

**Relationships between body, media and mental health: meanings of bodies mediated on Instagram****Relações entre corpo, mídia e saúde mental: significações de corpos midiáticos no Instagram****Relaciones entre cuerpo, medios de comunicación y salud mental: significaciones de cuerpos mediáticos en Instagram****Received: 05/03/2021****Approved: 25/07/2021****Published: 25/08/2021****Gabriella Campos Jannini de Lima<sup>1</sup>****Luciana Maria da Silva<sup>2</sup>**

This is a qualitative study carried out in a city in the interior of the state of Minas Gerais. It aimed to present perspectives of digital influencers on the female body and the meanings they convey, critically addressing possible relationships between body, media and health. Images and captions from July to December 2018 on Instagram from two digital influencers were considered: one fitness influencer and the other a plus size influencer. Data were analyzed by content analysis. Three categories emerged: *Differences between profiles*; *Similarities between profiles*; and *Posts and their influences on everyday life: health versus illness*. Similarities and differences were observed between both profiles, comprising aspects related to body and media and reflecting on health. These aspects showed that, despite the increase in profiles showing identifiable body models for most women, the bombardment of images reinforces thin beauty standards, which thus defined imprisonment and sicken the female audience, extremely affected by low self-esteem and distorted body perception, factors that predispose to eating disorders. Educational actions in health are urgently needed, considering the media and the body as relatable factors, as well as possible causes and maintainers of eating disorders.

**Descriptors:** Physical appearance, Body; Communications media; Social networking; Mental health.

Este é um estudo qualitativo realizado numa cidade do interior mineiro, com objetivo de apresentar perspectivas de influenciadoras digitais sobre o corpo feminino e os significados transmitidos, abordando criticamente possíveis relações entre corpo, mídia e saúde. Foram consideradas imagens e legendas feitas no período de julho a dezembro de 2018 nas contas na rede social *Instagram*<sup>®</sup> de duas influenciadoras digitais: uma *fitness* e outra *plus size*. Os dados foram analisados pela análise de conteúdo. Três categorias emergiram: *Diferenças entre os perfis*; *Semelhanças entre os perfis*; e *Postagens e suas influências na vida cotidiana: saúde versus doença*. Observou-se semelhanças e diferenças entre os perfis, compreendendo aspectos relacionados ao corpo e mídia e tecendo reflexões sobre saúde. Tais aspectos demonstraram que, apesar do aumento de perfis evidenciando modelos de corpos identificáveis para a maioria das mulheres, o bombardeamento de imagens reforça padrões de beleza magros, que assim definidos aprisionam e adoecem o público feminino, extremamente afetado por baixa autoestima e percepção corporal distorcida, fatores esses que predispõem transtornos alimentares. São urgentes ações educativas em saúde, que considerem a mídia e corpo como fatores relacionáveis, bem como possíveis causadores e mantenedores de transtornos alimentares.

**Descritores:** Aparência física; Meios de comunicação; Rede social; Saúde mental.

Este es un estudio cualitativo realizado en una ciudad del interior del estado de Minas Gerais, con el objetivo de presentar las perspectivas de influenciadoras digitales sobre el cuerpo femenino y los significados que transmiten, abordando críticamente las posibles relaciones entre cuerpo, medios de comunicación y salud. Se consideraron las imágenes y las leyendas en el periodo de julio a diciembre de 2018 en las cuentas de la red social *Instagram*<sup>®</sup> de dos influenciadoras digitales: una *fitness* y otra *plus size*. Los datos se analizaron mediante un análisis de contenido. Surgieron tres categorías. *Diferencias entre los perfiles*; *Similitudes entre los perfiles*; y *Publicaciones y sus influencias en la vida diaria: salud versus enfermedad*. Se observaron similitudes y diferencias entre los perfiles, comprendiendo aspectos relacionados con el cuerpo y los medios de comunicación y tejiendo reflexiones sobre la salud. Tales aspectos demostraron que, a pesar del aumento de los perfiles que muestran modelos de cuerpos identificables para la mayoría de las mujeres, el bombardeo de imágenes refuerza los estándares de belleza de la delgadez, que así definidos aprisionan y enferman al público femenino, extremadamente afectado por la baja autoestima y la percepción distorsionada del cuerpo, factores que predisponen a los trastornos alimentarios. Son urgentes las acciones educativas en materia de salud que consideren los medios de comunicación y el cuerpo como factores relacionables, así como posibles causas y mantenedores de los trastornos alimentarios.

**Descritores:** Apariencia física; Medios de comunicación; Red Social; Salud mental.

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**he body is constituted according to customs, habits and culture, aspects that change over time. Depending on time period, or even during the same period, the way bodies are portrayed is different, as standards of beauty change historically and each society has different ideas of how people should look like based on their physical aspects, especially in relation to the female audience<sup>1</sup>. Currently, the silhouette considered ideal and desirable is lean or fit, defined, with a minimum of body fat; this is the woman considered beautiful<sup>2</sup>.

To fit in with the beauty standards of women, concerns about the body increase, such as fear of gaining weight, desire to lose weight, excessive control of food consumption, excessive physical activity, aiming at weight reduction, concern with body measurements and negative evaluation of one's own body image (how the person perceives themselves) triggering changes in eating behavior and body dissatisfaction, factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of Eating Disorders (EDs), such as Anorexia Nervosa (AN) and Bulimia Nervosa (BN). AN is characterized by a restricted and persistent caloric intake, fear of gaining weight and distorted body perception<sup>1,3</sup>.

BN, on the other hand, is characterized by compensatory behaviors aimed at preventing weight gain, distorted body perception and binge eating, defined by eating more food than most people would consume at one sitting. This compulsion is always accompanied by a feeling of lack of control (inability to stop eating after starting) and purging, such as induced vomiting and/or use of laxatives<sup>3</sup>.

The media, a main player in the construction of social representations and concepts that influence countless people, reinforces the search for a slim body<sup>4</sup>. Apps and digital social networks are defined as the joining of two elements: actors (people, groups or institutions) and connections (social interactions), which happen by the meeting of like-minded people sharing ideas, photos, videos and information. They are able to reach thousands of users in a short time. This is the case of Instagram, one of the most popular social networks in Brazil, created by Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom in 2010, as a free app, which allows anyone to create and maintain a personal account, allowing interaction through photo posts and their captions, in exchange for likes, comments and messages in them<sup>5,6</sup>.

On Instagram, the body within the current aesthetic standards is in full display, however, this flood of images, for the most part, does not correspond to the real image of women, they are far from reality and carry the impression that they can be easily attainable, and the achievement or not of these objectives is the full responsibility of the people<sup>1</sup>. This context only reinforces the consumption of techniques that prove to be simple, such as physical exercise, diet and consumption of medications, aiming at lean ideals of beauty, even if this entails serious physiological changes, development of self-image disorders, self-esteem, depressive symptoms, anxiety and in more extreme cases, the development of AT<sup>3,4</sup>.

Taking this context into account, this work focused on two models of Instagram digital influencers (people who somehow stand out on the social networks and have a lifestyle admired by thousands of followers): the first has a body within the imposed beauty standards, a model presented as perfect, exemplary, successful and inspiring<sup>6</sup>. The second influencer exposes the body considered outside the beauty standards (fat, which is neither fit nor defined), breaking stereotypes, questioning beauty standards and valuing personality and self-esteem<sup>7</sup>.

This study aimed to present perspectives of digital influencers on the female body and the meanings they convey, critically addressing possible relationships between the body, media and health.

## METHODS

This study is characterized as exploratory and qualitative approach, encompassing specific research activities<sup>8</sup>. Instagram electronic media (a social network where users share

photos and videos) was used as a source of data for analysis. This social network was selected in view of the possibility of obtaining materials easily accessed by the general public, which are presented in large quantities and with a wealth of information to be learned.

For data collection, first, a search was performed using hashtags (an expression that uses the typographical symbol # before a term, which constitutes a context tag, aiming at categorization and facilitating search for specific subjects, according to what is proposed), to search for profiles related to the intention of the research. The hashtags used in the survey were #fitness, #plussize, #exercíofísico (#physicalexercise), #gorda (#fat).

Profiles of two people who were easily accessible to the researcher (from the same city) were selected so that they could be informed about the work and could consent to it. A face-to-face meeting was arranged through Instagram messages, with each one separately, to explain the study and answer questions. Participants signed the Informed Consent Form (FICF) before starting data collection.

The profiles of two digital influencers were analyzed: a fitness and a plus size model, chosen because they expose different perspectives and meanings about the body.

The materials analyzed were the photographic posts and their respective captions, from the Instagram profiles of the two digital influencers, over a period of six months (from July to December 2018). Captions and images were viewed one by one and counted. Subsequently, the most discussed topic in each profile was identified, and then the results were separated according to similarities, differences and influences in everyday life.

The collected materials were analyzed and understood according to content analysis, defined as a set of communication analysis techniques<sup>9</sup>. This analysis is configured as an instrument composed of various forms, mainly objective, quantitative and systematic descriptions of the manifest content that applies to the extensive field of communications, being widely used by any means of communication involving sender and receiver<sup>9</sup>.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM) under No. 3,013,891.

## RESULTS

For the study, two digital influencers were considered – Laura and Bruna (fictitious names). One of them, Laura condones de current beauty standard for women (fitted and defined body), is adept of a fitness lifestyle and healthy and restrictive eating. The other, Bruna, works with plus size fashion and her profile makes a counterpoint, showing her own body as a body different from what society considers ideal (fat). Divergences between the contents and discourses posted by both influencers can offer a broad dimension about two different models and meanings of the body, as well as its relations with the media and health.

From the data collection, it was possible to formulate a general overview containing information on the profiles of the two influencers. Laura's profile contained, at the time of collection, 443 posts and 14 thousand followers (people who follow the profile). 59 posts were counted, among them 3 videos that were not part of the analysis material. Most posts (61%) referred to food, dealing with diet or foods from their industrial kitchen.

Bruna's Instagram contained 1609 posts and 14,500 followers. There were 94 posts in the period analyzed, 3 videos that were not part of the analysis material; the majority (37%) of posts are photos of Bruna's face, taken by herself, known as selfies.

Lifestyle and body investments are relevant factors in both profiles. In Laura's profile, food is discussed a lot, and the influencer shares what she consumes after training at the gym, as in a photo of a bread on the plate and the caption commenting that no one is forced to live on supplements alone. In another post, the influencer recommends certain sweets that, according to her, do not interfere on a diet. Laura also combines physical exercise with food and exposes this in a photo in which she wears her own clothes for physical exercise and lifts a weight bar.

In one of Bruna's selfies, she shows herself with makeup and says in the caption Wonder Woman. In another selfie, she says, "*De todas as 'caras' que eu tive, a única certeza que eu tenho é que nenhuma delas não era a minha. Posso mudar de cabelo, emagrecer, engordar, mas o meu caráter vai permanecer intacto. Custe o que custar!*" (Of all the faces I've had, the only certainty I have is that none of them weren't mine. I can change my hair, lose weight, put on weight, but my character will remain intact. Whatever it takes!).

In one of the posts, Bruna appears in a full body photo, wearing a denim skirt and a T-shirt with the words: "*Toma conta da sua vida*" (Mind your own business). In the caption she states: "*Melhor do que ser admirado, é admirar a si mesmo*" (Better than being admired is to admire yourself). Less often, Bruna also shows her body, in bikini and bathing suit photos in which she shows her full body, admiring her body shape and showing sweets that she given, commenting that everything that comes from the heart is sweet.

Laura brings food and training in a personal and directive way, treating her followers with intimacy and proximity, as in a post in which she contrasts two photos showing the before and after of her own body, reporting that she did physical exercises before and then added these activities with a diet, losing a kilogram and defining the body, the caption also says: "*Essa foto é para você que ainda não aliou a dieta ao seu treino*" (This photo is for you who have not yet combined diet with exercise).

Influencer Laura also links advertisements to tips for followers, such as in a photo promoting cookies made by her as replacements for *coxinhas*, with the caption: "*Já preparou seu lanche da tarde?*" (Have you prepared your afternoon snack?). Laura uses many hashtags to communicate, some examples are: *#reeducaçãoalimentar* (#dietaryre-education), *#saúde* (#health), *#motivação* (#motivation). Private moments are also shared in her profile, such as the wedding of friends, with the following description: "*Agradecendo o vestido e por ter sido madrinha do casal*" (Thankful for the dress and for being the maid of honor).

The plus size influencer communicates directly with her audience in a very relaxed way, as in a selfie where she appears with makeup, saying: "*Começando a semana com a cara de deboche que eu tenho naturalmente*" (Starting the week with the mocking face that I naturally have). Bruna shows her personal life in publications, declaring herself to her boyfriend, in photos with her son and the content of her travels in which she poses in a bikini with captions like "*Saudades Cabo Frio!*" (Missing Cabo Frio!). Some of the hashtags used by her are: *#gordana* (#chubby), *#tatendobarrigadefora* (#bellyout), *#decaralimpa* (#cleanface).

Some catchphrases were found in both profiles. In Laura's profile: "*o que não vale é ficar parado, esperando que as coisas aconteçam sozinhas. Mexa-se! Bora fazer a coisa acontecer*" (You can't stand still, waiting for things to happen on their own. Move! Let's make it happen). Another example is the post: "*Mesmo que seja difícil, insista. A vida, de vez em quando, precisa saber que você quer mesmo*" (Even if it's difficult, keep going. Life, from time to time, needs to know what you really want).

In Bruna's profile, the interaction by catchphrases takes place in a photo that she appears in a bikini, with the caption: "*Não aguarde o colorido dos dias: pinte você mesmo com sua cor favorita e viva a vida com alegria. Boa semana!*" (Don't wait for the color of the day: paint it yourself with your favorite color and live life with joy. Good week!). In another post, she appears with two phrases stamped on different t-shirts: "*Toma conta da sua vida*" (Mind your own business) and "*Me poupe, se poupe, nos poupe*" (give me a break, give you a break, give us a break).

From the contents obtained (photographs and their captions) three categories were organized: *Differences between profiles*; *Similarities between profiles*; and *Posts and their influences on everyday life: health versus illness*.

## DISCUSSION

### *Differences between profiles*

In general, Instagram influencers' profiles are similar due to the desire to convey feelings of personal fulfillment and happiness, reinforcing the image they want to convey of trust and extroversion, as extensions of the person behind the network<sup>10</sup>. However, there are variations between profiles, as with the fitness and plus size influencers in this study.

Fitness influencers (fitness refers to restricted diets and training to achieve a certain body shape, a stronger and leaner body) are women who use social networks, such as Instagram, to post photos and videos that show their routines, with an emphasis on the practice of exercises and diets. These profiles work like diaries and show only what the influencer selects, further legitimizing such content<sup>6</sup>.

Plus size is a term defined as from mannequins 44 or 46<sup>11</sup>. It can be considered that Bruna is part of the Body Positive social movement, which seeks the same treatment for different types of bodies, regardless of color, weight, limitations, and others. The individual goal of Body Positive is for each subject to accept their own body. The social role of the movement, on the other hand, refers to the right of representation and occupation of social spaces that all types of bodies must have<sup>12</sup>.

Considering that a thin body is valued and an obese body is the target of criticism and prejudice, seen as undisciplined and that images highlighting the aesthetics of the fat body in the mainstream media began to appear more only recently, as well as references to female beauty in large size, it is plausible that profiles of plus size influencers are described as spaces of resistance to the standard of thinness, as they emphasize fat bodies as synonymous with beauty, value body plurality, stimulate self-esteem and a non-idealized body conceived as it really is<sup>7,13</sup>.

These profile models go against the standards imposed by the media, which emphasizes what is predominantly considered beauty and chooses characteristics that compensate for excess fat, such as good humor, friendliness and friendship<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, influencers considered non-standard (plus size) employ new values and meanings to the body through their Instagram profiles and the fact that plus size women debate aspects related to beauty in the media, specifically on Instagram, can be considered a movement against the bombardment of body standards imposed on the female public<sup>7,13</sup>.

On Bruna's Instagram, her image projected on the mirror is linked to self-esteem and the representation of a fat woman who acquires other meanings. A large and fat woman, a very attractive, beautiful, powerful woman who has several roles in her daily life, mentioning a capable and strong woman, presenting the possibility of not needing to follow slim standards of beauty<sup>14</sup>. Interests in freeing themselves from the shackles that restrict bodily aspects are also disclosed, encouraging other women to feel good about their bodies; body diversity is celebrated, excluding the idea of body perfection and showing detachment from rules on how women should act to achieve the body framed in the standards<sup>7</sup>.

This aspect is extremely relevant and goes against conventional advice valued by the media to plus size women, disseminated by style and fashion consultants, such as: do not wear clothes with flashy prints or in white, nor with horizontal stripes, as the body will appear larger; these professionals advise plus size women not to wear or reduce the use of clothes that highlight certain parts of the body, such as the belly<sup>11</sup>.

Bruna's social network can be considered a space of resistance and plus size representation; in a photo, she wears a long dress, typical attire for special occasions, and comments: "*é muito difícil a gente ser vista e respeitada num mercado 'padrãozinho', na qual, tudo é a mesma coisa sempre. E fazer uma reprodução de um look de uma marca famosa conhecida exclusivamente por produzir peças pra mulheres magras foi uma ousadia*" (it's very difficult for us to be seen and respected in a 'standard' market, where everything is always the

same. And doing a reproduction of a look of a famous brand known exclusively for producing pieces for thin women was a daring thing).

Collections, brands and stores for large sizes are appearing more and more, thanks to events linked to plus size fashion and plus size representation in the media. However, there is still a mismatch in relation to the desires and needs of consumers, as fashion is limited to this audience, is not updated and does not add modeling to fat biotypes, does not receive a variety of products, the clothes are not affordable, nor do they cater to a variety of styles and trends consistent with the seasons and special occasions<sup>11</sup>. The fact that there are not many options for clothing for special occasions demonstrates aspects such as not fitting the expected model, generating exclusion of fat women from certain environments, especially occasions that require more formal clothes<sup>11</sup>.

Most of Bruna's posts are selfies, generally associated with self-esteem and narcissism, in an individual aspect, which is configured as exaggerated investments of the subject focused on the image itself<sup>15</sup>. However, research in the field of communication indicates that the practice of posting selfies has more to do with factors on the communication mechanism aimed at inclusion in groups, building reputation, and others<sup>15</sup>.

Bruna uses a more sarcastic and/or aggressive tone in her posts and in addition to reaffirming herself as a beautiful woman, she reinforces her own self-esteem. She claims that beauty goes beyond physical characteristics and adds attributes of the subject's personality. The photos and captions do not show any impediments or concerns of Bruna about showing or not showing her body, or which clothes disguise the fact that she is fat and therefore would be more appropriate. She does not discuss stigmas for fat women in fashion, does not value the fat body based on the traditional discourse about appearing thinner and hiding characteristics considered excessive by beauty standards, and both bodily freedom and freedom in relation to food are treated in a natural way.

Currently, only a few body models are socially authorized, demonstrating the importance of profiles of plus size women such as Bruna, who usually show pride in being who they are, self-esteem, acceptance of their own bodies, discourses of self-acceptance and valuing of fat women and signs of changes in social and discursive practices<sup>16</sup>.

In the case of the fitness influencer, beauty is linked to bodily, aesthetic and dietary actions, configuring a daily lifestyle cultivated<sup>16</sup>. The fact that she has achieved a thin body, following a routine that, in theory, does not require sacrifices, showing the people who follow her that it is possible to have a body within the social beauty standards and continue to consume common everyday foods, adds subjects following their profile, because they identify with the personality in question<sup>17</sup>.

The concept of diet has been replaced by dietary re-education, which emerged in the context of educational practices on nutrition in 1990. In this process, which is even publicized by Laura, subjects are encouraged to change diets (seen as non-durable practices), by dietary re-education, considered as a permanent change in habits and the most effective way to lose weight, based on the balance of foods low in sugar and fat<sup>18</sup>.

Dietary re-education provides for new eating habits, which would not require deprivation of eating, but the need to control anxiety, desires and compulsions<sup>18</sup>. You can eat anything, as long as it is re-elaborated within the parameters considered healthy that advocate the control of carbohydrates, consumption of fruits and vegetables and light products. The denial of eating is no longer used, but the affirmation of diet, which is commonly linked to the practice of physical exercise<sup>18</sup>.

Along with dietary re-education, the fitness influencer publishes her CrossFit practices, a type of high-intensity training, combining different exercises that promises to exercise all physical capacities in one training session<sup>19</sup>. It can be noted the adaptation of the discourse present in most of the media and its use in a realistic way, when identified on Laura's Instagram, the dissemination of her exercise and eating routine, leading followers to believe that the

actions and practices disclosed are really done by fitness influencers in everyday life, that is, having the body similar to theirs requires following a similar routine<sup>20</sup>. This type of publication has a pedagogical emphasis, teaching and showing followers the influencer's dedication to achieve the ideal body<sup>10</sup>.

The main points of difference between the Instagram profiles of the two digital influencers refer to the lifestyle and the way they publicize their bodies. For Laura, it can be said that there are constant bodily investments to maintain a body pattern; and, for Bruna, the body is designed in a way that does not require interventions, it exercises acceptance of it as it is. Another aspect quite divergent between them is the content of the publications: the fitness influencer focuses on issues of exercise, nutrition and motivation, for example, while the plus size influences focuses a lot on self-esteem.

### ***Similarities between profiles***

First-person captions, use of hashtag, informal, personal and friendly speech are tools used by digital influencers to gain more followers<sup>14</sup>. Despite having different intentions, Laura and Bruna use this type of communication a lot, in which the choice of words denotes the meanings they intend to generate and the non-verbal is never disconnected from the discourse, thus, the images added to the caption increase the intended meanings<sup>13</sup>.

The possibility of interacting with the content, talking directly to the public, considered a participant in the life of influencers, a fact confirmed by the predominant language on Instagram, everyday and personal posts, are factors that cause the feeling of closeness between them and whom is on the other side of the screen<sup>21</sup>.

Both use a more serious tone to address specific issues, that is, depending on the theme, the approach is modified. Laura, when talking about diets and training and Bruna in her posts dealing with self-esteem and body acceptance. This makes her followers give her authority in matters<sup>21</sup>.

Sharing personal moments, with friends, family, travels is noticed on both Laura and Bruna's social networks, as well as the use of catchphrases. The phrases shared by Laura are motivational, to encourage her followers to adhere to the lifestyle she promotes, which would require willpower and sacrifices from each subject. Bruna uses inspirational catchphrases, talking about self-esteem and encouraging detachment from physical beauty standards. Currently, body shape is no longer attributed to nutrition and physical exercise, but to catchphrases along with lifestyle<sup>21</sup>.

The carefree, informal and casual language, the everyday posts and the catchphrases carry a content of proximity, complicity and trust. In general, the communication established on the network allows Laura and Bruna to configure themselves as ordinary people who have gained prominence for the content they publish, transforming them into specialists in the subjects covered in their profiles, with communication emerging as a factor that seems decisive in maintaining both as digital influencers.

### ***Posts and their influences on everyday life: health versus illness***

Postmodernism is seen as the time when the consumer society emerged, in which the individual is a consumer and products are considered not only for their monetary value, but for symbolic and imaginary connections, factors that generate attraction and fascination; they are sign goods, which when compared to others, lose value<sup>22</sup>. Nowadays, technologies have expanded consumption, which presupposes standardization of relationships, discourses and recognition of people based on the goods they hold. In this context, subjects become vulnerable to available products, consumed in a superfluous and disposable way<sup>22</sup>.

Considering that the huge offer of products requires an increase in consumers and consequently seductive marketing strategies, advertising is based on the basis of consumption, images are produced, selected, elaborated and attributed to the real world as if they were part

of it, having as a proposal influence choices, reflect individual desires, weaving a consumption that is directed, creating in the subjects the need to consume<sup>22</sup>.

In the body bias, it can be considered that the body is crossed by the marketing and consumption of products/content referencing exercise practices, regulated diet, and various techniques that, together with effort and discipline, promise a "healthy body", denying biological and emphasizing procedures that aim to build a hyperbody: artificial, composed of cosmetic products, aesthetic procedures, that is, the body is no longer at the mercy of old age, diseases or the passage of time<sup>22</sup>.

The idealization of the body, always rebuilt and reformulated, starts to rely on investments and, currently, can be understood from the consumer society, without ignoring media and lifestyles, factors that together form subjectivity and dictate choices that will be made by the subjects<sup>22</sup>. The media greatly collaborates in this process of subjectivation and production of temporary identities, as through its disseminated content it encourages people to act and consume goods loaded with identifications and feelings of belonging to a community<sup>22</sup>. Even before the popularization of the internet, print media vehemently propagated the ideal female body standard and studies indicate that such standards were guided by men<sup>23</sup>.

The mass media exert power over the imagination and images present themselves as being more real than reality itself, the desired life is that of TV, which currently belongs to the Internet, to Instagram. Real life does not appear on screen<sup>24</sup>. The media, an active part in the process of achieving the idealized image, influences the way individuals think, perceive themselves and, through appealing content, disseminate what they consider beautiful, linking this concept to feelings of happiness, well-being, success and freedom; the media show thin women and show the public how to conquer this fashionable body, in addition to defining and reinforcing very well what is considered an attractive body, and people go in search of that idealized appearance<sup>1,25</sup>.

In this case, this body is that of Laura, who has several types of habits (CrossFit and nutritional education) and who shows how she achieved this ideal, reinforcing that it is possible for people to fit into this body standard too. Furthermore, the distance brings the feeling that the lives of fitness influencers are coherent, a work of art that others are striving to achieve as well<sup>24</sup>.

Admired by bodies that are not even congruent with reality, more and more women report dissatisfaction with their own bodies and go in search of millimetrically altering characteristics different from those disclosed, ignoring marks that are inherent to them, they wage real battles against the biologically inherited body, getting sick in front of the mirror<sup>25</sup>.

Low self-esteem and distortion of body image, a concept understood by body perception, weight estimation, satisfaction and concern with appearance and avoidance of contexts due to body shapes, reinforce the search for weight loss and make these women use practices such as fasting, excessive physical activity, use of appetite suppressants, laxatives, diuretics, among other harmful methods, leading to the development of eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa, mental disorders with a 20% fatality rate by malnutrition and suicide<sup>16</sup>.

Women are the most affected by social pressures related to body standards, with a percentage of 90% to 95% of cases of eating disorders detected in females<sup>26</sup>. From childhood, eating habits for girls tends to be more regulated and contain more restrictions, in adolescence, the search for a thin body can already be seen in the speeches of young women, who often fantasize about losing weight and question their own body shape, see the body of distorted way, consider thinness as ideal, and even being thin or having the ideal weight for their age and height, usually perceive themselves as overweight<sup>23,26</sup>.

In adulthood, the comparison with other women's thin bodies leads to the pursuit of slim bodies, these are seen all the time in the media and sound like a demand for women, who



despite having climbed several spaces and achievements, are considered failures if they do not fit the preponderant beauty standards<sup>23,26</sup>.

Bodily interventions such as diets associated with the ideal body are trivialized and completely decontextualized; the dissemination of perfect bodies, cosmetic procedures and technical tips to achieve it were appropriated by the media as health care, begin to sound like truth and are followed by a wide range of people, placing the media as a producer of beauty standards which cause eating disorders<sup>16</sup>. A fact that proves such information is that in 2012, Brazil already had more than half of gyms in Latin America and fitness gained reach with the endorsement of the media<sup>21</sup>.

Female body self-perception is directly related to weight loss, a factor influenced by the desire to be socially accepted. The female public is enslaved by the thinness dictatorship, becoming susceptible to nutritional diseases, such as bulimia and anorexia, disorders that are extremely related to the female gender and that increase with the beauty standards that reinforce thinness, maintained by eating habits mediatized by less than communication, denying the individuality of the subject, replaced by the objective of reaching a body standard considered as ideal<sup>26</sup>.

In this context of identification based on body models vaunted by the media and the direct link between being in shape and being beautiful and healthy, it is common that there are isolations in consumption niches, in addition to stigmatization and exclusion of individuals with difficulties in adhering to the rules of "good shape", seen as non-collaborators, rebels and lacking in self-care; in health, they are considered disobedient patients, contrary to the treatments and recommendations of professionals and, therefore, need to be adjusted, standardized, and it is recommended that people become aware of their excesses, eating errors and change their behavior, disregarding attitudes, beliefs and values<sup>22</sup>. Fitness is still highly valued and when subjects share images of people outside the body standard, most of the time they do it with the intention of criticizing or making fun of it<sup>27</sup>.

The unbridled search for body patterns tends to be constantly updated, as social media bombard information, ideas and examples that change all the time and the body acquires a plasticity character aiming at the "perfect and healthy body" (thin) as the only model beautiful body and linked to notions of happiness and success, but which does not represent the majority of women, who consequently develop risk factors for the development of mental health disorders such as EDs, with excessive concern with body shape and weight, fear of getting fat, body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, pushing them to search for standards that must be achieved at any cost and sound like something that can be achieved without effort<sup>16</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Body standards published by the media lead countless women to extreme dissatisfaction with their own bodies, which leads to the practice of restrictive diets, excessive physical exercise, aiming to fit the current and socially accepted body ideal. The media corroborates this process, boasting discourses and images that solidifies concepts of beauty and educate bodies to fit in with what society considers beautiful; body standards of thinness generate diseased subjectivities and limited by beauty standards, providing feelings of anxiety, frustration, loss of control, impotence, shame and self-contempt, denoting risks for the development of eating disorders.

Having as a premise that easy access to the means of communication is a fact, it is useful to point out alternatives in understanding the messages triggered by them; this type of action can gain space at school, an environment conducive to discussion about cultural diversity and educational activities about how the media disseminate standards of beauty, reproduce trends that interfere in the social sphere and dictate lifestyles that threaten health, especially of women.

The family, researchers and society can also be included as responsible for being aware of media influences, as well as health professionals, focusing on ways to provide supremacy of positive aspects in the use of communication technologies and being attentive to media and consumption as variables important and should be considered in the development and maintenance of eating and other disorders.

It is urgent to critically understand the relationship between media, body and health, questioning about possibilities of informing and establishing connections without restrictions and impositions, aiming that health actions are implemented according to the detected needs.

Research specifically linking body and media is scarce, but extremely relevant. A very important factor related to this theme, but which was not addressed in this research, refers to the pressure that women suffer not to age and are driven to seek an endless youth.

Another limiting point of this research is that it was not possible to measure how much and in what way women who follow these profiles are affected by body patterns in the media and how they face these influences in their daily lives.

A suggestion for future work with this theme is to analyze comments of followers on photos posted by digital influencers on Instagram, considering the reflections of the media "behind the screen", covering both sides of the communicative process and expanding the understanding and reflections on the theme.

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**Gabriella Campos Jannini de Lima** contributed to the design, collection and analysis of data and writing. **Luciana Maria da Silva** participated in the design, collection and analysis of data, writing and reviewing.

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