Image-discursive construction of body beauty in social media: effects on followers' body and eating perceptions

Construção imagético-discursiva da beleza corporal em mídias sociais: repercussões na percepção sobre o corpo e o comer dos seguidores

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Abstract

Contemporary representations of beauty patterns are limited to a lean and sculpted body. Such representations are mainly outspread by social media. *Instagram*, and its strong imaging profile, is widely used to share fitness images that depict ideal-body models. The current study followed the qualitative approach to assess comments about body-exposure pictures in an *Instagram fitness* profile. Twelve pictures published between January and December 2017 were selected for the study. Comments about the pictures were subjected to content analysis. Three categories of analysis emerged from them: *"Marvelous, goddess, diva, inspiration" - exaltation to the lean body; "My dream is to have this body"- desire for bodily metamorphosis;* and *"A wrong choice ruins the whole body"- blame and distortions in food relations*. There was close association among thinness, beauty and happiness as inspiration and desire sources. In light of the foregoing, one can assume the existing strong desire for bodily re-construction, which gets mixed with the sense of longing for the re-construction of one's identity. There is the illusion that the outspread image of an ideal-body model is available to all, as long as the individual works out hard, dedicates him/herself to it and has the strong will to reach such model. At the same time, this search for the ideal body raises feelings of sadness and frustration when this model is not reached. The desire for bodily remodeling echoes on eating habits, which become distorted and lead to guilt, regret and to the need of pleasure control. Such process can end up in dysfunctional eating behaviors.

Keywords: Social media, Body image, Eating behavior.

Resumo

As representações contemporâneas dos padrões de beleza se fecham em um corpo magro e delicadamente esculpido, e são especialmente disseminadas pelas redes sociais. O *Instagram*, com sua forte característica imagética, é muito utilizado para compartilhar imagens *fitness*, que difundem modelos corporais ideais. Este estudo, pautado na abordagem qualitativa, examinou o conteúdo dos comentários associados a fotos centradas na exposição corporal, veiculadas em um perfil *fitness* do *Instagram*. Foram selecionadas 12 fotos, publicadas entre janeiro a dezembro de 2017. Os comentários associados às fotos foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo, da qual emergiram três categorias de análise*: "Maravilhosa, deusa, diva, inspiração": a exaltação ao corpo magro; "Meu sonho é ter esse corpo": o desejo de metamorfose corporal;* e *"Uma escolha errada arruína o corpo inteiro": culpabilização e distorções na relação alimentar.* Observou-se íntima relação entre magreza, beleza, felicidade e como fonte de inspiração e desejo. Sob este prisma, existe um forte anseio de (re)construção do corpo, que se confunde com o anseio de (re)construção da própria identidade. Ainda, cria-se a ilusão de que o modelo de corpo ideal difundido está ao alcance de todos, bastando empenho, dedicação e força de vontade para alcançá-lo; ao mesmo tempo, sentimentos de tristeza e frustração emergem quando esse ideal não é atingido. Foi possível observar também que o desejo de remodelamento corporal reverbera na relação com a alimentação, que se torna distorcida e fonte de culpa, arrependimento e necessidade de controle do prazer, podendo culminar em comportamentos alimentares disfuncionais.

Palavras-chave: Redes sociais, Imagem corporal, Comportamento alimentar.

Introduction

Changes in the socio-historical context turned the lean body, which in the past was a sign of food scarcity and weakness, into the standard model. It became everybody's object of pursuit and desire, regardless of social class, ethnicity, sex or generation.[1] At the same time, overweight, which in the past meant wealth, richness and abundance, is nowadays denied and stigmatized[2] to the detriment of the ideal beauty and unquestionable slimness.[3]

Society is marked by its trend to define categories for attributes seen as normal or common to humans in order to create a social identity. Individuals who present features other than the defined attributes are often stigmatized. Therefore, these individuals have their social identities affected by any attribute that goes against the 'normality' established by society.[4] Contemporary society poses beliefs, values and negative stigma on overweight individuals. This feature becomes an undesired social, moral and identity mark that disqualifies the individual simply because he/she does not fit the current physical appearance standards.[5]

Nowadays, the national and international epidemiological scenes point towards alarming overweight and obesity numbers.[6] This frame reinforces the standard of a specific physical type, which goes beyond the individual's choice for his/her own body, due to his/her pathological bias. The healthy body archetype based on lean shapes leads either to a pedagogy or to a clinical practice focused on thinness. Thus, the body (as a symbolic space) becomes an identity-construction instrument: the target for domination and control through action and value standards influenced by social imposition.[7]

Media plays a key role in the outspread of body models and beauty standards[8], which are currently limited to lean bodies sculpted in the gym.[3] Therefore, the influence of media becomes one of the main risk factors for individual dissatisfaction with the body. Such distress, in its turn, has negative effect on the individual's life, besides generating frustration, guilt, shame, depression, low self-esteem and low quality of life. Moreover, these feelings are the main risk factors for the development of eating disorders.[8]

The association between traditional media (such as Television and magazines) and body perception and satisfaction is already quite well-defined,[8] but the internet – mostly the social networks – brought expressive changes to the herein addressed context; however, media was not so persuasive in the past as it is now. Although it is a recent phenomenon, social network numbers evidence the dimension reached by this service in the internet. Facebook counts on two million users worldwide and Instagram shares more than eighty million pictures of their users on a daily basis.[9]

Instagram's nature, which is focused on image, became a differentiated social network, since its images are susceptible to be more often recalled than words.[10] Thus, Instagram is the ideal instrument to share fitness-content images, mainly the ones depicting lean and slender bodies. Such feature may explain the choice made by the fitness community for this platform.[11] Besides body images, individuals in the 'fitness world' who use this social network often post pictures of their food and diets. Such process can have an impact on users' eating choices due to social influence, and it concerns the effect people have on the eating behavior of others. This effect can be straight, indirect, conscious or unconscious.[12]

There is consensus that broadening the knowledge about the reflects of certain contents posted in Instagram - mainly the ones outspreading and reinforcing the need of a lean body as the only possibility of having a beautiful and appropriate body – is essential to better understand the herein approached phenomenon. There are few studies published about this topic in national journals since it is a relatively new phenomenon; thus, the aim of the current study was to assess narratives associated with pictures highlighting body exposure posted in an Instagram fitness profile.

Method

This is an exploratory study based on the qualitative approach. This design is recommended for complex phenomena of social nature and does not tend to quantification. It is necessary learning to observe, record and analyze real interactions between people, and between people and systems. It must be done by taking into account the social space where these interactions are built[13] in order to follow the qualitative methods.

We analyzed comments published with pictures - whose image content focused on body exposure - in an Instagram's fitness profile. Users in this platform often keep their profile public and allow people to follow their profiles, to expose and be exposed to pictures, whose owners most of the time do not know each other personaly.[14]

We chose the fitness profile intentionally, its pictures/comments were selected and analyzed. It is a national profile that counts on a large number of followers encompassing the fitness category (more than 3.8 million). This profile publishes body image references, eating standards and physical activity examples on a daily basis.

Picture selection for comment evaluation happened in two stages. The 1st stage comprised the criteria adopted for selection procedure, namely: (1) pictures posted between January and December 2017, (2) pictures focused on body exposure, and (3) pictures in which the blogger was alone. Only two independent appraisers were in charge of the selection in the 1st stage in order to assure its reliability. When appraisers disagreed about selection issues, a third appraiser would have the final word on it. Due to the large number of selected pictures, we made the option for limiting the collection to one picture per month in the 2nd stage. Thus, the final research corpus counted on twelve pictures selected for comment analysis. The picture from each month was selected based on the largest number of 'likes'. The set of assessed pictures in shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Features of pictures selected for the analysis, Brazil, 2017 (N =12)

Picture identification	Month	N. of likes	N. of comments
Picture 1	January	129,972	1,007
Picture 2	February	95,366	1,160
Picture 3	March	97,754	569
Picture 4	April	170,144	2,656
Picture 5	May	206,841	2,000
Picture 6	June	128,168	620
Picture 7	July	188,140	1,165
Picture 8	August	125,913	811
Picture 9	September	135,116	546
Picture 10	October	118,888	809
Picture 11	November	175,277	820
Picture 12	December	155,581	728

Comments attached to pictures selected in the previous stage were subjected to content analysis, [15] based on the thematic analysis technique, which holds the following stages: (a) pre-analysis; (b) material exploration and (c) data treatment and interpretation. All comments were exhaustively read (fluctuating reading) during the pre-analysis in order to allow researchers to set their first impressions and hypothesis. Comments disregarding the picture were excluded from the analysis. The content of interest was organized by theme-axes, which were defined *a posteriori*. Such organization provided a simplified gross-data representation by condensation, it helped interpreting the messages in the pictures. Next, we grouped the messages presenting features in common into different categories based on the organized content. Three categories of analysis emerged after the material exploration stage: a) those referring to lean-body exaltation; b) to the desire of body metamorphosis and c) to demerit and blame manifestations regarding eating habits.

The last stage of the analysis process concerned interpretation, this analysis type corresponds to a set of techniques applied to analyze communications based on systematic and objective procedures developed to describe message contents and to find indicators – quantitative, or not. These techniques allow inferring knowledge about the production/reception conditions of the

assessed massages.[15] Scientific articles about the subject published in the national and international literature were used to substantiate the discussion about the results.

Results and Discussion

Category 1 - "Marvelous, goddess, diva, inspiration": exaltation to the lean body

Although recent, social networks are an important part of the life of contemporary populations, they outspread the strong values and aesthetic standards embodied by society, besides broadcasting and reinforcing body-related social concepts.[16]

Communication is a performance, a game of information; thus, it allows individuals to project a certain situation – even if its role seem passive. Receptors, in their turn, effectively develop other situation based on the received responses.[17] Accordingly, the generalized outspread of the thinness ideal as beauty, mainly via media stimuli, triggers mechanisms used to build and learn new cultural standards.[18]

The focus on body as central reference does not hold the body-shape plurality found in the contemporary world;[19] however, it is a persuasion strategy. Public figures, mainly the ones with great power to exert their influence, materialize an imaginative hedonism far from the reality of most people[20]. Such hedonism is the symbol of their success, control, rationality, health and happiness, as well as of moral quality.[21] Messages that systematically value the lean bodies enable the embodiment of such messages, which are the ultimate social definitions of attractiveness and beauty.[22]

Individuals exposed to this beauty standard believe they can reach all the qualities associated to it just by reaching such body model.[21] Contemporary society outspreads the homogenized concept of what would be a beautiful body through subjective mechanisms. Industries and services living on the body-beauty concept develop methods, techniques and approaches specific for the beautiful and lean ones.[23] The industrial capitalist society "sells" the idea that individuals reach happiness by fitting the body standard.[24] It does not mean a project developed only to those who are overweight or obese; the struggle for thinness nowadays has a universal character. Besides weight loss, many individuals are motivated by the need of modeling a silhouette.[19] Expressions such as "a body is a body", "that's what a body is about", "look at this body", "what a body" and "I want this body", as well as the words "gorgeous", "wonderful", "beauty" and "perfect" were often used in the comments. These expressions and words highlight the embodiment of a specific ideal of beauty, which is seen as the only aesthetic possibility, as well as correct and appropriate identity to be reached.

Body-beauty as symbol of divinity and power was another dimension approached in the comments of this category. The worship of a lean body is explained by comments such as: (1) "She

is the diva of all divas… total beauty!”, (2) “Powerful and gorgeous!”, (3) “She is a mermaid, a muse, so thin!!! Kick ass”, (4) “She summarizes the word beauty”; (5) “Inspiring muse”, (6) “Geee, it seems that she doesn’t get tired of being a goddess…Almost offensive!”, (7) “…this is a body of powerrrrr” and (8) “Sis, she is not a woman, she is a goddess!!!”.

Words “diva”, “goddess” and “muse”, which were often mentioned in the comments, emerge from religious dimensions and symbolize the divinity of the ones who must be worshiped, but nowadays they are used to glorify the ones with lean bodies. Comment (8) stands out among the other ones: “Sis, she is not a woman, she is a goddess!!!”, since it brings along the idea that such body standard is so “perfect and divine” that is away from the bodies of ordinary humans. It is the personification of beauty, because this body “summarizes” the meaning of such word. Accordingly, the “very few” people who reach this standard end up becoming “inspiring divinities” who deserve to be glorified and worshiped. At the same time, beauty – based on an aesthetic viewpoint – leads to the illusion that such body standard is on everybody’s reach.

The detailed analysis of comments (2) “Powerful and gorgeous!” and (7) “…this is a body of powerrrrr”, highlights the power and standardization narrative surrounding people’s lives and affecting their bodies, identities and subjectivity.[25] The desired body, which results from cultural and socio-historical constructions, brings the power relations along.[5] Much more than beauty itself, the lean body - in a lipophobic society - is a symbol of power, since individuals are classified and qualified based on their moral, character and body mass.[25] The cultural pressure for weight loss reinforces the current lipophobic sense. The lipophobic discourse in contemporary society addresses obesity as a body condition that highlights people marked by the distress imposed by the lipophobic rule. Thus, the discourse pointing out obesity as a disease stood out due to the concern with what is morally acceptable, but it is disguised by the narrative of health.[26]

Some of the comments analyzed in this category point towards followers’ concern with the body complexion of the fitness blogger, with the fact that they do not have a sculpted body like hers, and with how such followers compared their weight and body complexion based on the posted pictures: (1) “What is your fat percentage? (Just curious)”, (2) “Does anybody know her fat percentage?”, (3) “What is your weight?”, (4) “And I’m getting chubbier everyday”. It is noteworthy that knowing the weight or fat percentage of the body seen as “perfect” is like having the parameters to be followed, to have a model to copy.

These comments raise the reflection about the aversion and rejection for overweight bodies based on the contemporary socio-historical context. The obesity stigma gets stronger every day because the thin appearance is seen as the key for success. It somehow becomes a physical and moral distortion, and the overweight or obese individual becomes a stranger in the current universe, a pariah. All such stigmatization is based on a representation and belief system, no

doubt it is a form of socially acceptable prejudice; obese individuals are the only ones allowed to be openly discriminated.[2]

Category 2 - "My dream is to have this body": the desire for a body metamorphosis

The sociocultural environment and media have strong influence on the image individuals build about their own bodies and about the ideal body they would like to have.[27] The body becomes a reflex of society and culture, such reflex allows constructing particularities, with emphasis to certain attributes to the detriment of others in order to create one's own standards.[28]

Nowadays, body is in the very core of daily concerns; thus, we seem to be living the "body crisis", in which humans must match the aesthetic standard. This process highlights many symptoms, for example, many individuals have been using prosthesis, surgical techniques have been advancing and chemical substances have been prescribed.[28] Comments such as (1) "the body I would like to have", (2) "This is my body-target", (3) "The super target of my life!", (4) "Please, give me this body", (5) "I want to get a body like this", were very common in all pictures. They express how body has turned into a machine, without subjects or fondness. It became an imperfect object, a draft to be corrected.[29] The body stopped being an entity in itself, as well as a form to 'be' in the world, to become a moldable and transitory object, a sum of parts. Any attempt to change the body is also an attempt to change life.[30] More and more, body image represents a mirror of the *self,* in which appearance and essence get fused.[19] Thus, the will to rebuild the body gets mixed with the will of reconstructing identity itself.

Getting a thin/beautiful body demands discipline and dedication, a constant work from oneself to oneself;[19] it forces the individual to discipline his/her body in order to accomplish social acknowledgement and approval. Therefore, it associates pleasure to effort, because nothing comes for fee, everything must be earned.[28] If the individual is not capable of disciplining oneself, the individual is the only one responsible for his/her own failure. Body remodeling and reconstruction seems to depend on individual commitment and effort: (1) "When you look at your body and think that you need to start exercising", (2) "How much more focus must I have?", (3) "This abdomen is very beautiful, what a discipline", (4) "@...fitness deal until I get there", (5) "It is a matter of choice, you just need to have courage and strong will, nothing more", (6) "we need to start exercising now@...", (7) "As if being a fitness person only depends on financial matters; effort and dedication are the biggest fraction of it", (8) "I want to have this body when I grow up!!! When I get strong enough I will get there!", (9) "look at this belly Sissss.... Keep focused and we will be like her in this life yet" and (10) "Because a belly like this demands a lot of discipline!!!" Congratulations!!!".

Once the outspread idea lies on reaching the "dream body", such target depends only on strength, courage, focus and discipline. It also outspreads the concept that flaws in this process are on the hands of the individual, and that such failure means laziness, weakness, incapacity and lack of commitment. The responsibility for the overweight, and for the solution of such issue, is attributed to individuals who are away from the established body model.[3]

The body becomes a manageable instrument, a body-capital that guides choices, which are ordered, and organized, according to a certain mean. Therefore, it can be produced, modulated and adjusted, based on a defined target image, and on a whole variety of strategically developed productive actions. Body-remodeling involves many disciplinary practices that mix observations and experiments, among which one finds exercising.[31]

It is interesting highlighting that the word "*malhar*" (forging), which is often found in the comments, means molding iron, (re)molding it by correcting and changing each part.[32] The picture shows that thinness is not the only target, since it is not enough *per se*, it is necessary to have a "forged" body. Exercising, which in the past meant getting body strength, is now performed for aesthetic means in order to sculpt the body.[33]

Body image is built based on the contact between body and external experiences. The negative self-image is the source of great psychological distress and leads to low self-esteem, insecurity, guilt, frustration, anxiety, depression and even to suicidal thoughts.[8] Some comments would explain such burden: (1) "Thanks for destroying my self-esteem right in the morning, LOL", (2) "So beautiful that makes us angry", (3) "Can you stop humiliating me, please #gorgeous", (4) "@...just to make me feel like killing myself"; (5) "If I was in the same plane with you, and you were dressing like that, I would jump off the plane. Be happy", (6) "How to get more depressed with life. As if life itself was not enough", (7) "I'll cut my wrists and will be right back!! LOL, muse", (8) "I'm broke, I can't stand it…", (9) "I don't follow her in order not to feel like killing myself", (10) "And here I am feeling humiliated with my belly", (11) "Could you please stop stepping on my face" and (12) "The body I will never have". Contemporary self-portraits, the so-called selfies, get contaminated with the body models broadcasted by the media, they symbolize the will to have the unknown body visualized and acknowledged. The selfie image seems to be a way to leave invisibility behind when the subjectivity is not understood as the possibility to "be" in the world, because the body becomes unnoticeable in many spaces. However, the distance between the real body and the desired one ends up in the sense of failure, dissatisfaction, mismatching and humiliation.[30]

The understanding about how hard it is to reach 'this' body model marks the negative feelings surrounding all comments above. Comment (12) "The body I will never have" highlights the way this desire brings along the sense of difficulty in reaching this body standard, which is far from most people. It happens because the possibility to have such body is quite limiting and excluding

because of human-body diversity. Most of the time, ideal bodies are not even real, since they can be changed with a "digital scalpel" – Photoshop.[34] Thus, the aesthetic plasticity of the ideal body has been changing through a continuous move that leads to detachment from the real body and to the endless search for the perfect body.

This category also encompasses the body objectification phenomenon, which focuses on specific body parts shown in the pictures, such as (1) "nice waist", (2) "This is a nice butt! Goddess", (3) "Look at this belly", (4) Sisss, what a leg!!!", (5) "Look at this calf, this leg, this belly, this body, Geeess! I love you!", (6) "An abdomen is an abdomen", (7) "Look at the curve on the leg muscle", (8) "Wow, what a thigh. Kick ass!".

Objectification images include the ones exposing an individual, most often a woman, in such a fashion that it reduces him/her into an instrument of pleasure or of somebody else's use; images that isolate, emphasize or evaluate specific body parts. These parts usually refer to sex appeal and appearance, besides leaving aside any emotional or psychological attribute. When individuals, mainly women, are socialized to embody the perspective of an observer, who has a primary view of their own completions, these individuals tend to think about themselves as objects to be seen. This phenomenon is known as self-objectification.[35] Women experiencing self-objectification internalize the perspective of a third person when they evaluate themselves. It leads them to concerns about their self-monitoring and about negative self-evaluations. Studies have pointed out that the exposure to objectified images, which depict the ideal lean body, increased the self-objectification level, the anxiety caused by weight, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.[36,37]

Category 3 - "A wrong choice ruins the whole body": blame and distortions in food relations

Studies about eating behaviors highlight an interesting paradox: we never knew so much about eating effects on the body, but, at the same time, we never had so many health issues related to them.[38] The "psychopathology of everyday food" is underlined by the current numbers of overweight and eating disorder cases, such as anorexia and bulimia;[39] and of deviant eating behaviors, or dysmorphic disorders, such as orthorexia nervosa and bigorexia nervosa.

Besides, we observed the over identification of food and of its nutrition constituents, which turns food into mere nutrients. Such 'pharmaceuticalization' supersedes food's cultural, social and symbolic aspects. The pleasure with, preference and taste for food are not the reference anymore. These 'new' eating habits give room to certain eating rules, which are only based on food's biological role. Food is categorized in very simplistic way: "good" and "bad", "allowed" and "forbidden", "healthy" and "unhealthy", depending on its nutritional composition: calories, proteins, carbohydrates, fat, fibers, among others. Its nutritional power is extremely valued, and all its other shades and meanings are disregarded. We became a real gastro-anomic culture.[39]

The pressure over the contemporary eater is huge and imposed by specialists, mainly, by the media, which reinforces the "eating panic" condition. Eating became a personal decision field, which is fed by a whole variety of mismatching rules,[40] among them one finds the aesthetic standards. Nowadays, new meanings have been given to food and to what can be understood as "eating well". These meanings derive from the modern eating, which synthesizes and represents the effects of social changes on food. Food still has its physiological function, but it is followed by new meanings,[40] food is now seen based on the sense of a 'means' to build a perfect body, as if it had some magical elements. Based on the super value given to food due to aesthetic reasons, those who do not match the eating standard, who do not follow the "up to date" diet, or who allow themselves the pleasures of eating, may face losses in their social life and even the sense of not-belonging to certain social groups.

All these elements are clear in the following comments: (1) "@...good morning for you who had pizza last night", (2) "I just had a sfiha, which is weighing in the belly and in my conscience…", (3) "And I am eating cheese bread!!! I will never get to this body", (4) "@...just by looking I feel the pain. I just ate a tamale", (5) "That moment when you finish eating a lasagna and regrets it!!!, (6) "@...I just ate a cheese bacon sandwich, how sad", (7) "I just ate a bunch of oreo milka bars, I'm crying", (8) "Oh Lord! Set us free from this evil called food!", (9) "Come to this picture when you feel like eating junk, babe @...", (10) Thank God the person who marked me in the picture, I was about to have a bread", (11) "At the time I will be about to give up my diet, I will look at this picture" and (12) "I felt like eating a sweet! I look at this picture and gave up the idea of doing so".

The comments above highlight the "pathologization of eating", which is caused by distorted relations with food. These relations are marked by the sense of guilt, regret, by the need of controlling hunger, eating pleasures and desires, besides the strong dichotomous view about eating. The simple act of seating at the table to enjoy the food now brings along a sense of guilt. Eating, which is herein understood as a biological act of survival based on social, cultural and psychological contexts, now just has a healing character[41]. Recently, the act of eating embodied a modeling, or desired-body constructing character, food became a raw material or "the means for an end"[35]. Accordingly, the act of eating was reduced to the simple practice of medical prescription. It now disregards the fact that our biology depends on certain nutritional needs, as well as to the fact that we also have sociocultural demands to be preserved.[41]

Disidentification elements standing out in the contemporary scene emerged from the fact that eating, which used to be a simple and daily act full of meanings and affection, became a source of distress, confusion, pain and even of moral judgment. Mental and physical disorder cases related to dysfunctional associations with eating, food and body, such as the eating disorders, were triggered by such change of perspective about the act of eating. Some classical symptoms of eating disorders, such as purge and the restraint-compulsion cycle (common symptoms of bulimia), can be seen in

some comments about the pictures: (1) "@... Let's through up the pizza we ate?", (2) "Look at this being's belly, spit out the food because you still have time", (3) "Please, do not spit out lunch @...", (4) "@...I'm thinking about throwing up all the potato breads I ate", (5) "Throwing up all I have eaten within 3,2,1!!! Powerful Girlll", (6) "Better body every day, but we get hungrier every day" and (7) "@... I seat here eating like crazy and then I see this beautiful body... Just got depressed...".

We must have a careful look over such deep and delicate matters. Diets and disordered eating behaviors such as the attempt to lose weight and to gain back the self-esteem, which at first may seem naïve, can be mixed with health concerns and cover more severe disorders. The body, which is the core object of dissatisfaction - given the weight and shape concerns it represents -, capitalizes on dysfunctional eating behaviors.[42] People start believing that the "perfect-body" images posted on a daily basis are real; therefore, they also believe that not reaching such model is the reason for feeling frustrated and dissatisfied.[43] Body dissatisfaction, in its turn, leads to serious behavioral and eating-attitude losses; therefore, such process can be an important trigger for the development and maintenance of eating disorders.[8]

Evidences in the literature highlight the association between social networks and body dissatisfaction, and potential negative eating-behavior responses. Some authors observed that more than 10 daily accesses to Facebook and to Instagram increased the chances of Brazilian adolescents to develop body dissatisfaction by 6.57 and 4.47 times, respectively.[43] A recent study showed that the act of following profiles limited to physical appearance and fitness contents (celebrities) in Instagram has been associated with the internalization of the thinness ideal, with body surveillance and with the desire for thinness.[8] A systematic literature review focused on the impact of social media on body dissatisfaction and on disordered eating, besides corroborating results of our study,[44] also pointed towards some problematic activities in these networks: visualization and upload of pictures that favor social comparisons based on appearance and reinforce body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. A recent meta-analysis also concluded that the exposure to contents related to appearance in social networks associates more concern and disorders with body self-image in women.[9] Thus, platforms whose main focus lies on pictures/images, such as Instagram, deserve in-depth research based on the herein addressed panorama.

Final considerations

The search for the ideal body became a contemporary mindset. Aspects involving body image have been representing the acceptance, or not, of oneself in different spheres of live. It can also lead to social inclusion or to discrimination when the individual shows off a standard other than the demanded one. Thus, it is important understanding that there is a series of dimensions

surrounding and forming the body, such as the cultural, social and economic ones. Therefore, the body cannot be reduced to, or exclusively valued by, its physical dimensions. Similarly, it is essential knowing the control mechanisms underlying the outspread ideal-body models.

Based on our study, it was possible observing that the lean body is seen as a vital adornment in order to be successful, fulfilled, beautiful and happy. There is direct association between matching the beauty standards and success in many dimensions of an individual's existence. The body to be seen and to be symbolically consumed suffocates the one that is out of the standard.[38] When the individual understands that by "conquering" a perfect body he/she will also "conquer' all the positive attributes associated with it, the desire for rebuilding the body ends up mixed with the desire to reconstruct the identity itself. Based on this process, the demand for having a beautiful and lean body lies on the individual. The responsibility for remodeling the body becomes an individual moral duty, rather than a collective responsibility.[38] Such "individualization" of the body-change process is focused on controlling wills and desires, but it ends up simplifying a quite complex factor, just as if having #focusstrengthandfaith would be enough. Since reaching the ideal physical complexion is impossible for most people, frustrations, guilt and failure feelings become frequent and cause great psychological pain.[8] The diversity of factors involving body formation and remodeling go beyond individual efforts and are neglected.

We could observe that the desire for transforming the body echoes on individuals' relation with food, and it distorts and triggers the "pathologization of eating". Eating is seen through the biomedical viewpoint, the way to build the desired body. This process disregards the act of eating from its social, cultural, affective and symbolic contexts and turns it into something that generates anguish, regret, guilt and judgment, rather than a source of pleasure that is full of meaning. These negative feelings can trigger the commitment with restrictive diets and with disordered eating behaviors.

Therefore, it is essential deepening in our reflections about the ideal-body concept, and on the simplistic views surrounding such concept, which is quite complex in its essence. The body ideals systematically imposed by the social networks seem to contaminate our sense of beauty and ugliness, as if only two body standards were possible: the ideal standard and the non-ideal one. This limited view gives no space between these extremes. Natural features are now rejected, and beauty is acknowledged when the individual is able to sculpt his/her own body, either through exercising, diet or surgical procedures. The negative effects of body dissatisfaction, such as low self-esteem, depression and eating disorders, are linked to the individual's mental and physical health. In light of the foregoing, health professionals must address body issues based on the mental and physical health perspective, as well as encourage reflections about all its plurality and singularity.

Acknowledgments

Collaborators

Silva AFS helped with data collection, analysis and interpretation, with manuscript elaboration and with the final review; Neves LS helped with data collection, analysis and interpretation, and with manuscript elaboration; Japur CC and Penaforte TR helped with data analysis and interpretation, manuscript elaboration and final review; Penaforte FRO helped with study conception, analysis and with data elaboration, with manuscript elaboration and with the final review.

Conflict of interests: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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