disturbance”. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

to be used without due regard to the scope of limitations of the concept” (Chen, 2013: 70). Comment sections are available for all site users to contribute to and is available for anyone to read through whether they have an account or not. However, there are no limitations to what can be said on these forums. Comment sections may have an option to report certain remarks that are against the site’s policy, but there are no monitors that dictate what can be said before it is released into the public on most platforms. The type of “fluid discussion reduces the ability of technology and service providers to control the nature of public discourse” (Chen, 2013). It may also take hours or days for comments to be removed if they get removed at all. Platforms with “resources devoted to comment moderation may not seem as overrun with vulgarity, but the act of sorting through obscenity can take a heavy toll on moderators, especially when image sharing is enabled” (Lemieux, 2016).

While all platforms have comments sections incorporated into them, social media platforms such as Instagram or 9gag only consist of images with comment sections which allow for comments on images to be the only form of communication and they are predominately in the public domain. This places a higher emphasis on the comment sections and drives users towards them more since there exists few other options of directly speaking to other users, bar the possibility of a direct messenger feature. Users may take to the comment sections to gather more information on an image, compare or contrast their own thoughts of the image with others, or may simply scroll through them for entertainment.

While comment sections are part of the territory of social media, they become an issue when people can hide behind anonymity and have the safety of being able to say things that would be more abrasive and unacceptable in person. While many people do use their real names and photos on themselves on social media, it is also possible for people to create false identities or to obscure their identity. Instagram has a mixed number of authentic names and pseudonyms, while 9gag most often shows users choosing pseudonyms and using profile photos of films, television series, etc. Moreover, when “people are allowed to post without disclosing their identity (as in many forums and websites), their comments debase noticeably (Aleksandra, 2016).

In a *New York Times* article, the author asserted that “comment sections seem to be little more than a microphone for the Internet’s most despicable, cowardly and hateful personalities” (Lemieux, 2016). The author wrote “it is in comment sections that trolls get a static space with a built-in audience, at which they can hurl the kind of shocking vitriol and bigotry most wouldn't dare express offline”.

While it is common knowledge that you will find comments that are negative or ‘trollish’ on most sites, “if you want almost guaranteed hate, be a woman”, said the writer of *The Guardian* in regard to comment sections (*The Guardian*, 2014). Women’s bodies in particular seem to attract comments about their appearances, and these comments often focus on appraising or criticising women’s physical features. Such comments revolve around body-shaming, comparisons with other women and appraisals of their bodies in such a way that recipients and viewers are affected by them, as I observed through preliminary research. Certain celebrity women such as Demi Lovato, Bella Thorne, Julia Roberts, Amy Poehler, etc. have spoken about comments on social media and how, as a consequence, many of them avoid social media (Todd, 2016).

Crystal Karges says that “trends of publicly shaming celebrities’ bodies has become the cultural norm”, and that “[w]ith celebrities often being in the spotlight for events, entertainment, etc. our society has learned to hyperfocus on perceived body flaws rather than the value these celebrities contribute with their talents and artistic abilities” (Karges, 2017). Many women such as Taylor Swift, Kim Kardashian and Kendall Jenner have disabled their comment sections at times when there was particular media of scrutiny and attention focussed on them (Elizabeth, 2017). With the help of social media, celebrity body-shaming has become unanimous “with people immediately taking their thoughts about others’ bodies to Twitter, Facebook, etc.” (Karges, 2017). Psychologist and body image expert Sari Sheppird says that: “[w]ithin our culture, it’s a fair game now to comment on a women’s weight, regardless of age” (Karges, 2017). Karges further theorised on Sheppird’s claim that this public display of comments “has negatively reinforced body negativity” (Karges, 2017).

After years of personal observation, I noticed that images of women’s bodies on social media received mostly (see Appendix A) comments that criticised or appraised the women in the photographs. It made me curious as to what flaws commenters may have possibly pointed out when I saw an image of a woman’s body. After noticing these comments a few years back, I was driven to read the comments out of this curiosity, because it became apparent to me that commenters will critique every aspect of a women’s body, regardless of what her body looked like.

Discussions within comment sections depend heavily on the material posted but there is noticeably more discussion of women’s bodies when the images posted are of women. While some platforms tend to differ from others in terms of how commentators speak about women, there is a tendency for commentators to give their approval of criticism of the

women's body in the image. The commentary on women's bodies found in the comment sections of social media sites has gone mostly untouched by social research studies.

Authors that have written about the nature and impact of comment sections are published by news outlets such as *The Guardian* (Moosa, 2014), and not as part of social science research studies. Some authors agree that comment sections can impact your emotional state (Lemieux, 2016), but there are no publications that write about how women are spoken of and how those words can have an impact on the recipients of the comments as well as other users on social media that scroll past them or use them to make their own comments. Authors and celebrity women who have spoken about comment sections, usually make the suggestion that people should simply stop reading the comments, as singer Kesha once stated (Baldwin, 2017)

In fact, "don't read the comments" has become a common phrase seen on social media, especially when someone voices how the comment sections can impact them. Yet, it is not as simple for social media users to merely avoid reading the comments. Not only are comment sections on most sites, but they make up a large part of the use of social media. Moreover, a Google search for the phrase "don't read the comments" produces more than 1.5 million results, including the 2013 article in *Scientific American* about how the desire to read and respond to comments relates to anthropology and that "[c]omments help us understand where we fall in the range of perspectives about a particular view" (D'Costa, 2013). The acknowledgement that reading comments should be avoided seems to support the notion that comment sections can be damaging.

The exact reason why people continue to read them cannot be narrowed down to one or two reasons (D'Costa, 2013). While there have been countless warnings issued for social media users to stop reading them, from celebrities such as Kesha (Baldwin, 2017), and a Twitter page with the handle '@AvoidComments'⁵ that constantly reminds other not to read comments, the comments continue to exist, and avoiding eye contact with them does not stop them from being problematic. Thus, the focus of this project is not solely based on looking at how comment sections following images of women function, but also how the recipients and viewers of these comments are affected by them. In particular, because I observed that women's bodies receive many comments about their appearances that are often degrading or sexualised, the project will also focus on the comments around women's bodies and how other women may experience these comments.

⁵ @AvoidComments on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/avoidcomments?lang=en>

The effects of social media platforms that are mostly visual (i.e. consisting of images or video) when studying social media and body image in early adolescent girls, has been researched before by Blair Burnette et al. They found that visual networks were more popular due to the easy nature of image consumption and the visual stimulation that the participants wanted from social media (Burnette, 2017). Since 9gag and Instagram are the two platforms that solely consist of images and comment sections, I looked at these sites specifically for this project. The visual aspects of these platforms came to play an important role in the construction of the project and my decision to create illustrations.

While the women's body does play an important part of the function of negative comments on social media, the purpose of this project was not to show which bodies are praised and which are critiqued, but rather to demonstrate that anyone's body regardless of shape, size, colour, etc. are praised and critiqued within these comment sections.

Therefore it was important to illustrate a large variety of bodies to further emphasise that every woman's body is up for judgement on social media. I wanted to use the idea of illustrations and text to remain appropriate to the subject matter, but also as a way of subverting what can be seen on social media. By replicating the images and comments and then subverting them, I can create a window into the world by interpreting and displaying these images in a certain way in order to represent this concept (Rose, 2016: 2).

Project Aims

In 2014, there was an "increase in the prevalence of eating disorders, body image dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and unhealthy weight control behaviors" among adolescents in South Africa alone (Gitau, 2014). With a concurrent rise of social media, many links have been made between body image and social media use. The most recent research studies such as "Social Media on Body Image Concerns" (Fardouly, 2016) and "Influences Social media has on body image, anxiety and self-esteem in young adults" (Meshioye, 2016) have placed emphasis on images on social media that portray bodies. While it has been argued that images on social media have a direct impact on body image dissatisfaction (Statistic Brain, 2017), the impact of commentary on women's bodies has been neglected. While images of women's body do often represent an ideal beauty standard, specifically when used for marketing products or services; it has been my experience that the commentary that women face about their appearances is more damaging to self-worth than the image itself. Without

social media, these opinions are hardly voiced and made public. Comment sections allows for individuals online to provide their opinion on what is 'right' or 'wrong' about a women's body, which can lead to further confusion about what an ideal body is considered to look like or reinforce unattainable ideals for individuals. Images seldom ever explicitly state that the woman in the image is attractive or not, but the comment sections do. While researching the comments on Instagram images, I found that most images of women can have as many as 36 out of 50 comments that directly appraise or criticize the woman's body.

While some comment sections on social media may simply consists of comments such as "beautiful", "gorgeous", "perfect" or "goals", some comments may go as far to say, "damn she's huge", "you are too skinny", "disgusting" or "I would rape her" (from Instagram and 9gag). Without having done the necessary research at this point that is needed to demonstrate how women experience negative comments on social media, it is my hypothesis that reading these comments can cause a dissatisfaction with a person's own body if they constantly read how certain aspects of women's bodies are valued or assessed. While it is uncertain whether these comments can create body dissatisfaction or lead to eating disorders, it is in the realm of possibility that these comments can harm those with existing body image dissatisfaction and concerns of self-esteem.

While real-life bullying can often be escaped in private places, cyberbullying can become inescapable in a society where over 3 billion people use social media (Williams, 2017). While it may not seem logical for victims of cyberbullying to continue to use social media, there are certain societal obligations expected from people, and refraining from being online can often impact a person's social standing. Moreover, while victims may find it easier to stop using social media once they have been targeted, other users are still exposed to these comments and can unknowingly become impacted by them personally even if they are directed at someone else.

The negative effects of social media can also extend beyond bullying. David Baker, a trainee clinical psychologist at Lancaster University, "analyzed 30 studies about the relationship between Facebook and mental health" (The Guardian, 2017). It was revealed that "people who compared themselves with others online were more likely to feel depressed, as were people who ruminated on what they'd seen" and with the nature of social media showing the more renowned parts of our lives, comparison becomes a great deal part of social media. "If you spend a lot of time thinking about what you've seen while you're online, that might be more likely to lead to depression", said Baker. Social media can thus become inescapable and overwhelming.

The aim of this project is to create an overwhelming platform that highlights the more harmful comments that cannot be escaped from if one is on social media, that will mirror the sensations experienced by someone with body image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. The illustrations and text that have been created or selected for the project, consists of real images and comments that have been collected from Instagram and 9gag over the course of a year that have subjectively been selected as harmful appraisals or disapprovals. The images, as well as the scrolling text and infographics, represent the comment sections of image-based social media platforms and the comments that are specifically posted with regards to women's bodies.

Process

I began this project by looking at the images of women that were being posted on Instagram and 9gag. Both platforms are popular networks, with Instagram having between 600-800 million active users per month (Statista, 2017) and 9gag having between 150-200 million visits a month (SimilarWeb, 2018) and both contain mostly images and comment sections.

I began looking at the images that had the most likes and comments in order to establish the most popular images and noted the patterns between the images, such as the amount of likes and comments that each image received. I used the images that I found relevant then to create illustrations that show women's bodies. I thought it be would the most appropriate for me to demonstrate my findings and concepts through illustrations as "early adolescents are more likely to engage with photo-based, rather than text-based, platforms (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2015)" (Burnette, 2017: 155).

The illustrations began as replicas of the images and were then reduced to line drawings. The idea behind the project thus became based on anecdotal evidence and preliminary quantitative research that was informally collected and used to represent the phenomenon. The illustrations began with simple line drawings of the women in white with warm, feminine colours. This style was chosen as it simplified and objectified the women's bodies to the point that their names and reputations would become unclear and they would simply resemble any women's body. The choice to do so came from wanting to take away any aspect of the women's personalities or reputations so that the criticism and appraisal against them would seem more focused on their bodies than what the public may think of them in general. It was also a choice that was taken in order to dehumanize these women and

make them appear as objects designed for visual consumption, which is often how these women are regarded as on social media.

Visual images “are made mobile through many different kinds of exchanges,” argued Anthropologist Poole (Rose, 2016: 11). Thus, images are given different meanings and can have different effects “as they move through different places.” (Rose, 2016: 11) While my illustrations are similar to the original photographs and bear the same visual and textual messages as the posts on Instagram, the context of the image is being subverted to rather show the harm of these social exchanges.

After creating the line drawings, I started to add in one main comment that I would find on the image such as “Rate her”, “Slut” or “Perfect girl” to highlight some of the words that were most often used to describe the image in the comment section. Subsequently, I started creating several images with more than one word or phrase as I wanted to further complicate the image and bring more of the comments into the images. I also wanted to create a sensation of the images and feel of the website becoming more intensified. More comments were introduced into an image in order to represent the feeling of being bombarded by comments and of comments being inescapable. The line drawings of the women also became less detailed and more faded into the background as the effect of more comments continued.

The end result of the thread of images was ultimately images that only consisted of comments found from various sites and the women’s bodies begun to disappear in relation to the onslaught of comments. The context of the comments also intensified and the comments towards the end became more critical, more invasive and included some comments that spoke of sexual harassment and assault. The purpose behind this was to mirror the idea that comments become gradually more harmful and impactful for users on social media as they continue to use it and become exposed to more content.

Some of the comments that were left on the images being studied, often spoke directly to the nature of comments and their effects and those comments became part of the illustrations in order to show that there are in fact people who are impacted by them and people who are aware of the nature of these comments. It was most suitable to then create a website for these images to be displayed on as these images and comments are consumed on websites. After some deliberation, it was decided to add comment sections onto these images on the website with the text “Add your comment about her body”. The inspiration came from wanting to make the website resemble the timeline of Instagram. The website started to evolve into a meta social media site that could seem like that of Instagram and 9gag alike

since their timelines are similar to one another. On further consideration, I also decided to add a star-rating feature under each image in order to supplement the idea of women's bodies being solely under critique on social media. The images were placed in a descending order from the first, simpler images to the heavy-textual images.

I designed the navigation bar of the website to bear resemblance to Instagram's 'stories' which consist of circular images of users with a gradient circle around the image. The navigation bar thus consisted of four icons with illustrated images of women, for the 'Home', 'Posts', 'About' and 'Info' sections. The illustrations were placed under the 'Posts' section in order to create an appearance similar to an Instagram profile. The headline was then decided to resemble the Instagram headline, but with a different font. The headline, which was decided to be 'Don't read the comments' was then placed above the navigational icons.

The first page of the website mirrored the traditional comment sections online, with only text arranged beneath each other. Upon scrolling through comment sections, I got inspired to make the text on the 'Home' page scroll automatically at a speed slow enough to ensure readability, but fast enough for the audience to feel that the comments are ongoing and never ending. In order to achieve this, real comments were sampled from Instagram and 9gag that ranged from name-calling to more explicit criticism. The comments were selected without the username of the commenter to ensure their anonymity. To further replicate the Instagram website and the concept of comments, I included the Instagram 'likes, comments and followers' bar that appears at the bottom of the screen when an Instagram user receives any likes, comments, or followers.

The 'About' page of the website includes context of the project and a description of the project, with a link to this report and a comment section that will allow the audience to give their own testimony of how comment sections have affected them. Lastly, the 'Info' page was decided on in order to showcase the research that fueled the project. From doing both quantitative and qualitative research on comment sections, I was able to accumulate data that conveyed how many comments on an image of a woman, appraised or criticized her appearance. Using the quantitative data from this research, graphs were made to inform the audiences of this research. The graphs were also illustrated using similar design aesthetics to the illustrations and were influenced by data designer Giorgia Lupi's book, *Dear Data* (2016), that demonstrates Lupi's year-long, analog data drawing project.

Reflection

During the process of this project, it became increasingly apparent to me that this subject speaks to more than how women are policed and surveilled in every-day life. The internet and social media constructs the nature of these comments rather than the beliefs and ideologies of the people behind them. Social media provides a platform that asks for people's opinions. Without the input of people's comments, there would be very little user-generated content on social media. The comment sections do not solely exist for people to give feedback but can be used for any reason that the user wishes.

Facebook comment sections mostly consist of users 'tagging' other users in the comments in order to direct them to the image or video that has been posted. Instagram comment sections are mostly used for users to speak to the publisher of the content, to ask them questions or give them appraisal or to tell the publisher what they dislike about the image or person. On 9gag the woman in the image is not present most of the time as images from other platforms are often reposted by 9gag users, and the subject of the image is seldom the publisher of the image. The use of the comment section plays a large role in how women are spoken of. For example, without the woman in the image being present on the platform as the publisher of the image, the comments are much more critical and explicit such as on 9gag, which results in the comments on Instagram generally being more positive and appraising.

I find it relevant that these encounters exist on an online platform because the ability to hide your identity, the quick speed of the internet and the transcendence of time and space, as well as the depersonalized aspect of talking to someone over the internet, all contribute to why and how people speak differently about women in comment sections. It is for these reasons that it was most appropriate for my project to be exhibited and published on a website. Not only does a website relate more than any other medium to my topic, but the topic also directly talks to social media and internet users and thus has to be in a format that will be more accessible for social media users.

A website can be shared to social media profiles and shared through friends and followers and be able to reach the market or target audience more sufficiently than another medium. The website further becomes beneficial in that it can be made to function and

resemble other platforms and thus allows me to create an exaggerated effect of how social media impacts people who have body image dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

This project stemmed from a lack of discussion surrounding the impact of commentary on women's bodies on social media. It is undeniable that social media can have effects on body image satisfaction and self-esteem, but thus far the research studies have looked more at the visual imagery than the comments. While visual imagery makes up a large part of social media timelines, they are inherently harmful in themselves. A woman's body without the connotation of beauty standards, is just that, a woman's body.

Existing in a digital world that bombards users with opinions from various individuals around the world can make it impossible for people to simply see an image and produce their own opinion about it. The entitlement for users to give their opinions on every image of a woman's body, creates a paranoia for other users about what those individuals may think of their bodies. Since it seems unavoidable for people to judge and evaluate women's bodies online, it can affect the audiences of these comments into believing they would receive the same judgment over their own bodies.

The comment sections become a harmful, but inescapable place for many people who wish to be on social media, and simply avoiding them is a lot harder than it sounds. While the existence of monitors that allow or disallow comments to be posted would infringe on the freedom of speech of many users and the concept of user-generated content, it cannot be said that self-censorship cannot be beneficial when it comes to voicing individual opinions on social media comment sections. It is with the hope of bringing light to this social issue and the effects of comment sections on body image, body dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders, that this project was created.

For many users, social media is a place to see the daily lives of their friends and family or to catch up on news and share humorous image. For many others that suffer from body image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, social media becomes a place that exposes you constantly to images and comments that cause you to criticize yourself. The practical project thus mirrors the manner in which social media can feel when it is harmful to you or your self-esteem.

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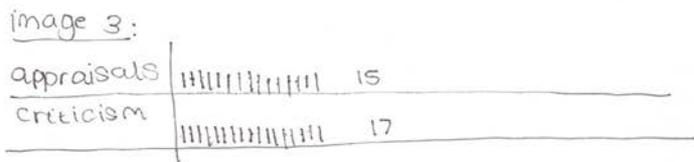
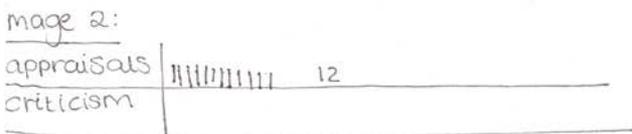
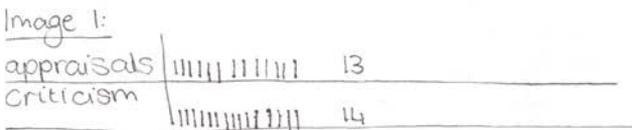
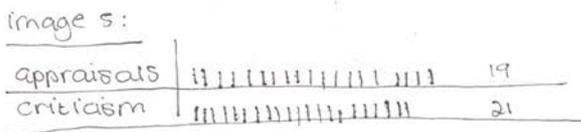
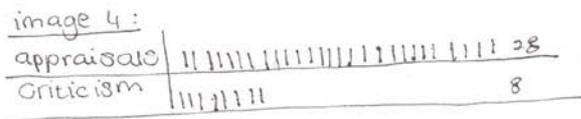
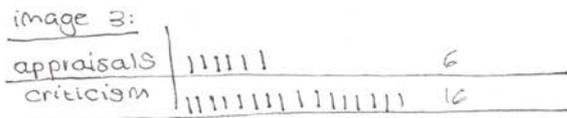
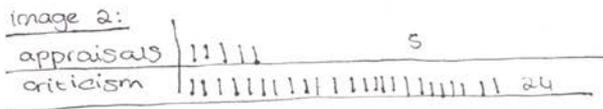
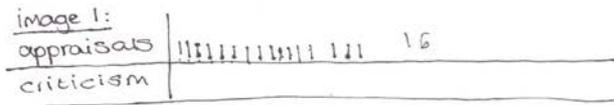
APPENDIX:

A (preliminary quantitative research on the comment sections on Instagram, 9gag and Facebook)

Appraisals have been categorized as complimentary or approving assessments. On certain documents, 'appraisals' have been represented by a 'plus' (+) symbol or a smiling emoticon (☺).

Criticisms have been categorized as disapproving comments or disapproving judgements made through analyzing and inspecting. On certain documents, 'criticisms' have been represented by a 'minus' (-) symbol or a frowning emoticon (☹).

Instagram



Selena Gomez (album cover)

:)	|||||	(33)
:(	||	(2)
:)♀	|||||	(13)
:)♂	|||||	(20)
:(♀		
:(♂	||	(2)

Shay Mitchell (video of parody)

:)	|||||	(42)
:(	||	(2)
:)♀	|||||	(42)
:)♂	||	(2)
:(♀	||	(2)
:(♂		

Ariana Grande (herself dancing)

:)	|||||	(43)
:(	||	(3)
:)♀	|||||	(24)
:)♂	|||||	(19)
:(♀	||	(2)
:(♂	||	(1)

"she's too bitchy to appreciate people who made her who she is today!! Fudcin' cunt"
 "whats up with her body on this picture? Lol it looks so...um...weird"
 "What a Bimbo!"

Taylor Swift (promo)

:)		
:(
:)♀		
:)♂		
:(♀		
:(♂		

"just drop 60lbs and put that hair to the side"

③

Miley Cyrus (selfie)

:)	|||||	(30)
:(	|||||	(22)
:)♀	|||||	(12)
:)♂	|||||	(18)
:(♀	||||	(5)
:(♂	|||||	(17)

"Do you stick out your tongue in pics when the herpes is flaring up to hide it?" Cause it must be a horrible case..."
 "What would you do without that tongue. no talents"

Lorde (herself)

:)	|||||	(38)
:(	||||	(7)
:)♀	|||||	(26)
:)♂	|||||	(12)
:(♀	|	(1)
:(♂	||||	(6)

"why is she so perfect"
 "dat ass"
 "little butt"
 "she looks so much better when she's not wearing toilet paper"

lorde (herself)

:)	|||||	(42)
:(	|||||	(12)
:)♀	|||||	(12)
:)♂	|||||	(30)
:)♀	||	(2)
:(♂	|||||	(10)

"god bless u and ur titties"
 "this is the breast photo of you I've ever seen"

Sarah Hyland (outdoor in gym clothes)

:)	|||||	(20)
:(	|||||	(11)
:)♀	|||	(4)
:)♂	|||||	(16)
:(♀	||	(2)
:(♂	|||||	(9)

"this is how fit I will have to be to be out of pain I think. However I still think surgery is the best"
 "What a dumb bitch is this Sarah Hyland!"
 "fuck u bitch"
 "you will never be beautiful lilce Marisa Laurito"

Emma Watson (on set)

:)	|||||	(21)
:(	|||||	(5)
:)♀	|||||	(24)
:)♂	|||||	(7)
:(♀	|||||	(1)
:(♂	|||||	(4)

"she is the best housewife"
 "she has such a small waist that it look like it's edited ... I'm so jealous."
 "Better watch out, someone might say you're not a feminist if they see you standing in that kitchen"

Candice Swanepoel (with child)

:)		
:(
:)♀		
:)♂		
:(♀		
:(♂		

Kendall Jenner (modeling)

:)	|||||	(16)
:(	|||||	(19)
:)♀	|||||	(6)
:)♂	|||||	(10)
:(♀	|||||	(8)
:(♂	|||||	(11)

"please don't be like your sister they terts"
 "and the implants have started"
 "that's right eat babe it's healthy for the body and mind plastic surgery is for insecure dilapidated old people"
 "the rest of the Kardashians doesn't look normal anymore on their implants"
 "you posting this pic means you accept sexualizing women"

Kim Kardashian (herself)

:)	|||||	(35)
:(	|||||	(9)
:)♀	|||||	(21)
:)♂	|||||	(13)
:(♀	|||||	(4)
:(♂	|||||	(5)

"showing your tits and being naked. is that a good to do?"
 "she had one nice breast, talk about the other"
 "she is so greedy"
 "good tits"

Cara Delevingne (primo)

:)	|||||	(31)
:(	||||	(6)
:)♀	|||||	(14)
:)♂	|||||	(17)
:(♀	|||	(3)
:(♂	|||	(3)

"Bitch you suck at acting and your book is filled with cliches like a motherfucker"
 "what a lazy bitch"
 "oh god now she thinks she's an author"
 "you are by far the most beautiful woman inside out plz fuck me"
 "You spoiled Hollywood shithead"

Kylie Jenner (her smoking)

:)	|||||	(17)
:(	|||||	(15)
:)♀	|||||	(17)
:)♂		
:(♀	|||||	(11)
:(♂	|||	(4)

"Kylie you are a disgrace to young girls out there following your footsteps."
 "useless fool that's what you are kylie because illiteracy is killing you"
 "I love Kylie but that's not sexy"
 "All Kylie does is teach teen girls that its okay to hate yourself enough to get plastic surgery"

Friday 17 March 2017

INSTAGRAM

@thelovemagazine 1hour : woman of colour; artsy / fashion

♡ 2,138

:) |||| 4

:(0

:) ♀ |||| 4

:(♀ 0

:) ♂ 0

:(♂ 0 6 comments

@kayla-itsines 15hours 66 comments : transformation of ww

♡ 17,183

:) ||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| 20

:(||||| ||||| 11

:) ♀ ||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| 16

:) ♂ || 2

:(♀ ||||| ||||| 10

:(♂ | 1

50 comments

@nylonmag 14hours : black woman - dj

♡ 1,992

:) |||| 4

:(0

:) ♀ |||| 4

:) ♂

:(♀

:(♂

15 comments

@nylonmag 22h : ww model

♡ 3,886

:) | |||| 5

:(

:) ♀ ||| 3

:) ♂ || 2

:(♀

:(♂

15 comments

1

@Kayla itsines 8h : photo of her stomach

♡ 35,093

:)	| ||||| 9
:(
:) ♀	| ||||| 8
:) ♂	
:(♀	
:(♂	

50 comments

@arianagrande 15h : pt. video of her singing

♡ 1,807,257 views

:)	| ||||| 10
:(
:) ♀	| ||||| 9
:) ♂	
:(♀	
:(♂	

50 comments

@armani 17h : Angeline Jolie / paparazzi

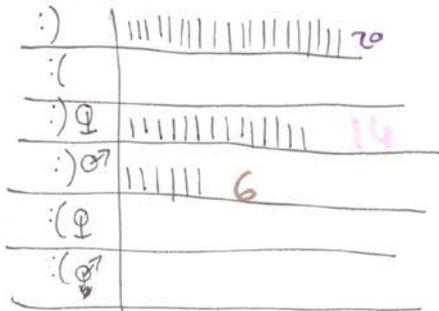
♡ 53,843

:)	| ||||| 14
:(
:) ♀	| ||||| 13
:) ♂	
:(♀	
:(♂	

50 comments

@victoriasecret 1hour : 2 modes /iw;1b

♡ 44,081



50 comments

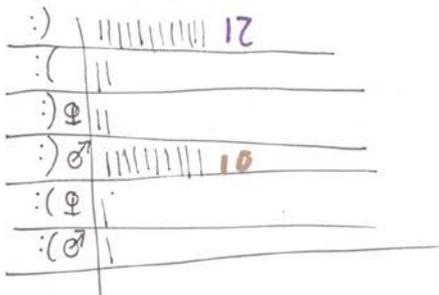
@nora sleeps not me 1h : herself

♡ 15

0 comments

@victoriasecret 23h : model in lingerie.

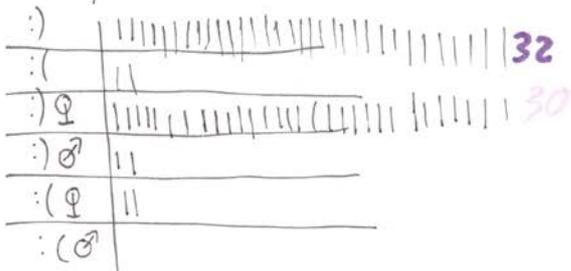
♡ 259,786



50 comments

@Kayla_itsines 1h : transformation

♡ 9,642



50 comments

3

@voguemagazine 1d : Selena Gomez cover

♡ 283,533

:)	|||||	18
:(	||||	5
:)♀	|||||	14
:)♂	||||	4
:(♀	||||	5
:(♂		

50 comments

@gigihadid 1d : herself

♡ 1636,528

:)	|||||	21
:(	||	2
:)♀	|||||	16
:)♂	||||	5
:(♀		
:(♂		

50 comments

@voguemagazine 1hour : selena gomez in bathing suite

♡ 85087

:)	|||||	25
:(	||||	4
:)♀	|||||	21
:)♂		
:(♀		
:(♂		

@katyperry 3hours : red carpet

:)	|||||	17
:(
:)♀	|||||	13
:)♂		
:(♀		

5

@squaresvillevintage 2 days : girl's bum (no face)

♡ 23 865

:)		
:(	| 111	3
:)♀		
:)♂		
:(♀	| 11	2
:(♂	| 1	1

+1 "nice ass" ?

± 100 comments

@wolfandfoxx 11 hours : topless girl in swimsuit

♡ 2989

:)	| 11	2
:(
:)♀		
:)♂		
:(♀		
:(♂		

15 comments

@theofficialscousecrank 1 day : Kardashians weight loss

♡ 6566

:)	| 11	
:(
:)♀	|	20
:)♂		
:(♀	| |||||	15
:(♂	| |||||	6

Friday 17 March 2017

@thelovemagazine

♡ 2,138

:) 4 ♀ 1 ? 1
:(0 ♂ 1

@kayla_kesines

♡ 17,1838

:) ||||| ||||| ♀ ||||| ?
:(|| ♂

@theashleygraham 4 hours : plussize / diverse models

♡ 145232

:)	|||||	20
:(	||||	4
:)♀	|||||	10
:)♂	|||||	16
:(♀		
:(♂		

"damn she's huge" "so fat...but sexy"

50 comments

@kardashian_s_wags 2 days : Kendall Jenner red carpet

:)	|||	4
:(	|||	4
:)♀		
:)♂		
:(♀		
:(♂		

"got them rug grinding knees"

50 comments

@victoriainjustice 22 hours : hating

:)	|||||	18
:(
:)♀	|||||	10
:)♂	|||||	8
:(♀		
:(♂		

"you are too skinny"
"eat something"

7

Facebook: Adele (photo of herself)

:)	|||||	(13)
:(	||	(2)
:)♀	|||||	(11)
:)♂	||	(2)
:(♀	|	(1)
:(♂	|	(1)

52 comments

Lady Gaga (selfie)

:)	|||||	(19)
:(	||||	(6)
:)♀	|||||	(13)
:)♂	||||	(6)
:(♀		
:(♂	||||	(6)

50 comments

"Overrated Beyoncé goofy ass thinking she's fucken Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus Fucken Christ"

"Bitch u are versatile. You're costume pop music spoiled faggot"

"Maybe buy some clothes that fit and cover you up"

"Mouth surgery is very ugly... most of all from this angle. I prefer the natural old Gaga"

Beyoncé (modeling)

:)	|||||	(21)
:(	|||	(3)
:)♀	|||||	(14)
:)♂	|||||	(7)
:(♀	||	(2)
:(♂	|	(1)

"You've lost weight! Looking lovely"

Shakira (photo with friends)

:)	|||||	(21)
:(	|	(1)
:)♀	||||	(6)
:)♂	|||||	(15)
:(♀		
:(♂	|	(1)

~~Facebook:~~
~~Harmful comments:~~

+
 -
 +♀
 -♂

Rihanna (modeling)

:)	|||||	(7)
(	|||||	(25)
:)♀	||	(2)
:)♂	|||||	(5)
(♀	|||||	(4)
:(♂	|||||	(21)

"She sold her sexuality to make records...
 Yea that's a real female example,
 & celebrities dumbaf"
 "you dance naked on a stage... women are
 supposed to be known for there brains
 and what they are good at"
 "Riana feminist so that's why she's half
 naked in all videos and sings about
 sex, yeah feminism at its worst"

Gigi Hadid (compilation of coves)

:)	|||||	(17)
(	|||||	(11)
:)♀	|||||	(11)
:)♂	|||||	(6)
(♀	|||||	(7)
:(♂	|||||	(4)

"you'll be gone soon as soon as your looks
 start to go you'll be through that should
 be in a couple of years"
 "You're looks fade quickly, but you're
 ugly on the inside and that last
 forever"
 "your looks will disappear and your
 body will wrinkle and age"

Kim Kardashian (shared post on Kourtney)

:)	|||||	(15)
(	|||||	(37)
:)♀	|||||	(13)
:)♂	||	(2)
:(♀	|||||	(26)
:(♂	|||||	(11)

"her actions make her ugly... she's so judgement
 and blechy and a no"
 "i actually thought she had Down syndrome"
 "The Kardashians have to learn that they're
 not beautiful, they're just some really freak
 girls addicted to plastic surgery. You gi,
 look like aliens and you all freak us out"
 "She used to be sexy before she became
 a mother"
 "she's a pig!!! no morals, self respect or
 dignity"
 "You mean the opposite of sexy"

52 comments

9gag

image 1

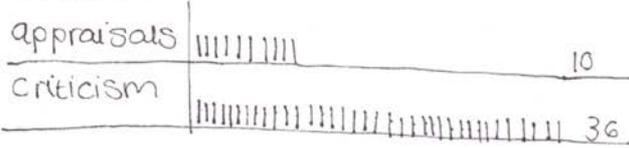


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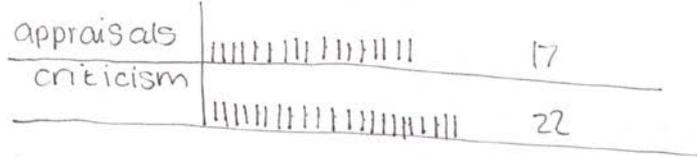


image 3

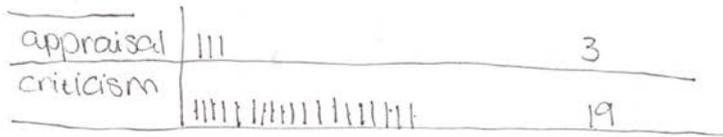


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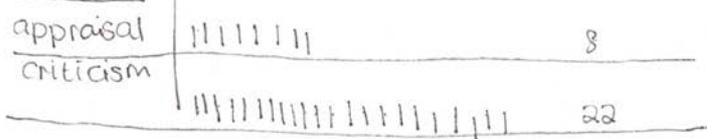


image 5

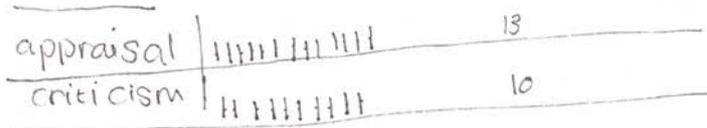


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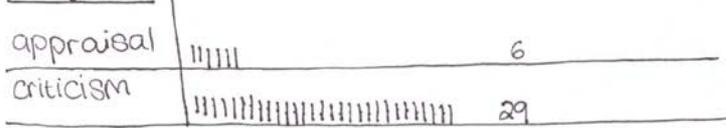


image 2:

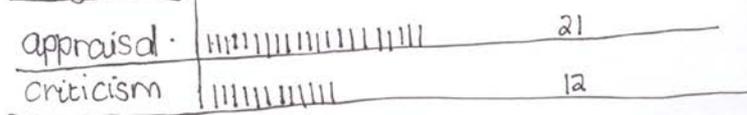


image 3:

appraisal		3
criticism		12

image 4:

appraisal		16
criticism		12

image 5:

appraisal	||||	5
criticism	|||||	23

9gag | Girly things: '12 times a year'

+	||	(2)
-	|||||	(13)
+♀		
+♂		
♀		
♂	|||||	(13)

'Girls'

+♀	
+♂	
♀	
♂	

"Leave her. That level of crazy probably means she's hot, but it's not worth it..." - bobo_bonobo
 "Why don't you kill her and eat her?" - tentacle
 "She is crazy ru" - blackjenniS

'When the bride doesn't have any girlfriends, it's time to call her bros.'

+♀	
+♂	
♀	
♂	

"All those guys were probably hoping to bang her" - hongarsebeer 97
 "And it ends with a gangbang" - dimasyogaxama
 "All I could think of was 'group orgy'" - suchahmed
 "She slept with 60% of them. i bet" - sshinjectionik
 "You mean when she leads on her orgy but they never get to complet in her" - ajyung1qie

qgag - 'girl' category

(naked girl doing yoga)

:)		
:(	|||||	(33)
:)♂		
:)♂		(2)
:(♀		
:(♂	|||||	(31)

"a man needs the front view"
 "three holes in a row. Have fun! Effortlessly"
 "I'm curious how she tastes from the front"
 "wow she would fit perfectly in my small basement"
 "fuckable?"

(girls exercising)

:)	|||||	(5)
:(	|||||	(26)
:)♂		
:)♂	|||||	(5)
:(♀	|	(1)
:(♀	|||||	(25)

"Women that do that shit bring the hell out of me. Seriously jus+ attention seeking"
 "I will rape them all"
 "it rhymes with grape"
 "pee on them to show dominance"
 "stop exercising on a strategically positioned machine to get the best possible view of daz ass"
 "wip it out and fap violently"
 "Rape... I would teach them what rape is"

(girl in active wear)

:)	|||	(3)
:(	|||||	(12)
:)♀		
:)♂	|||	(3)
:(♀		
:(♂	|||||	(12)

"I have fapped for less than this"
 "she's a sex doll"
 "Really hot ass. Great figure. Until you turn your phone round to see her face... Not so great after all"
 "That face, I will rape that face"

74 comments
 (mad hatter - i.r.t. colouring)

:)	|||	(2)
:(	|||||	(8)
:)♀	||	(2)
:)♀		
:(♀	|	(1)
:(♂	|||||	(7)

"stop attention whoring pls"
 "Why not normal colour skin, free of makeup?"
 "boys start having unrealistic standards when searching for girlfriends"
 "Look at all these girls fishing for attention"

24 comments

(1)

(text post about thigh gaps)

:)	|||||	(12)	"we don't like no skinny bitches"
:((42)	"we don't like fat fucks either"
:)♀	|||||	(5)	"yes it's true nothing tastes as good as skinny feels" "skinny bitches for life" "OP is a fat feminist" "you don't need more, you are still fatty" "guys like thick girls period"
:)♂	|||||	(5)	
:(♀	|||||	(4)	
:(♂	|||||	(40)	
169 comments			

(girl in revealing dress)

:)	|||||	(7)	"she is ugly thx tu photoshop" "still can't hide the face + tits" "those titties look fake as fuck" "no curves = aint sexy" "I like to see the curves though" "what is the point if you can't see the woman curves?"
:(	|||||	(19)
:)♀	|||||	(3)	
:)♂	|||||	(4)	
:(♀			
:(♂	|||||	(19)	
136 comments			

(Snapchat of girl in bed with man)

:(♂)	||	(1)	"I bet she charged him for rape" "you're a hoe" "why she make it public that she is a bitch"
:)♀	|||||	(14)	
:)♀			
:)♂	||	(1)	
:(♀			
:(♂	|||||	(14)	
44 comments			

(men in cosplay in bathroom) - dressed as women

:)	|||||	(12)	"People with a dick, go to the men's room" "Traps are better girls than girls" "They certainly have a more bearable personality, other than the 'I wanna be rich and tall gy that buys me everything and I hate sex' + that the average female has" "gross" "we need a new plague" "I don't like it" "nice place to burn the fuck out" "a mentally ill transgender"
:(	|||||	(59)
:)♀	||	(2)	
:)♂	|||||	(10)	
:(♀	||	(2)	
:(♂	|||||	(57)	
711 comments			

(see-through balcon)

X:)	|	(1)	"Well, time to give the nice looking blind girl a present"
:(:	|||||	(43)	"Just remember not everyone looks like a model, can you just imagine a feminazi in that?"
:)♀			"after wearing it they'll still get offended if you see them in their underwear"
:)♂	|	(1)	
:)♀	|||	(3)	"Send pic of you in it for proof that it's yours"
:)♂	|||||	(6)	"Fuck no I don't wanna go near a women who fucking smell like skunk wear a normal bra you hoe not all men wanna see your saggy tits"

50 comments

B (selection of sampled images and comments)

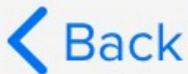
“This is a poll. A competition. A comparison of two bodies. It’s a feeding ground for comments of judgement and negativity. ‘Betty is fat,’ ‘That’s not flattering,’ ‘The model looks way better.’ It is a perfect way to fuel this delusional idea that it’s still okay to put women on a pedestal and compare them.”



lillireinhart

Open in **tumblr.**

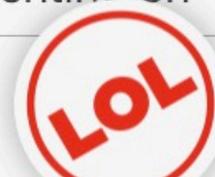




I've asked myself so many times... how do we actually learn to love our bodies? How do we as a society, openly and privately, accept that all bodies are truly beautiful and there shouldn't be a specific body type that is considered "the best" or the most beautiful? It's so easy to say "embrace your curves" "everyone is beautiful!" — but to actually put that into practice is the hard part. It's easy to convince others that we think this way, but it doesn't mean anything if you don't actually believe that.

I do not have that model's body. I'm fully aware of this. I don't have a thigh gap.. a 24 inch waist.. toned arms or abs. I am not her. And how dare anyone assume that I should look like her.

And the people who are commenting on

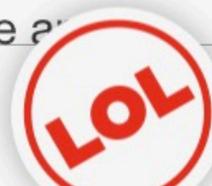


[Back](#)**BuzzFeed**

I do not have that model's body. I'm fully aware of this. I don't have a thigh gap.. a 24 inch waist.. toned arms or abs. I am not her. And how dare anyone assume that I should look like her.

And the people who are commenting on this photo and weighing in on this poll... are the ones who are comparing themselves to the model as well. It's so easy to point out someone else's "flaws", isn't it? Because it makes us feel better about ourselves and about our own insecurities.

It's upsetting to see all these young women who proclaim to be feminists participate in something that represents the exact opposite. To them I say: You are the problem, don't you get it? You are promoting the idea that this model is what all women should look like a





It's upsetting to see all these young women who proclaim to be feminists participate in something that represents the exact opposite. To them I say: You are the problem, don't you get it? You are promoting the idea that this model is what all women should look like and that it's not okay to look like anything else.

This is why we have eating disorders. This is why young teens are suicidal about their body image. This is why people have body dysmorphic disorder. This is why there aren't nearly enough plus size models in the industry.

I hope that this makes you reconsider the next time you feel the need to comment on another woman's weight or figure.

4,394 notes



reply 22 HOURS AGO



alexandrag4b642e7d5



Omg wtf????? Why would you specifically find the piece of clothing she wore and then post it around comparing her to the model? While I didn't particularly care for the scene, I thought she looked great. I'm glad she said something because I see too many posts saying how these different celebs are "too fat" or "you need to hit the gym. Your thighs are huge!" And I'm just sitting there thinking these people are here to entertain you. It's not your right to bully them and make them feel bad because it can really do something to someone's mental state. I just hope people learn from her statement because we definitely need more positivity!! :)

Reply

22 HOURS AGO

Add a comment



xarazura

Why do I let myself read comments on things? I read a post about what it's like to experience harsh judgement and hostility when you're fat and practically everyone was commenting such horrible things...

Like we should pay more for things (apparently we should buy two seats when flying), we aren't people because we don't always fit well into seats made for people, calling us entitled fatties, we should stay away from "normal people", we deserve to be miserable and die... It just goes on and on



ogdoodles Wearing that won't help rape culture



1h Reply



ogdoodles
[@baesloveyou123](#) but she looks like a street hooker. Just be a little more reserved.



49m Reply



interim_champ We get it, yall want attention, and women still wonder why they are looked a certain way upon 🤔🤔 really world changing haha



2h Reply



ingeborgvibe But people who are body shaming make me wanna throw up



8m Reply



teddi.archer I take the right one, I bring her to a gym every day for a month and she is perfect 😊



17m 3 likes Reply



biggredd601 Eat a burger ha a hard wind gonna blow her away



5d 2 likes Reply



shatter_monkey Someone get that girl some food!! Way to skinny. All that's left is bones n skin



1w 1 like Reply

Sick and tired of being told she is 'too skinny' and should 'eat a burger' or her head is 'too big' for her body, 26-year-old Sarah decided to open up about her 'tough year' and, in turn, silence those judging from behind their keyboards.

Admitting she doesn't normally respond to comments as it 'draws attention to those trying to spread negativity', she wrote: 'I haven't had the greatest year.'

'Maybe one day I'll talk about it but for now, I'd like my privacy.'

She then went on to share heartbreaking comments she has been sent – such as being told she is 'disgusting' for allowing her head to be 'bigger than' her body.



Mean comments came rolling in like the ones below.

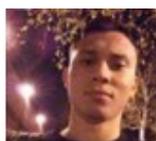
████████ DID CHANNING APPROVE OF THIS POST??

████████ You look Slutty, just sayin

████████ Unfollowing. She's a mother. No need for these posts.

████████ Yes because self pride comes from exposing yourself to strangers . Hot or not , famous or not . This is what attention seeking looks like . I am so sick of your pictures being forced down my throat just fuck off .





Ben Gonzalez

Back to sucking Black dick because money is running out and bootie running out of Silicon 😂

Thursday at 21:23 · Like · Reply ·  46



Love Centle Axe Replied · 18 Replies



Becky Wyler

WTF- you just showed us a pic a few days ago where you were half naked and your thighs were huge. Why do you keep posting these photoshopped pics when we all know you're not that small? Why?

14 hours ago · Like · Reply



hitlerisamazing 140 points · 11h

I will rape them all

Reply  