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SKIN DEEP:

BODY POSITIVITY AND BRAND AUTHENTICIY

Camilla Guimaraes

A Senior Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

Requirements of the Honors Degree Program

May 2022

Rollins College

Winter Park, Florida

Dedication

My professors, Dr. Painter and Dr. Stone, who have been such wonderful mentors to me throughout not only this thesis but my entire Communication degree.

My family because without them I would not be where I am today, especially my father for tutoring me throughout all my years of school and helping make me the student I am.

To all the girls who have ever felt less beautiful or less worthy than they are.

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Skin Deep:

Body Positivity Marketing on Instagram

Abstract

This experiment explores the influence of a plus-size model's dress (modest or revealing) and skin condition (perfect or imperfect) on participants' responses to branded body positive Instagram posts. Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (i.e., modest-perfect; modest-imperfect; revealing-perfect; revealing-imperfect) to compare their (a) ratings of the model's attractiveness, (b) emotional responses, (c) perceptions of the sponsoring brand's authenticity, and (d) purchase intentions. In addition to the four treatment conditions, responses were also compared across participants with varying attitudes toward society's beauty standards and with high or low body images. The results indicate the condition, the manipulated independent variable exerted significant main and interaction effects with the measured independent variables, beauty standard internalization and body image scores, on all four of the dependent or outcome variables. Overall, participants rated the perfect skin posts the most attractive and the imperfect skin posts the least attractive. However, the revealing posts elicited the strongest positive emotions, and they were rated the most authentic. Finally, the results indicate participants' purchase intentions were largely determined by their emotional responses to the posts, followed by their authenticity ratings, the model's dress, and skin condition, but not by their attractiveness ratings. Finally, the implications of these results for both body positivity theories and fashion marketing practices are discussed.

Skin Deep:

Body Positivity, Brand Authenticity, and Purchase Intentions

Western society's beauty standards, norms, and ideals for women have changed and evolved considerably over the millennia, generally in line with the cultural contexts and representations at the time. The rise of visual mass media (e.g., cinema, television) in the early- to mid-Twentieth Century, however, further facilitated the normalization and uniformity of these appearance-based standards at the same time as they became increasingly unrealistic for many women. Specifically, the thin-ideal beauty standard for women, which dictates a very narrow view of the ideal body shape and size (Volonté, 2017). While the fashion and entertainment industries promoted very slender and small-framed women as the beauty ideal, the rapid diffusion and adoption of image-based social media over the past couple decades has resulted in the further internalization of these standards by millions of young women around the world (Derenne & Beresin, 2017).

Overall, there appears to be a consensus in the literature that usage of photo-based social media sites such as Instagram may be harmful to women users' self-image, body satisfaction, mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, (e.g., Brown & Tiggemann, 2020; Fardouly, J. & Holland, E, 2018; Saiphoo, A. N. & Vahedi, Z., 2019). This line of research also suggests that the use of readily available editing tools and filters contribute to these harmful effects because users modify their appearance to better fit beauty standards. For instance, Snapchat filters that eliminate skin imperfections or sharpen their jawlines are widely used (Hunt, 2019). Further, some survey results indicate as much as 70% of Instagram users would not post a photo without editing it first (Aspinall, 2020).

This widespread use of editing and filtering tools has led to the "platformization of beauty" (Slutsky, 2020, p.1), which means the beauty standard on these image-based social media is based on the idealized and unrealistic images that users post on these platforms. It is important to note that the platformization of beauty represents an ideal that can only exist online because it does not exist in users' off-line lives without filters or editing. Furthermore, research indicates that internalization of the thin ideal is positively related to the onset of eating disorders in young women. Moreover, the diet culture propagated on social media may also lead otherwise healthy individuals (i.e., no mental health concerns associated with eating disorders) to become "malnourished and in need of treatment" (Derenne & Beresin, 2018, p.131).

As women became more aware that these beauty ideals were not only unrealistic, but also nonexistent off-line, many began calling for a countermovement to celebrate body diversity and acceptance. This growing body positivity movement became particularly prominent when #BoPo first trended on Instagram in 2012 (Gelsinger, A. S., 2021). This movement became even more salient in 2013 when Tess Munster, a size 22 U.K. model, launched @effyourbeautystandards, an Instagram account created to celebrate women's unique and individual bodies regardless of their sizes or other perceived imperfections (France, 2015). This movement has continued to grow over the past decade to the extent that a search returned about 17 million "#bodypositive" and five million "#effyourbeautystandards" Instagram posts in early 2022.

As body positivity or "BoPo" has become more popular, many brands have adopted (or co-opted) the movement as part of their marketing and public relations campaigns. One of the earliest examples was Dove's "Real Beauty Campaign," but many more have followed suit. For example, the "Aerie Real" campaign pioneered by partnering with body positive influencers on social media in ways that other brands have tried to replicate. Indeed, championing body

positivity and representing diversity seem like socially responsible and laudable campaign themes on the surface. However, research on the extent to which these brands are perceived as authentically committed to the movement's values rather than a commodification of the movement for profit is extremely limited (but see Braithwait & DeAndrea, 2021).

Thus, this study is one of the first to test viewers' responses to branded body positivity posts on Instagram. While prior research has examined how viewing body positivity posts may affect women's self-perceptions such as their body satisfaction (Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A., 2019; Tiggemann, M., Anderberg, I., & Brown, Z., 2020), this investigation explores viewers' evaluations of the authenticity of brands who use the body positivity movement as part of their marketing campaigns. Specifically, this experiment will test the influence of skin exposure (revealing vs. modest) and skin imperfections (filtered/unfiltered) on women's attitudes towards the posts and the sponsoring brand. To achieve this goal, the experiment will compare how women with varying body images and attitudes toward society's beauty standards respond to the branded body positivity posts.

Theoretical Framework

This project draws upon six theories from the behavioral sciences to establish a framework for exploring the factors influencing women Instagram users' responses to branded body positivity posts. First, socialization theory explains how women learn about the behavioral norms associated with society's beauty ideals, standards, and norms through interactions with their family, peers, and their environment (Maccoby, 2016). Next, cultivation theory provides the mechanism through which the media propagates the standards upon which this socialization process is based. Then, social comparison theory explains how women Instagram users' behaviors may shape the platform's effects. Finally, I will explicate the theoretical constructs of

body image and body positivity before explaining how marketers have commodified the body positivity movement, particularly on Instagram.

Socialization Theory

Prior research indicates that body image socialization may occur as early as children's pre-school ages, though the parents are often unaware of it (Liechty, et al., 2016). These socialization and internalization processes frequently occur through interactions among family members that may include weight commentary and/or teasing. These interactions frequently occur when family members make appearance related comments about media (e.g., television) images based on the extent to which they conform with or diverge from society's beauty ideal. While these types of appearance-based commentaries are relatively frequent, remarks about the individuals' physical capability and/or body functionality are comparatively scarce (Liechty, et al., 2016).

Though socialization involves more than just body image, the two are interrelated through the concept of self-schema. That is, self-schema explains how individuals interpret information from their environments to develop the elements in their self-concept over time (Markus et al., 1987). In this way, the relationships between body image and socialization are progressive. An individual's socialization influences their self-view, while cues and social constructs in their environment influence their values, and these two forces interact in the individuals' formation of their body images.

Additionally, other studies suggest that family socialization may be a significant predictor of an individual's body satisfaction, internalization of thin-ideal beauty standard, and depression. Specifically, Keery and colleagues (2004) found that 23% of middle school aged girls reported experiencing appearance-related teasing by one or both of their parental figures. This study also

indicated that girls subjected to this parental teasing were significantly more likely to report higher levels of body dissatisfaction, thin-ideal internalization, and disordered eating behaviors (such as restrictive or bulimic behaviors). Further, those whose mothers teased them were more likely to experience depression. The results from Keery and colleagues' (2004) study indicate there is a strong connection between the formation of one's body image and their socialization experiences.

Cultivation Theory

While internalization of society's thin-ideal beauty standard is a direct consequence of socialization, it is also largely propagated by the media and subsequently adopted and reinforced through family, friends, and social connections. The internalization of the thin-ideal, as described by Thompson and Stice (2001), is the "extent to which an individual cognitively buys into socially defined ideals of attractiveness and engages in behaviors designed to produce an approximation of these ideals" (p.181). In addition to family socialization, scholars have also identified the media, and particularly Instagram, as one of the channels exerting some of the most powerful influences on young women's attitudes toward society's beauty ideals as well as their own body images and wellbeing (de Vries et al., 2018). Since Instagram users frequently use photo editing and filtering tools to ensure their images conform to society's beauty standards, an entirely new set of body image problems have arisen. That is: many of Instagram images, especially those celebrating unnaturally lean, muscled, or even emaciated bodies, represent a standard that is both unrealistic and unachievable for most people offline (Derenne & Beresin, 2018).

Another crucial factor that makes social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and more recently TikTok, such powerful disseminators of society's beauty ideals is their

widespread use and accessibility. In particular, research indicates that 82% of Americans use social media, and that users of visual social media platforms such as Instagram skew young and female (Statista, 2021). Research also indicates that the consequences of thin-ideal internalization through social media may significantly increases women's (and particularly teenage girls') risk of developing eating disorders such as unhealthy dieting, bulimia, and anorexia (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Moreover, social media usage may cause users to develop negative body image issues because it fosters comparisons with the unrealistic and unachievable images posted by other users.

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger (1954) developed the social comparison theory based on the proposition that "people have a fundamental desire to evaluate their opinions and abilities, and they strive for stable, accurate appraisals of themselves" (Dijkstra et al., 2010, p.195). This form of social comparison has probably influenced how people view themselves since the origins of human society, shaping the ways people perceive their attributes such as physical attractiveness and body images as well as their abilities and personalities. Moreover, the widespread diffusion and adoption of visual social media have drastically increased users' connections with and insights into other's lives.

In their analysis of viewers' emotional responses to Instagram posts, de Vries and colleagues (2018) explained that individuals may vary in their social comparison practices, but that filtered images in positive posts elicited negative emotions from participants with high social comparison orientations. Similarly, the results of Stewart and Ogden's (2020) study indicated that self-comparison to unrealistic media ideals increased negative mood, anxiety about physical appearance, and disordered eating behaviors. Further, Vandenbosh and Egermont's (2012) study

revealed a positive relationship between adolescent girls' social media usage and their internalization of the thin-ideal beauty standard. These scholars also suggested that the social pressure to conform to the thin-ideal may lead to anti-fat stigmas, causing people to be more hostile and unaccepting towards those with larger body sizes.

Much of the literature indicates that individuals high in social comparison orientation have also internalized the thin-ideal beauty standard to a greater extent than others, which may result in a variety of negative wellbeing outcomes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Stewart & Ogden, 2021; de Vries et al., 2018). These consequences occur because some people internalize the media's message that being thin and hence attractive equates with happiness, health, and success, which may lead them to use their own body size and attractiveness as a measure of their social status (Stapleton et al., 2017). While people may compare themselves laterally to others with similar attributes and resources or downward to users with fewer positive attributes and resources, most engage in upward social comparison to others who are more attractive, likeable, and successful than themselves. Engaging in this upward form of social comparison has been linked to more frequent social media use and lower self-esteem than lateral or downward comparison (Stapleton et al., 2017). Moreover, when social media users' upward social comparisons involve viewing images of people who are more attractive and fit than themselves, the immediate effects are much more negative than positive, causing anxiety and negative mood (Kohler et al., 2020). On the other hand, downward social comparison generally results in fewer negative effects on mood and body image than upward comparisons (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). Finally, lateral social comparisons do not appear to have any effect on the outcomes associated with upward or downward comparisons.

In addition to comparisons with others, social media users may also compare themselves with the filtered and edited images of themselves that they post on social media. This self-comparison occurs because "girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves" (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, p.173). In this kind of social comparison, women may perceive their social media posts in the third person and internalize that their appearance determines their self-worth. Specifically, in their analysis of Snapchat filters' effects on users' appearance satisfaction, Burnell and colleagues' (2021) defined their conceptualization of self-objectification as a construct that "is behaviorally manifested as body surveillance, or a preoccupation with and monitoring of one's body" (p. 2). Further, their analysis revealed a positive relationship between posting filtered Snapchat images and body surveillance, self-objectification, and lower levels of facial satisfaction. Burnell and colleagues (2021) also suggest that engaging in higher levels of body surveillance and self-objectification may negatively impact one's body image.

Body Image

While body image has been studied for more than a century, scholars have not uniformly defined, operationalized, or analyzed this social construct. Originally, the concept of body image was developed by neuroscientists studying mind-body phenomena such as "autotopagnosia" (loss of ability to recognize one's own body parts) or "phantom limb" syndrome (Fisher, 1990). In fact, it was only in recent decades that psychologists began investigating body image as an individual's perception of and attitudes towards their own bodies.

Thomas Cash (2004) refers to body image as a "psychological experience of embodiment" which includes aspects of physical appearance but is also more broadly one's "body-related self-perceptions and self-attitudes, including thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and

behaviors" (p. 1). This idea of body image, particularly negative body image in young girls, has become a salient topic because of related serious health concerns. Negative body image not only has negative consequences on physical health, but also it has been connected to negative effects in other areas of wellbeing, including unsafe sexual practices, reduced education (hence financial and intellectual harm), and deterioration of relationships due to less social participation (de Freitas et al., 2017). And, as previously mentioned, the media may be one of the main culprits in creating negative body image "through social comparison, objectification and internalization of the thin ideal" (de Freitas et al., 2017, o. 253). As a result, many attempts at deterring the development of negative body images have arisen, one of the most prominent being the body positivity movement.

Body Positivity

Positive body image is a relatively new construct that developed as a challenge to the thin-ideal beauty standards and norms propagated by the media. This movement's purpose is to celebrate self-love through body appreciation (Avalos et al., 2005). The theoretical construct of body appreciation focuses on "appreciating the features, functionality, and health of the body rather than focusing solely on its appearance" (Cohen et al., 2019, p.1548). Proponents of body appreciation acknowledge the wide diversity in shapes and sizes of real women's bodies.

According to de Freitas and colleagues (2017), governmental policies and regulations have exerted some of the greatest pressure on the media to represent diverse body types. Specifically, the Australian government began an Advisory Group in 2009 to institute best practices in the media and fashion industries, including the representation of body diversity and restrictions on digital alterations (de Freitas et al., 2017). Similarly, Israel in 2012 and France in 2015 enacted laws requiring advertisers to disclose when a picture had been altered, edited, or

filtered (Fardouly & Holland, 2018). However, research indicates that such disclaimers do not mitigate the negative effects of internalizing unattainable beauty ideals or negative body image (Brown & Tiggemann, 2020; Fardouly & Holland, 2018). On the other hand, Stewart and Ogden's (2020) study indicated that exposure to diverse body images on social media reduced viewers' weight bias, which suggests that regulations promoting the representation of diverse body types may mitigate the formation of negative body images and its associated health consequences.

Multiple brands have begun to slowly make progress towards including more body diversity in their fashion shows, campaigns, and photos. Some of the first "plus-size" models to truly make it in the fashion industry include Ashley Graham who was the first curvy model to appear on the cover of *Vogue* (Chabbot, 2017) and to make the cover of *Sports Illustrated* (Edwards, 2016), as well as Robyn Lawley who landed a campaign with Ralph Lauren as their first curvy model (Goldwert, 2012). More recently, Chanel included a plus size model, Jill Kortleve, in their 2020 show for the first time since Crystal Renn, who was in their 2010 runway show (Schild, 2020).

While it was initially viewed as a major development in the fashion industry for Lauren and Chanel to include plus-size models, Schild (2020) points out that it also raised many criticisms about what exactly constitutes "plus-size." In his article, Schild (2020) explains that "in the high-fashion modeling industry, 'plus-size' can describe models who are a size 8 or above.". However, the average U.S. woman's dress size is 16–18, which corresponds to a Women's Plus size 20W" (Christel et al., 2016, p. 132). Ashley Graham wears a size 16, putting her at an average U.S. women's size, but at a height of 5'9", her body is actually skinnier than the average woman. In particular, Edwards (2016) writes that not only is she about the average

woman's size, but also that she is also extremely attractive without any real overweight markers such as stretch marks or fat rolls. "Ashley Graham has a big bust, big hips, and a little bit of fat … she is not a greater representation of women" (Edwards, 2016, para. 3). This fault in the definition of "plus-size" is even more prominent in the cases of Jill Kortleve and Robyn Lawley, who both wear a size 12. Thus, many of these plus-sized models weigh less and are taller than the average U.S. woman, making their body shapes conform to the "ideal" to a much greater extent than most U.S. women (Goldwert, 2012; Schild, 2020).

In 2013, the body positivity movement spread to social media when another plus-size model, Tessa Munster (now referred to as Tess Holliday), created her @effyourbeautystandards account (Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017). The main push for starting the account was to counter societal ideas that plus size women should be limited in their choices of fashion (i.e., prohibiting revealing clothing), and she called on women of every shape, size, and background to post pictures of themselves showing off their bodies with the hashtag "#effyourbeautystandards", regardless of whether they fit the traditional beauty norms or not (effyourbeautystandards, 2013). The account quickly gained support from women around the world, with hundreds of posts using the hashtag within just a few days and over 2 million by 2017 (Caldeira & De Riddler, 2017).

Lazuka and colleagues (2020) reviewed the content of body positive posts on Instagram and found that while many contained some aspect of body positivity content the majority, 79%, of the posts "at least somewhat embodied culturally based beauty ideals" including smooth skin, styled shiny hair, white teeth, or even beauty aspects related to the thin ideal such as a small waist or toned body (Lazuka et al., 2020, p. 87). More popular body positivity accounts, however, tend to more closely adhere to the idea that plus size bodies are also beautiful bodies, which in turn raises some other concerns about whether the body positivity movement has

shifted away from its initial purpose of promoting appearance-related positivity instead of body appreciation. Moreover, Cohen and colleagues (2019) concluded that viewing body positive posts reduced women's body dissatisfaction and negative mood compared to viewing thin-ideal posts, but that it nonetheless increased women's body objectification levels since the posts focused on appearance.

Other criticisms of the body positivity movement include concerns that the movement may only promote body *size* positivity, but fails to counter other appearance-related norms such as perfect skin, regular facial features, and stylish hair. For example, an article posted in *The Huffington Post* calls out Tess Holliday's effyourbeautystandards account for being a contradiction because beside the fact that she is a size 22, she is otherwise "gorgeous" (Plantamura, 2015). As the author puts it, Holliday is a "professional model, perfectly coifed right down to her eyebrows." with smooth, "porcelain skin" and perfectly styled "deep red hair" in all her photos. Still other researchers raise the question of whether the body positivity movement is endorsing obesity, which poses another set of serious health risks and concerns (McWhorter, 2020). However, possibly the most prevalent criticism of the movement lies with its recent commodification or its use by brands and individuals as a marketing strategy.

Commodification

Once the body positivity movement gained a wide audience, especially on social media, many brands appropriated its ideals, values, slogans, and hashtags in their marketing campaigns. Specifically, Dove was one of the first major brands to engage in this commodification of the movement with the launch of its "Real Beauty" campaign in 2004. This campaign included images and advertisements with women that were "wrinkled, freckled, pregnant, had stretch marks, or might be seen as fat" (Johnston & Taylor, 2008, p. 942). The Dove campaign was

successful, raising sales of multiple products and increasing their media attention overall, which may have encouraged other brands to follow suit and use similar ideals in their own marketing and public relations campaigns (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). Many influencers on social media who serve as advocates of body positivity have also begun using their accounts to sell products and promote themselves for personal and commercial gain instead of solely to promote inclusivity ideals, which was their initial purpose. Further, Cwynar-Horta (2016) suggests that many of these accounts are promoting things like exercise or slimming clothing, makeup, detox teas, or diet plans, propagating traditional beauty ideals including smooth skin and thinness.

Another brand that has more recently become widely known for their body positivity campaign is Aerie (an intimate apparel sub-brand of American Eagle Outfitters) with their launch of the #AerieReal campaign in 2014 (Aerie, 2014). The #AerieReal campaign committed the brand to completely stop editing images of their models and promote inclusivity and diversity of all body shapes and sizes (Kim, 2020). Kim (2020) praises Aerie for taking their diversity campaign a step further and being diligent about including disability representation in their campaign. Specifically, Kim (2020) wrote that "brands like Savage X Fenty, ThirdLove and Adore Me, have made great strides in representing diversity in terms of race, gender expression and body type, (but) they too often lack disability representation" (para. 3). While advocating for acceptance of all body types through underwear propaganda seems to have earned Aerie accolades and attention, some researchers are concerned that it may lead to yet another contradiction. For example, Tasker and Negra's (2007) reference to "formulaic female sexualities," where the advocates "enthusiastically perform patriarchal stereotypes of sexual servility in the name of empowerment" (p. 3). In essence, this kind of advertising attempt to broaden society's beauty ideals ultimately still measures feminine beauty through objectification.

Overall, research on branded body positivity campaigns has examined their effectiveness in several areas. First, Braithwaite and DeAndrea (2021) tested the campaign's promotion of the body positivity movement's values, including self-acceptance and broader beauty norms, using the Persuasion Knowledge Model. The Persuasion Knowledge Model, created by Friestad and Wright (1994), was intended to explain "how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts" (p.1). The model theorizes that consumer knowledge of persuasion attempts leads to consumers engaging in coping strategies such as greater cognitive elaboration of the topic or product at hand (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The study conducted by Brathwaite & DeAndrea (2020) shows that corporate commodification of the body positivity movement can indeed negatively impact its effectiveness. In general, consumers easily identified persuasion cues and the more users identified promotional content in a post, the less likely they were to associate the posts with genuinely promoting body acceptance; furthermore, users found promotional posts to be significantly less "morally appropriate" than non-promotional posts (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021). This study has important implications in terms of a brand's appropriation of the body positivity movement because it indicates that using a social movement as a marketing tool may not be an effective strategy - and in turn may deter the progression of the movement as a whole.

However, there is a positive to the commodification of the body positivity movement because brands' adoption of the movement has resulted in people seeing many more plus-size models in ad campaigns and runway shows for high end brands (Clayton et al., 2017). In Clayton and colleagues (2017) experiment, they found that an overwhelming number of women participants reported greater body satisfaction after seeing ads with plus-size models compared to those who saw ads with traditionally thin models, which had the opposite effect. These results

illustrate how brand authenticity may decrease when viewing promotional body positive content, but the content nonetheless positively affects viewers. In particular, viewing these branded body positivity posts may increase users' body satisfaction while reducing their social comparison levels, which could help attenuate the negative effects associated with social comparison such as body dissatisfaction (Clayton et al., 2017).

Research Questions

While prior research has informed our understanding of the body positivity movement on social media, there remains much we still do not know. For example, prior research examined viewers' attitudes toward models who use body positivity to promote products on social media (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021), but we understand little about viewers' attitudes toward brands who do the same thing. Moreover, scholars have found that the model's size may influence women's responses to fashion advertising and body positivity posts (Brathwaite & DeAndrea, 2021), but I was unable to locate research on the effects of skin exposure and imperfections on viewers' perceptions and attitudes. Further, research on the influence of body positivity campaigns on viewers' attitudes toward the sponsoring brand is extremely limited.

Thus, the purpose of this investigation is to test the influence of the model's skin exposure or dress (e.g., modest versus revealing) and skin condition (e.g., perfect or imperfect) on viewers' evaluations of both the model and the sponsoring brand. To do so, this experimental investigation measures participants' levels of internalization of society's beauty standards and their body images, then exposes them to one of four branded body positivity Instagram posts (i.e., modest-perfect; modest-imperfect; revealing-perfect; revealing-imperfect). After measuring and manipulating these independent variables, the analysis explores the ways in which they influence viewers' responses outlined in the research questions:

RQ1: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their assessments of a model's attractiveness in a branded body positivity Instagram post?

RQ2: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their assessments of the authenticity of a branded body positivity Instagram post?

RQ3: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their emotional responses to a branded Body positivity Instagram post?

RQ4: How are participants' ratings of attractiveness, authenticity, positive emotional responses, and treatment condition related to their purchase intentions?

Method

Pretest: Stimuli Images

Before proceeding with the main study, an image search and a pretest were required to both locate and ensure the images used as stimuli for each condition would be perceived as accurately representing the characteristics of that condition (i.e., modest-perfect; modest-imperfect; revealing-perfect; revealing imperfect). First, an exhaustive online search for an image of a body positivity model that would be appropriate for each condition was conducted. This process yielded three images of Denise Bidot: modest-perfect; revealing-perfect; and revealing imperfect. After more image searches failed to yield results, the modest-perfect image was edited to show skin imperfections (e.g., acne) on the model's face and chest so the image could be used in the modest-imperfect condition. Thus, all four images showed the same model modestly and revealing dressed with perfect and imperfect skin (see Appendix).

Next, a pretest was conducted to ensure participants would perceive the model's appearance appropriately for each condition. Participants in this pretest were 104 students from three Rollins College communication department classes. Using a five-point Likert scale, these participants rated the modest-perfect image (M = 1.82, SD = 1.05) as significantly less revealing than the revealing-perfect image (M = 4.18, SD = 1.07), t (101) = -12.93, $p < .01$. Similarly, the modest-imperfect image (M = 3.53, SD = 1.36) was rated as showing significantly more skin imperfections than the modest-perfect image (M = 1.62, SD = 0.81), t 101) = -11.89, $p < .01$. Next, participants rated the revealing-imperfect image (M = 4.29, SD = 0.90) as significantly more revealing than the modest-imperfect image (M = 1.65, SD = 0.73), t(101) = 18.84, $p < .01$. And finally, the revealing-imperfect image (M = 4.26, SD = 0.95) was rated as showing significantly more skin imperfections than the revealing-perfect image (M = 1.79, SD = 1.03), t(101) = 18.32, $p < .01$. Based on these results verifying viewers perceived the model as intended for each condition, the primary experimental investigation proceeded.

Participants and Design

After receiving Rollins College Institutional Review Board approval, 639 participants were recruited from Prolific Academic and a Rollins College between February 17 to 21, 2022. Only women participants' data was used in the analysis, and their median age was 26 while their mean age was 30. These women were 70% White, 8% Hispanic or Latinx, 7% Black, 7% Asian, 5% more than one race, 1% Native American, and 1.5% preferred to self-describe or not answer.

This experiment used a 4 (modest-perfect; modest-imperfect; revealing-perfect; revealing imperfect) by 2 (internalization or rejection of beauty standards) by 2 (high or low body image) between-subjects, posttest-only design to answer the first three research questions. Thus, four of the independent variables (modest or revealing dress and perfect or imperfect skin) were

manipulated in the image stimuli and two (internalization and body image) were measured using established scales described below. The dependent variables included participants' evaluations of the (1) model's attractiveness, (2) sponsoring brand's authenticity, and (3) positive emotional responses to the branded body positivity Instagram post. Alternately, for the fourth research question, the four treatment conditions were collapsed into two (dress and skin condition) so that they could be used along with attractiveness, authenticity, and positive emotional responses as independent variables and purchase intention was the dependent variable.

Procedure, Stimuli, and Measurement

After consenting to their participation in the study, participants completed a pretest questionnaire that included demographic items asking about their race and age. The pretest also included items measuring the extent to which participants' internalization of and attitudes toward society's beauty standards as well as their own body images. The question measuring these constructs were adapted from the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Heinberg et al, 1995) and the Ideal Body Internalization Scale-Revised (IBIS-R; Stice, 2001; Stice & Agras, 1998; Stice & Bearman, 2001). Specifically, for the SATAQ, five items ($\alpha = .81$) asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements on a five-point Likert scale: (1) I compare my appearance to the appearance of celebrities and influencers; (2) I feel pressure from the media to look pretty (3) I've felt pressure from the media to diet; (4) I would like my body to look like the models who appear in social media; and (5) I wish I looked as fit as the people on social media. And for the IBIS-R, four items ($\alpha = .89$) also used a five-point Likert scale: (1) Slender women are more attractive; (2) Women who are in shape are more attractive; (3) Women with toned (lean) bodies are more attractive; and (4) Women with perfect skin are more attractive.

Participants' body images were also measured using four items (α = .89) from the SATAQ and IBIS scales asking participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of four statements on a five-point Likert scale: (1) I think my body is attractive; (2) I think I look good in clothes (3) Most days I feel good about my body; and (4) I wish I could change my body (reverse coded). Once each of these scores was computed, a median-split technique was used to create three dichotomous categories for participants with high or low (1) SATAQ, (2) IBIS, and (3) body image scores.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: modest-perfect; revealing-filtered; modest-unfiltered; modest-filtered (see Appendix). After viewing the image of the branded body positivity Instagram post, participants rated the model's attractiveness using a single item asking them to indicate the extent to which they agreed that the model was attractive on a five-point Likert scale. Next, participants indicated how the image elicited their emotional responses using three items (α = .81) on a five-point Likert scale: (1) This post got my attention; (2) I liked this post; and (3) This post made me feel good. Then, participants were asked whether they agreed that Bon Form was the name of the sponsoring brand on a five-point Likert scale. Thirty-one participants were eliminated from the analysis because they failed to agree or strongly agree with that statement.

Next, participants were asked to assess the authenticity of the sponsoring brand using six items (α = .91) on a five-point Likert scale: (1) This brand's model represents real people; (2) This brand connects people with their real selves; (3) This is an authentic brand; (4) This brand reflects important values people care about; (5) This brand is honest; and (6) This brand cares about its customers. Finally, purchase intentions were measured using a single item asking

participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with this statement: "Based on this post, I would buy something from this brand" (Shahid et al., 2017).

Results

The first research question asked: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their assessments of a model's attractiveness in a branded body positivity Instagram post? To answer this question, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with attractiveness ratings as the dependent variable and participants' (a) treatment condition, (b) SATAQ, (c) IBIS, and (d) body image scores entered as independent variables. The results indicated that the independent variables accounted for 20% (R^2 = .20) of the variance, revealing significant main effects for SATAQ scores ($F(1, 576) = 17.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$), IBIS scores ($F(1, 576) = 45.28$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$), and condition ($F(1, 576) = 11.09$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$), but not body image scores, $p > .05$.

Table 1: Attractiveness by SATAQ, IBIS, and Condition *

	Total (n = 608	Modest Perfect (n = 161)	Modest Imperfect (n = 156)	Revealing Imperfect (n = 150)	Revealing Perfect (n = 141)
Total Sample	3.96 (.86)	4.16[a] (.83)	3.81[b] (.86)	3.70[b] (.88)	4.17[a] (.78)
Low SATAQ	3.90 (.82)	3.83 (.93)	3.77 (.85)	3.88 (.81)	4.11 (.62)
High SATAQ	4.02 (.91)	4.50 [a] (0.50)	3.84[b] (0.87)	3.50[b] (0.92)	4.26 [a] (.97
Low IBIS	4.16 (.71)	4.21 (.78)	3.90[b] (.90)	4.13 (.53)	4.35[a] (.55)
High IBIS	3.75 (.94)	4.09[a] (.89)	3.75[b] (.83)	3.31[a] (.96)	3.95[a] (.96)

*Scores on a scale of 1-5; Standard deviations in parentheses
*Scores with differing superscript letters are significantly different, p < .05

As shown in the first rows of Table 1, the main effect of condition occurred because post-hoc Bonferroni analyses indicated that aggregate participants rated the model's appearance in the modest-perfect (M = 4.16, SD = .83) and revealing-perfect (M = 4.17, SD = .78) conditions as statistically equivalent, but each was significantly greater than the model's attractiveness in the modest-imperfect (M = 3.81, SD = .85) and the revealing-imperfect (M = 3.70, SD = .88) conditions, which were not significantly different from each other, $p > .05$. Next, the main effect of SATAQ scores occurred because participants with low scores (M = 3.90, SD = .82) rated all the models as significantly less attractive than did those with high SATAQ (M = 4.02, SD = .91) scores. Alternatively, the main effect of IBIS scores occurred because participants with low scores (M = 4.16, SD = .71) rated all the models as significantly more attractive than did those with high IBIS (M = 3.75, SD = .94) scores.

In addition to the main effects, the interactions between SATAQ scores and condition, ($F(3, 576) = 9.64$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$) as well as IBIS scores and condition, ($F(3, 576) = 3.67$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$), were significant. These interactions occurred because participants with high SATAQ scores rated the modest-perfect image the highest score reported in Table 1 while those with high IBIS scores rated the revealing-imperfect image the lowest of all the scores reported in Table 1, driving the main effects in the aggregate.

The second research question asked: RQ2: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their assessments of the authenticity of a branded body positivity Instagram post? To answer this question, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with authenticity ratings as the dependent variable and participants' (a) SATAQ, IBIS, and (b) body image scores as well as their (c) treatment condition entered as independent variables. The results indicated that the

variables accounted for 20% (R^2 = .20) of the variance, revealing significant main effects for SATAQ scores ($F(1, 576) = 10.44$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and condition ($F(1, 576) = 33.67$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$), but not IBIS or body image scores, $p > .05$.

Table 2: Brand Authenticity by SATAQ, IBIS, Body Image, and Condition *

	Total (n = 608)	Modest Perfect (n = 161)	Modest Imperfect (n = 156)	Revealing Imperfect (n = 150)	Revealing Perfect (n = 141)
Total Sample	3.35 (.73)	2.99[a] (.60)	3.28[b] (.75)	3.79[c] (.63)	3.39 [b] (.72)
Low SATAQ	3.31 (.54)	2.94[a] (.59)	3.15[b] (.71)	3.75[c] (.71)	3.31[b] (.54)
High SATAQ	3.43 (.91)	3.04 [a] (.62)	3.40[b] (.77)	3.83[c] (.54)	3.50[b] (.91)
Low IBIS	3.33 (.70)	2.92[a] (.63)	3.27[b] (.65)	3.85[c] (.55)	3.35[b] (.63)
High IBIS	3.38 (.76)	3.08[a] (.56)	3.28[a, c] (.81)	3.72[b] (.69)	3.43[b,c] (.82)
Low Body Image	3.38 (.70)	3.06[a] (.59)	3.17[a] (.72)	3.87[b] (.59)	3.33[a] (.58)
High Body Image	3.33 (.77)	2.92[b] (.61)	3.38[a] (.76)	3.67[a] (.67)	3.44[a] (.83)

*Scores on a scale of 1-5; Standard deviations in parentheses
*Scores with differing superscript letters are significantly different, p < .05

As shown in the first row of Table 2, the main effect of condition occurred because post-hoc Bonferroni analyses indicated aggregate participants rated the brand's authenticity in the modest-perfect (M = 2.99, SD = .60) significantly lower and the revealing-imperfect (M = 3.79, SD = .63) significantly higher than the other conditions. However, the differences in authenticity ratings between the modest-imperfect and revealing-perfect conditions were not significant, $p > .05$. Next, as shown in rows two and three of Table 2, the main effect of SATAQ scores occurred because the total authenticity score among participants with high SATAQ scores (M = 3.43, SD

= .76) was significantly greater than that of participants with low SATAQ scores (*M* = 3.28, *SD* = .70) across conditions.

The analysis also revealed a significant interaction between body image scores and condition, ($F(3, 576) = 5.68$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .03$). As shown in the seventh row of Table 2, this interaction drove the main effects because participants with low body image scores (*M* = 3.87, *SD* = .60) awarded the revealing-imperfect image the highest scores in Table 2. Alternatively, as shown in the sixth row of Table 2, participants with high body image scores (*M* = 2.92, *SD* = .61) awarded the modest-perfect image with the lowest score in Table 2.

Table 3: Emotional Responses by SATAQ, IBIS, Body Image, and Condition *

	Total (*n* = 608)	Modest Perfect (*n* = 161)	Modest Imperfect (*n* = 156)	Revealing Imperfect (*n* = 150)	Revealing Perfect (*n* = 141)
Total Sample	3.33 (.85)	2.81[a] (.79)	3.00[a] (.87)	3.50[b] (.76)	3.33[b] (.79)
Low SATAQ	3.12 (.81)	2.74[a] (.75)	2.94[a] (.87)	3.53[b] (.78)	3.29[b] (.61)
High SATAQ	3.19 (.88)	2.88[a] (.84)	3.06[a] (.86)	3.47[b] (.73)	3.40[b] (1.0)
Low IBIS	3.18 (.86)	2.69[a] (.70)	3.00[a] (.91)	3.71[b] (.77)	3.41[b] (.72)
High IBIS	3.12 (.83)	2.98 (.88)	3.00 (.85)	3.31 (.70)	3.24 (.87)
Low Body Image	3.16 (.92)	2.83[a] (.86)	2.82[a] (.98)	3.64[b] (.78)	3.32[b] (.75)
High Body Image	3.14 (.77)	2.79[a] (.73)	3.18[b] (.69)	3.30[b] (.68)	3.35[b] (.77)

*Scores on a scale of 1-5; Standard deviations in parentheses
*Scores with differing superscript letters are significantly different, $p < .05$

The third research question asked: How are participants' (a) internalization of society's beauty standards, (b) body images, and (c) treatment condition related to their emotional

responses to a branded body positivity Instagram post? To answer this question, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with emotional responses as the dependent variable and participants' (a) SATAQ, IBIS, and (b) body image scores as well as their (c) treatment condition entered as independent variables. The results indicated that the variables accounted for 12% (R^2 = .12) of the variance, revealing significant main effects for condition, ($F(1, 576) = 20.89$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$), but not SATAQ, IBIS, or body image scores. As shown in the top row of Table 3, this main effect of condition occurred because post-hoc Bonferroni analyses indicated aggregate participants reported stronger emotional responses to the revealing-imperfect ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .76$) and revealing-perfect ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .79$) images than to the modest-perfect ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .79$) and/or modest-imperfect ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .87$) images. This difference appears to be based solely on the model's dress because the revealing-perfect and imperfect scores as well as the modest-perfect and imperfect scores were not significantly different, $p > .05$. Finally, the analysis also revealed a significant interaction between condition and body image because participants with high body image scores were the only group in Table 3 to rate the modest-imperfect image ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .69$) significantly differently than the modest-perfect condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .73$) condition.

The fourth research question asked how the dependent variables analyzed above were related to the participants' purchase intentions. To answer this question, the four treatment conditions were collapsed into two separate variables: one for skin condition (perfect or imperfect) and one for dress (modest or revealing). Then, dummy variables were created for skin (0 for perfect, 1 for imperfect) and dress (0 for modest, 1 for revealing), and a regression model was constructed with purchase intentions as the dependent variable and skin, dress, attractiveness, authenticity, and positive emotions as the independent variables. As shown in

Table 4, the regression model accounted for 51% (R^2 = .51) of the variance, with positive emotions and authenticity exerting the greatest effects while attractiveness was not significantly related to purchase intentions. Further, the model's dress (revealing) exerted greater influence than did her skin (imperfect) condition on participants' purchase intentions, but both were significantly and positively related to purchase intentions. That is: the images of the model dressed in revealing clothing elicited stronger purchase intentions than did the images of the model with perfect skin.

Table 4: Purchase Intentions by Condition, Attractiveness, Authenticity, and Emotions

	B	*SE B*	β	*T*	*p*
Imperfect Skin	.13	.06	.07	2.10	.04
Revealing Dress	.30	.06	.15	4.80	.00
Attractiveness	.03	.04	.03	.85	.40
Authenticity	.34	.06	.25	6.11	.00
Emotional Responses	.65	.05	.55	13.11	.00

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the influence of a model's dress and skin condition (i.e., modest-perfect, modest-imperfect, revealing-perfect, revealing-imperfect) on women viewers' responses to branded body positivity Instagram posts. Specifically, this experiment compared participants' ratings of the model's attractiveness, the perceived authenticity of the sponsoring brand, and their positive emotional responses to the post across those treatment conditions. Further, participants' internalization of and attitudes toward society's beauty standards (i.e., SATAQ and IBIS scores) as well as their own body images were measured to explore the ways in which these variables influenced their responses. The results indicate that the manipulated independent variable, the condition, exerted significant main and interaction effects with the measured variables on all the dependent or outcome variables (i.e., attractiveness, authenticity, positive emotions, and purchase intentions).

First, when exploring participants' perceptions of the model's attractiveness, the images showing a model with perfect skin (in both modest and revealing dress) were rated significantly higher than the images showing a model with imperfect skin (again in modest and revealing dress). Interestingly, the results also indicated that participants' SATAQ exerted positive effects while their IBIS scores exerted negative effects on their ratings of the model's attractiveness. Moreover, the interactions between condition and SATAQ scores, and condition and IBIS scores, indicated that participants with high SATAQ and IBIS scores drove the main effects, rating the modest-perfect image the highest and the revealing-imperfect image the lowest in attractiveness, respectively.

Second, when examining authenticity, the results indicated that condition not only exerted main effects, but also interacted significantly with participants' body image scores. Overall, this interaction drove the main effects because those with low body image scores found the revealing-imperfect image particularly authentic while those with high body image scores found the modest-perfect image particularly inauthentic. Third, the results indicated that the condition also exerted significant main effects on viewers' positive emotional responses. This effect suggests that the model's dress was more important than her skin condition because participants experienced stronger positive emotional responses to the revealing (perfect and imperfect) images than to the modest (perfect and imperfect) images. Moreover, the interaction between condition and body image occurred because participants with high body image scores were the only group to indicate their positive emotional responses were stronger in the modest-imperfect than the modest-perfect condition.

Theoretical Implications

One of this study's most theoretically interesting purposes was to test the differential influence of participants' SATAQ and IBIS scores. Most studies use either SATAQ or IBIS - one or the other – or adapt questions from both into a single scale. However, this project used both scales because SATAQ measured internalization of and IBIS questions measured attitudes toward society's beauty standards. Thus, SATAQ scores were used to determine how women applied society's beauty standards to themselves (e.g., social comparison) while IBIS scores were used to explore how participants applied society's beauty standards to other women.

The differences in participants' responses to questions from the two scales suggests a double standard regarding how women judge themselves versus how they judge other women. Previous articles, as mentioned in the literature review, tend to group the socialization and cultivation of beauty standards through media together with internalization of the thin ideal. However, the results from this study suggests that the two constructs may have different social influences as they had inverse effects on some of the dependent or outcome variables. These findings are supported by Braithwaite & DeAndrea's (2022) results who also found that participants' IBIS and SATAQ scores exerted different influences on outcome variables.

For example, SATAQ and IBIS scores exerted differential effects on participants' ratings of the model's attractiveness in the current study. High SATAQ participants' attractiveness ratings were significantly higher than those with low SATAQ scores, whereas high IBIS score participants' attractiveness ratings were significantly lower than low IBIS score participants. While the perfect skin images were rated as significantly more attractive than the imperfect skin images across SATAQ and IBIS groups, participants' scores on these scales affected their attractiveness ratings differently. Specifically, high SATAQ participants found the modest-

perfect image the most attractive, driving that condition's score up, while high IBIS participants found the revealing-imperfect image the least attractive, driving that condition's score down.

Overall, participants' attractiveness ratings were determined by the model's skin condition, not her dress, because there were no significant differences between the images of the model with perfect skin, regardless whether she was dressed modestly or revealingly. Similarly, participants' attractiveness ratings were not significantly different between the modest and revealing images of the model with imperfect skin. However, there *was* a significant difference in attractiveness ratings between the perfect and imperfect skin conditions. Interestingly, the opposite was found to be true for positive emotions because revealing dress elicited stronger positive emotional responses than either of the modestly dressed conditions, regardless of skin condition. These results make sense based on social comparison theory since the perfect skin conditions likely elicited more upwards comparison from participants, causing less positive emotional responses; whereas the imperfect skin conditions likely caused more lateral or downward comparisons, hence the increase in positive emotions (de Vries et al., 2018; Stapleton et al., 2017).

The study's authenticity findings also align with expectations because the most attractive image was rated the least authentic and the least attractive was rated the most authentic. This finding suggests that authenticity is inversely related to attractiveness because participants view the more attractive models as unrealistic or fake. These findings support prior research suggesting that people may make cognitive appraisals of same-sex others' attractiveness that are disconnected from their affective responses (e.g., Kenrick et al., 1993; Martin & Gentry, 1997).

Practical Implications

With the rise of visual social media, and particularly Instagram in 2010, came the rise of photo filters, editing apps, and staging that have led to the preponderance of highly unrealistic pictures propagating unnatural thinness as well as unrealistic and unachievable beauty standards (Derenne & Beresin, 2018). These events led to the popularity of Instagram model accounts idolizing pictures of women with tiny waists and flawless skin (perfected by filters or editing). However, the average U.S. woman at least 20-years-old wears a size 16–18 (Christel & Dunn, 2016, p. 132), so it is not surprising they are embracing the body positivity movement countering society's thin-ideal beauty standard. Of particular interest in this study, the body positivity movement has attempted to overcome social norms that (1) compel women to filter skin imperfections in their social media images and (2) prohibit plus-sized women from wearing revealing clothing. The body positivity movement's popularity has also inspired marketers to adopt its messages and images in their promotional campaigns designed to engage their target audience of women consumers, especially on Instagram.

Some of the most interesting and unexpected findings in the study were those related to purchase intentions. In particular, the findings indicate that positive emotional responses were the strongest factor driving purchase intentions, followed by authenticity ratings, and the model's dress and skin condition also significantly and positively related to participants' likelihood of buying the brand's product. However, the model's attractiveness had no significant impact on purchase intentions, suggesting that campaigns or ads using more attractive models do not necessarily increase people's desire to purchase from that brand.

In practical terms, these results suggest that marketers need to consider their goals when selecting the images in their branded body positivity Instagram posts. While some branded

Instagram posts may be purposed with raising brand awareness, building engagement, positively influencing reputation, or other relationship goals, their ultimate objectives usually center on converting browsers into customers, increasing market share, or in some other way generating revenue. This study's results align with prior research suggesting attractiveness may not influence brand-related attitudes and behaviors, but that viewers' emotional responses and brand authenticity ratings are powerfully and positively related to their purchase intentions (e.g., Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020).

Consumer demands for authentic brand experiences while their own social media feeds and lived experiences are full of staged, filtered, and edited images is probably a natural response to this artificial environment. And this natural response may also fuel the disconnection between a model's perceived attractiveness, which is based on society's thin-ideal beauty standard, and viewers' affective and cognitive responses to the images in branded body positivity Instagram posts. Moreover, the images of the model dressed in revealing clothing, which violates the norm that plus-sized women should wear clothing that completely covers their bodies, elicited stronger purchase intentions than the images of the model with perfect skin, even though imperfect skin was also significantly and positively related to purchase intentions as well.

Overall, participants' responses to the branded body positivity Instagram posts in this study suggest that the commodification of the movement may exert positive influences on their engagement with the brand's content and purchase intentions. Additionally, brands may find that body positivity campaigns are less expensive to produce than traditional campaigns because plus-sized models are generally paid considerably less than traditional fashion models, and the use of unedited images means photographers cannot charge for post-production work (E. Barker, personal communication, January 14, 2022). Further, about two-thirds of the U.S. women are

considered plus-sized (Smith, 2022), so using images of models who represent their target audience is not necessarily an altruistic act that supports body positivity so much as a wise and informed marketing strategy.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all other research projects, the current study includes some limitations that must be noted. First, images of the same plus-sized model were used in all four treatment conditions to maximize external validity or real-world relevance, but some participants may have been familiar with Denise Bidot, which may have influenced their responses. Thus, future researchers may want to create their own images using an unknown model to investigate viewers' responses to branded body positivity Instagram posts. Second, this project used a 4 (treatment condition) by 2 (high or low social comparison orientation) between-subjects, posttest-only factorial design that did not include a control group. However, this design was intentional because I wanted to compare viewers' responses to four different images of the same model.

While prior body positivity research used a control condition with landscape images to compare their influence on viewers' body images (e.g., Vendemia, et al, 2021), this study used participants' social comparison orientations as an independent variable and explored their responses to different images in branded body positivity Instagram posts. Moreover, Privitera (2020) explains that a factorial design like this study's qualifies as an experiment if it (1) manipulates the levels of each factor; (2) each of the independent variables' levels is combined to explore all possible outcomes; and (3) selects participants from the same population and randomly assigns them to each group. That said, future research regarding the influence of branded body positivity Instagram posts on viewers' body images or other elements of their

psychological, physical, and/or emotional wellbeing may provide insights into these campaigns beyond the scope of the current investigation.

In addition to the theoretical and practical implications discussed above, this study's findings indicate that even when marketers adopt body positivity into their campaigns and ads it can still have a positive effect. They can use cheaper marketing for models and less money for editing and post photography, while also promoting a socially responsible cause and undoing the negative effects that past media has created with western society's beauty standards that to this day harm women's emotional, physical, and mental health. Given the rise of social media usage, particularly as marketing tools for brands, this study can more broadly apply to how brands can use these platforms to propagate positive changes in their industries and concurrently increase their sales.

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Appendix

PROPOSAL FORM Form Approved Fall, 2010 *Institutional Review Board*		Institutional Review Board

Section I: Proposal Information

Project title and contact information.

Project Title: Skin Deep: Body Positivity and Brand Authenticity

Date of Proposal: February 1, 2022

Starting and Ending Dates of Project, if approved: February 14, 2022 - February 13, 2023

Project Personnel

Principal Investigator: David Painter Office: CSS 160

Phone Number: 407.691.1702 Email: dpainter@rollins.edu

Department: Communication

Source of Project Funding: Communication Department

Qualifications of Principal Investigator:

Communication department faculty member with Ph.D. in communication and more than a decade of research experience with more than 40 conference papers and 20 publications.

Name/Rank/Title/Department/Role of other Investigators:

Camilla Guimaraes, Communication Senior, Honor's Thesis research project

Section II: Risk Category

Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. IRB will make the final decision on these categories.

1. Do you believe your proposal requires Institutional Review Board review? If your research proposal meets one of the criteria below, then you must receive Institutional Review Board approval before gathering data/information from research participants:

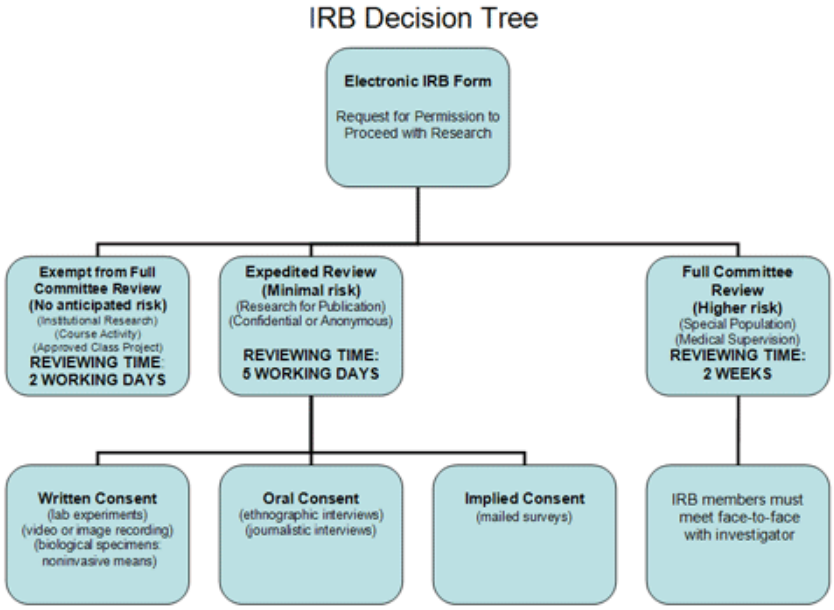
- Requires the collection of biological specimens (i.e. urine, bodily fluids, blood, tissue, etc.)
- Involves vulnerable populations (e.g. children under the age of 18, or participants who are incarcerated or mentally ill).
- Includes collecting sensitive private information where anonymity or confidentiality of responses cannot be guaranteed.
- Requires gathering data/information for the purpose of publishing any findings externally.

Note: Most pedagogical activities that occur during class, such as gathering data from students as part of class assignments/exercises do not require review.

Requires Review? ☒ Yes ☐ No

2. Select a Risk Category for your proposal:

- **Exempt** (No likely risk): Proposals are read by the chair of the IRB and returned with 2 working days.
- **Expedited** (Minimal risk): Proposals are reviewed by the committee and returned within 5 working days.
- **Full** (Higher risk): Review requires the investigator to meet with the IRB members. Allow at least 2 week for full review.



Review Category? ☐ Exempt ☐ Expedited ☐ Full

Section III: Project Details

Information in this section will aid the IRB in evaluating potential risks to human subjects and likely success of safeguards in place. Please see the IRB website for additional information about this process. Please note that a success proposal requires Informed Consent from participants and minimizing of stress, pain, deception, and physical or psychological harm.

Goals of the Research

Please describe the purpose of your project in language that an educated lay audience can understand:

While prior research has examined how viewing body positivity social media posts may affect women's self-perceptions such as their body satisfaction, this investigation explores viewers' evaluations of the authenticity of brands who use the body positivity movement as part of their social media marketing campaigns. Specifically, this experiment will test the influence of skin exposure (revealing vs. modest) and skin imperfections (filtered vs. unfiltered) on women's attitudes towards the posts and the sponsoring brand. To achieve this goal, the experiment will compare how women with varying body images and attitudes toward society's beauty standards respond to the branded body positivity posts. Since some research suggests that the most popular body positive posts use images of modestly dressed women with idealized skin tones, this project's goal is to compare responses to those types of posts to those exposed to posts with models wearing more revealing clothing and showing skin imperfections.

What benefits, if any, may accrue as a result of this research?

This investigation builds on a line of research indicating there are important relationships among society's beauty standards, women's body images, and important health outcomes. The benefits that this research project may produce include a better understanding of the factors influencing women's acceptance of body shape and size diversity, including their own internalization of beauty standards and body images. Moreover, this project may help us identify how fashion marketing that attempts to redefine society's beauty standards may influence women's body images and their corresponding physical, emotional, and psychological wellness.

Recruitment of Participants

How will you select individuals to participate in your research? Please submit proposed text of advertisements if appropriate. Will participants be compensated? If participants leave the study early, will they be eligible for compensation?

Participants will be recruited in two distinct ways. First, we have a $500 budget (from the Rollins College Communication Department) to recruit and pay participants using Prolific Academic services. Second, we will recruit participants from undergraduate courses at Rollins College. Minimal extra-credit be offered for students' participation (dependent on professor's prerogative), but there will be no penalty for those who leave the study early.
Although the questionnaires will be identical, the Informed Consent Forms for volunteer participants and paid participants (recruited through Prolific Academic) will be different. Both versions of the consent form as well as the rest of the questionnaire are attached at the end of this proposal.

TEXT OF PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO ROLLINS COLLEGE FACULTY, STAFF, AND STUDENTS:

Dear Rollins College Students, Faculty, and Staff:
We are recruiting participants for a research project designed to explore people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns. Additionally, you will be asked a series of questions about how you formed your body image, your feelings about your own body, and your opinions of a body positivity model in a branded Instagram post.
While no risks are anticipated in the completion of this 10- to 15-minute online project, body image is a very sensitive subject for many people. Therefore, if you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please do not participate in this study.
However, if you do feel comfortable answering questions measuring your attitudes toward your body, your opinions of a body positivity model, and the brand sponsoring the Instagram post, please follow the link below to read the Informed Consent Form in its entirety before deciding whether to complete the project.
Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.
Regards,
Dr. David Painter and Camilla Guimaraes

Potential Risks: Vulnerable populations, Deception, Consent

How will you obtain **Informed Consent** from participants? If consent is written, please submit the proposed Consent Form with your proposal. Are participants **aware** of how their responses will be used (i.e. confidential of anonymous) and that they can **terminate their participation** in the study at any time, even after they have provided data/information? Will participants be **deceived** as to the goals of the study and, if so, will you provide a **debriefing** of participants? If debriefing is written, please submit proposed debriefing information with your proposal. Please address any and all relevant issues in this section. If the research is to involve **vulnerable populations** (e.g. children under the age of 18, participants who are incarcerated or mentally ill) please describe any special risk factors and safeguards as appropriate. (For example, consent from a family member may be required for mentally ill participants or children.)

The Informed Consent forms will appear on the first page of the online questionnaire and require participants to agree or consent to participate in the study before they will be able to proceed. The Informed Consent forms are attached to this proposal along with the pretest and posttest questions and the stimuli. Participants will be made aware of that their responses will be anonymous because they will not be asked to provide any identifying information in the survey-experiment questionnaire, and that they can terminate their participation in the study at any time, even after they have provided data/information. Students completing this project for extra-credit will be instructed to click a link at the end of the survey-experiment questionnaire that will take them to another, unrelated website where they can enter identifying information to receive the credit.

Methodology

Please describe your research method in specific detail so as to enable the Review Board to assess exactly what data/information you plan to gather from participants and exactly how you plan to gather such data/information. Include discussion of your safeguards to ensure the anonymity or confidentiality of data/information gathered from participants. Please describe the methodology of your research in language an educated lay audience can understand. Please submit, along with your proposal, any additional materials that will help the IRB evaluate the method such as questionnaires, stimuli, interview questions, references, or web links.

This project will use Qualtrics software to collect information about participants' political knowledge, attitudes,
and behaviors. Participants will go to the web address for the Qualtrics survey, agree to the Informed Consent
form, complete the pretest questionnaire, and then be randomly assigned to a treatment or a control condition. After exposure to the stimuli, participants will complete a posttest assessing their political knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. Below, please find an outline, and attached, please find the questionnaire and all stimuli used in this study.

INFORMED CONSENT

PRETEST

1. Demographics
2. Socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance questionnaire items
3. Ideal Body Internalization Scale items
4. Body Self Image Questionnaire items

STIMULI

1. Modest/Filtered
2. Modest Unfiltered
3. Revealing Filtered
4. Revealing Unfiltered

POSTTEST

1. Authenticity to Body Positivity/real people items
2. Attractiveness of model item
3. Attention item (identify sponsoring brand's name)
4. Post evaluations and attitudes items
5. Brand authenticity items
6. Debrief

Section IV: Assurances

By signing, you affirm the statement below. Simply type your name in the space provided on proposal submission. Electronic signature (just type in your same) are permitted.

Assurance Statement

The information provided herein is accurate to the best of my knowledge. Procedures involving human subjects will be performed by trained personnel in accordance with the methods outlined in this proposal. Any changes will be communicated to the IRB Chair prior to implementation.

Include signature and date:

Principal Investigator:  2-2-2022

Body Positivity: Prolific Academic Informed Consent

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1 **Dear Participant:**

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to better understand people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns. Additionally, you will be asked a series of questions about how you formed your body image, your feelings about your own body, and your opinions of a body positivity model in a branded Instagram post.

Risks: No risks are anticipated in completing this 10- to 15-minute online project. **However, body image is a very sensitive subject for many people. Therefore, if you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now.**

Compensation: You will be paid $1.50 for completing this project.

Confidentiality: All of your responses are completely anonymous and confidential. Your name will not be requested, and no identifying information will be collected. The data will be collected on Qualtrics and downloaded to Dr. Painter's Rollins College computer for SPSS analysis. The SPSS spreadsheet with the anonymous data will be stored and secured in a OneDrive folder.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. **If you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now.**

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:
David L. Painter, Ph.D., at Rollins College Communication Department: dpainter@rollins.edu; 407.691.1702 or John Houston, Ph.D., at Rollins College Institutional Review Board: jhouston@rollins.edu; 407.646.2099

Study Results:

The aggregate results of this study will be published in an academic volume and on David Painter's ResearchGate profile: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Painter3

If you want to learn more about this study, or receive an individual report on the results of this study, please contact David Painter at dpainter@rollins.edu

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

If you agree to participate in this study, click the “I Agree” button below and enter your Prolific Academic ID below

If you do not agree to participate in this study, please check Do Not Agree below.

- ○ I Agree, enter Prolific Academic ID _____
- ○ Do Not Agree (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Rollins College Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to better understand people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns. Additionally, you will be asked a series of questions about how you formed your body image, your feelings about your own body, and your opinions of a body positivity model in a branded Instagram post.

Risks:

No risks are anticipated in completing this 10- to 15-minute online project. **However, body image is a very sensitive subject for many people. Therefore, if you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now.**

Compensation:

You will not be paid for completing this project.

Confidentiality:

All your responses are completely anonymous and confidential. Your name will not be requested, and no identifying information will be collected. The data will be collected on Qualtrics and downloaded to Dr. Painter's Rollins College computer for SPSS analysis. The SPSS spreadsheet with the anonymous data will be stored and secured in a OneDrive folder.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

If you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now. .

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

David L. Painter, Ph.D., at Rollins College Communication Department:
dpainter@rollins.edu;
407.691.1702
or
John Houston, Ph.D., at Rollins College Institutional Review Board:

jhouston@rollins.edu; 407.646.2099

Study Results:

The aggregate results of this study will be published in an academic volume and on David Painter's ResearchGate profile: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Painter3
If you want to learn more about this study, or receive an individual report on the results of this study, please contact David Painter at dpainter@rollins.edu or Camilla Guimaraes at cguimaraes@rollins.edu

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. If you agree to participate in this study, click the “I

Agree" button below and proceed.

If you are in a class that is allowing extra-credit for participation, you will be directed to click a link on the last page to go to another website and enter your name as well as the professor and class offering the extra-credit.

If you do not agree to participate in this study, please exit this website now.

○ I Agree

Demogaphics

First, we want to ask you some questions about your demographic traits.

Please indicate the term that best describes your racial identity.

○ Black or African American
○ Hispanic or Latinx
○ Asian or Pacific Islander
○ Native American
○ White or Caucasian
○ More than one race
○ Prefer to self-describe
○ Prefer not to answer

How do you identify your gender?

○ Woman
○ Man
○ Nonbinary
○ Prefer to self-describe

What is your age?

SATAQ

Next, we want to ask you some questions about your attitudes and experiences related to your appearance and body image.

Please read the following statements carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Social media are an important source of information about fashion and being attractive	○	○	○	○	○
I compare my appearance to the appearance of celebrities and influencers	○	○	○	○	○
I feel pressure from the media to look pretty	○	○	○	○	○
I've felt pressure from the media to diet	○	○	○	○	○
I would like my body to look like the models who appear in social media	○	○	○	○	○
I wish I looked as fit as the people on social media	○	○	○	○	○
I want my body to look very thin	○	○	○	○	○

IBIS-R

Next, we want to ask you some more questions about your attitudes toward society's beauty standards.

Please read the following statements carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Slender women are more attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Women who are in shape are more attractive	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Women with toned (lean) bodies are more attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Women with perfect skin are more attractive	○	○	○	○	○

Body Image

Now we want to ask you some questions about your body image.

Please read the following statements carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think my body is attractive	○	○	○	○	○
I think I look good in clothes	○	○	○	○	○
I wish I could change my body	○	○	○	○	○
Most days I feel good about my body	○	○	○	○	○
I support the body positivity movement	○	○	○	○	○

Modest Perfect

Next, we want to ask your opinions of a sponsored Instagram post.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This brand's model represents real people	○	○	○	○	○
This brand connects people with their real selves	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is just using body positivity to sell products	○	○	○	○	○
This brand's model is attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Bon Form is the name of the brand sponsoring the post	○	○	○	○	○

Modest Imperfect

Next, we want to ask your opinions of a sponsored Instagram post.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This brand's models represent real people	○	○	○	○	○
This brand connects people with their real selves	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is just using body positivity to sell products	○	○	○	○	○
This brand's model is attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Bon Form is the name of the brand sponsoring the post	○	○	○	○	○

Revealing Imperfect

Next, we want to ask your opinions of a sponsored Instagram post.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand's model represents real people	○	○	○	○	○
This brand connects people with their real selves	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is just using body positivity to sell products	○	○	○	○	○
This brand's model is attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Bon Form is the name of the brand sponsoring the post	○	○	○	○	○

Revealing Perfect

Next, we want to ask your opinions of a sponsored Instagram post.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand's model represents real people	○	○	○	○	○
This brand connects people with their real selves	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is just using body positivity to sell products	○	○	○	○	○
This brand's model is attractive	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Bon Form is the name of the brand sponsoring the post	○	○	○	○	○

Post Evaluations & Attitudes

Now we want to ask you more questions about the sponsored post you viewed.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly agre	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This post got my attention	○	○	○	○	○
I liked this post	○	○	○	○	○
Based on this post, I would buy something from this brand	○	○	○	○	○
I am tired of this type of post on social media	○	○	○	○	○
I would probably scroll past this ad if I saw it on Instagram	○	○	○	○	○
This post makes me feel good	○	○	○	○	○

Brand Authenticity

Finally, we want to ask you some questions about your thoughts and feelings about the brand sponsoring the post you viewed.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This is an authentic brand	○	○	○	○	○
This brand reflects important values people care about	○	○	○	○	○
This brand is honest	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand cares about its customers	○	○	○	○	○

Debrief

Purpose of the Study and Deception

Thank you for participating in this study that will help us better understand how people feel about brands' use of the body positivity campaign in their social media marketing. Please be aware, however, that the branded Instagram posts displayed in this study were created by the study's authors and were **NOT** real branded Instagram posts.

If you are a Rollins College student struggling with body image or any other emotional or psychological issues and want help, please contact the Rollins College Counseling and Psychological Services at the Wellness Center at 4076286340 or https://wellnesscounselingintake.rollins.edu/TitaniumWeb/OnlineAppointmentRequest

If you are not a Rollins College student, please contact your local mental health organization or professional or the National Eating Disorders Association helpline (online chat, phone call, and text resources): https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/help-support/contact-helpline

If you are a student completing this project for extra-credit, please click this link: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=GtfouH2U3UGB3YQB3MUQB3Sy5kj0NeRAkFF0qxra2M

IRB Proposal Addendum: Branded Body Positivity Instagram Study

1. "The IRB needs to see the exact language that will be used for advertisements/recruiting participants."

- TEXT OF RECRUITMENT EMAIL:
  Dear Rollins College Students, Faculty, and Staff:
  We are recruiting participants for a research project designed to explore people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns. Additionally, you will be asked a series of questions about how you formed your body image, your feelings about your own body, and your opinions of a body positivity model in a branded Instagram post.
  While no risks are anticipated in the completion of this 10- to 15-minute online project, body image is a very sensitive subject for many people. Therefore, if you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please do not participate in this study.
  However, if you do feel comfortable answering questions measuring your attitudes toward your body, your opinions of a body positivity model, and the brand sponsoring the Instagram post, please follow the link below to read the Informed Consent Form in its entirety before deciding whether to complete the project.
  Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.
  Regards,
  Dr. David Painter and Camilla Guimaraes

2. "The explanation of the project in the two forms of the survey are a little different. The Prolific Academic Informed Consent statement explains the project more fully in my opinion; does the College student one need to be so concise? It's just this one line 'The purpose of this study is to better understand people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns.'"

- We made the descriptions fuller and uniform across consent forms, which now read: "The purpose of this study is to better understand people's attitudes toward branded body positivity marketing campaigns. Additionally, you will be asked a series of questions about how you formed your body image, your feelings about your own body, and your opinions of a body positivity model in a branded Instagram post."

3. Could anything from the survey content be triggering to participants? Body image is a tricky and sensitive thing sometimes. If so, is a "trigger warning" needed in the informed consent and would help resource be appropriate to provide at the end during the debriefing?

- We included the stimuli images that will be used in the questionnaire in this revised IRB application. These images are posted publicly on Instagram now and no trigger risk is anticipated, but we added a warning in the "Risks" section of the consent form so that it now reads: "No risks are anticipated in completing this 10- to 15-minute online project. **However, body image is a very sensitive subject for many people. Therefore, if you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now."**
- We also added a statement at the end of the Voluntary participation section of the consent form: **"If you do not feel comfortable answering questions about your body image, please exit this study now."**
- We also added a section to the Debriefing that includes links to help resources: "If you are a Rollins College student struggling with body image or any other emotional or psychological

issues and want help, please contact the Rollins College Counseling and Psychological Services at the Wellness Center at 407-628-6340 or https://wellnesscounselingintake.rollins.edu/TitaniumWeb/OnlineAppointmentRequest If you are not a Rollins College student, please contact your local mental health organization or professional or the National Eating Disorders Association helpline (online chat, phone call, and text resources): https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/help-support/contact-helpline"

4. "The researchers don't mention anything about where the data will be stored, though it is clear that all data is anonymous."

- We added language to the Confidentiality section of the Consent Form: "The data will be collected on Qualtrics and downloaded to Dr. Painter's Rollins College computer for SPSS analysis. The SPSS spreadsheet with the anonymous data will be stored and secured in a OneDrive folder."