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BODY IMAGE PERCEPTIONS REFLECTED IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A  
GUATEMALAN INSTAGRAM STUDY

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By Sarah Kathryn Harris

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the  
Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies  
Croft Institute for International Studies  
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College  
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi  
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## ABSTRACT

Guatemala has faced a long battle with colonialism, civil war, and an ensuing, rapid urbanization. Still today, the country exhibits high levels of malnourishment while also facing an ascending obesity epidemic. This project seeks to explore how the obesity epidemic has changed body image perceptions in the region. Through the use of social media accounts on Instagram, I aim to analyze how Guatemalan influencers use their platform to explore notions of varying body image perceptions in a country where food is culturally significant, malnutrition has plagued many communities, and obesity is growing in prevalence daily. This thesis aims to answer the question: How are body image perceptions reflected in social media in Guatemala and does the obesity epidemic play a role in those social perceptions? I use a qualitative approach, using Atlas.ti software, to answer this question in which several posts were collected from a group of Guatemalan influencers during the months of March-October 2021. I find that the obesity epidemic has not played a large role in the Instagram posts of these users; however, their content surrounding fashion, fitness, and lifestyle all pertain to the emerging ideas of body positivity and inclusivity within media.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes more intricately interconnected through global processes, advances in technology and cultural transmissions have changed the way the world functions. In the past, there was rarely a time where a high fashion magazine did not feature a shockingly tiny, white model on the cover. Young women and men are consistently exposed to celebrities redefining the ideal body size as an aspirational, rarely attainable, model-thin body. In recent decades, this slender-frame, idealized body is becoming less normalized; however, it is often still praised. Governments and corporations throughout the world are working to change this norm and promote an environment that allows for more diverse bodies to be seen on runways, billboards, television, etc. A 2017 law passed in France banned underweight models, citing that models must receive a doctor's note verifying they were not underweight according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) system, although the BMI does not take into consideration other various factors as discussed later. Modeling underweight could result in tens of thousands of Euros in fines. This measure, supported by France's health ministry, "aim[ed] to fight eating disorders and inaccessible ideals of beauty" ("France Bans Extremely Thin Models"). This law followed the course of other countries (Italy, Spain, and Israel) that also utilize legislation in the modeling industry and banning underweight models. Promoting a more authentic atmosphere, concerning the bodies we see and idealize in the media, does not require the use of the legal system, however. Various global beauty corporations are working to make changes.

Through assorted modernized mass-market campaigns within major corporations (e.g. the #AerieReal campaign at Aerie), international marketing is relying more heavily on plus-size models in non-plus-size promotions. Aerie's large campaign resulted in a huge change in the fashion and beauty industry. With a commitment to unretouched photographs and models with stretch marks starting in 2014, the brand saw over a 20 percent increase in sales following the new marketing approach (Nast). The historic shift to size inclusivity and dedication to accurate portrayals of female bodies catalyzed the conversation surrounding body image perceptions. This shift is in large part due to the rise of social media. Users and normal, everyday people from all over the world are able to give feedback and designers and collaborators now have the ability to listen. When luxury brand Christian Louboutin chose to post a plus-size model wearing their new lipstick collection, the world returned high praise. This choice in model, however, was accidental. While users around the world thought Louboutin was using the model for an entire campaign, the company was simply reposting the video the model had posted, as opposed to working directly with her (Wilbur). The consumer commendation of the 2014 misunderstanding did give rise to the idea that society was more than ready for increased representation of traditionally marginalized groups in advertising campaigns.

As a teenage girl growing up during this emerging idea of size inclusivity, I chose to focus my research on the importance of positive body image and how that manifests in the world. Print campaigns have become less and less popular with rises in social media interactions so this research primarily focuses on body image perceptions through Instagram, an app I employ daily. My interests in mental health were also a large factor in deciding to pursue this research. Body image proves to be a causal factor in mental

health; a positive body image provides a healthier self-esteem. Furthermore, body image is shown to have an astounding influence on various aspects of mental wellbeing. It has been shown that insecurities and anxiety in body image are linked to mental health issues such as “poorer quality of life, psychological distress, and unhealthy behaviors including eating disorders” (*The Influence of Body Image on Mental Health* | BPS). With an interest in the Spanish speaking population, I chose to concentrate on the nation of Guatemala. Guatemala boasts a diverse population with ethnicities of Ladino (or Mestizo), Afro-Guatemalan, twenty various Indigenous groups, and other immigrant pools. Although a broad population, given the restraints of Westernized urban centers that are more prone to social media use, this study focuses significantly on Ladino and Afro-Guatemalan people located in Guatemala’s metropolitan areas. Guatemala provides a fascinating case as the country has rising overweight and obesity prevalence rates each year since 2000 (*Country Nutrition Profiles*). Guatemala’s history with nutrition and transitions to urban lifestyles are a large factor in these growing rates.

Through a historical food shortage that resulted in a rapid urbanization, perceptions concerning how the rural and urban Guatemalan communities view and treat obesity have significantly affected the view of body representation and standardization. Guatemala provides an interesting case for this study due to the cultural significance of food, existing issues with malnutrition, and its growing rates of obesity within the population. As one of the most malnourished countries in the world, almost 50% of children in Guatemala are diagnosed with stunted growth (PBS NewsHour). Despite government interventions into food security improvements, malnourishment still plagues communities throughout the region. Due to the increased amount of the population living

in poverty, many Guatemalans associate fatness as a sign of success and well-equipped access to food. Emily Yates-Doerr's field-study encounters with native Guatemalans found their responses of "And why would I want to be thin?" given their abundance for "satiety and the value of providing abundant and delicious meals for others" (Yates-Doerr 6). Increases in fast food consumption and moves to urban centers have both been attributed to growing obesity rates in the nation. These growing rates are often associated with the "nutrition transition" currently overwhelming Guatemala (Yates-Doerr 37). This transition is characterized by the enactment of "Western diets that are higher in saturated fats, sugar, and refined foods, which may explain the observed pattern" (Marini and Gragnolati 4). The nutrition transition accounts for further disease (e.g. anemia due to low iodine in processed foods) seen in growing rates across the population.

While malnutrition and obesity might seem like two opposite ends of the body size spectrum, they closely interact with one another. The World Health Organization notes that "many low- and middle-income countries are now facing a 'double burden' of malnutrition" wherein "these countries continue to deal with the problems of infectious diseases and undernutrition, they are also experiencing a rapid upsurge in noncommunicable disease risk factors such as obesity and overweight, particularly in urban settings" (*Obesity and Overweight*). In many communities, some individuals are obese while others cannot get enough to eat. Many poor individuals grow up as malnourished children and then turn to cheap, convenient foods that bear significant calories with little nutritional value. The importance of nutritious food has an obvious implication for physical health; however, the overnutrition in Guatemala is leading to larger bodies and stigmatizing ideals about bodies that are viewed as too small or too



large in the eyes of their society. These size stigmas affect a large percentage of the region and can lead to a toll in the mental health of the individual. This research aims to push a positive approach to redefining how we view our bodies and encouraging a healthy body, instead of a societally labeled body.

Through the differences in attitude amongst varying ethnic populations in Guatemala, we must ask: How are body image perceptions reflected in social media in Guatemala and does the obesity epidemic play a role in those social perceptions?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

Guatemala provides an interesting demographic profile. With a youthful population—median age 23.2 years—consisting of 56% Mestizo (also locally called Ladino) and 42% Mayan, the country officially recognizes 23 languages with about 70% of the population speaking Spanish, the country's official language (*Guatemala Demographics Profile*). Upon reading initial sources, it has become evident that how native people view body image largely differs based on age group. Older Guatemalans give no preference towards modern medical statistics and find that body shape largely demonstrates a physical portrayal of health and diet (Yates-Doerr). Older women particularly show favor towards a large, robust stature as that proves a sustained, consistent diet. Guatemala has had a long history of food scarcity, specifically within the Xela region, which led to older generations viewing fatness as a sign of health, beauty, and wealth. Through the recent shift to urban living, many styles of eating have changed due to the proliferation of fast food by multinational corporations. This new Westernized nutrition has become a developing pattern for much of Latin America. Large groups are relocating to city centers accompanied by a loss in income. The limited earnings lead to cheap, highly-caloric foods and a consecutive weight gain (Rozowski and Moreno). This tendency towards fast food consumption also detrimentally affects children in Guatemala. These large food corporations have greatly shifted towards advertising techniques (i.e. toys in kid's meals, cheaper prices, shorter wait times) that speak to young persons and do not usually offer healthier alternatives like fruits or vegetables (Mazariegos et al.).

Although Guatemala was shifting towards a more modernized society, it has become apparent that legacies and history of colonialism and racism still plague opinions on health and body. The postcolonial exploitation of Guatemalan resources led to scientists finding a correlation between acute malnutrition and these practices. Much like the hegemonic practices that colonizers use, the postwar environment showed how Guatemalan “dieting techniques configured both individual and social bodies as bounded objects to possess and control” (Yates-Doerr 7). Colonial violence in Guatemala significantly affected bodies and how they are represented. A large issue with the societal norms and biomedical approaches is the constant debate on how to define a “healthy” or “normal” body (Lock and Nguyen). Within these biomedical approaches, the process of biomedicalization has allowed for “societal issues (e.g., violence, anomie, obesity) [to be] reinterpreted as medical problems, individualized and depoliticized, and subject to technical intervention” (Birn et al. 477-8). Although we might consider biomedical approaches to be rooted in technology and clinical trials, biomedical origins are more closely related to colonialism, through French and British dietary experiments conducted in their own colonies. In contemporary eras, the standardization of the body and its diet “is reflected in the current obsession with fats, sugar, and carbohydrates, an obsession now traveling through a global health apparatus whose employees worry about the weights and diets of Guatemalans or Indians but with no understanding of local lives and metabolisms” (Lock and Nguyen 95). If we continue to ignore the value of cultural and societal factors in the health of individual lives, findings deemed standard will be meaningless.

Social influences and circumstances largely contribute to the vast array of body sizes and shapes. It is more difficult to define a healthy body shape when countless body types exist. Instead of defining normal, we are more prone to discomfort with the abnormal. The abnormality in relation to body size and appearance is now mostly reflected by the Body Mass Index (BMI), which has been largely regulated by bureaucrats that define normality as those who most closely reflect their own appearance regardless of local circumstances (Lock and Nguyen). The BMI does not characterize a healthy body by the statistical majority. If that were the case, much of the population would be seen as healthy instead of overweight or obese. Much of the modernized approach to medicine in Guatemala now relies solely on the BMI labeling and decreasing rates of obesity in Guatemala. Countless advertising for new pharmaceuticals and fad diets plague the country and can often be found in clinical settings (Yates-Doerr).

Due to modern advertising techniques, there exists a tendency to associate modernity with thinness. Billboards plague the streets that show thin, white models. In Guatemala, a billboard showed a thin, light-skinned model advertising for a “healthier” version of mayonnaise (Yates-Doerr 127). This dangerously affects body image for millions of young ethnic people who now might associate thinness with white skin and develop body dysmorphic ideals. In response to society’s ideals concerning body type, numerous social media accounts and authors have worked to promote a more positive image concerning various body shapes.

While many Guatemalan women do find solace in larger, more robust bodies, studies are showing that acculturation to American traditions is leading to changes in body image. Franko and Herrera’s study, using standardized questionnaires to evaluate

body satisfaction, initially showed that Guatemalan-American women showed a higher rate in body satisfaction compared to American women. However, higher rates of body dissatisfaction began to show in Guatemalan-American women that had been living in the United States for a longer duration of time (Franko and Herrera). Furthermore, data is beginning to show that eating disorders are just as prevalent, if not more prevalent, in minority populations. While eating disorder research was predominantly more focused on white subjects, there exists a dire need for inclusion of minority groups in conjunction with eating disorder research (Rodgers et al.). Eating disorders represent the most severe form of a harmful and negative body image perception.

Based on introductory theories, it is apparent that Guatemala's history with food has led to differing "typical" body types over the course of time. Through the transformation from a food shortage to rapid urbanization, body image perceptions have changed and resulted in a push for more body positivity through social activists. Although many Guatemala natives still find favor in eating and larger bodies, dangerous implications are being found in the population that show a negative body satisfaction and higher rates of eating disorders. It is important for society to strike a balance between a healthy body (not a thin one) and a positive body image regardless of shape. Societal pressures enforced by the fashion and beauty industry in addition to the overmedicalization of body size in healthcare, individuals are suffering in the long run. Urbanization has led to less nutrient-dense foods resulting in weight gain causing a multitude of health issues. On the other hand, vast expanses in media are creating unrealistic, aspirationally worshiped body shapes that are chronically affecting mental health, and in the extreme, leading to highly dangerous eating habits. The remainder of

this research will focus on Instagram accounts that analyze how Guatemalan users incorporate their bodies, representation, and image perceptions into posts that reach a large number of followers.

### 3. **METHODS**

#### **Nonprobability Theoretical Sampling**

In order to conduct primary research for the topic of body image across Latin American communities, and specifically in Guatemala, I relied on social media. For my case selection, I analyzed social media websites, primarily Instagram, that convey body image perceptions and expression. I chose Instagram due to its propensity for influencer culture and its ability to have both photos and writing. De Veirman et al. composed experimental research in which “two studies show that Instagram influencers with high numbers of followers are found more likeable, partly because they are considered more popular” (De Veirman et al.). Instagram also allows for the following of users without the requirement of a personal relationship. Additionally, the writing is not limited by character count (like Twitter). I used nonprobability, theoretical sampling, defined as a “method of case selection other than random selection”, to find each account and website that was analyzed (Dixon et al. 139). I chose this methodical approach in order to locate users with large followings and to choose posts that showed their bodies.

Through using hashtags, such as #feminista and #percepcióncorporal, I was able to locate seventeen accounts that use social media to share their beliefs on body image. I chose these accounts based on the type of content created; fashion, lifestyle, health, etc; and their followers number, at least 600. These searches were limited due to the fact that I

could not refine each post to be explicitly based in Guatemala; however, these hashtags relate to messages from the Latinx community. Other limiting factors arose as only public accounts were included in this study. Additionally, I was referred to two women of Guatemalan descent by a Spanish professor at the University of Mississippi. Both accounts are different in their goals of how body image affects Hispanic women, but each account does want to convey the same level of vulnerability and confidence in their own skin.

In order to analyze popular influencer's messages, I performed a Google search for influential "Guatemalan fashion bloggers" and was directed to a website that listed the seven most popular. Upon viewing the posts of these fashion bloggers, it is clear that their social media accounts are run very differently. Using this website's recommendations, I was able to include the accounts of five women and two men all of whom are light skinned and perceived as thin. Using the *Star Gage* website, I narrowed down popular Instagram accounts ranked based on their follower numbers. Additionally, the website had the option to narrow down accounts based on their primary content. I chose the topics "fashion", "health and fitness", and "lifestyle". Using this website, I found additional accounts such as @studiof-guatemala and @lucyfitnesscoach who support body positivity through high fashion, exercise, and diet. I was also able to find an account run by a woman of color in Guatemala so that I could better compare social media posts across racial populations. While this website was helpful in locating accounts with significant follower ranges, it was limited in the fact that not every belief in Guatemala and other Latin American countries will be voiced.

The cases selected needed to meet several criteria. Each account had to have at least 600 followers. This requirement ensured that the user was reaching a significant number of people and using their content to spread a certain message or portray a certain lifestyle. Additionally, each account had to be based in Guatemala or run by someone of Guatemalan heritage. Only two users are not actively living in Guatemala, but both accounts often relate their posts to Guatemala and make their heritage well known for their followers. Finally, the account had to contain content that related to lifestyle, fitness, diet, or fashion, all material that actively relates to our body and can affect our body's size. In total, 17 accounts (cases) were chosen and 43 posts (documents) were considered.

For case selection, the first step was to explicitly define the timeline of each account, labeling the first post of March and last post of October. Once those photos were found, I began to scroll through all eligible posts. If the user was seen in swimwear, the user was shirtless, or the user was wearing fitness wear, those posts were first selected. If the user is comfortable to publicly post in swimwear, tight-fitting clothing, or without a shirt, they are comfortable with their body to some degree. If the user had multiple photos fitting the outfit guidelines, I would then select the two posts that contained the longest caption. It was important to envelop their thoughts and how they share their words with a large number of followers.

Using the cases selected, I made two primary comparisons: men versus women and thin versus plus size. I initially intended to make comparisons amongst the indigenous population, but my search was limited, and I was unable to find any indigenous influencers. Due to that reasoning, the study only focuses on white and Ladino women and men located in more urban areas. For the analysis, I reviewed the



picture posted, the caption accompanying, and the comments left by other users. I also took into account the user's outside life and how that relates to their content posted. For example, one account is run by a woman who is a poet and uses her poetry to portray her beliefs on body image as a Guatemalan woman living in the United States. Additionally, I analyzed the language that accompanies each post and see how this can expand or limit the content's ability to interact with certain demographics. I only reviewed posts that were uploaded in the year 2021, posted between March-October. These months were chosen as they feature a warmer climate, and thus, allow for images containing bodies showing more skin. I reviewed the account as a whole, but only provided in-depth analysis on two posts by each user. Posts that featured swimwear or gym wear showing a large proportion of skin were given superiority. Upon review of the accounts as a whole, a pattern of posting for Breast Cancer Awareness, Pride Month, and Guatemalan Independence Day emerged. I chose to incorporate these holidays into the research so some accounts have more than two posts coded.

These posts were be sorted and tagged using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data software program. By coding each post, I then compared and contrasted the codes that are prevalent and develop the theory that connects the ability of social media to affect body image perceptions.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

To begin the data analysis, I overviewed each group code and the subcodes that fall under this category. These codes were then ordered in terms of prevalence, beginning with highest prevalence rates. Forty-three documents (Instagram posts) were studied using seventeen Instagram users with a total of thirty-seven codes to label each case.

##### **Social Awareness**

The qualification to be coded as social awareness requires that either the image posted or accompanying caption alludes to taking and acknowledging a perspective that empathizes with an ongoing social concern or issue. This group code was chosen to show that social media can be a powerful tool and platform to spread awareness to a collective group of people. Falling under this category are the codes breast cancer, pride, heritage, fitness, mental health, body image, and woman empowerment.

##### **Body Image**

To objectively view body image, this code was labeled under the circumstances of images or captions relating to our physical appearance and our bodily health. Seventeen documents (the highest percentage in the social awareness category) were found that related to body image. This subcode presents the most broad range of obtained content showing that body image is not a limited field. Posts that were taken in gyms promoting fitness, one user's pregnancy journey, captions supporting self-confidence, fashion bloggers encouraging diversity in clothing etc. all show how body image perceptions pertain to and encompass numerous aspects of our lives. In relation to the clothing we wear, Lucía Velásquez (@lucyfitnesscoach), a fitness blogger, posts her beliefs on the ability of all to wear what they choose no matter how much skin is showing. In her bikini

post, shown below, Lucía shares her pride in her dedication to fitness and diet.



In contrast to thin and fitness-minded Lucía, Havala Hidalgo, a Guatemalan plus-sized model currently based in Houston, Texas, Hidalgo worked to create her own “size inclusive fitness brand that was born from the absence of sexy, cool athletic apparel for fat and marginalized bodies” (“ABOUT BIG BOTTOM BEHAVIOR”). Her company, Big Bottom Behavior, uses social media to encourage and promote acceptance of plus-sized persons. This is best exemplified by the company’s creation of the “Take Up Space” shirt which shows women of various sizes and skin colors moving in different ways. The promotion of this item was accompanied by the reminder “we need everyday to live loud, live proud, take up ALL the space, and flaunt this body anyway we see fit!” (Big Bottom Behavior). The company’s approach to body image takes on a powerful and important role in society’s view of body representation. By using a marketing strategy that allows for further body inclusivity, people all over the world are further empowered and encouraged to embrace their current body size and find a higher sense of self worth in a world that often glorifies a small body.

## Female Empowerment

Female empowerment featured sixteen documents labeled under this category. Each of these posts featured images or captioning that related to the encouragement of the female population. Each post was curated by a female user and was broad in range in the types of images that accompanied each post. Images contained women located in fitness environments, wearing swimwear, promoting female health, encouraging risks in fashion, etc. Studio F in Guatemala (@studiof\_guatemala) advocated female empowerment in their pursuit of sharing their clothing items and fashion trends.



Their post, shown above, featured a woman of color being photographed in traditionally feminine clothing. The simplicity of the photo was accompanied by captioning that alludes to the strength and passion of the female model. Additionally, the account employed the use of hashtags like #soymujer and #mesdelamujer commemorating the end of International Women's Month. The account was paying tribute to the countless female followers, customers, and employees that work to make the company function.

This gratitude and commitment to social awareness allows the brand to achieve a more personable and accessible relationship with the public.

### **Mental Health**

The mental health code embodies the message of a positive mental state and/or a source of inspiration to how we think of ourselves. Mental health is closely related to how we view our own physical body and our perceptions of body image. In order to find the confidence and security necessary for a positive body image, a state of mental wellbeing is often required. Sixteen out of forty-three documents were found to contain wording closely related to mental health. These posts ranged from Mental Health Day to graphics to how exercise can lead to a better mental health. The connection between mental health and body image was best embodied by the graphic by the *Mente Feminista* account (@mente.feminista). This graphic displayed, “Tú cuerpo no está mal, la sociedad y los estereotipos sí” (*Mente Feminista*). Interestingly, this graphic was displayed with a pink and floral (a color and design typically associated with females) background image. This can be interpreted as the prevalence of societal and mental pressures against women for the perfect body, displayed by the burdened model industry that works to put dangerously thin models on billboards and magazine covers.

### **Fitness**

While fitness more closely relates to physical health, exercise can serve as a healthy outlet for mental health issues. For the fitness code, each post had to center around the idea of fitness. Eleven documents were found to contain dedication to the importance of fitness and physical activity. Each account similarly shared the ideals of

exercise being good for your body, but differed in their approach of how it relates to our body. No account premised that exercise should be used to shape our bodies to the thin, idealized body we see in fashion magazines; however, these accounts did share the belief of the positive mental and physical effects of fitness. Christa García (@christagarciag) shared her beliefs in the power of physical activity in her post on August 18, 2021 saying, “Hacer ejercicio no solo transforma el cuerpo, también la mente, la actitud y el estado de ánimo” (Christa García). García reinforces the idea that mental and physical health do not have to be separate entities, but instead, a set of interconnected ideas that relate to our tangible body and how we view it.

### **Heritage**

With heritage, seven documents alluded to a sense of pride and joy in the user’s home country of Guatemala. Six out of seven of these posts were posted on September 15, Guatemalan Independence Day. 2021 was a special year for Independence Day as it marked the 200th anniversary of the sovereign nation. Each of these posts contained images taken outside with a large scenic background alluding to the vastness of the country’s geographical beauty. Each user was proud to be a Guatemala citizen and shared similarities in captions with their use of “Guatemala linda” and the emoji for the Guatemalan flag. The seventh post came from poet Melissa Lozada-Oliva, an American citizen with Guatemalan immigrant parents. She posted of her accomplishments that were made possible and supported by her Latin American roots. I have included user Sorel Fashion District’s, a fashion account, post, shown below, for Independence Day.



Although her account relies predominantly on clothing and fashion trends, this post proved her heart for her country and the “azul y blanco” of the flag. Her rise to awareness for this day shows that accounts do not have to be limited in their content, but instead, are fully capable of acknowledging and celebrating matters close to them. Our bodies are large reflections of where we live and the love we have for them. The majority of images contained in this study feature locations in Guatemala. Heritage for one’s country does not have to differentiate from the body we place in it, but can foster an environment showcasing the surroundings, food, beliefs, etc. that we put into our bodies.

## **Pride**

The next aspect of social awareness related to Pride celebration for the LGBTQIA+ community. Similarly to the United States and other countries around the world, Guatemala celebrates Pride month in June to acknowledge the bravery and sacrifice given during the Stonewall riots of June 1969 (CEPPS). I found four documents coded for Pride. Two posts were uploaded from male users, one uploaded from a female, and one uploaded by a feminist account using a graphic. Each caption contained emojis in the

form of a rainbow or various-colored hearts. The post's captions by males alluded to their personal exploration as gay men and their journey to acceptance. This was best exemplified by user Nando Yax (@nandoyax), and his words reading,

“..... Pasó mucho tiempo antes de aceptarme, hasta que comprendí que primero me tenía que amar yo. No ha sido un camino fácil, pero vaya que estoy muy orgulloso del hombre en que me he convertido! Atrás quedaron esas burlas, culpas y rechazos, muy atrás. Hoy mi entono, mis amigos, mi familia me han proporcionado un espacio para ser yo, simplemente yo. Sueño con que quiénes aman diferente puedan tener lo mismo, lejos de discriminaciones, juzgamientos y violencia, que crezcamos libres respetando y celebrando nuestras diferencias. Por quienes lucharon y dieron su vida para crearnos un espacio de expresión, por quienes decidimos hacernos visibles, por quienes vienen atrás y tengan una mejor oportunidad de vida... Happy #pridemonth 🍷 Never gonna be brokenhearted, ever again! #🌈” (Nando Yax)

Through his words detailing his struggles and fight for inclusion, he was able to spread awareness across a vast platform. Additionally, his use of the #pridemonth hashtag allowed for a greater interaction in Instagram. This hashtag is featured on over six million Instagram posts throughout the world. The discrimination that exists within body image also plagues the LBGTQ+ community. Their approach to their bodies may differ from someone not suffering further stigma. Research has shown that LBGTQ+ communities might be at higher vulnerability for an eating disorder diagnosis given their “inability to meet body image ideals within some LBGTQ+ cultural contexts” (“Eating Disorders in LBGTQ+ Populations”). The pressures that these communities already face should not become further reflected in their body size or shape.

### **Breast Cancer**

Several images posted under the seventeen accounts studied included posts highlighting breast cancer awareness during the month of October. Although not directly related to body size or how we measure our bodies, this push to raise awareness for early detection and prevention of breast cancer showed how social media can be a vital tool in relation to our bodies and how we care for them. I found the code “breast cancer awareness” 3 out of 43 documents. Each post was uploaded during the month of October



and uploaded by a female user. Additionally, each post contained some element (i.e. Emoji, clothing, text color) that was pink representing the color chosen to represent breast cancer awareness. Posts ranged in images that portrayed the user of the account or a graphic that the account made. An example post has been included below showing the account's use of graphic text and a caption that promotes a call to action in the prevention and risk aversion of breast cancer.



Breast cancer does not discriminate any body when choosing its victims. Any size or shape can obtain a diagnosis further exemplifying the need to take care of our bodies regardless of societal pressure.

### Account Type

During coding, each image was labeled based upon the type of user and content typically posted. In this group, there existed six different types of accounts: dance company, poet, fitness instructor, singer, clothing brand, graphics, and fashion blogger.

### Fashion Blogger

Ten of the seventeen accounts studied were labeled as fashion bloggers/influencers. The clothing industry's grasp on the world has an obvious reflection on social media in the success of fashion bloggers. Body image obviously has grasps in many categories (fitness, diet, social perceptions), but body image is often best reflected and represented in the way that we dress ourselves. Fashion can be used in a conservative manner to hide areas of our body that we may find discomfort. On the other hand, fashion can be portrayed more liberally in order to promote comfort and acceptance with the diverse array of bodies we see and encounter everyday in modern society. One blogger used her fashion reviews and style to accept imperfections and teach that total achievement of physical and mental wellbeing is an aspirational task.



Although she wears a simple black dress with floral crochet, her message was powerful and showed the importance of fashion in how we carry and portray ourselves, and our bodies, to the rest of the world.

## Clothing Company

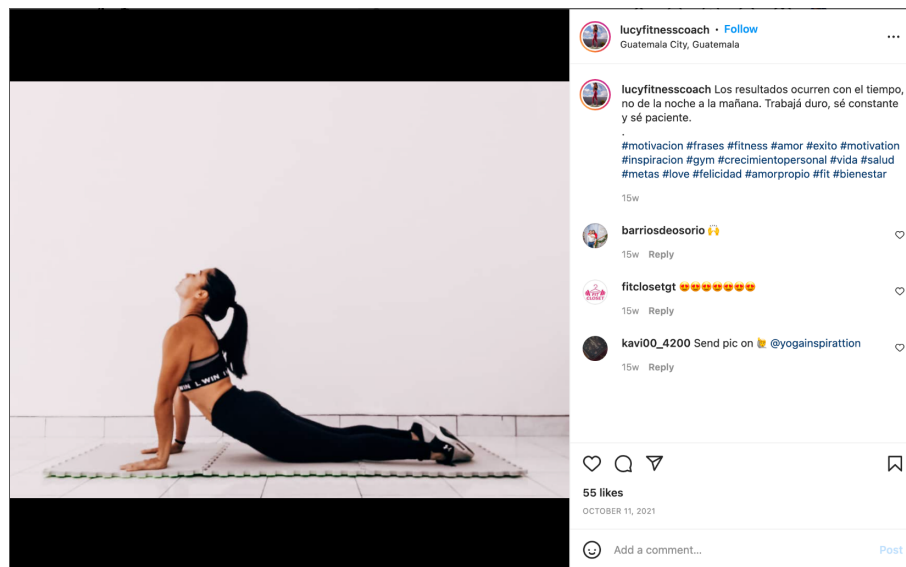
Two accounts, Big Bottom Behavior and Studio F, are clothing brands. These brands greatly differentiated themselves with the promotion of their products. A side-by-side comparison of their content is shown below.



Big Bottom Behavior is a plus-size brand that uses a diverse demographic to model their clothing. Studio F, however, does promote diversity in the form of skin color and age, but does not employ the size-inclusive modeling. The success of Big Bottom Behavior does show a need for accessible clothing for plus-sized shoppers, but Studio F shows the tendency of the fashion industry to operate under the historical standard of exceptionally thin fashion models.

## Fitness Instructor

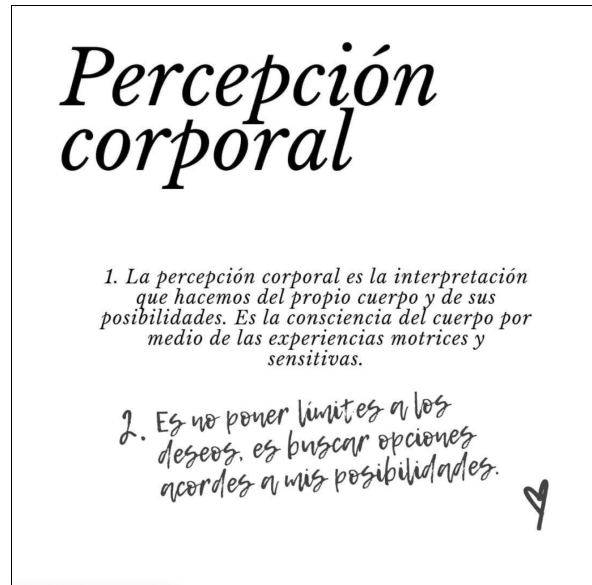
Lucía Velásquez is a fitness instructor/blogger based in Guatemala. A brief overview of her account shows numerous videos of exercise regimens, healthy meals, socially aware graphics, and other personal photos.



Pictured above, we see Lucía partaking in yoga exercise and encouraging followers to work hard and be patient in their exercise plans. As a fitness instructor, it is of dire necessity that she works to promote encouragement and a positive environment for those following along with her.

## Dance Company

Of the seventeen accounts studied, one user was a dance company based in Guatemala (@danzaliz). This account worked to produce several graphics they created to promote the time and location of their dance classes while additionally posting graphics highlighting different elements of dance that have larger social meaning: body image, learning and apprenticeship, motivation, physical activity, etc.



The account showed how dance and movement have a direct correlation with our own body image, seen in the graphic above. While dance assists our bodies physically, dance also provides an outlet to a free expression of emotions and creativity without the need for explicit talent or technique. This account shows that dance is accessible to all shapes and sizes, giving numerous opportunities for all.

### **Poet**

Another account included in this case study is run by Melissa Lozada-Oliva (@ellomelissa), a poet based in the United States with Guatemalan and Colombian roots. Lozada-Oliva has dedicated her writing to exploration of the struggles Latina women feel in relation to their bodies. Although not explicitly limited to the struggles of body image in terms of weight and measurement, Lozada-Oliva used her words to delve into the complex issue of “peluda” and the pressure Latina women feel to undergo hair removal in order to better fit in. Similarly to perceptions of body size, peluda proved to be yet another struggle in terms of self-image and the societal pressures many people are subjected to each day.



Lozada-Oliva does not center her Instagram on her own works or personal missions but proposes a more casual approach to social media in which she shares with fans casual, unposed personal photos, sarcastic captions, and other minor aspects of her everyday life. She does post photos in swimwear, as shown by one example above, leading to the inference that she is comfortable in her own body and would want her followers to share this confidence.

### **Singer**

One account is run by Dennis Arana (@\_dennisarana), a singer who is now currently residing in Mexico. Although much of his content does relate to his journey as an entertainer and the events that coincide with those two personalities, he does make it a point to post content pertaining to causes he is passionate about. Arana posted for both World Mental Health Day in October and Pride Month in June. Attached below is his post for World Mental Health Day encouraging the acceptance and call-to-action needed

to combat mental health problems.



Although we can assume most of his followers are interested in his singing career, Arana chose to use his platform to focus on the importance of caring for our mental health, a large aspect of body image and how we view ourselves. Mental health relies largely upon how we care for our bodies and how we represent them to the world.

### Caption/Image

Under the caption/image group code, the actual images posted and accompanying captions were further identified and labeled in order to analyze repeating patterns. In terms of the image uploaded, the codes video, graphic, gym, and sponsorship applied. Captions were broken down on the basis of length (short caption or long caption), funny caption, and location tagged.



## Location Tagged

The last aspect of imaging and captioning pertained to the user's decision to tag a location on their post. Over half of users chose to employ this tactic with twenty-five documents coded for location tagging. This aspect of social media is important in the idea that it can boost interactions with posts since users can search images posted by location on Instagram. On one hand, the location is important so that if followers desire to visit the location, they will know where it is. On the other, the space for location tagging allows users to further their message or include other words that did not mesh with their original captioning. For example, user Sorel Muñoz Najarro (@sorel\_fashiondistrictgt) employed this tactic to bring further attention to Breast Cancer Awareness in the month of October. Since location is viewed right below the username, it is immediately noticeable what the purpose of her post was (shown below).



## Caption Length

The next factor to contrast captions relied on the length of the caption. Two subcodes fell under this category: long caption and short caption. A long caption was defined as three or more lines of text while a short caption was defined as less than two



lines of text. Hashtags and tagged accounts were not counted as lines of text when measuring. Interestingly, this category was almost split evenly with twenty-one documents defined as long caption and twenty-two documents defined as short caption. Caption length can also pertain to the message being written. Many captions that were several paragraphs in length shared extremely personal journeys and stories of several users, promoting awareness and self-acceptance by the poster. Although captions differed in length, the purpose of the message did not have to change. Although using few words, several short captions expressed sincere and serious messages like Studio F's caption, "¡Evita el riesgo! El cáncer de seno se puede prevenir si te realizas el autoexamen . ¡Cuidate, tócate, amate!" calling attention to early detection of breast cancer (Studio F Guatemala). Almost all of the long captions pertained to inspiration or social awareness; however, Melissa Lozada-Oliva did consistently make use of long captions and often concludes each message with a joke.

### **Sponsorship**

As the world of influencer marketing continues to rapidly grow each day, companies are beginning to notice the chokehold that Instagram users can have when promoting their brand or products. This became obvious during this study seeing that eleven documents contained a sponsorship promoting a wide range of products. Posts ranged in support from fast food to skincare and beauty to clothing. User LF Mazariegos, an influencer with over 70,000 followers, cornered the market on brand deals. On April 2,

2021, she shared a post promoting a bronzing product by Hawaiian Tropic.



Mazariegos chose to focus on the health benefits of this product, calling attention to its contents of Vitamin E and D. However, bronzing and tanning products have received public backlash for a period of time despite their consistent popularity. On one hand, pale skin persons might feel insecure and pressured to darken their skin to obtain a sunkissed glow. On the other hand, persons of color express disappointment in seeing this desire for brown skin when they been subjected to the stigma and discrimination associated with their dark skin. Despite the controversy of tanning products throughout the world, users did not express any dismay in the comment section of the post (although Mazariegos does reserve the right to block or delete comments expressing disapproval).

### Graphic

Although only one account studied (@mente.feminista) exclusively posted graphics, there were six instances of graphics posted by additional users. Each of these graphics pertained to a social issues like mental health, body image, and feminism.

Graphics pose an interesting aspect of social media. While many users choose to post

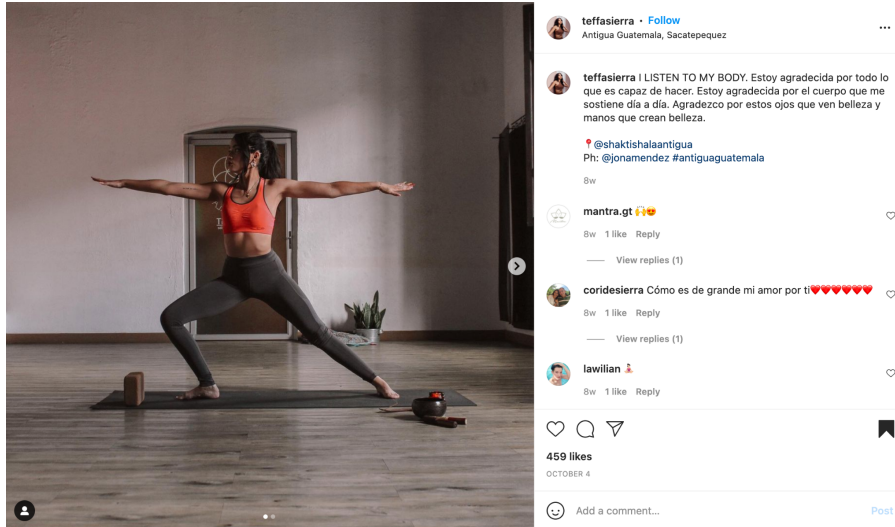
personal photos with complex or profound captioning, there is no guarantee that a substantial amount of users will read these words.



With graphics, however, there is a much larger opportunity for spreading a message with a colorful and eye-catching image that immediately shares the message without expanding text or diverting attention below. With this graphic by *Mente Feminista*, shown above, users immediately knew that they were working to call attention to Pride Month and the celebration of the LGBTQ+ community. With users who chose to post personal pictures, it would be more difficult to deduce their message without reading a lengthy caption.

## Gym

The gym code related to the images being posted that were taken in gym settings. These five posts all related to fitness, an obvious overlap. Photos that fell in this category often featured personal journeys with fitness or inspirational quotes/messages relating to physical health and oftentimes, mental health. User *Teffa Sierra (@teffasierra)* made use of the inspirational fitness post, shown below, by showing gratitude for her body and the sustainability it gives her.



By showing her appreciation for the vessel that keeps her alive, Sierra reinforced the idea of positive body image. Our bodies do not have to be a perfectly idealized magazine cover, but instead serve as the machine for seeing and hearing beauty and keeping us alive.

### Funny Caption

Most users chose to make use of captions as opportunities for inspiration or sincerity, four posts did feature captions that were not serious. While “funny” is more difficult to objectively measure, captions that featured phrases such as “just kidding (jk)” or “jaja/haha” or laughing emojis were labeled under this subcategory. User Melissa Lozada-Oliva often made use of funny captions which I attribute to her dedication to her casual style of social media. For example, a brief section of her caption accompanying her August 29, 2021 post read “marriage is FAKE love never existed friendship is a LIE being alive is DISGUSTING!!!! jk I’m having a gorgeous time at the end of the world!” (Melissa Lozada-Oliva). This caption accompanied a batch of photos taken at a small reunion with friends. Given her fame associated with her poetry, I would attribute her

comedic style as purveying a casual, more personal relationship with her fans and followers.

### **Video**

While many accounts featured videos on their Instagram feed, only two videos were chosen for this study. Interestingly, both of these videos were posted for Guatemala's Independence Day in September as an homage to the country and the many sites and treasures featured within the country. These videos were posted on the accounts of Amparo Zepada and Michelle Araujo, both fashion bloggers/influencers. While both in the same field of interest, these videos were starkly different. Zepada posted a short clip walking through a Guatemala city center holding a coffee from McDonald's for a paid sponsorship with @mccafeguate. While the caption only pertained to the sponsorship, "Cafecito de Guatemala para pasear por Guatemala", Zepada did include the Guatemalan flag emoji and the hashtag #bicentenarioguatemala to show that she was celebrating and acknowledging the anniversary of the country (Amparo Zepada). Araujo's video was starkly different, featuring a collection of short video clips spliced together of her many adventures in the outdoors of Guatemala. Her video began with the typed interface of, "Si me preguntan: ¿cómo es tu país? Yo les mostraría este video..." (Michelle Araujo). While Zepada used the 200th anniversary as an opportunity for sponsorship, Araujo chose to share with followers her love for Guatemala and her satisfaction with governmental changes. My observation showed the different ways we can choose to use our heritage. Zepada chose to use her popularity for personal gain while Araujo gave a more personal, relatable story.

### **Language**

Under this group code, each post was broken down into linguistic categories based on the caption and hashtags used. For this case study, only the languages found were English and Spanish. This group code showed the importance of language in how we reach target populations, but also how we exclude certain groups given linguistic barriers. These categories included emoji caption, English caption, English hashtags, Spanish caption, and Spanish hashtags.

### **Spanish Caption**

As the most popular code in this research, tagged in thirty-six documents, the use of the Spanish language for captioning appeared to be the most popular choice for the users studied. This does not come as a surprise, as Spanish is the national language in Guatemala. However, Guatemala has 25 languages spoken: Spanish, twenty-two Mayan languages, and two Indigenous languages (“Language Data for Guatemala”). About 40% of the population speaks a language other than Spanish, although 93% does speak Spanish as a first or second language (“Indigenous Languages in Guatemala”). With this in mind, we can see how exclusionary these social media users are with limiting their ability to reach certain ethnic and indigenous populations. I do not believe this to be of malintent by these users, however. Through a diligent search for Indigenous voices on social media, I was unable to find any Indigenous Guatemalan users, implying an Indigenous absence from the social media site. This could be attributed to limited Internet access, language barriers, cultural preferences, etc.

### **English Hashtags**

Almost doubling the prevalence of Spanish hashtags, thirty-two documents emphasized the use of English hashtags. The majority of these documents were uploaded by users centered in fashion and style. While these users did not explain the preference for English hashtags, we can assume that they desire a larger international audience. Instagram is based in California, and the United States has the most Instagram users of any country in the world (Davis). With this in mind, it is possible that Guatemala users crave more followers and interaction for their content, and the US is an easy market to corner, with 110 million users that nearly doubles the second highest user number in India. Hashtags that were repetitive in the research included: #fashion, #beauty, #pride, and #blogger. As of February 2022, a quick comparison will show that #moda is incorporated in 227 million posts while its English counterpart #fashion is tagged in over one billion posts.

### **Spanish Hashtags**

Out of forty-three documents, only seventeen Instagram posts were accompanied by hashtags written in Spanish. Hashtags serve the purpose of boosting interaction and accessibility to user's posts; however, with the majority of the users studied based in Guatemala, a country whose national language is Spanish, it is interesting to see the unpopularity of hashtags written in Spanish. Several hashtags seemed to be popular amongst the group studied: #TeTocaAmarte (Breast Cancer Awareness), #bicentarioguatemala (200th Independence Day), #moda, #feminismo, and #motivacion.

### English Caption

To be designated under the category of English caption, there had to be at least one word/phrase written in English. Ten documents were coded with this label. Users Melissa Lozada-Oliva, an American citizen, and Jacobo Suret, a Guatemalan citizen, were the only users studied that explicitly wrote in English prose with no Spanish language featured. Suret differed slightly in his occasional use of Spanish hashtags and in the Spanish comments left by followers. Other users applied a different linguistic approach that often started with a short English phrase followed by a longer message written in Spanish. Amparo Zepada exemplified this format in her caption on April 9, 2021:

“LET GO! ✨⚡ Mis [#amparitoproblems](#) con la tecnología últimamente me han hecho recordar lo importante que es soltar y desprenderse de las cosas-situaciones-personas-etc en el momento adecuado. Es ese momento en el que dejamos ir algo, que hacemos lugar para nuevas y mejores cosas. ⚡” (Amparo Zepada)

While the purpose of this quote is to show the Spanglish approach to Instagram seen by many users, the message of this quotation alludes to the importance of detaching from social media. As we have seen, social media is a large contributor to reinforcing ideas of thinness. Social media serves as a revolutionary tool to keep up with long-time friends or celebrities, but social media has a vast power to reach vulnerable minds susceptible to pressurized, idealistic social standards. Zepada forces attention to this and encourages her followers to lessen focus on social media and allow for bigger and better things.

### Emoji Caption

Only one document featured a caption with no words and only the use of emojis. This labeling required no written word and only the use of symbolism. For Guatemala’s Independence Day, Lucía Velásquez posted an image of herself outdoors with mountains



in the background. Her caption was simply two pink floral emojis and one flag of Guatemala emoji. Although this caption did not present a profound message for the 200th anniversary of the country, it served an interesting purpose in that users all around the world could recognize the emojis and their meaning without the use of a translator.

### **Demographic**

In order to better analyze the diversity found within social media and content studied, each post was demographically labeled by determinants of gender and skin color. Four subcodes were found under this grouping which included black, white (also to include Ladino people), male, and female. While these users are of Guatemalan ancestry, they did not identify with or speak of any specific ethnic or indigenous group identification. I found various trends and patterns amongst each gender.

#### **Female**

Out of forty-three documents, female users posted thirty-three. This overwhelming majority reinforced the traditional ideas of fashion as a feminine and female-cornered market. Although the influence of males in fashion is growing each day, the interaction of accounts was vastly more popular amongst the female bloggers/influencers. Females were much more likely to have higher rates of likes, comments, and sponsored posts. When searching for the most popular Instagram accounts, articles almost always included female users and rarely males. With societal pressures surrounding physical appearance mostly burdening women, there is a vital explanation for the female need to caption images with inspiring messages and the desire

to promote positivity and self-confidence, both important aspects for varying perceptions of body image.

### **White**

Twenty-nine documents included showed white models or were posted by white users. It should be noted that all of the users in this study were Latinx and being labeled as white only referred to a lighter pigmentation in skin. The high population of white influencers in social media provides an interesting insight into the diversity, or lack thereof, in the nation. Skin color has been shown to correlate with body image. Additionally, I found the traditional, thin model is often light-skinned, and these correlations pose a dangerous threat to body positivity in connotation with skin color. Despite the association of whiteness and thinness in social media, this association is prevalent everywhere—billboards, magazines, television, etc.

### **Male**

Seven documents included males/were posted by male users. Some female accounts featured their male significant others in certain photos, although I did not label these posts as “male”. The fashion and fitness scene in Guatemala was predominantly cornered by women as evidenced by the individual follower counts and interaction differences. With the three male accounts that were analyzed, two are bloggers, and one user is an entertainer. Two male users posted for Pride Month and included long captions sharing their journeys as gay men and their dreams of acceptance. The starkest difference amongst male users was their employment of short captions. While female users often posted longer captions with some sort of empowering or motivational message, male users trended more towards short captions that only related to the image they uploaded.

Nando Yax shows this with this caption, “Until the sun needs to rise”, occurring with his individual photo with the ocean’s horizon in the background (Nando Yax). Similarly, Jacobo Suret exemplifies the use of short captions like in his post captioned, “Don’t snap a pic of me!”, which accompanied a photo of himself with his arm covering half of his face.

### **Black**

Only five documents featured black models in the photos. This low percentage suggests the limitations of diversity in skin color with popular Instagram users in Guatemala (although the Afro-Guatemalan population is only about 1-2% of Guatemala) (Williams). Only one influencer account with a major following was run by a black woman. Accounts that did feature black persons were often clothing brands that used models to show their products, proving their commitment to diversity. Both the companies of Studio F Guatemala and Big Bottom Behavior showed an inclusion of darker bodies; however, Big Bottom Behavior was limited in this as Havala Hidalgo, the company’s founder, is featured as the premier model for the brand’s social media. The alarming deficiency of dark skinned bodies in high penetrating social media accounts suggests a better commitment to honoring and encouraging diversity in these posts.

### **Outfit**

How we choose to clothe ourselves and portray ourselves to the outside world greatly reflects our own personal body image and implicitly shows a value of self-esteem.

For this study, three popular clothing choices were seen: shirtless, workout clothes, and bikini.

### **Bikini**

Bikinis serve an interesting role in the culture of social media and body image. On one hand, it is what many choose to wear for a fun outing to a water source. On the other hand, bikinis serve as a sense of insecurity and anxiety for many scared to show their skin in public. Thirteen documents showed images of women in bikinis. Most photos were taken at the beach. Some women chose to caption images with structured positivity encouraging all followers to wear what they choose regardless of disapproval from others. Lucía Velásquez followed this guideline by captioning her bikini picture, “Que por qué subes fotos en traje de baño?? Mi respuesta siempre.... Por que no??? Si me gusta como me veo, si éste cuerpo que ves es lo que tanto esfuerzo y dedicacion me ha costado y mostrarlo me hace una mujer orgullosa y me motiva a seguir trabajando con entusiasmo y dedicación” (Lucía Velásquez). In contrast to Velásquez, user Lin Chang posted her bikini image with simple captioning without acknowledgment of her body or the swimwear. While Chang did not profess a profound message concerning her body, she did portray that posting in swimwear or other skin-showing clothing does not have to be a deep or philosophical ordeal, but instead something we are all capable of and entitled to.

### **Workout Clothes**

While workout clothing, often posted in a fitness area setting, does cover more skin compared to swimwear, the tight-fitting structure does not cover the shape of our bodies. Ten documents featured workout clothing, defined by sports bras, leggings, t-shirts, and shorts. Although casual in nature, workout clothes do allude to ideals of

fitness and physical health, large aspects of body image and how we are sculpted. Some influencers work to promote fitness as a means of mental and physical health; however, in a post by Amparo Zepeda, shown below, she referred to fitness and diet as a means to



Although weight loss is necessary in some situations (e.g. weight influenced diseases), exercise does not have to be motivated by an aspirational kilogram number. Exercise could be promoted more safely by explaining the numerous mental and physical benefits.

### Shirtless

Users posted without wearing a shirt in six of the documents. Four of these documents were posted by men and were either featured at the beach or gym. Interestingly, two female users posted without a shirt, and both of these photos were encouraging breast cancer awareness. However, in each post, the breast of the female was censored. Each of these aspects promoted an enlightening perspective on our body image perceptions. The male longing for muscular, sculpted abdominal areas and arms closely mirrors the female desire for a thin body. Although none of the male users alluded to body positivity in their posts like some female users do, it did promote an ideal of

comfort in your own skin and body no matter the circumstances. With the breast cancer awareness posts, female users alluded to a more physical aspect of body image in that we must take care of our bodies and health in order to sustain life. Breasts are a large part of the feminine physique and part of what makes us biologically women, although now accessible attainable with a hormonal regimen for more groups. Body image can often relate to women insecure in their chest area, whether flat or robust, and insecurities that occur in both degrees. Breast augmentation is prevalent in Guatemala and is the most common plastic surgeries to schedule in the United States, as of 2015 (Zuckerman et al.). With the development and rising popularity of cosmetic surgery, we now hold the ability to alter our bodies to obtain the body image we desire; however, economic circumstance is often limiting in this capacity.

### **Body Size**

Body size correlates to the type of user/model featured in photos. To avoid labeling a user as plus-size or thin, I applied each code based on the self-identification of the user. Three types of bodies were found in this study: pregnant, plus-size, and thin. Size of the user often corresponded to the type of content uploaded and the difference in following/success of each account. Messages behind captions varied greatly.

#### **Thin**

An astounding thirty-three documents were posted using thin models or posted by thin users. Thin users were labeled based on the fact that they did not self-identify themselves as plus-size. Thin users were more likely to post in swimwear, shorts, and tight-fit, two-piece gym wear. Their captions ranged greatly and followed no direct

pattern. Some captions were inspiring, funny, awareness boosting, song lyrics, quotes, short snippets of daily life happenings, sponsorships, etc. Thin users occasionally made reference to a positive body image, but many remained confined in messages promoting self-pride and mental toughness. Their references to body image were not rooted in personal insecurities, but instead homages to physical health and fitness. Michelle Araujo exemplified the disposition to promote self-care, esteem, and the best version of your personal self in her October 2021 post seen below.



Araujo uses her influence to encourage feelings of self-worth and promotion. Individual growth relies heavily on independent thought and development. This does not have to mean perfection, but it does open doors for inclusivity and self-love. Before we can accept others, we have to accept ourselves.

### **Plus-Size**

Despite the international push for more size-inclusive marketing and branding, this study was limited in the ability to find plus-size influencers with significant followings. Only five documents included plus-size models/users. In order to remain

objective and not label bodies, the user had to self-identify as plus-size in order to be included in this category. While this does serve as a large limitation for the study, it does also imply that thin users are more likely to find success in social media and fashion. This very reason was a large deciding factor for Havala Hidalgo in her entrepreneurial expenditure into her plus-size clothing company Big Bottom Behavior. After years of seeing women wearing comfortable, flattering clothing, she obtained a desire to dress the large and marginalized bodies that were refined to boring, unsupportive materials. Hidalgo began her company with the intention to “celebrate and showcase women wearing our line of all sizes... Whether we’re out running errands all day or working-out our clothes should be comfortable and make us feel confident, and powerful. I wanted my line to fill the void I saw by providing athletic and lifestyle wear for larger bodies.” (“ABOUT BIG BOTTOM BEHAVIOR”). Although her company seeks to make fashion for larger sizes, she does not discriminate against thin bodies, proving size-inclusion with the options for sizes small to triple extra large. Her ambitions are manifested in her social media account, with an example given below.





The embroidery of “Aquí yo mando” gives the power to plus-size women, and her use of hashtags always encourages an ambiance of positivity and confidence.

### Pregnancy

One of Guatemala’s most followed influencers, Christa García, was pregnant during the timeframe of this study. Through her social media, she allowed users to see her body transform throughout her pregnancy, and I included two of García’s posts labeled under this subcode. Pregnancy allows a unique interpretation of body image. Pregnancy, a large part of many females’ lives, expends a complete change to the female body with effects that last for a significant amount, if not all, of her life. García shared numerous baby bump photos as her stomach expanded each week with the growing fetus. Her posts, like one shown below, often related to the power of the female body to house and grow a tiny human and the major transformation that her body underwent.



Pregnancy leads to large changes in the body: weight gain, breast growth, face acne, stretch marks, etc. This process is one of the most rapid modifications to the female body, leading to possible perceptions of a negative body image. While García takes a positive

approach to the power of the body to grow and nourish a fetus, many women might be susceptible to negative thoughts surrounding their growing bodies. It is important for society, like García, to encourage and support pregnant women, a forward step in body positivity.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Varying body image perceptions are prevalent throughout the country; however, much of the social media popular amongst users reinforces thin ideals. While accounts might be more open to conversations concerning size and mental health, much of the popularized accounts featured thin, white users. Contrary to beginning theories, the obesity epidemic and Guatemalan ideals respecting a robust stature did not prove important in the cases studied. While this does limit the research, it does speak to a larger societal trend in how we celebrate and follow idealized bodies. Amongst the cases, it appears that a more Westernized approach to social media is prevalent. Looking at the images randomly, I would not be able to suspect differences between a Guatemala user and an American user. Emerging ideals in Guatemala are closely aspiring to an American culture: the preponderance of fast food (e.g. McDonald's and Taco Bell), the similarities in style, rising popularity of social media, etc. All of these aspects are being mirrored in the media and showing a rapid change in our perception of the country.

When examining how body image is reflected in social media, different models were found to exist. Body image pictures and captions were rarely found outside the posts of plus-size users and fitness influencers. This does beg the question: could body image be more closely related to physical shape as opposed to how we dress or cover our bodies? Additionally, while body image does closely relate to our literal shape or fat content, further insecurities in our bodies do plague populations, an idea that Melissa Lozada-Oliva is bringing awareness to. Lozada-Oliva has dedicated her career to eliminating the stigma against body hair on Latina women. Through her poetry and social media, she aims to make Latina women feel more comfortable in the American setting where they are found in the minority. Traditional gender ideas that relate body hair to

masculinity create an oppressive environment for women who are genetically predisposed to body hair.

Similarly to Lozada-Oliva's approach to inclusivity, the world of fashion is making gains in how fashion can be expressed to promote self-worth and a tool in body image perceptions. In regard to fashion, it was readily apparent in the research that fashion and beauty bloggers have a large influence in the social media industry. Users with large corporate sponsorship deals all worked in the fashion industry. While these users mostly created content concerning new trends in the world of fashion, they occasionally accompanied their photos with inspiring captions related to increased self-esteem and confidence in how we dress. While not explicitly calling attention to body positivity, these posts do closely follow the pattern that fashion is a way to express ourselves and that expression requires the participation of our body. Body image becomes paramount in fashion when concerning the idea of size inclusivity. While a fashion blogger might tag the brand of the outfit he or she is wearing, if the clothing is not unlimited in sizing, it becomes exclusive from a large portion of the population. Havalá Hidalgo noticed this large issue plaguing the corporate world and chose to actively combat it with her size inclusive brand, Big Bottom Behavior. Interestingly, Hidalgo did not restrict her website to larger populations, but instead shows her impact on body positivity by incorporating sizing for those large or small.

The Westernized approach to social media became further observed when almost every post employed the use of English language hashtags even if the entirety of the caption was written in Spanish. I was unable to locate any existing literature which might provide an explanation for the propensity to incorporate English hashtags with Spanish

captioning. While I cannot find a direct cause for this choice, I would suspect that users wanted to increase their engagement on their platform as English hashtags have far more tagged photos compared to Spanish hashtags. While this incorporation makes posts more global and accessible to millions of English speakers, the use of solely Spanish captions is somewhat exclusionary in the country of Guatemala. While Spanish is the official language of the country, Guatemala has over twenty-five languages spoken. These languages vary regionally and are Indigenous and Mayan in nature. Even though many rural populations do not have consistent access to the internet (often linked to low education rates or high illiteracy in the area), excluding opportunities for information on Indigenous languages cuts off a large portion of the population and eliminates their voice in media (Sywulka et al.). The absence of neutral language does limit representation in popular influencer accounts. It is important to note that Instagram does offer a translation option for words written in a language other than the user's account setting. This option by Instagram does allow for further interaction and access to global populations; however, the use of an automatic translator could limit the meaning of the message as many colloquial or regional expressions could not translate perfectly.

An additional pattern found in the research that proved interesting was the recurrence of users posting for similar causes and/or holidays. As noted in the social awareness section of the data analysis, patterns arose for Pride Month in June, Guatemala's Independence Day in September, and Breast Cancer Awareness in October. These events had different popularity with users. While many users did post for Independence Day (given each user studied was of Guatemalan heritage), men were more likely to post for Pride and women were more likely to post for breast cancer. While not

shocking that women were more prevalent to post for breast cancer, a debilitating illness often affecting women, women were considerably less likely to post for Pride. Most women in the study were heterosexual, and the men studied were all homosexual based on their posts and self-identification. This leads to the pattern of users raising awareness for causes that directly affect them. I additionally find great interest in these events as they do provide further insight on how our bodies are not defined by a shape or label. Independence Day provides a positive opportunity to express pride and joy in one's heritage, a large factor in our lives and for our bodies. Heritage does not have to be bounded by geographic location, but instead, can cross international borders. Heritage provides a fascinating aspect to our bodies through genetics and culture. These interconnected ideas of body and culture can relate through styling choices, gastroeconomy, genetic predispositions, etc. Similarly, LGBTQIA+ populations can also experience varying body image perceptions given different lifestyle approaches. Trans persons present an especially interesting case given the bodily dysphoria experienced with the birth-assigned gender given. Although the biological aspect of gender is determined internally, the external effects are often how society denotes and labels gender. A positive body image environment is essential for this population as sex-changing surgeries become more and more popular. With breast cancer, the conversation around body image takes a different approach. While the cancer grows internally and is not visible to the naked eye, many women diagnosed with breast cancer are subjected to mastectomies. This surgery, although not dangerous in nature, provides a much more important social and gender-based symbolism. Women's breasts are often closely related to their image as a woman, a form of their own femininity. The

elimination of this body part leaves many women insecure about their new physique and dismayed with their sexuality in the future. The American Cancer Society has an entire webpage devoted to “Body Image and Sexuality After Breast Cancer” which details support techniques for uncertainty about new physical appearance and other medical treatments that may lessen the effects of chemotherapy and hormonal imbalances (*Body Image and Sexuality After Breast Cancer*). While these are all social causes, they are largely different in nature. However, we can see that body image is not only related to diet and exercise, but instead, a wide array of social influences, gender-constructions, and cultural impact.

As the world shifts to a more tolerant society, the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion remains paramount. A disappointing aspect of this study was the lack of diversity found in popular influencers in Guatemalan social media. Of the most popular accounts found (follower numbers in the tens of thousands), the model was white and thin. An article detailing the “7 Fashion Beggars From Guatemala To Follow” listed seven popular, blooming accounts; however, every account was a white, thin user (Nelson). These articles, being written by fashion magazines and websites, must work to increase representation in their publications or they put society at risk of reinforcing the structures that allow for systems of oppression and stigmatization and severely limit opportunities for minority groups and their voices. Big Bottom Behavior was the only account that was continuously diverse in the use of plus-size models. However, the exclusive use of large bodies could be reinforcing limitations in the industry. Additionally, although rare, Studio F Guatemala did present the only diversity in respect to skin color. The company occasionally employed black models and featured their

shoots on their Instagram feed. If the world wants to harbor a sense of body positivity, diversity is of the utmost importance. Our physical appearance is more than the reading of a tape measure; it is the combination of skin color, ethnicity, clothing, and so much more. In order to obtain a positive perception of body image, representation has to be predominant.



## LIMITATIONS

I did find a few limitations in my study. While the aim of this thesis is to evaluate and analyze social media's incorporation of body image perceptions in Guatemala, the study was limited in its ability to find accounts that represented all of the Guatemala population. Popular influencers were demographically similar, limiting the voices of plus-size and dark skinned individuals. Although this does limit the study, it provides an interesting remark on how we reinforce thin, white idealized bodies despite attempts to destigmatize. Social media also does reserve the opportunity to portray life in an aspirational and not always realistic manner. With users having the ability to edit photos and captions, social media does have an aspect of reality distortion. Additionally, this study was conducted on the basis of observation of Instagram posts. I did not contact any Guatemalan natives and have no direct quotes detailing their interactions with or lack thereof with Instagram. Only public accounts were studied so any user operating under Instagram privacy settings was also excluded. Most influencers were located in metropolitan areas so obtaining a rural or Indigenous perspective provided a limitation. Most of the posts included were written in Spanish so small language barriers did exist for certain keywords used to find accounts.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, body image perceptions amongst the young Guatemala influencers included in this study remained versatile. Many of the users did not have an explicit approach to defining their own opinion regarding body image, but implicitly, they do show a positive identification surrounding the ability to post images where a large portion of their skin is showing. While I do not know personally their own personal experiences or struggles with body size, they do foster a comfortable environment in their pages encouraging their followers to maintain a strong level of self-esteem, confidence, mental health, and physical health (reflected through diet and exercise).

Social media remains a powerful way to increase awareness for social causes and foster an environment of education and conversation. Social media becomes negative when users fabricate images or captions that lead susceptible people to praise or follow an ideal that is not attainable, leading to diminished self-worth and mental health and can later manifest into physical ailments. Much of the detrimental impacts of media are more closely related to large corporations and their advertising techniques that prey on vulnerable populations, as seen with the rapid growth in fast-food consumption and the current obesity epidemic that affects Guatemala.

I would not conclude that the current obesity epidemic has a large impact on how body image is manifested in social media. Users I examined were thin and not directly affected by the weight gain seen in much of the population. However, each of these users are impacted daily by the obesity epidemic and surrounded by large bodies. These interactions could lead to a more open acceptance of various body shapes given the

increased diversity they experience in their daily life. Guatemalan users did have a better understanding of how to encourage confidence in fashion, especially, compared to other influencers across the globe. Their more casual, less fabricated approach marks the urgency for commitment to reality as opposed to the airbrushed, retouched photos we see on billboards and magazines. The turn to inspiration and tolerance, as seen with most of the users examined, similarly follows the global trend to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion. There is no quick fix to reassess every individual's perception on bodies or other discriminatory practices. We can only hope for further representation in media that allows for higher education on the subject and fosters a permissive and sympathetic environment, a goal for this thesis. While individuals can work independently to create this new acceptance for all bodies, the majority of the change needed relies in the hands of large advertising companies. As seen with the Louboutin ad of 2014, society is ready to see models that are more representative of the bodies we see everyday walking down the street.

For further research, I would recommend searching for additional diverse voices to gain a better representative view of body image in the Guatemalan population. Additional recommendations include a push for more inclusivity in large brands. The brands at the forefront of the inclusivity movement have had high success initially, and it is important to continue this trend. Through further representation, dangerous perceptions and eating practices could be more limited or even prevented by abolishing the popularity of the super slender supermodel. As a young girl, I remember wondering why I never saw someone that looked like me on the cover of a magazine. By continuing this research and further solidifying society's need for size inclusion, more young persons will grow up

with unrestricted dreams and opportunities without the danger of the systemic oppression created by the industry.

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