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UWP 101

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Twitter's Role in #BodyPositivity

The #BodyPositivity movement is one that has rapidly and wholly encapsulated the idea that it is okay to be oneself. The daily struggle of not feeling confident in your own skin, not loving the person you see in the mirror, and watching what you eat is just the beginning. This movement, started roughly in the 1960s, has been a battle for many people to try and normalize bodies that are not the picture-perfect rendition by which the media has forced people to compare themselves to. Using the understanding that Body Positivity as a whole is rooted in the loving of oneself and the acceptance of who one is, this paper is going to intend to examine how it feels to be involved directly in the movement itself and find what it means to have peace with who you are. I have been involved in the Body Positivity movement since around 2016, and, much like a lot of the people who are involved in the discussion on Twitter, I, myself, was once not confident in the person I was because people made it very evident that I was different. Now, I am by no means overweight or obese, but my body isn't stick thin, the way a lot of bodies are when you're raised in Orange County. Generally, the goal of this paper is to find what it means to be involved in something that means something: finding light in a dark world and examining the purpose of loving oneself, especially when it seems tough to do so.

On Twitter, I made a lot of hefty observations that originally I was unsure as to how to organize into true thoughts: the #BodyPositivity movement is one that places importance on finding self-confidence. A couple of the patterns that I located from this study and observation of data are rooted in the Tweeting itself. The overall purpose of the #BodyPositivity movement for

Twitter is utilizing the platform to normalize photos of what bodies all around look like: it focuses primarily on finding the good in an ugly world. A lot of the captions you find attached to these photos are things that are both backhanded and encouraging: captions like, “Most of the time I don’t love who I am but today I do” and “It’s not everyday that an outfit makes me look this good”. A lot of these statements are both concerning and also interesting: it shows that even the community that is supposed to be uplifting themselves is able to find flaws in their overall being. By posting a photo, it almost seems as if they’re doing something that makes them temporarily feel good. It’s hard for one to admit to being positive about themselves all of the time, but the captions attached to these photos are interesting and important because it shows that generally speaking, the people who surround themselves into this movement are those of which see themselves as flawed but allow for their perfection to show through momentarily.

This observation was one of my absolute favorites because I found it to be the most contradictory to the whole purpose of this group. My contributions to this group in the past have been very focused on finding oneself in a good and positive light—it has worked to show that even the people who claim to be #BodyPositive find flaws in their own ways and observations. I think that it is interesting to see these things because there is so little that one can do in order to find their own security and peace, even within a group that encourages one to look for perfection in the imperfect. These sort of backhanded comments about oneself kind of glorifies the idea of being something other than what the media has portrayed as “beautiful” or “perfect”, and it shows a sort of difference from the rest of the world. In reality, however, the point of the movement is to glorify one’s own body and make it their perfection: being born alone is miracle, and yet somehow the world and media has forced people to see the flaws that are written in their stars.

I chose to conduct three anonymous interviews on people who fall underneath the #BodyPositivity movement on Twitter. Like myself, they have used the hashtag and their confidence to post into the community for others to be proud of them and their progress and growth. I aimed to really try and capture the reasons that people were a part of this community: every person had something a little different to say, which made the interviews that much more fun. The first person I interviewed had some interesting points, in which I found their overarching goal in the community to be their own personal growth. “I think that above all, the community is rooted in finding beauty in your own self. I’ve always struggled with finding that part of me, and this group of people has done nothing but help me to grow into accepting and loving myself more,” person 1 writes. The feeling of knowing you have a group of people who are willing to support, love, and help one person shows how deeply rooted in self-love this entire community really is. It shows that above all, the group does a good job of encouraging others and fostering a healthy environment that allowed for personal growth. Person 2’s goals were different, however, in that they began to truly join the community as a way to be a part of something. “I chose to really begin to participate in the body pos movement because, honestly, it’s easier to be a part of something and take on the world alongside other people. I mean, honestly, who would want to go through this stuff alone?”

These two interviews really shined some light onto what it means to be a part of this group: my own personal contributions and my own personal research were very centralized to me, so getting an outside perspective on it was helpful and encouraging because it shows that participants all have different goals but typically see this platform as a way to encourage and feel supported. That’s why I was completely unsurprised when my final interview, person 3, told me: “LOL I love this! OK so I actually really wanted to be a part of this ‘community’ because of the

idea that complete strangers can support each other from all over the globe. I don't know one person who doesn't struggle with self-acceptance or body image and to have a community like this is to have a support system. I joined because I wanted to support others...and then, once I found that I was getting supported, too, I knew that it was a safe space to be".

Looking at these three interestingly different perspectives, I think it is important to truly examine what it means to be a part of this community: and when you really delve into the hashtag, it is rare that it is ever found alone. This leads into the question of what it means to truly be a part of a community. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "community" as "a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity. Hence: a place where a particular body of people lives" (OED). Considering communities have shifted to both real life and online interfaces, this definition is particularly interesting and inspiring: to have a body of people living in the same place, together, in harmony because they believe in the same thing is to find a form of peace. And that is why the fact that the hashtag #BodyPositivity is rarely found alone is intriguing: it's one of the many fluid and flexible communities, allowing for diversity amongst all of its masses. Person 1, when asked about the communal aspect of #BodyPositivity, was shocked to consider it a community to begin with. They said, "I've never really thought about it like that tbh. I guess then every hashtag on twitter would be a community? Weird". And, when it comes down to it, every individual hashtag is a community in and of itself. This is such an interest phenomenon to focus on because of the importance of the #BodyPositivity movement being built on and involved in other communities as a way to spread the message across so many other communities, as well.

Person 2 is one of the people I chose to interview who hashtagged more than one community in their post, and while I aim to keep that secondary community anonymous, they

spoke about what it means to them to have this level of community. “Yeah! So, I also identify strongly with the #[anonymous] here on Twitter. I think I hashtag both at the same time to appeal to a wider range of people...it’s not like these two communities are in competition, but rather both matter to me and both deserve to see one of their strong community members.” This then leads to the idea that, while these two communities may be vastly different in nature, they are also building off of one another in many ways. To identify with two different communities, you are merging the two and showing people who identify with one or both of these communities that it is wonderful and encouraged to be unapologetically yourself in all capacities possible.

In accordance with this same idea, Lorayne Robertson and Dianne Thomson wrote primarily about the importance of body image in schools in their literary article “‘BE’ing a Certain Way: Seeking Body Image in Canadian Health and Physical Curriculum Policies”. This article examines the policies in place in a Canadian school. One of the most emphasized and important parts of this article is the idea that young people are terrified of being dissatisfied with who they see in the mirror: the youth of Canada are most afraid of being labeled by harsh words such as “fat” (article 6). The policies that are set in place are primarily used to help students to see that the “ideal” body image is not something that is necessary or something simply to strive for. To quote the article, “education can: help students understand that this ideal body type occurs naturally only in a very small percentage of the population; help students understand that health includes physical, social, and emotional health and how best to work toward this balance; and help students understand that they can be healthy at a broader range of sizes and body types than those portrayed in the media” (Robertson & Thomson 2012). All of these rules are particularly interesting because they place a very vast importance on health as growth and movement, the same way the #BodyPositivity community does. Not only do these article

emphasize that body size is genealogical, but it also shows that there must be rules and policies in place to show that to be any size is to be healthy in a lot of cases. These policies clearly and wholeheartedly support the #BodyPositivity movement, and they allow for students as young as elementary level see that the pressure put on people by society is merely something created from media and the interconnected environment. This is clearly one of the many supporters of the same love of one's self image that the #BodyPositivity community has.

Unfortunately, not all platforms can allow for this sort of support toward body image being a positive and uplifting thing. In fact, in June of this year, there was an attack on the #BodyPositivity community when The Telegraph posted an article by writer Tanya Gold about a plus sized mannequin in one of the Nike's athletic wear stores. In the article, Gold writes "yet the new Nike mannequin is not a size 12, which is healthy, or even a size 16 – a hefty weight, yes, but not one to kill a woman. She is immense, gargantuan, vast. She heaves with fat" (Gold 2019). This specific line is one that struck the #BodyPositivity community with disgust: the idea that someone is so increasingly upset with an athleticwear store for promoting something to include every type of person seems insane to so many people. One of the most interesting aspects to the entire study of the #BodyPositive community is finding out all of the ways people find to attack this inclusive and beautiful community: it allows for some many different types of people to be included in something and to love themselves for who they are, but these attacks show that the world is not willing to accept anyone for who they are.

It is as if Gold is arguing that people who identify as being plus sized then do not deserve the same rights, thoughts, opinions, and options as those who have lower body weights and need lower athleticwear sizes. Expectedly, the #BodyPositivity community erupted with anger over this attack on people and beautiful body image. A lot of the arguments against this hateful and

dehumanizing article revolved over the idea that, Gold's opinion is not going to change the fact that people deserve to feel their best whenever they choose to. Not only that, though, but the idea that by not allowing plus sized people the opportunity to purchase athleticwear is also contradicting her point in that the only way for one to get "healthier" would be to exercise and utilize the gear provided to them to increase their athletic stamina. The same article describes the mannequin as such: "she is, in every measure, obese, and she not readying herself for a run in her shiny Nike gear. She cannot run. She is, more likely, pre-diabetic and on her way to a hip replacement. What terrible cynicism is this on the part of Nike?" (Gold 2019), and it goes to show that simply by advertising the plus-sized community, Gold believes they are advertising unhealthy habits and eventually lead to the death of those who allow themselves to mirror the way this mannequin looks.

In response to this piece, there was an outburst of women who fought on behalf of Nike's choice to advertise their plus sized line. Of these was Youtuber LoeyLane, a plus-sized model, influencer, and overall beautiful person. In her video "Nike Has a Fat Mannequin and This Woman is Pretty Angry", Lane emphasizes that there are a specific sector of human beings that aim to destroy the mentalities of overweight people by telling them to lose the weight for their "health". While Lane does not seem to specifically agree with this argument, she says, "the other excuse is that it is for our health. It is because they *care*; they want to point out how fat we are. They *care* that we're going to die from being so obscenely fat. Ultimately, they want us to lose the weight, and they want us out of their hair. 'They', being these people, who believe that portraying fatness or plus-size-ness in any form is harmful or dangerous. Why, then, *to these people*, would you *discourage*, of all things, if your ultimate goal is to get the fatness out of your face, [...] Nike...Nike...a workout brand?" (LoeyLane, 2019,). Her points make sense, and even

thought his video goes on for about 27 minutes, this is one of the most powerful lines in the entire thing. To have a certain facet of people discouraging workout brands' promotion of workout clothes is similar to saying, "I know you're sick, but get better on your own. You can't go to the doctor or get medicine, you're all alone in this" and it is sickening and discouraging and defeating to those who are heavily involved in the #BodyPositivity community.

Another interesting response to Gold's hateful article was Health.com's article and video called "What Nike's Plus-Size Mannequin Means for All Women, Even Tanya Gold". The video's host, Jessamyn Stanley, begins her argument with "happy people don't shame other people, it's only people who are sad themselves" (Stanley 2019). The rest of the video is extremely encouraging and shows that body acceptance is the one form of self-love that everyone can use to be positive to themselves. The article attached to this video is very heartfelt and often times heartbreaking, in that there are moments in which the writer, Dara Pettinello Kapoor, opens up about the responses and the way she was treated by those around her while she was dieting and changing her body. She writes, "I'll never forget my brother's words after one of the many times I lost weight: 'you finally look like a woman.' He was always stunned to learn that I vacillated between a size 10 and 12. (The double-digit horror!)" (Kapoor 2019). She also goes on to discuss her own personal journey into the many jobs she took on, and she writes "being a health editor is nothing I ever aspired to be. [...] really I never saw myself as a health editor because I was never allowed to view myself as someone who could serve as a paradigm of fitness and beauty (because 'health is synonymous with these things?)" (Kapoor 2019). All of these raw and emotional quotes show that simply by the comments and actions society and media and our families make toward us, it makes everybody different from the "standard". It's

disgusting to think that so many people are not comfortable in their own skins, and this is one of the many sad and disturbing instances of this in the media today.

And finally, I would like to touch on one final source that emphasizes the importance of Body Positivity. In J. Nicole Morgan's book, *Fat and Faithful: Learning to Love Our Bodies, Our Neighbors, and Ourselves*, Morgan emphasizes the importance of finding peace within the image of yourself. In Chapter Ten, labeled "Live a Fat Positive Life", Morgan discusses the many things one could do to develop a healthy and good relationship with one's own body. She even gives a step-by-step to those who are seeking their own levels of acceptance within their own communities. She begins with the encouraging message: "people don't normally jump straight from loathing to love, but the steps in the middle where we begin to accept our bodies are important as well" (Morgan 2018). The steps range from "Look at yourself" (Morgan 2018) to "Know yourself" (Morgan 2018), to "Stop wearing clothes you don't like" (Morgan 2018). This book is, in itself, the beginning for a lot of people's journey toward their own levels of self-acceptance. By emphasizing that growth and development is pertinent to the community of self-love, Morgan is emphasizing one of the most important part to the entire #BodyPositivity Community.

In conclusion, I think that this community is one of the most interesting and diverse communities on twitter. It is flexible and it allows for all different community to merge with it, allowing for ideas to bounce off of it, not in competition with it. Diving into the studying of #BodyPositivity allowed me to grow more in my understanding of what it means to be #BodyPositive, and it gives me an entirely new perspective for why. People are involved in it. I personally like to be involved in something where I can inspire others to begin their self-love journey. My interviews and my studying of many other articles and learning about the many

other reasons people join this community have inspired me to continue to attempt to show others just how crucial this community is to the world. Finding love in yourself is the first step to finding pure and enjoyable happiness, and it is a beautiful thing to discover.

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