"No Offense but Have You Considered Dieting?"

A Content Analysis of Weight Bias in Mukbanger Comments on TikTok

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This thesis examines the occurrence of weight bias in comments received by mukbang creators on the short form video platform TikTok. Weight bias refers to negative attitudes and beliefs that are based on a person's size or weight and these can include for example the objectification of larger individuals and the focus on personal responsibility in weight outcomes. Weight bias can have serious concrete implications such as decreased opportunities for health care, interpersonal relationships and professional ventures and a higher occurrence of harassment. Social media was chosen as the research avenue due to its rising importance in modern communication and TikTok in particular due to its rapidly increasing popularity and young userbase. Food was used as a framing device in this study to collect comparable data and thus all the content creators chosen produce mukbang videos. Mukbang is an online phenomenon originating from South Korea where content creators record themselves eating substantial amounts of energy-dense foods in front of a camera.

This thesis focuses on the implications of weight bias by comparing content creators who present themselves online as normative bodied and content creators who present themselves as larger than normative. Since weight bias is known to be a gendered phenomenon, the content creators were chosen based on size and binary gender, male and female. Thus, the data set comprised of 600 comments in total, 150 collected from the comment sections of each creator, one female larger than normative creator, @shirinjka, one larger than normative male creator, @realnikocadoavocado, one normative female creator, @keilapacheco, and one normative male creator, @stevensushi.

The collected data was analyzed using quantitative content analysis and utilizing a hate speech categorization model that categorizes comments based on their supportive, critical/hostile, and neutral sentiments. After looking at the data quantitatively, it was then further analyzed using thematic analysis to see what kinds of themes arise in weight bias discourse online.

The results showed that weight bias exists in online communication. Both the male creators and the larger than normative female creator received a majority of critical/hostile comments while the female normative creator received a majority of supportive comments. In the critical/hostile category, both the larger content creators received more comments aimed at their personal characteristics than their normative counterpart. Furthermore, larger than normative creator comments showcased themes that have weight bias implications such as notions of self-responsibility in weight outcomes and humor which contributes to objectification. The normative male creator did receive a considerable number of critical/hostile comments as well which points out the large amount of online hate males receive online. He also received, as the only creator in the data set, inappropriate sexual remarks which raises interesting questions about gendered and heteronormative representations online. The vast differences in the female creators' comments also shows how weight bias can be more intense and divided when it comes to females online.

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1   Introduction

People existing in larger than normative bodies experience weight bias throughout their lifetimes (Salas et al, 2019). Weight bias refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about someone based on their weight and size. This bias can manifest as prejudice and harmful stereotypes (Salas et al. 2017) which in turn can label larger than normative individuals to living with weight stigma. This stigma can lead to significant issues for the person such as body dissatisfaction, health issues, and lack of adequate health care (e.g., Salas et al. 2019). Furthermore, the stigmatized individual can face social issues such as rejection from social spaces and reduced opportunities for their future. Even with numerous documented negative effects, weight bias remains socially acceptable (e.g., Puhl & Heuer 2010). It differs from other kinds of stigma in the sense that its enforcement is believed to lead to positive health transformations which in this case refers to losing weight and fitting into a social norm. Due to this widespread belief, weight bias is incredibly prevalent in our society and can be observed in most spaces such as traditional media and new forms of social media.

Constructions of larger than normative individuals in traditional media are generally seen as harmful and contributing to weight stigmatization. The usual focus of weight and body size is on individual responsibility and lack of character. In the media, larger bodies are often depicted as headless and emphasizing the perceived weight of the individuals (Harjunen & Koivumäki, 2023). The larger body in this instance is objectified to represent the negative values and connotations associated with weight which is often rooted in weight bias. Furthermore, the focus on individual responsibility erases the complex nature of the issue and leads to oversimplifications which put aside the various social, biological, and environmental effects at play in individual weight manifestations (Salas et al. 2017) such as access to nutritional, satiating and fulfilling foods and adequate health care. Social media on the other hand, can reproduce these harmful constructions, possibly being even more harmful since user generated content can be seen as more authentic which affects the way consumers receive and internalize content information (eg., Van Der Bend et al. 2023). In terms of weight representations, this can lead to inauthentic lifestyle messaging that can for example cause body dissatisfaction and encourage disordered eating patterns. In addition to this, the last few years on social media have seen the rise of hate speech online which has made the online environment more hostile for content creators and consumers alike (e.g., Kienpointner 2018) making it harder to navigate and control.

This thesis studies the occurrence of weight bias and hostile speech in the comment sections of the popular short form video app TikTok. The most downloaded app of 2019 and 2020 (Jain & Arakkal 2022; Talarico 2021), TikTok has established itself as a major player in the social media market utilizing the rise of popularity of video-based content online. TikTok is known for its young user base and their high level of engagement which can lead an individual user to spend large amounts of time on the platform (Jain & Arakkal 2022). Infamously, TikTok is also known for issues when it comes to online discrimination and hate speech (Kaipainen 2021, 15). In this thesis, the focus is on two TikTok creators who exist in larger than normative bodies and their received reaction in their comment sections. These results are then compared to two creators whose bodies fit into the social norm, so called normative bodied creators, to find out what kinds of differences can be found and whether implications of weight bias and weight stigma can be detected in the comment sections. Since weight bias is known to have different occurrences and forms based on binary gender[1], it is also considered by comparing comments received by male and female content creators and the perceived weight stigmatization in them. This is done by collecting the data set out of one male and one female larger than normative content creator and one male and one female normative bodied creator. This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods by first recreating a quantitative content analysis model created by Wotanis & McMillan (2014) where the comments are categorized based on their supportive, critical, or neutral sentiments. Sentiment, in this case, refers to an attitude or emotion that is present in the collected comments. After the quantitative analysis, they are then further analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

Researching video-based social media is meaningful since the visual mode provides the user with much more context and information than more text based social media platforms, such as X (formerly known as Twitter) or Reddit. This, in turn, can evoke more weight stigmatization since users are seeing various representations of body size, making TikTok a very fruitful arena for weight stigma research. Furthermore, TikTok especially is known for its algorithm categorizing user data and connecting users with new content based on previous online engagement and behavior (Jain & Arakkal 2022), making it easier for content creators to reach new viewers either in or outside their particular online space. Despite this, the creation of online communities is very prevalent on TikTok as well and many creators try to contribute to a niche

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[1] Western thinking traditionally categorizes gender as a binary: male or female.

online by producing highly specified content around a topic (Ohlheiser 2021) such as body positivity or various aesthetics.

To combat the issues of online community bubbles of likeminded followers, this study utilizes food as a framing device and looks at creators who produce mukbangs on their channels. Mukbang is an online phenomenon that originates from South Korea and refers to people who broadcast their eating online (Strand & Gustafsson 2020). Nowadays, mukbang has gained popularity globally and some of its distinctive features include the performer eating large amounts of energy dense foods while talking to a camera. Many mukbang creators stream this activity online but this research focuses on creators who post mukbang videos on their TikTok channels for asynchronous viewing at a later time.

This study is conducted because more studies about weight bias online are needed. Weight bias, weight discrimination and the effects of online content on body dissatisfaction have been studied extensively (eg. Jiotsa et al. 2021; Stewart & Ogden 2021; Flint et al. 2016) and found to be detrimental to an individual's wellbeing and their opportunities in life. Furthermore, studies concerned with abusive language online often focus on racial or other forms of discrimination (eg. Ștefăniță & Buf 2021; Calderón et al. 2020) which often have effects in place for legal ramification, unlike weight bias. Hate speech itself has been recognized as a research area in need of more research and empirical data (Castano-Pulgarin 2021) so research on weight stigma and hostile speech contributes to that research topic as well.

Social media has been used for weight bias research over the years numerous times. For example, the social media platform X has been repeatedly used for data on weight bias. So et al. (2016) looked at obesity related retweets on Twitter and found out that the discourse around the topic focused on individual responsibility and humorous intent in the form of derogatory jokes. Lydecker et al. (2016) researched tweets containing the word *fat* and found 56.57% of the messages being negative. Lazarus et al. (2021) also found overwhelming evidence of negative obesity talk on Twitter in their research about two medical conditions strongly linked to obesity. Wanniarachchi et al. on the other hand, conducted two studies (2022; 2023) on weight stigma on Twitter, Reddit and YouTube creating a methodological framework of a mixed methods approach of sentiment analysis, discourse analysis and topic modeling. Studies done on YouTube have also shown that weight stigma online can be more aggressive towards women (Jeon et al. 2018; Hussin et al. 2011).

However, not much research exists about weight stigma on short form video apps or TikTok in particular. Contributing to this gap in weight bias research is important due to multiple reasons. Firstly, TikTok is a huge social media platform with a very young user base in comparison to other social media platforms. Young people can be more impressionable to social expectations, and this can establish itself as anti-fat attitudes and body dissatisfaction as discussed in the theoretical background sections. TikTok as an app is also so young that it may not have as elaborative hate speech procedures as other apps in the online space. Compared to other social media platforms such as X or Reddit, TikTok is a visual media and that could add to the prevalence of hostile speech about shown physical characteristics and since TikTok's algorithm differs from other platforms and makes it easier for anyone's content to be seen (Zhang & Liu 2021) material that could evoke weight bias could be more prevalent. Lastly, TikTok is one of the largest social media platforms in the world right now so researching its communication culture can give us helpful insights into our current society in general as well.

With these objectives in mind, three research questions for this study were formulated:

1. *What kinds of differences can be found in the sentiment used in the comments received by larger bodied creators compared to normative bodied creators?*
2. *How does the content creator's gender play a role in weight bias manifestations in the comments received by the content creators?*
3. *Which themes tend to arise when spoken about larger than normative bodies and can these be associated with weight bias?*

These questions aim to describe the phenomenon of weight bias by first looking at differences in the supportive, critical, and neutral sentiments of the received comments according to creator body size. Afterwards, the effects of binary gender are studied by comparing male and female creator comments. Lastly, some themes present in the comments are analyzed from a weight bias viewpoint. The hypotheses for this research are that both the larger than normative creators and the female creators will receive more hostile comments related to their physical appearance or character than their comparison counterparts and that the themes arising from weight discourse on social media emphasize personal responsibility and objectification.

Before delving into this thesis, a note on terminology used for these research purposes. Due to the highly stigmatized nature of this issue, there are no inherently neutral terms to use when referring to weight outcomes. Puhakka (2023, 24) calls fat a 'linguistic-discursive issue' since cultural connotations we attach to words such as *obese, overweight,* and *fat* denote negative implications and especially the terms obese and overweight imply the existence of a defined norm that can be measured or quantified. Despite the connotations, fat is the preferred term used by researchers (Harjunen 2009) and as a term it has been reclaimed by activists working with these themes. This thesis, however, utilizes the term larger than normative much like Hynnä-Granberg (2022) who explains that this term includes the affective reality of someone living outside of the norm.

The following theoretical background sections 2 and 3 give a concise introduction into both weight bias and stigma as well as social media as phenomena by delving into their various aspects such as diet culture in 2.1., obesity stigma in 2.3., and online engagement in 3.1. Comprehensive backgrounds of both TikTok and mukbang are given in sections 3.2. and 3.3. Section 4 presents the theoretical framework used in this study, content analysis and thematic analysis, before moving on to section 5 which presents the material and methods, as well as providing some ethical considerations. Finally, the results are presented in section 6 and further discussed in section 7 before moving on to the final conclusions, general remarks about the construction of this study and notions about the future of weight bias research in section 8.

2   Weight Bias

This section focuses on weight bias and the different forms it can take or develop into. First, the phenomenon of weight bias is discussed in general, before moving into diet culture which refers to the way our society views bodies and nutrition. Then, the focus is on perceptions of weight bias and finally the openly discriminatory nature of this kind of stigma is discussed.

Weight bias refers to negative attitudes, beliefs and overall discrimination faced by larger individuals due to their weight (Andreyeva et al. 2008). Unlike other forms of discrimination, such as race and gender discrimination, weight discrimination has few places with legal ramifications so an individual experiencing this kind of discrimination can be left more vulnerable (Puhl&Heuer 2010). Out of U.S. States only Michigan and Washington ban weight-based discrimination by law (Koivumäki et al. 2023). Furthermore, even though weight bias has been observed in a multitude of settings such as in personal and professional relationships, its prevalence has not been greatly studied in recent years thus leaving the nature of it ambiguous especially in comparison to other forms of discrimination (Andreyeva et al. 2008). Weight discrimination indeed exists in the intersection of other forms of discrimination and the experiences of an individual labeled as fat and how the notion of fatness affects these experiences remains silent (Farrell 2011, 2-3). Instead, weight stigmatization is socially acceptable, and it can be seen as a helpful asset in battling issues caused by obesity even though studies show that it can have many short- and long-term issues for both the individual and for the public health sector (Puhl & Hauer 2010). These issues can be, for example, disordered eating patterns and increased difficulty in losing weight (Boswell & White 2015, 1). Weight stigma can also cause adults to avoid exercise altogether (Puhl & Heuer 2010). Furthermore, weight bias internalization leads to eating pathology and psychological issues such as increased risk of depression and disordered eating behavior (Boswell & White 2015, 5). The issues also present differently in gendered discourse with women experiencing more cognitive and attitudinal changes such as eating restriction and depression whereas men report higher behavioral changes such as binge eating behavior (ibid.) Weight bias internalization also occurs at lower Body Mass Index (BMI) levels in women than it does on men which may suggest women experiencing higher levels of weight stigmatization than men (Boswell & White 2015, 5-6).

Weight bias exists in a social context, and it also is culture specific (Puhl & Heuer 2010). In the United States right now, a body is seen in the context of the obesity epidemic (Farrell 2011, 7) where weight gain is seen as a significant public health issue. Fatness divides bodies into an inferior form where the negative label is usually associated with other marginalized groups such as immigrants and women and that is where the majority of modern-day fat activism stems from (Farrell 2011, 8). What is important to note in weight bias phenomena is the apparent disconnect between existing research and the public attitudes and opinions on weight. For example, studies have shown that even minor weight loss has significant health outcomes even if the weight's physical manifestations such as an individual's BMI remain unchanged. This lack of physical change leads to insufficient reductions in stigmatization and its negative outcomes (Puhl & Heuer 2010). Weight bias thus is often heavily tied to an individual's appearance rather than their actual health. Weight discrimination seems to be getting worse by time with its rates increasing from 7% to 12% in 1996-2006 in the United States (Andreyeva et al. 2008). One of the leading causes of weight stigma is a lack of understanding and oversimplification of weight and obesity (Ramos Salas et al. 2019) and this is reflected onto society in different forms.

2.1 Diet Culture

Although diet culture has not been holistically defined, the most fitting descriptions of it emphasize food and eating related mythology and structural features in our societies that encourage a moral hierarchy of bodies (Jovanovski & Jaeger 2022) meaning that diet culture encompasses the way we see bodies and nutrition and assigns specific values on different kinds of bodies which are then internalized by individuals in a cultural context. Dieting thus is both the act of controlling one's weight but also a sociocultural phenomenon that promotes harmful eating habits. Diet culture promotes the thin-ideal and simultaneously a fear of the fat body (ibid.). Anti-dieting attitudes came forth in feminist discourse in the 1980s to pay attention to the way patriarchal ideals control women's bodies (Hynnä-Granberg 2022). That is not to say that diet culture affects only women. Within diet culture and our societal ideals, females are instructed to be as small as possible and males on the other hand are expected to be muscular and strong. Both of these societal ideals instruct individuals to consume less to fit into them. This, however, can be harmful as studies show that internalizing standards for attractiveness leads to greater risk of body image issues and disordered eating (Thompson & Stice 2001). A study conducted on young adults 19-23 reported findings of both male and female participants having a higher likelihood of conducting a diet when presented with an underweight peer

(Miething et al. 2018). This evidence shows that diet culture ideals are less connected into health ideals rather than cultural ideals of attractiveness. Jovanovski and Jaeger (2022) in their research call this the weight=health myth that promotes an unhealthy relationship with nutrition and bodies.

Diet culture is ingrained in our Western culture. For example, a recent example of it is the term *Quarantine 15* coined during the Covid-19 pandemic which refers to the weight gain caused by the sudden halt the disease caused in our societies and in our daily lives (Pavlos 2022). This term of course was met with advice on how to fix this issue. Weight being something "fixable" in this context further promotes market-based solutions that generate income. It is estimated that the diet industry in the United States is worth more than 175 billion dollars (Expert Market Research 2023) and this industry encompasses mostly female-led industries such as fashion, beauty, health, and wellness (Jovanovski & Jaeger 2022). Media portrayal is often emphasized as the driving force behind diet culture. Thinness in the past has been presented as the female ideal in a mass form in fashion, fitness, and movie industries (Eli & Ulijaszek 2014, 51) to name a few. Especially imagery of thin fashion models has been linked to female body dissatisfaction (Brown & Tiggeman 2016) but media exposure in general is linked to not only dissatisfaction but increased focus on appearance and disordered eating (Grabe et al. 2008). Nowadays media imagery is most widely present on social media, but studies suggest that the same body image dissatisfaction that was present in the mass media before is present on social media (Butkowski et al. 2019; Brown & Tiggemann 2016; Fardouly & Vartanian 2016; Fardouly et al. 2018).

The effects of diet culture start young. Some estimates suggest that even girls as young as 9 can follow dieting practices and younger children internalize dieting ideals (Balantekin et al. 2014). These children often experience diet encouragement from their parents which however is linked to BMI increases during adolescence (ibid.) meaning that active dieting or diet encouragement actually has an opposite effect. Even when pushing diet culture ideals is not intentional, children learn by following their parent's example, either their active dieting or searching for dieting information (Nichter 2000, 122). Diet culture maintains fat stereotypes and those are linked to higher body satisfaction on average weight women who are more prone to be conscious of their bodies (Kim & Jarry 2014) essentially meaning that holding onto anti-fat bias makes normal weight women feel better about their own bodies thus engaging in further secluding of larger individuals and upholding diet culture ideals. Studies also suggest that stronger anti-fat bias is

linked to stronger pro-thin bias (Carels & Musher-Eizenham 2010) meaning that internalizing the diet culture thin-ideal can lead to stronger weight bias.

2.2   Perceptions of Weight Bias

Weight bias remains visible in our societies, and it affects individuals in a variety of ways. Farrell (2011, 5-6) divides weight bias into explicit discrimination, meaning the openly hostile discriminatory thinking and practices, and implicit denigration which refers to the more hidden notions that influence the way we see larger individuals in general. Farrell suggests that fatness and the social status it holds deprives a person of a crucial part of a Western cultural identity which is the thin ideal. Larger individuals can thus feel their value as people lesser due to their weight (Ramos Salas et al. 2019, 7). Due to being objectified into a fat standard, fat individuals often see life opportunities reduced such as health care, education, and interpersonal relationships (Farrell 2011, 7). A fat person is expected to not take space nor ask for too much (ibid). Farrell (2011, 1) reports of a story where all the fat and non-white members of a sorority were expelled for not upholding a sorority ideal, which in the context meant thin, white and desirable. Weight bias has also been linked to getting into graduate school programs in general, where a higher BMI resulted in less program offers especially for female applicants (Burmeister et al. 2013). Studies on academic success also report a higher body mass index being linked to a lower GPA and higher depressive symptoms (Aimé et al. 2017). Weight bias encounters for many start at a young age as larger adolescents suffer from more bullying and weight seems to be one of the leading causes of teasing (Browne 2012, 107) which can lead to psychological distress and weight bias internalization in the long term. Indeed, many obese individuals report starting their struggles with weight and weight bias from a very young age (Ramos Salas et al. 2019).

Weight bias and the role of weight in society first started to attract feminist scholars and especially black activists in the 1970s and 1980s (Hynnä-Granberg 2022, 26). Fat activism and anti-dieting became intertwined with fighting against bodily discrimination which often came from discrimination of other marginalized groups (Jovanovski & Jaeger 2022). Susie Orbach published her now classic *Fat is a Feminist Issue* in 1978 and linked eating pathology to female sexualization (Hynnä-Granberg 2022, 26). Another classic linking societal beauty ideals to deep rooted issues is Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) which sees beauty standards, including thinness, as another symbol of patriarchy (Ramati-Ziber et al. 2020). Fat studies nowadays aim

to refocus the narrative of fat on social issues, attitudes and oppression and create a new sense of awareness for the fat body and the fat experience (Pausé & Renee Taylor, 2021, 1). Nowadays the fat acceptance movement has grown significantly in size and produced an increasing amount of research on the topic (Friedman et al. 2020, 1) and intersectional organizations like The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) work on destigmatizing fat and bringing equality for all.

2.3   Obesity Stigma and Weight Discrimination

To understand why weight bias and its implications are a serious and harmful issue in society, obesity stigma needs to be discussed. Obesity is defined as a chronic disease where an excess of body fat has a negative impact on an individual's health (Ramos Salas et al. 2019). Even though its categorization as a disease, it is stigmatized holding a specific disease stigma where obesity is seen as the individual's fault and a result of their own shortcomings such as laziness and an unwilling spirit (Puhl & Heuer 2010). Despite this, multiple studies suggest that obesity is a result of various sociocultural factors such as technological advancements in food production, increase in portion sizes in outside of home dining, inflation being slower on energy-dense food items such as high in carbohydrate products, and the increase in females in the labor force which further promoted the shift to eating outside of homes (Finkelstein et al. 2005). This, in addition to technological advancements such as new developments of media, have promoted a sedentary lifestyle which further affects an individual's ability to control their weight (ibid.). Reducing the public health response on obesity into individual choices further undermines and ignores the effect of weight stigma and discrimination (Puhl & Heuer 2010). Individuals experiencing weight discrimination are both more likely to become obese and stay obese than those not experiencing weight discrimination (Sutin & Terracciano 2013) which does not indicate the stigma to be a helpful approach for public health struggles.

The concrete outcomes of obesity stigma are widely seen in our societies and cultures. A negative correlation exists between weight and wages where an individual experiences an accumulation of these issues whether it be a higher weight resulting in lower wages or a lower wage resulting in a higher weight for example due to the accessibility and affordability of energy dense foods (Finkelstein et al. 2005). Ramos Salas et al. (2019) in their study used narrative inquiry to shed light on obese individuals' life experiences and reported results of feeling like a burden, being labeled as unhealthy without evidence, public humiliation, and

strangers automatically assuming the right to comment on their bodies or eating habits. One interviewee spoke of having a difficult time removing their individual identity from the label of obese and accepting obesity as a chronic illness that requires comprehensive evidence-based solutions (2019, 5). Another reported on not belonging in public spaces such as offices or classrooms due to not having chairs that accommodate her larger body (2019, 6). A concerning extent of obesity stigma is the quality and accessibility of health care for obese individuals. Health care is one of the most reported arenas for weight stigma and obese people report facing negative stereotypes, not being taken seriously and not receiving adequate care as issues often are blamed on their weight (Puhl & Heuer 2010). Assuming weight is the root cause of other health issues leads to lack of quality in health care that can have serious implications for obese people (Ramos Salas et al. 2019). Lastly, the way obesity is framed in the media is hugely detrimental to obese individuals. The media seems compelled to showcase obesity both in ways that grab attention, click-bait titles (Koivumäki et al. 2023) and framing obesity in a fear-mongering way (Boero 2014, 37) as well as using imagery that further promotes stigmatization (Koivumäki et al. 2023) such as headless torsos that emphasize the size of one's body further implying that visual imagery is all that is needed to make weight and health-based assumptions.

3   Social Media

Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate with each other both in private and in public. Even though online communities have a long history, profit-driven social media companies such as Meta and X, formerly known as Twitter, have had a huge impact on the development of the social media we know today (Brügger 2018, 196). Nowadays there are about 4.8 billion social media users worldwide (Petrosyan 2023, Statista) which is over half of the global population. In theory, the idea of social media is simple. You form online communities where users are allowed to post content. Content creation has also been made fairly easy in today's society, only basic equipment such as a smartphone camera and an internet connection are needed (Puhakka 2023, 32). The goal for a post online is to get engagement and users often use this to get some kind of gratification (Perloff 2014). This could be appreciation or admiration. More engagement such as likes, comments, or reposts, on an online post often means more visibility since the algorithm favors content that seems to be getting an emotional reaction from users (Puhakka 2023, 32). Sometimes this leads to users creating affective content on purpose such as with the use of click-bait titles (Chatterjee & Panmand 2022) or other exaggerated behavior. Social media has its fair share of problems. The increase in online spaces and users has increased the spread of misinformation and fake news. Fake news refers to intentionally misleading content such as news articles that are designed to gain popularity and go viral (Tandoc Jr. et al. 2017). This can lead to serious outcomes if the fake news are considered real such as the increased risk of violence (ibid). Online hate in general is very prevalent and it takes many forms such as hate speech which is discussed in section 3.1.

One of the more concerning elements of the modern social media culture is how it affects especially young people's self-image and body satisfaction. Multiple studies show that exposure to online imagery on social media has a negative effect on the viewer's self-image (eg. Fardouly & Holland 2018; Jiotsa et al. 2021; Perloff 2014). This is often due to comparison to the idealized images presented online. It has been suggested that due to user-generated content, social media content might be even more harmful to body dissatisfaction because it is portrayed as something more authentic than mass media publications (Fardouly & Holland 2018). One phenomenon that has arisen to combat this issue is the body positivity movement. Body positivity refers to showcasing a wider array of different kinds of bodies and de-emphasizing appearance as the purpose of a body (Sastre, 2014). Although the movement has been criticized for being unable to remove appearance as the main focus and for promoting

unhealthy practices, overall body positivity is seen as a good way to promote positive body image (Cohen et al. 2021). The use of disclaimers on social media content has also been studied as a way to improve the effect of body dissatisfaction while viewing online imagery. For example, showcasing comparison images of real life to idealized online images has been shown to decrease dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Anderberg 2019).

3.1   Online Engagement and Hostile Speech

The rise of online forums has made it increasingly easy to share networks and unite with like-minded people. Social media is based on the idea of interest and engagement and algorithm models further promote grouping up by promoting similar content or content creators based on previous engagement (Herbert & Fisher-Hoyrem 2021, 2). Thus, an individual social media user has a unique interface and an experience catering for their interests and opinions. This is one of the causes of growing polarization in online communication (Bliuc et al. 2020). Polarization online is mostly connected to forms of group identity and linguistically polarized language emphasizes the use of intragroup pronouns *we* vs. *they,* certainty of expression and hostility such as swear words (ibid). The presence of outgroup dissent itself can be an indicator for online engagement meaning that an individual user might be more likely to engage with content when presented with a social group they do not identify with. For example, a study conducted on online polarization and the presence of comments shows that the participants were more likely to engage in polarized behavior and show more extreme views when presented with a comment section than without one (Asker & Dinas 2019). Homogenous groups online who share or give the implication of sharing the same moral views are more likely to result in an increase of hostile behavior from a group member such as increased numbers of hostile posts (Atari et al. 2021).

This affective polarization online has given rise to the rapid emergence of hate speech which is one of the leading issues in social media communications. This is concerning especially since research shows that hate speech is often targeted at marginalized groups (Castano-Pulgarín et al. 2021). One of the ways social media platforms are fighting against online hostility is intervening and allowing users to reflect on their engagement before posting on a platform. For example, Twitter users were 6% less likely to engage in offensive tweets when presented with the opportunity to reflect (Katsaros et al. 2021). Other studies have shown that counter speech

focused on empathy is an effective way to reduce hate speech (Hangartner et al. 2021). These kinds of anti-hostility methods however are not commonplace practices on most sites.

It is known that most online engagement stems from an affective element (Damiano et al. 2020) meaning that online content produces an emotional reaction. In terms of social media, the algorithms push for content that is engaged with whether that emotional reaction be positive or negative. For example, negative affect language and moral-emotional language are predictors of online engagement (Rathje et al. 2021). Studies show that 56% of news commenting is done to convey an emotion or an opinion (Jomini Stroud et al. 2016). Furthermore, some 40% avoid reading or commenting due to the argumentative nature of commenting culture and 47.9% believe that online anonymity raises disrespect in comments (ibid). Studies done on student online engagement show that the students conducted more careful responses when they perceived an audience (Kerawalla et al. 2009). This could further suggest that online responses are motivated by the perceived lack of an audience which allows for a more hostile approach to online conversations.

3.2 TikTok

TikTok is a short-form video app that allows users to create and upload videos ranging from 15 seconds up to 10 minutes long (Elkhazeen et al. 2022). The social media platform was created in 2016 and has since gained an increasing amount of popularity especially with the younger generation (Ng & Indran 2023). TikTok is owned by a Chinese company ByteDance who first launched the video app Douyin in China in 2016 and then released its international equivalent TikTok in 2017 (Mossou 2020). TikTok's popularity was further increased when ByteDance acquired another popular short-form video app Musical.ly in 2018 (ibid.) and merged it with TikTok in the same year (Savic 2021). TikTok has been a huge success. It was the most downloaded app of 2019 and 2020 (Jain & Arakkal 2022; Talarico 2021) and especially the Covid-19 pandemic and isolation measures made the platform even more popular (Quiroz 2020). Savic (2021) suggests that TikTok's popularity can be explained by the accessibility of good quality cameras on our phones and a preference to consume more visual content. He also points out how the emphasis on creativity and play promoted positive adult interpretations of the platform which allowed children and teenagers to use the platform without adult intrusion.

TikTok is most known for lip-synching, dance videos, (Talarico 2021) trends and challenges (Elkhazeen 2022). The TikTok user interface allows an individual user to see a specifically curated *For You Page* (FYP) that promotes endless scrolling of new recommended content (Zhang & Liu 2021). Thus, it's not surprising that TikTok users spend on average 95 minutes per day on the app (Doyle 2023). TikTok is known as a platform for teenagers and young people (eg.Kennedy 2020; Boffone 2022, 2; Ng & Indran 2023) so the effects of spending so much time online could be concerning since younger people are more impressionable (Weimann & Masri 2023) and can be in contact with negative influences online. The TikTok user model allows for any kind of video to appear on the FYP so even though TikTok has online communities, there is no guarantee that a posted video will reach its target audience. The commenting function is available to all users unless the content creator removes the comments from an individual video in which case there will be no comments at all. The user can also delete individual comments or reply to a comment with a new video. Lastly, comments that can be seen going against the community guidelines of TikTok can be reported and marked as hidden in the comment sections. The community guidelines, meaning the rules of TikTok, for example ban discriminatory and hateful behavior on the platform.

It is clear that TikTok has had a huge effect on mainstream culture in general. Songs and artists that gain popularity on TikTok can transform this popularity into commercial success in a way unlike other social media platforms (Boffone 2022, 4). TikTok is also known for its ability to allow users to form communities such as BookTok, CottageCore and Wellness TikTok that have been appealing to older users as well. These communities can be directly translated into real life marketing strategies as we can see for example from the BookTok displays in bookstores (ibid.). Indeed, brands have noticed the opportunities and success TikTok can create due to high user engagement on the platform (Wahid et al 2022) and young people have responded positively to brands and companies creating entertaining marketing content (Salokangas 2023).

TikTok is not without its fair share of problems. Due to its younger audience, concerns have been expressed about the impressions young people can get on the platform. For example, advertisement and brand deal content can be difficult to distinguish from other content which can have an effect on the way young people view a product and its properties (Van Der Bend et al. 2023). The nature of trends and challenges can also promote unhealthy or even potentially dangerous behavior such as the Tide Pod challenge where users were prompted to consume

laundry detergent or the Benadryl challenge which caused serious and potentially lethal consequences (Elkhazeen et al. 2022).

The effect of TikTok content on body image concerns has also been discussed for example consuming fitness inspiration content has been linked to appearance comparison and negative mood (Pryde & Prichard 2022) and a thin line exists between eating disorder recovery content and content promoting disordered eating (Herrick et al. 2020). Body positivity content on TikTok has also been stated to have unrealistic ideals and not enough diversity (Harriger et al. 2023). TikTok's lack of weight diversity and promotion of weight loss has also been linked to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction (Minadeo & Pope 2022). These concerns showcase how deeply body and nutrition representations online affect an individual content consumer and, on the other hand, how allowing this online space is for new kinds of representations. Further concerns have been made about hostile speech on TikTok, a phenomenon which was discussed in the previous section. As a young platform, TikTok has not had extensive anti-hostility measures so it can be easier to spread hate on TikTok than on other platforms (Weimann & Masri 2020). For example, ageism has been researched on TikTok through #Boomer and #OkBoomer hashtags (Ng & Indran 2022;2023) as well as disability hate speech (Raffone 2022).

3.3   Mukbang and Other Food Representations Online

Food is a popular content topic online. From sharing a picture of a plate of food to reviewing new food items, food is an easy way to produce content for various social media platforms (Winzer et al. 2022). The most common themes for food posts online are extraordinary foods, social events such as going out to eat, advice about food and food related emotions (Barre et al. 2016). Even before social media, food has had widespread visibility in the traditional media through various cooking and food shows on television since the 1940s (Park 2021, 83). Their popularity can be explained by the desire for viewers to enjoy a mixture of traditional values and hedonistic pleasures all at the same time by watching someone else cooking and eating and enduring the consequences (ibid.). Social media has allowed users to tap into that market and create various food content online such as recipes or *What I Eat in a Day* videos in which users document their daily food consumption (Davis et al. 2023).

One of the most popular eating-related online phenomena in recent years is *mukbang*. Mukbang refers to a South Korean phenomenon where individuals record themselves eating excessively large amounts of food usually for an online audience (Strand & Gustafsson 2020). Mukbang gained popularity in South Korea in the late 2000s when Korean streamers *broadcast jockeys* began streaming themselves eating online (Park 2021, 81) and the phenomenon then spread online and gained global popularity. Part of the reason why mukbang originally became so popular is that socializing is seen as part of the activity of going out to eat and mukbang provides a way for people to feel that social aspect while eating alone (Jackson 2018). Even though mukbangs could be produced with standard size everyday meals, most of them are made with excessive amounts of unhealthy food in particular. Mukbang literally translates to "eating and broadcasting" (ibid.) or "an eating show" (Strand & Gustafsson 2020) which emphasizes the performative nature of the food choices and the activity of eating. Studies have shown that users engage more with food content that is unhealthy (Pancer et al. 2022; Murphy et al. 2020) and *mukbangers*, people who create mukbangs online, utilize that by mainly showcasing energy-dense foods, such as fried foods. This is similar to *What I Eat in a Day* videos that focus on eating, rather than lifestyle, which often showcase an excessive consumption of food (Davis et al. 2023). Mukbangs can, thus, have multiple functions such as entertainment or providing social comfort.

Showcasing food and eating on social media has raised concerns about its link to balanced eating habits. Studies suggest that low energy-dense food imagery on social media could promote eating of low energy-dense foods (Hawkins et al. 2021). Social media, however, is much more known for the opposite showcasing foods low in nutritional value and promoting them especially to children (eg. Van der Bend et al. 2023; Winzer et al. 2022; Brooks et al. 2022) which can influence what kinds of foods they will prefer. In adults, problematic mukbang watching is linked to disordered eating (Kircaburun et al. 2021) such as binge eating and purging but also to not eating while watching mukbangs (Von Ash et al. 2023). Mukbangs could therefore be watched to satisfy eating needs in real-life (Kircaburun et al. 2022) and to help restrict eating (Strand & Gustafsson 2020) which can cause further issues. Like other social media platforms, TikTok has been criticized for lack of representation and promotion of unhealthy eating patterns and negative body image. To combat these issues TikTok has banned pro-eating disorder hashtags (Herrick et al. 2020) and attached eating disorder disclaimers to weight loss content. Despite these efforts, much still exists to be done about food, body, and eating representation on the platform. It is thus crucial that more information about TikTok

communication culture is gathered. The next section introduces content analysis, which is the main methodological approach used for this study.

4   Content Analysis

There are various methods to conduct linguistic research. Content analysis is used as the methodological framework for this research mostly due to its ability to be both quantitative and qualitative. Both content analysis and discourse analysis can be used to analyze text. Even though there are many similarities in the two methods of searching for meaning in text, the overall approaches and goals are very different and produce different kinds of results. Content analysis tries to locate meanings in text while discourse analysis looks at how meanings are created through text (Tuomi & Saarijärvi 2009). Thus, content analysis is a suitable approach for a study trying to locate the prevalence of weight stigma in textual data. Furthermore, since this research aims to locate the most common themes of stigmatized conversation, thematic analysis is employed. Even though classifying data into themes and topics is already ingrained into the format of content analysis, separating thematic analysis into its own section provides insight into both how theme formation is constructed in scientific research but also how complex analyzing those themes can be and establishes thematic analysis as a research method of its own.

4.1   Approaches to Content Analysis

Content analysis is a popular way to conduct text-based research by extracting meaning from content (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). It is widely used as a qualitative research tool although it can be used for quantitative research as well (eg. Carroll & Freeman 2016; Döring & Mohseni 2020). In short, content analysis systematically reviews content and identifies themes or recurring patterns of meaning (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The themes and patterns are then analyzed, and conclusions are made based on them. Content analysis is a wide term and refers to multiple different approaches for example, content analysis can be *conventional* where textual data guides the coding process, *directed* where there already exists some codes or themes according to which the data is categorized or *summative* where, certain words or other textual features are counted and quantified, and then further analyzed for their meaning (ibid.). Looking at content this way through counting and comparing for meaning can also be referred to as manifest content analysis (Bengtsson 2016).

In this thesis, a directed content analysis approach is employed where the data is categorized into an existing categorization model by Wotanis and McMillan (2014). In their study, Wotanis

and McMillan looked at gender dynamics and online hostility on YouTube, a video-based platform. They compared two popular creators, Jenna Mourey and Ryan Higa by collecting the hundred most recent comments in each of the creator's top ten videos. These comments were then categorized based on their sentiment thus creating a categorization model dividing the comments into either supportive, critical/hostile, or omitting the comments from the research altogether for example if the comment appeared incomprehensible. The categorization was then used to quantitively analyze the online content. This 2014 study utilizing content analysis inspired Döring and Mohseni to replicate the categorization on two occasions (2019; 2020) showing how versatile and useful content analysis is for research on online cultures and language.

 Although in this study content analysis is used as a tool for text analysis, content analysis is suitable for a variety of multimedia analysis such as audio, image, and video analysis as well (Li 2017). Due to the wide methodology and general approach used in content analysis, some suggest that it is more so a general framework of looking at content rather than a specific method (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). Practices of systematically reviewing text date all the way back to the 17th century (Krippendorff 2019, 22). Nowadays new developments to the methodology include utilizing new technologies to help with automating the process (Riffe et al. 2019, 3). When conducting research using content analysis, a researcher must first decide on the meaningful features of content for their study. Then, by assigning codes to the content units, they must classify the data before they divide it into different themes or types based on what the researcher is looking for (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). These topics of interest can be similarities or differences or for example new or recurring topics in data (ibid.). The popularity of content analysis can be accredited on one hand to its simplicity and straightforwardness and on the other its flexibility as a research method (Vaismoradi et al. 2013) and content analysis has been widely used in applied language studies. Content analysis is also a popular method for conducting discourse related Master's theses (eg. Iso-Kouvola & Säilä 2023; Kareranta 2021; Väisänen 2021) and for using alongside other research methods (eg. Peltomäki 2018) such as critical discourse analysis (CDA). In addition to that, content analysis has been used extensively for analyzing online comments (eg. Scott et al. 2021; Döring & Möhseni 2019; Berdida et al. 2022).

4.1.1 Thematic Analysis

In content analysis, themes are formed based on recurring topics or attitudes in the data that has gone through the categorization coding process (Graneheim et al. 2017). While categorization of things such as topics, attitudes and experiences can be seen as an already existing theme formation, these codes or categories usually are absent of meaning which is what creates actual themes (ibid.). Thematic analysis refers to a qualitative research approach identifying those meanings and systematically organizing them to see collective and shared views and experiences (Braun & Clark 2012, 57). Although also part of content analysis, thematic analysis can be used as a data analysis tool of its own. The clear definitions and boundaries between content analysis and thematic analysis remain undefined (Vaismoradi et al. 2013) but content analysis and thematic analysis analyze and interpret meanings in different ways. Content analysis is usually seen as a direct representation of research data while thematic analysis goes further into interpretation (Crowe et al. 2015). Thematic analysis, much like content analysis, is both flexible and accessible and can be used to research a variety of topics such as social media content (eg. Herrick et al. 2020) literature (Sodhi & Tang 2018) and healthcare (Braun & Clarke 2020). Although content analysis can be used both qualitatively and quantitatively, thematic analysis is mostly used as a qualitative method.

5 Material and Methods

This section introduces this thesis' material and specific methods before going into ethical considerations about conducting research online and on social media. Firstly, this section provides some additional background information on other studies about weight bias that have been conducted in a social media environment before going into the research questions and hypotheses of this study. Then the research data is introduced in subsection 5.1. and research methods, including the aforementioned Wotanis and McMillan's (2014) hate speech categorization model, are introduced in 5.2. Lastly, the ethical considerations subsection 5.3. goes into why it is especially important to carefully consider research ethics when dealing with social media data.

5.1 Research Data

The data for this study was collected from four content creators on the social media platform TikTok. Two of the selected creators were larger than normative bodied creators, one male and one female, and two of them were normative bodied creators with the same gender division. As of 2023, no content processing tools allowing for body size categorization are in existence, meaning it is impossible for a current software to label someone as belonging or not belonging to a normative representation of size. For this reason, the content creators were chosen manually by the researcher. The content creators chosen for this research were *@realnikocadoavocado*, *@shirinjka*, *@keilapacheco*, and *@stevensushi*. The creators were sampled from TikTok by using different search terms which were *mukbang*, *mukbanger*, *big girl mukbang* and *big boy mukbang*. All the chosen creators produce mukbangs but additionally also other kinds of food content such as food reviews. Both chosen male creators are known for their performative antics on camera, for example @realnicocadoavocado utilizes a lot of sharp movements and exaggerated facial expressions whereas @stevensushi creates performative sounds while eating such as moans to react to the food. In general, finding male mukbangers without these antics turned out to be quite troublesome and raises questions about whether this kind of performance is needed for a male creator to succeed in this online space. On the other hand, female creators utilizing the same kind of exaggerated performance in their content was equally difficult to locate. Both @shirinjka and @keilapacheco have a calm personality in their mukbang videos with the difference of @shirinjka preferring talking to the camera while eating whereas

@keilapacheco oftentimes chooses to stay quiet while taking exaggeratedly large bites and showcasing the sounds she makes while eating such as crunching or chewing sounds. All of the creators showcase multiple different kinds of locations for eating in their videos but most commonly their mukbangs are filmed either at home or in their cars.

The creators were chosen due to their large popularity of over 100,000 followers to ensure that firstly, there are enough comments per video to look at and secondly, so that the comments hold some variability. Due to the large number of comments (70–3562) per video, standardization on comment collection was employed by collecting 150 comments from each creator, 50 newest comments from the three newest eating videos, making the data 600 comments in total from a total of 12 videos. This ensured some variation in the comments received by each creator as well as enough data to look at thematic differences. Any videos that had less than 50 comments or that did not focus on performative eating, such as food reviews, were omitted from analysis because the data needed to be comparable to produce reliable results. The length of the collected comments varied between 1 and 25 words each.

The creators chosen for this research publish their content in English, so the comments chosen naturally were in English as well. Any foreign language comments in the data selection were omitted since this study focuses on the sentiment in English language comments. Furthermore, any emojis or other visual emotion representation modes present in the comments were omitted as well since even though emojis are a helpful way to add cues of intent and emotion online (Alshenqeeti 2016) due to the scope of this research, adding emojis into the analysis was not feasible as it would require an added layer into the analysis. For ethical reasons, all the content creators were informed of their role in this research and offered an opportunity not to take part if they so wished, a so called, opt-out method which allows for informing the participants which is in line with research ethics but without any additional work for the creators. None of the content creators responded. For ethical reasons as well, all the usernames of the commenters were omitted from the data and no actual real-life comments were showcased in this research. Instead, if an example of a type of comment was needed, it was manually created by the researcher to showcase a feature existing in the data. The ethical considerations are discussed more in depth in section 5.3.

5.2   Research Methods

Methodology-wise, this is a mixed methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The data was first analysed using quantitative content analysis before looking at the data qualitatively with thematic analysis. In content analysis, the data is sorted based on its distinctive features. In this study, the focus was on the supportive, hostile, or neutral sentiment, implicit bias and the perceived target and theme of the comments. For this approach, an online hate comment categorization model created by Wotanis and McMillan (2014) was used as a base that was modified to fit this research. In the original model, there were three categories: supportive, critical/hostile and omitted from analysis. For this study, a *neutral* category was added to represent neutral statements present in the comments such as legitimate questions or neutral statements about video content and using the video to formulate a joke. Using the video content as a punchline is especially popular since TikTok videos are short in nature. This punchline is usually in the form of statement plus colon for example. "me when I wake up:". It is important to note that this kind of humor-based category can be hard to distinguish from other types of humor in the comments that are derogotary in nature. However, grouping this kind of joke into the critical/hostile category is not correct either since the sentiment is not critical or hostile in nature. Additionally, an extra form of supportive comment, a supportive general statement, was added for this study due to a need for this kind of category in the categorization process. The modified hate speech categorization model used in this research is presented in table 1.

Table 1. *Hate Speech Categorization Model (Adapted from Wotanis & McMillan's 2014 categorization)*

Type of Feedback	Type of Comment	Example
Supportive	Compliment: video content	"great video"
	Compliment: personality of video performer	"I love how happy he is"
	Compliment: appearance of video performer	"you are so cute"
	Supportive general statement	"I hope you're having a wonderful day"
Critical/Hostile	Criticism: video content	"this is so gross"

	Criticism: personality of video performer	"you are boring"
	Criticism: appearance of video performer	"your acne is so bad"
	Inappropriate remark: racist or sexist	"you should go back to the kitchen"
Neutral	Neutral statement or question about video content	"can you try domino's?"
	Using content for a joke	"me when I wake up:"
Omitted from analysis	Spam	"click the link to win"
	Incomprehensible or unclassifiable remarks	"yeah you when I"

After categorization, the data was analysed based on the variables of body size and gender and the similarities and differences between the two were looked at such as the number of both hostile and supportive comments, the intended target of the comments and the perceived nature of the comments such as the humorous and neutral intent. This was done to look at the main focus of this study, weight bias, but also to figure out the role gender plays in these weight bias manifestations. It is important to note that the categorization process required careful consideration since some of the categories and actual comments can be overlapping on their sentiments. A singular comment could at the same time be supportive and critical such as when a commenter states their stance *this is not a hate comment but you should lose weight*. Even though these kinds of comments rarely occurred, they were looked at through their stigmatizing effect meaning the comment was categorized based on the critical component. Furthermore, it is good to remember that just because a comment is deemed critical does not mean that it has an implication of weight bias in it. A high number of critical comments in general, however, can be due to weight bias. There were no instances of uncategorizable comments in this data set. The elements of categorization are further discussed in section 6 where the results are stated.

After the quantitative content analysis, the data was then further analysed qualitatively with a thematic analysis approach to look at recurring themes of weight related speech and how they could relate to weight bias specially building on the notions from previous research. To become

a theme, there needed to be multiple comments stating a similar notion. These comments, however, did not have to exists in all four or all two creators' comment sections, when looking at specific size or gender differences. A recurrent theme in only one creator's comment section could constitute a theme if it was deemed important for the results of this study. The themes did not have to exist in parallels either, but a theme could be formed if it was present in all the creator's comment sections forming a general common theme for all creators which was done in this study as well. The size-based themes, however, were created based on notions that were not existing in the data of the counterpart meaning that a theme stated in the larger than normative communication did not exist in the normative bodied communication. The themes were constructed by a careful consideration of the comments after their categorization process was finished. Some of the notions considered in the thematic analysis were what does the sentiment of the comment say, who is the object and subject of the comment, how is size represented in the comment and what is the supposed function of the comment. The specific themes are presented and discussed in section 6.4.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical aspects to be considered when conducting research on social media and even more so when the topic of research is a group suffering from stigmatization. As a researcher you must make sure that the research does not contribute to the stigmatization of the group, after all the general ethical principles of research outline that no significant harm should be done to the research participants (TENK 2019). This principle is also important for the commenters whether the comments studied are morally right in this case meaning the level of hostility presented in the comments. To ensure this, this research will only look at numbers, topics and themes and no real-life comments will be featured in this paper. As stated previously, all examples that are showcased to bring clarity to the results or discussion are formulated by the researcher based indirectly on the research data meaning that the considered feature is replicated using different words while retaining the general sentiment of the comment. This will guarantee some level of anonymity to the commenters. There are also no ways of determining whether a social media user is underage so for this reason as well anonymity is preferred. The specific content creators however are named due to multiple reasons. Firstly, the data collection for this study requires the content creators to be specified before data collection. As of now, there are no data collection tools that would automatically sort visual data based on body size and nevertheless, in terms of TikTok, automated data collection without the

Application Programming Interface (API) is against the Terms of Service (Greenman, 2022). API is a mechanism that allows an additional software to access and handle information from another program. Without access to TikTok's API, human agency is needed for data collection. Furthermore, labeling someone as normative or larger than normative requires knowledge on social norms but it also requires ethical consideration since it puts the researcher in a position of power thus naming the creators increases research transparency. The creators were notified of their comment sections being used for this research and given the opportunity to decline research participation.

In general, social media can pose challenges in data collection since most social media platforms are fairly accessible. Content may be viewed simply by accessing the site or at most the platform will require the user to create a login and accept the terms of service. Using data collected from social media brings up issues of copyright and privacy. Even though most social media platforms have the legal right to use all content on their platforms, the ownership of the content posted is with the content creator (Gardoce, 2021). This is another reason why it is important to name and contact the content creators whose comment sections are used for data collection in this study. Ravn et al. (2019) also suggest an informed approach into studying "publicly available data" by engaging but not necessarily reproducing the content and informing the content authors of the research. Both steps are done in this research firstly by informing the content creators about this study and secondly by not reproducing any real-life comments to ensure that such publicly available data is handled with the right discretion. In general, TikTok as a platform encourages research and wants to increase its transparency (TikTok, 2023) However, research conducted on TikTok cannot be made with commercial intent or for profit (TikTok) which this thesis study is not.

6   Results

The results of the content and thematic analyses are presented in this section. The first three subsections focus on the quantitative content analysis where general results and both of the research variables, body size and gender, are considered in their own sections before moving to the final subsection 6.4. which showcases the results of the thematic analysis by presenting themes arising from the research data. The results are complemented by a few set examples that, as stated in the previous sections, are for ethical reasons manually formulated by the researcher based on the existing data. No actual real-life comments are featured to ensure the commenters' anonymity. The subsections in this chapter are divided in accordance with the research questions and the hypotheses to provide clear results which are further discussed in detail in the discussion section later on. But first, some general points about the data categorization, analysis process, and overall results are mentioned.

The analyzed dataset consisted of 580 comments in total after the categorization process was finished. That means that 20 out of the total 600 comments were omitted from analysis. Even though all of the content creators received some comments which were omitted according to the categorization model, @realnikocadoavocado received 14 omitted comments with the other three creators receiving two omitted comments each. This omission of comments could contribute to an information bias in the quantitative analysis results and is good to keep in mind while examining the results and their distribution. However, the need to omit itself could imply the prevalence of a specific kind of user behavior in the creator's comment section that could be due to for example his expressive and performative behavior, popularity and large follower base or his fame as one of the most prevalent mukbangers in the online space. The omission thus also gives information about user behavior.

In addition to omitted comments, the categorization process itself is not as clear-cut as the simple coded categories could imply. The categories are flexible and overlapping and many comments could very well be placed in multiple categories. For example, *love your content but aren't you worried about your weight* has a dual notion of being supportive of the creator's content but also being critical about the creator's behavior which in this case would be the creator not being worried about their body size. Wotanis and McMillan (2014) themselves counted comments that could fit into multiple categories twice in their research about gendered online hate speech. This research, however, only places each comment into one existing

category (Table 1) and marks it as supportive, critical/hostile, or neutral since the focus is on the implicit or explicit weight bias of the comments thus making the assumption of weight bias either being present or nonexistent in the comment. If an individual contributes to stigma or stigmatizing behavior, it has a stigma-enforcing effect on the phenomenon as a whole. So, for example the earlier example with a dual notion showcases how the inherent weight bias in the latter half of the comment undermines the supportive statement in which case the comment was placed in the critical category aimed at personality or behavior. The stigma-enforcing effect is important since, as discussed in the theoretical background section on weight stigma, weight exists in an interesting juxtaposition where weight stigma enforcing behavior is seen as socially acceptable even if it is shown to be harmful for the stigmatized individuals. Furthermore, much of weight bias behavior remains hidden under well-meaning intentions or words and thus it is important to note that some individuals may not be aware of their stigma enforcing behavior such as when it comes to giving unsolicited health-based advice.

6.1   General Results

The division of general comment sentiments of supportive, critical/hostile, and neutral are presented in Table 2. In the following tables, gender is marked F for female and M for male whereas body size is marked as LTNB for larger than normative bodied and NB for normative bodied. From the results in Table 2, it can be seen that by far the most supportive comments, 55 %, were received by @keilapacheco who represents the female normative bodied creator. She was also the only content creator who had a majority of supportive comments. The rest of the content creators all had a majority of critical/hostile comments with both the male creators, @realnikocadoavocado and @stevensushi, having close to half of all comments critical with 47%. The larger than normative female creator, @shirinjka, was not far behind with 42% critical/hostile comments out of all her received comments.   In general, the female creators received more supportive comments than the male creators even though both @shirinjka and @stevensushi received over a third supportive comments with 37 % and 35 % respectively. The least number of supportive comments was received by @realnikocadoavocado whose supportive comments made up about a fifth of all his comments which is considerably less than the other content creators. In contrast, he received the most neutral coded comments which made up close to a third of his comments with 31%. @keilapacheco was not far behind with 28% of all her comments.

Table 2. *The Division of Comment Sentiment Categories within the Content Creators.*

Creator Sentiment	@realnikocadoavocado (N=136) LTNB M	@shirinjka (N=148) LTNB F	@stevensushi (N=148) NB M	@keilapacheco (N=148) NB F
Supportive	(30) 22 %	(55) 37 %	(52) 35 %	(82) 55 %
Critical/Hostile	(64) 47 %	(62) 42 %	(69) 47 %	(25) 17 %
Neutral	(42) 31 %	(31) 21 %	(27) 18 %	(41) 28 %

Based on the general comment sentiments, the content creators can be grouped into three: @keilapacheco received a majority of supportive and a minority of critical comments, @realnikonacoavocado received a majority of critical comments close to half of all his comments with the neutral comments making up almost a third, and lastly, @shirinjka and @stevensushi received a high number of both supportive and critical comments in relation to the neutral category. These results could indicate that a normative size predicts more supportive comments for the creator. Furthermore, the same could be said for being female. The number of critical/hostile comments on the other hand could be linked to being male instead of a specific body size since both of the male creators received the same number of critical comments, a result which is unexpected since earlier research shows weight stigmatization to be more prevalent when it comes to males (Hussin et al. 2011) meaning that larger size-based differences in the male creator results were expected. Furthermore, since the larger than normative female creator received close to the same amount of critical comments as both the male creators, 42% out of all her comments compared to 17% in her counterpart, the normative bodied female creator, the results correspond to earlier research which indicates that weight stigma can be more aggressive towards women (Jeon et al. 2018) meaning that the differences in reaction are large unlike with the male creators. The more specific findings based on our variables, body size and gender, and specific comment categories are discussed in detail in the following sections 6.2. and 6.3.

6.2 Size-Based Differences

A closer inspection of the results shows that examining comments based on body size provides interesting and meaningful differences in the comment sentiments. Whereas examining general comment sentiments showed that a larger body size could indicate a lower amount of supportive comments in males and a higher amount of critical/hostile comments in females, looking into the more specific types of comments shows what kinds of differences there are in the specific comment categories which answers the first research question that aims to find out the differences between larger than normative and normative bodied creator comment sentiments. The division of comment sentiments by body size can be found in Table 3. The results show that normative bodied creators receive 12 percentage points more compliments on video content and three times more compliments on their appearance than larger than normative creators. Furthermore, larger than normative creators received 9 percentage points more critical/hostile comments on their personality/behavior and five times more critical comments on their appearance. Lastly, normative bodied creators received 4 percentage points more neutral statements or questions while larger creators' content was used for a joke four times more than normative bodied creators' content. The amount of comment sentiments for *compliment: personality or behavior*, *supportive general statement*, and *criticism: video content* remained similar for both body size representations. Only one creator received inappropriate remarks which will be discussed more with themes in 6.4.

Table 3. *The Division of Comment Sentiments by Body Size*

		Body Size	
Sentiment	**Comment Category**	Larger than normative bodied creators (N=284)	Normative bodied creators (N=296)
Supportive	Compliment: video content	(48) 17%	(86) 29%
	Compliment: personality or behavior of video performer	(27) 10%	(28) 9%
	Compliment: appearance of video performer	(6) 2%	(18) 6%
	Supportive general statement	(4) 1%	(2) 1%

Critical/Hostile	Criticism: video content	(39) 14%	(38) 13%
	Criticism: personality or behaviour of video performer	(74) 26%	(51) 17%
	Criticism: appearance of video performer	(13) 5%	(2) 1%
	Inappropriate remark: racist or sexist	(0) 0%	(3) 1%
Neutral	Neutral statement or question about video content	(49) 17%	(63) 21%
	Using content for a joke	(24) 8%	(5) 2%

The most common specific comment sentiment category received by normative bodied individuals was compliment on video content followed by neutral statement or question about video content. For the larger than normative creators, the most common category was criticism of personality or behavior followed by both neutral statement or question and compliment on video content. From this we can see that body size can contribute to both how the creator and their content are seen and received by the audience. A creator existing in a larger body can receive more individual focused criticism and objectification than a normative bodied creator who receives compliments directed at their produced content which remains outside of their own personality or character.

These results go along with earlier research that see negative connotations of excess weight as a pervasive and continuous theme in weight stigma research (Lazarus et al. 2021; Jeon et al. 2021). Furthermore, body objectification remains a central topic as it is suffered by both males and females who encounter weight stigma (Wanniarachchi et al. 2023). The research data further shows the differences in the critical nature of larger than normative and normative bodied creators. For example, in the criticism of personality or behavior category, the larger creators received comments such as *you need help, learn how to chill, eat better* whereas in the same category the normative bodied creators received comments such as *I can't see you swallowing the food, why are you making sounds when you eat, it's not as serious as you're making it seem*. The examples *learn how to chill* and *it's not as serious as you're making it seem* are similar in nature but for example the imperative form in the first one conveys more

aggression. All these examples further show how the larger creators can receive more hurtful personal attacks as comments while the normative creators receive doubts about their authenticity or statements which are often aimed at factors outside of their character such as the sounds and actions in the previous examples. Especially doubts about whether the female normative bodied creator was truly swallowing the foods were pervasive in the data implying a prevalent weight stigma ideology of eating specific foods automatically leading to a change in appearance or body size. These kinds of gendered differences in the results are discussed in the next section.

6.3   Gender-Based Differences

The observed gender-based differences answer the second research question which asks what kinds of gendered differences can be found in the comments, some of which were already observed such as the male higher prevalence of hostile speech and the female greater range in reactions based on body size. Looking at gender-based differences on their own helps to determine whether or not the specified phenomenon of weight bias in online comments results from a person's body size, gender or whether those two have any interplay according to this data. Nevertheless, based on existing research, weight stigma is a gendered issue where especially females suffer from increased hostility and unmet social expectations (De Brún et al. 2013) which is important to note in this study as well.

The division of comment sentiments by gender can be observed from Table 4. The most common comment categories for the female creators were *compliment: video content* with 28% and *neutral statement or question* with 23%. For the male creators the most common comment category was *criticism: personality or behavior* and *compliment: video content*. It is noteworthy that when the observed variable is changed from body size to gender, the female results show similarity with the normative bodied results in the previous section and the male results on the other hand show similarity with the larger than normative bodied results. This can be due to multiple reasons. Earlier research shows that males can endure significantly more fat stigmatization than females (Hussin et al. 2011). However, the amount of stigmatization does not automatically contribute to the supposed effects of stigmatization and how harmful they are since female weight stigmatization is known to be more derogatory in nature (Jeon et al. 2018).

The female creators received more comments on all of the supportive comment categories. Consequently, the male creators received more comments on all of the critical/hostile comment categories than their female counterparts. As for the neutral category, the female creators received more comments on *neutral statements or questions* whereas the male creators received more comments that used their content for a joke, a fact which can be explained by the proportionally high number of joke-based comments on @realnikokacoavocado's results. Since the results are so equally divided based on sentiment, a more thorough reading of individual results is needed.

Table 4. *The Division of Comment Sentiments by Gender*

		Female creators (N=296)			Male creators (N=284)		
		@shirinjka LTNB N=148	@keilapacheco NB N=148	All F	@realnikocadoavocado LTNB N=136	@stevensushi NB N=148	All M
Supportive	Compliment: video content	(34) 23%	(49) 33%	(83) 28%	(14) 10%	(37) 27%	(51) 18%
	Compliment: personality or behavior of video performer	(16) 11%	(17) 11%	(33) 11%	(11) 8%	(11) 8%	(22) 8%
	Compliment: appearance of video performer	(3) 2%	(14) 9%	(17) 6%	(3) 2%	(4) 3%	(7) 2%
	Supportive general statement	(2) 1%	(2) 1%	(4) 1%	(2) 1%	(0) 0%	(2) 1%
Critical/ Hostile	Criticism: video content	(24) 16%	(7) 5%	(31) 10%	(15) 11%	(31) 23%	(46) 16%
	Criticism: personality or behavior of video performer	(32) 22%	(17) 11%	(49) 17%	(42) 31%	(34) 25%	(76) 27%

	Criticism: appearance of video performer	(6) 4%	(1) 1%	(7) 2%	(7) 5%	(1) 1%	(8) 3%
	Inappropriate remark: racist or sexist	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(3) 2%	(3) 1%
Neutral	Neutral statement or question about video content	(28) 19%	(39) 26%	(67) 23%	(21) 15%	(24) 18%	(45) 16%
	Using content for a joke	(3) 2%	(2) 1%	(5) 2%	(21) 15%	(3) 2%	(24) 8%

A closer look at the results shows that the individual differences between creators vary drastically. @keilapacheco received more compliments on video content and over four times more compliments on appearance than @shirinjka. @shirinjka on the other hand, received close to double the amount of criticism of personality or behavior, three times more criticism on video content and while @keilapacheco received close to no criticism on her appearance, appearance criticism made up 4% of @shirinjka's overall comments. For the male creators, @stevensushi received more comments both on video content compliments, 17 percentage points more than @realnikocadoavocado, and on video content criticism, half more than his male counterpart. @realnikocadoavocado on the other hand received more criticism for both his personality or behavior and his appearance. His content was also used for a joke over seven times more than @stevensushi's content.

The general result of males receiving more critical/hostile comments is in line with earlier research which suggests that negative sentiment is slightly more common in males (Wanniarachchi et al. 2023). However, after looking at the individual creator received comment categories and their variability, it can be seen that differences based explicitly on gender are rare. Only in the comment category compliment of personality or behavior, female creators systematically received more comments than male creators and even that difference was only 3 percentage points between genders. This result is surprising for several reasons. Multiple studies show that weight stigmatization is experienced differently between genders where males are more likely to be criticized for heterosocial skills such as annoyance and females are more criticized for characteristics such as laziness (Jeon et al. 2018). Females also more often find

fatness linked with aspects of appearance (Wanniarachchi et al. 2023) which cannot be seen in this dataset neither in the positive or negative sense. Lastly, females are exposed to more sexual and sexualized responses online (Wotanis & McMillan 2024; Wanniarachchi et al. 2023) of which the only examples in this dataset are targeted at the normative bodied male creator which is surprising but can be due to the limited amount of data. This is discussed further in the next section.

6.4   Themes Present in Communication

This section moves from looking at the data quantitatively to delving into it with an inductive thematic analysis, letting the data showcase and form the themes that are presented here as weight bias implications. In general, multiple themes were recognized from the data set. These themes were divided into two general themes that were recurrent: food appreciation and meta commentary, three larger than normative bodied creators' themes: advice, self-responsibility and disappointment, and humor, and three normative bodied creators' themes: disbelief, performance admiration, and inappropriate remarks. These themes can be seen from Table 5.

Table 5. *Themes Present in the Dataset Divided by Body Size*

	Larger than normative bodied creators	Normative bodied creators
Theme 1	Food appreciation	
Theme 2	Meta commentary	
Theme 3	Advice	Disbelief
Theme 4	Self-responsibility & Disappointment	Performance admiration
Theme 5	Humor	Inappropriate remarks

The first general theme occurring in the data set, food appreciation was by far the most common recurrence on both analyzed body representations. Food appreciation refers to admiration of the eaten food items in ways such as: *omg that look's so good, I would kill for that, that slaps so hard*. Slaps, in this context, refers to something that is excellent or very good. Even though this kind of appreciation does not necessarily focus on body size or weight, it is important to note it because it is a very prevalent theme that was found in all of the creators' comment sections. Body size and the performative action as well as the showcased food items thus are

differentiated which allows the content creator to be separated from their physical appearance meaning that appreciation can be aimed at either the subject, object or the action. This implies that even creators suffering from weight stigmatization can prove successful in online performative eating spaces if the action (performative eating) or the object (the food item) is preferable.

The second general theme, meta commentary, contrasts this notion of identity and content separation and explicitly highlights weight bias implications for the content consumers online. In this study, meta commentary refers solely to comments made about weight and weight bias and not to other kinds of meta commentary that could exist in online comments. Meta commentary thus makes the implicit notions of weight bias explicit by stating them out loud. This is done through comments such as: *why do larger creators get more hate than skinny ones, no one would bat an eye if they were skinny, these comments would be different if they gained some weight*. This clear emphasis on weight bias serves as an interesting feature for this kind of research due to its dual nature and what it implies. For the larger creators, the comments have a supportive element, with the commenter exposing stigmatizing and harmful constructions with the supposed aim to decrease them. For the normative bodied creators, on the other hand, the comments can portray as social critique which scolds the other commenters but also the content creator's identity attaching a label of responsibility for other people's behavior.

Having considered the general themes of this data set, I will now consider the themes of both body types separately. For the larger than normative creators, advice was a central theme in the data. Advice refers to comments that offer unsolicited educational information such as: *you need to exercise and eat less, you just need to move more, try eating something green*. Some of the comments went even further and expressed worry about the creator using emotive language such as: *dear please for your own good, think about dieting*. Lastly, some comments utilized the previously mentioned meta commentary strategy by providing advice but explicitly stating that it is well meaning: *this is not a hate comment, you need to eat less for your own health*. The occurrence of advice is in line with earlier research that sees trying to educate larger individuals as a common form of weight bias and a larger person may feel victimized by these attempts (Wanniarachchi et al. 2023). Usually this implies that an outsider has more health information than the larger individual. Furthermore, the offered advice does not take into account the complex nature of weight fluctuations and only states strategies that can be considered common knowledge such as *eat less*.

Self-responsibility and disappointment are grouped as one theme that refers to comments that emphasize the creator's own role in their physical outcomes. These include comments such as: *they are never losing weight are they, I miss who you used to be, they are an adult, if only you ate more vegetables, you're so young do you ever worry about your size*. These comments emphasize the creator's agency in portraying a socially acceptable image or more specifically a lack of such an effort. For example, referring to the creator's age implies that they should 'know better' or that they 'should have learned by now' how to present themselves publicly. Some form of disappointment could also be found from the normative male creator's comments, but this was mostly aimed at their behavior through comments such as *that food is not keto* which is not size-based self-responsibility or disappointment. Earlier research shows that individual responsibility is a key belief in weight bias manifestations (Hilbert et al. 2014). This theme differs from the previous theme of advice since the commenters are not actively trying to push the creator into action. For example, the aforementioned example *if only you ate more vegetables* only poses a suppositional statement whereas the same statement as advice would urge the creator to eat more vegetables.

The last theme, humor, is present in the data in various ways. Even though one of the comment categories utilized humor in the neutral sense in the form of jokes and punchlines, this theme looks at aspects of humor that have been rooted in weight bias. For example, *you're only eating three burgers is this a cut* refers to making fun of the creator eating less but still, in their eyes, not less enough. Another comment: *they can balance all those plates but not lose weight* pokes fun of the creator's skills and implies the creator is not skilled enough to partake in health transformations. Lastly, a self-deprecating joke: *I wish he liked me how you like burgers* turns derogatory in nature since it makes fun of the creator's supposed excessive desire for food. Humor as well is a well-documented form of weight bias and earlier research suggests that especially derogatory content, such as the previous examples, is popular when it comes to weight related discourse (So et al. 2016).

The previous themes of advice, self-responsibility and humor were not present in the normative bodied creators' comments. In contrast, the normative bodied creator comments exhibited different kinds of themes such as disbelief, performance admiration, and inappropriate remarks. Disbelief in this sense refers to an audience reaction that is a refusal to believe that the action, in this case eating food, actually occurred. This is an implication of weight bias, since it is based

on an assumption of specific food items occurring alongside specific body manifestations. For example, the data was filled with comments such as: *I need an unedited video, you're not eating, this is not real*.

Disbelief was contrasted with the theme of performance admiration which gives credit to both the way the action of eating occurs but also to how the creator remains a specific size. Performance admiration is a form of weight bias since it is so prevalent in normative bodied creator comments but close to nonexistent in larger than normative bodied creator comments only giving credit for the action when a creator fits the social weight norm. Examples of these kinds of comments are: *love love love how you eat, wow sweetheart you sure can down all that impressively, if my future partner is not like this I don't want them.*

Lastly on the final theme, as mentioned before, an interesting feature of this data set was the occurrence of recurrent inappropriate remarks that were aimed at the normative bodied male creator. Earlier research shows that females generally, both normative bodied and not, get more sexually natured messaging online (Wotanis & McMillan 2023, Wanniarachchi et al. 2023). Some of the comments received by @stevensushi included notions such as: *I'm so close* and *you came on camera*. His sexuality was also questioned with: *fully believe you're gay*. Consequently, these inappropriate remarks may as well be due to discrimination based on his questioned sexuality. Research shows that perceived features of femininity in men are linked to increased negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Falomir-Pichastor 2019). Thus, acting outside the heterosexual norm can increase hostility towards the content creator. The further dimensions of the results, both the thematic and the quantitative content analysis, are discussed in the next section.

7 Discussion

The results collected from conducting a content analysis and a thematic analysis on the data set give a multifaceted picture of weight bias in the real-life concrete scenario of content creation online. This section discusses the results in three different ways. First, the way weight and body size are represented in the results is discussed in 7.1. Then, the more specific notion of hate speech and what constitutes body size influenced hostile speech is discussed in 7.2. before moving onto the intricate textual implications of weight bias that are both formed by our surrounding societies and further maintaining social stigmatization. But first, a closer look is taken at the original research questions and the hypotheses stated in section 5.

The research questions for this study were:

1) *What kinds of differences can be found in the sentiment used in the comments received by larger bodied creators compared to normative bodied creators?*

2) *How does gender play a role in weight bias manifestations in the comments?*

3) *Which themes tend to arise when spoken about larger than normative bodies and can these be associated with weight bias?*

The first research question asked about the differences in sentiments between the comments of larger than normative and normative bodied creators. The corresponding hypothesis assumed that larger than normative creators would receive more hostile comments directed at their physical appearance or character than normative bodied creators. The results show that this is accurate in this data set. Larger than normative bodied creators received 9 percentage points more critical/hostile comments on their personality or behavior and five times more critical/hostile comments on their appearance than normative bodied creators. The assumption followed earlier research which saw online hostility as a form of weight bias. Criticizing the personality or behavior of a larger than normative creator engaging in a similar act of performative eating as normative bodied creators implies that one size is more allowed to execute said action. Furthermore, criticizing their appearance brings up notions of attractiveness in society and the value based on it, especially in the sense of privilege held by people conforming to social norms.

The second research question moved onto looking at gender-based differences of weight bias in the data set. It was hypothesized that female creators would receive more hostile comments related to their physical appearance or character than male creators. This hypothesis is not accurate in the current data set as is but presents itself in a more varied composition. Female creators in general received far more supportive comments than male creators. When looking at differences between individual creators, it was seen that only the normative bodied female creator enjoyed the prevalence of supportive comments while the larger than normative female creator suffered as much if not more criticality than the male creators. This is in line with previous research that states that female weight stigmatization can be more aggressive than male stigmatization (De Brún et al. 2013). In addition to this, this result follows in the footprints of Wotanis and McMillan (2014) who found that if you follow social gender norms, such as the thin ideal, you will receive less hostile speech online.

Lastly, the third research question asked what kinds of themes arise in the comments and whether or not they could be associated with weight bias. The hypothesis was that the themes would emphasize personal responsibility and showcase objectification. Based on this data set, it can be stated that the themes do construct a narrative of personal responsibility as the root cause of size manifestations. This maintains the societal notion that weight, and especially excessive weight is always the individual's own choice rather than an outcome of various personal and social factors. Both the themes advice and self-responsibility & disappointment add to this narrative. The recurrent theme of humor also adds to the objectification of larger individuals by placing them as the punchline and thus further contributing to weight stigmatization. In this sense, the creators are seen through humor rather than as complex individuals and the humorous nature of these comments decreases the larger creators' power and voice in the online space.

7.1   Representations of Size

The way body size and weight are represented is important for the ways we construct our ideas of different sizes in society. Especially in the digital age, online representations of size form our thinking of norm-based behavior online. This can cause issues in the long run if the content consumer consistently sees only one kind of representation. Online spaces have been linked to body dissatisfaction and performative lifestyle content can escalate these issues and lead to attempts to change to conform to the visible representation seen online.

The representation of size in this data set paints a picture of weight determining how acceptable performative eating is. For the normative bodied content creators, the act is celebrated through supportive statements such as content compliments which work as a further endorsement for the subject matter. Even neutral statements and questions imply that there is demand for further content and interest in the act. This works as an enabler and privilege that norm conforming content creators can use for their own advantage. The larger creators face criticism for their behavior most likely since that behavior is assumed to have led to their physical form. This notion is further emphasized by the disbelief aimed at normative bodied creators eating large amounts of energy dense food such as fast food and remaining a specific body size. Repeatedly, weight is aligned with the idea of self-responsibility which further preserves the notion that weight is something that is done by yourself to yourself.

Rather than letting weight bias go undetected, the commenters utilized a metacommentary strategy, calling out the implicit weight bias such as *these comments would be different if they gained some weight.* As discussed earlier, the effects of this are twofold, the metacommentary is done both in support of the larger creator and it also places some responsibility on the normative bodied creator. In terms of size representations however, this kind of commentary can be seen as further establishing the effects of size on the content creator as they are stated out loud in the comments. This unsolicited defense technique can alienate the larger creators and objectify them much like in the similar way the unsolicited lifestyle advice does, by representing a larger size to be something that needs to be defended, further contributing to the objectification faced by larger than normative content creators.

7.2   Weight-Based Hate Speech

The general underlying assumption of weight bias online deals with the notion of hate speech and how it presents itself in a weight bias environment. Hate speech and online hostility can be either direct or indirect, either implicit or explicit, which sometimes makes hate speech detection rather challenging. Now, the benefit of using Wotanis' and McMillan's hate speech categorization model (2014) is that there are direct results that show the criticality and hostility present in the creator comments.   The results implied that both the male content creators and the female larger than normative creator faced a majority of hostile comments which is

concerning but not surprising since it has been well-documented in previous research how verbal attacks are prevalent in both male and female discourses online (Kienpointner 2019).

There are multiple kinds of hostile speech present in this data set. Some of it is aggressive and easy to recognize as hostile speech, such as the aforementioned inappropriate remarks in @stevensushi's comments which are sexual in nature. However, the criticality he faced in his comments seemed to emphasize how the audience perceived him as annoying or embarrassing due to his actions. The aggressiveness of the hostile speech seems to increase in the larger than normative creator comments since both @realnikocadoavocado and @shirinjka received comments that linked their lifestyles to disease and ultimately fatality with comments such as *they got diabetes* and *their heart is gonna attack them eventually*. Especially @realnikocadoavocado's comments were extremely hostile, constantly making fun of his lifestyle, behavior and physical appearance with comments such as *he is beyond help, nonexistent summer body* and *I think he regrets what he has done to himself*. It could be due to the commenting culture that exists on his channel quite possibly because his content is provocative in nature. When compared to @shirinjka, her received hostility constantly poked fun at her eating habits and appearance even if her content does not aim to be provocative. Some of her hostile comments include *we know you like food no need to smile*, *she looks 50* and *did you forget your salad?* This result showcases the problematic differences of gender at play in weight bias manifestations. Furthermore, the criticality emphasis on creator appearance, which was a recurring feature of larger than normative criticality, seems to be increasingly harmful for females due to the social value that is placed on normative female attractiveness. This lack thereof could also explain why she received such a large amount of hostility in the data set.

Online hostility raises questions of intent and awareness. The large number of comments on each creator post could imply that there is a marginal opportunity that the content creator themselves will notice a specific comment. The commenter could enter a state of a parasocial relationship, where they use their time to try and connect with the creator, but they must be aware of the low probability at play. Thus, we could argue that hate speech also exists to fulfill another kind of social function. Wilson (2019) suggests that one of the functions of hate speech is to uphold norms and silence dissent. In this case, it could be argued that online hostility functions as a way to maintain the social acceptability of weight bias. This hostility encountered

by larger than normative individuals online could lead to less of these creators existing in online spaces and thus, less diverse representation online in general.

7.3   Implications of Weight Bias

Lastly, even though explicit and aggressive hostile speech is clearly a harmful effect of weight bias, it is also important to look at the intricate details that constitute weight bias thinking and its textual representation in online comments. Most of the comments collected in this data set that were perceived as critical, did not explicitly state weight using terminology that commonly occurs in weight-related discourse such as *fat*, *obese*, *chubby*, or *overweight*. Rather, weight bias was implied by other word or topic choices and the way things were said. For example, the way larger creators were instructed to eat more vegetables implies that the commenter wants them to lose weight. The notion of losing weight could be contested in general because firstly, the creators' choices regarding their own body are theirs to execute and most likely have no effect on the commenter's life and secondly, the commenter has no knowledge about the health status of the comment receiver. Alongside losing weight, the notion of greed was present in the comments as well both in the ways commenters implied the content creators to be incapable of sharing: *they said they were gonna share but none of that is for their friends* and in the way the commenters implied the larger creators to be incapable of containing themselves around food: *moth to a flame, calm down it's all yours*. Greed can be associated with mental imagery of weight because it traces back to having the self-responsibility to maintain a normative weight. Even if the neutral-coded commentary is looked at, there can be implications of weight bias: *let's live healthy*. The constant recurrence of the topic of health and what is healthy can also be seen as an implication of weight bias as well as the ongoing attempts to offer unsolicited advice to reach vague health goals.

Implications of weight bias are constantly present in this data set. They can be seen in the way the larger creators' comments are categorized, content is emphasized over character in the positive comment manifestations and character is attacked in the critical comments, the drastic differences between the two female creators where one receives praise for their actions and the other hostility, and in the way the larger creators are talked about instead of talked to which upholds aspects of objectification. Weight bias is, after all, rooted in the mindsets of most of us due to the representation of discourse we see around us, and its detection needs to be a conscious

cognitive process in all of us. Only through recognizing these harmful patterns, can we move into a more holistic view of weight and body size in general.

8   Conclusion

This thesis set out to find implications of weight bias in the comments of larger than normative and normative bodied mukbang creators on the short form video app TikTok. This was done by collecting a data set of 600 comments from four online content creators and categorizing the comments based on the Wotanis & McMillan's (2014) hate speech categorization model. The data was first analyzed using a quantitative content analysis, where the number and percentual frequency of coded comments was compared in relation to body size and gender. The data was then analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis to look at recurring themes that might contribute to the implications of weight bias online. The research questions guiding this thesis were: how the comment sentiments differed between the creators representing different body sizes, how did gender have an effect on the perceived weight bias, and what kinds of themes could be found from the data set and could they be associated with weight bias.

The results showed that there were differences between body size and gender in the data set. Both the larger than normative creators and the normative male creator received a majority of hostile comments while the normative female creator was widely supported in her comment section. Furthermore, both the larger creators received more critical/hostile comments in the personal character related categories, personality or behavior and appearance, than their normative counterparts. The normative bodied male creator received more critical/hostile comments aimed at his content than the larger than normative creators which further emphasized the divide between online hostility aimed at individual characteristics and content which can be seen as a more neutral target. The results followed earlier research that stated the high prevalence of online hostile speech towards men and the level of aggression that weight bias hostility can take when it comes to women by showcasing the drastic differences between the female creators' comments. There was, however, an anomaly in the results which was not in accordance with earlier research, the normative male creator, instead of the female creators, receiving inappropriate sexual remarks, which raises interesting questions about the perceived femininity and heteronormative representations online.

Weight bias could also be detected in the thematic analysis, as the size-specific themes emphasized personal responsibility and humor for the larger creators and performance admiration and disbelief at the performative eating for the normative creators. As discussed, these themes contribute to representations of weight that see weight manifestations as an

individual choice rather than a set of complex physiological and social factors, some of which are outside of the individual's command. The humor-based approach, found in the larger than normative creator comments, also contributes to the weight-based objectification faced by larger than normative individuals. Lastly, one of the detected themes, meta commentary, implies that weight bias does not exist in online communication undetected but rather some online content consumers protest it through the mode of exposure.

The insight gained from this thesis is valuable for weight bias research. Not only did it contribute to the existing research by reaffirming the results of previous studies and showcasing how prevalent weight bias can be in everyday situations, but it also diversified the research field by focusing on a new social media platform, TikTok, and weight bias expressions in visual based short form videos. The use of a social media phenomenon, mukbang, and food as a framing device also gave information on social media cultures and especially how approachable these cultures are for larger content creators. The results also raised new points about different kinds of representations online with discussion on weight and heteronormative representations. Furthermore, the results of this thesis implied that the atmosphere on social media could be changing as weight bias is explicitly stated in the creator comments which could be beneficial for the larger than normative creators. This kind of research and the results could be used for the development and implementation of hate speech detection models on social media in the future.

Based on this study, the need for future weight bias research is evident. This research scratched the surface of a wide phenomenon and did so with limited data due to the scope of the thesis. In a data set comprised of four creators, each representing a different kind of comparable variable, even one creator can skew the results which in a way can be noted in this research in the larger than normative male creator results which differed from the rest for example on how many comments were omitted from the final analysis. Furthermore, the inappropriate sexual remarks faced by the normative bodied male creator in this data set are interesting in terms of online representation, but one creator is not enough to look at systematic harassment that occurs online. Instead, in the future, natural language processing tools could be used in a wider capacity to detect and categorize online hostility. This process is slow, however, due to the different privacy and copyright mechanisms used by social media companies.

Lastly, weight bias research in general does seem to have the scope and motivation to further expose these issues and reduce stigmatization in the future. This is evident from the amount of research done in recent years and the efforts to combat weight bias by different organizations such as the World Obesity Federation and Fitness Professionals Against Weight Stigma. Even the Finnish Government supported weight bias research in 2023 in a joint research project with the Finnish Heart Association, the University of Jyväskylä, and The Eating Disorder Association of Finland (Policy Brief 2023:3). After all, at the heart of all weight bias research is the need to increase the information and research supply and, in the end, decrease bias and its harmful effects for anyone suffering from weight-based stigmatization.

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Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

Tämä pro-gradu -tutkielma käsittelee painostigman ilmentymiä sosiaalisen median alusta TikTokissa. Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat mukbang-videosisältöä alustalle tuottavat sisällöntuottajat ja heidän saamat kommenttinsa. Painostigmalla viitataan erilaisiin asenteisiin ja uskomuksiin, jotka kohdistuvat yksilöihin heidän kehonkokonsa tai painonsa perusteella ja joilla voi olla haitallisia vaikutuksia yksilön hyvinvointiin ja mahdollisuuksiin elämässä. Näitä haitallisia piirteitä voivat olla muun muassa sosiaaliset haasteet, terveydenhuollon palveluiden riittämättömyys tai tyytymättömyys omaan kehoonsa (Salas et al 2019), mitkä voivat aiheuttaa niin fyysistä kuin psyykkistäkin oireilua.

Painostigma itsessään on mielenkiintoinen stigman muoto, sillä vaikka stigmatisointi nähdään yleisesti haitallisena ilmiönä, painostigma koetaan positiivisena ja hyväksyttynä stigman muotona, sillä nähdään, että sillä olisi kansanterveyttä edistävä vaikutus (Puhl & Heuer 210). Tämä johtuu siitä, että korkeampi paino yleisesti liitetään erilaisten terveysongelmien ilmentymiseen. Tästä syystä painostigma voi olla erityisen haitallinen, sillä terveys ja ihmiselle sopiva paino nähdään hyvin yksipuolisen muotin kautta. Yhteiskunnassa vallalla oleva laihdutuskulttuuri myös yleisesti ihannoi laihuutta ja sosiaalisesti kannustaa ihmisiä laihduttamaan yhteiskunnan normien mukaisesti samalla ylläpitäen lihavuuden pelkoa ja täten myös painostigmaa (Jovanovski & Jaeger 2022). Laihdutuskulttuuri viittaa siis erilaisiin uskomuksiin ruoasta sekä syömisestä ja kannustaa kehojen hierarkiaan.

Tässä tutkielmassa painostigman ilmentymiä havainnoidaan neljän TikTok-sisällöntuottajan saamista kommenteista. Ruoka kehystää tämän tutkielman tutkimuskohdetta ja tällä pyritäänkin välttämään erilaisten somekuplien asennoitumista vääristävä vaikutus. Siksi kaikki tarkasteltavat sisällöntuottajat tuottavat mukbang-videoita kanavalleen. Mukbang on alun perin Etelä-Koreasta lähtöisin oleva sosiaalisen median ilmiö, jossa sisällöntuottajat syövät suuria määrä energiatiheää eli esimerkiksi rasvaista tai sokerista, ruokaa kameran edessä (Strand & Gustafsson 2020). Monet mukbang-tuottajat suoratoistavat syömistään reaaliaikaisesti mutta kaikki tämän tutkielman tarkasteltavat sisällöntuottajat julkaisevat pysyviä mukbang-videoita kanavalleen, josta videoita voi katsella mihin aikaan tahansa.

Painostigmaa havainnoidaan tarkastelemalla normatiivisen kehon koon ihannetta eli kaksi valituista neljästä sisällöntuottajasta edustaa normatiivista kehon mallia ja kaksi sisällöntuottajaa edustaa normatiivista suuremman kehon mallia. Näiden sisällöntuottajien saamia kommentteja verrataan toisiinsa ja etsitään painostigman erilaisia ilmenemismuotoja määrällisen sisältöanalyysin sekä laadullisen teemoittelun eli teema-analyysin keinoin. Koska aiempi tutkimus aiheesta osoittaa, että painostigma ja sen ilmentymät ovat sukupuolittunut ilmiö (Jeon et al. 2018; Hussin et al. 2011) tämä otetaan myös tutkielmassa huomioon siten, että sekä normatiivisen että normatiivista suuremman kehon ilmentymiä edustavat sekä naispuoliset että miespuoliset sisällöntuottajat. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan siis nimimerkillä @stevensushi Tiktokiin tuottavaa miespuolista normatiivisen kehon omaavaa sisällöntuottajaa, merkillä @realnikocadoavocado alustalle tuottavaa miespuolista normatiivista suuremman kehon omaavaa sisällöntuottajaa, nimellä @keilapacheco alustalle tuottavaa naispuolista normatiivisen kehon omaavaa tuottajaa sekä nimimerkillä @shirinjka alustalle tuottavaa naispuolista normatiivista suuremman kehon omaavaa sisällöntuottajaa.

Sosiaalinen media on mullistanut tavan, jolla me kommunikoimme toistemme kanssa ja siksi sosiaalista mediaa ja sen erilaisia ilmiöitä tutkitaankin nykypäivänä runsaasti. Erityisesti videopohjaiset alustat ovat kasvattaneet suosiotaan ja lyhyisiin videoihin keskittyvä TikTok olikin Covid-19 pandemia-ajan menestys (Quiroz 2020), joka oli vuosien 2019 ja 2020 ladatuin sovellus (Jain & Arakkal 2022; Talarico 2021). Videopohjaisella alustalla visuaalisen moodin merkitys korostuu ja siksi TikTok onkin painostigmatutkimukselle hyvin hedelmällinen alusta verrattuna muihin sosiaalisen median alustoihin, kuten X tai Reddit, jotka keskittyvät tekstipohjaiseen ilmaisuun. Toisaalta myös haitalliset ilmiöt korostuvat sosiaalisessa mediassa ja yksi lähivuosien huolestuttavimmista ilmiöistä onkin vihapuheen kasvu verkossa erityisesti koska vihapuhe kohdistuu usein vähemmistöryhmiin (Castano-Pulgarín et al. 2021). Eri sosiaalisen median alustat ovatkin yrittäneet luoda keinoja kitkeä vihapuhetta erilaisten vihapuheen tunnistusmallien tai yksittäiseen käyttäjään kohdistuvien keinojen kautta. On tutkittu esimerkiksi sitä, miten jo kommentoinnin mahdollistaminen voi osaltaan lisätä vihamielistä puhetta (Asker & Dinas 2019). Myös toimien kuten reflektoinnin mahdollistaminen sekä empaattisen puheen korostaminen voivat osaltaan vähentää vihapuheen ilmentymiä (Katsaros et al. 2021; Hangartner et al. 2021). Tällaiset menetelmät vihapuheen tunnistamiseksi ja vähentämiseksi eivät ole kuitenkaan yleisesti käytössä monissa sosiaalisen median alustoissa.

Yleisesti ottaen lihavien ihmisten kuvaukset perinteisessä mediassa on nähty haitallisina ja painostigmaa lisäävinä. Yleensä lihava ihminen kuvataan hänen kehon kokoaan korostaen ja esimerkiksi leikaten hänen kasvonsa kuvaruudun ulkopuolelle (Harjunen & Koivumäki, 2023). Tämä osaltaan lisää lihavien ihmisten kokemaa esineellistämistä. Myös puhe heidän ympärillään mediassa usein korostaa yksilön vastuuta ja tahdonvoiman puutetta kehon muokkaukseen, mikä sivuuttaa täysin sosiaaliset, biologiset ja taloudelliset tekijät, jotka vaikuttavat painoilmentymiin (Salas et al 2017) kuten terveellisen ruoan saatavuus sekä terveydenhuollon palveluiden laatu. Sosiaalisen median osalta tilanne voi olla vielä huolestuttavampi, sillä yksityiskäyttäjien luoma sisältö voi vaikuttaa aidommalta kuin perinteisen median sisältö, mikä voi vaikuttaa siihen, miten sisältöä kuluttavat yksilöt sisäistävät julkaisun informaation (Van Der Bend et al. 2023). Tämä voi johtaa esimerkiksi siihen, millaisena käyttäjät näkevät normatiivisen ulkomuodon erilaisten sosiaalisessa mediassa esillä olevien ulkonäön piirteiden mukaan. Sosiaalinen media on aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa linkitetty muun muassa käyttäjien itsetunnon alenemiseen, tyytymättömyyteen omasta kehostaan sekä häiriöityneen syömiskäyttäytymisen lisääntymiseen (Jiotsa et al. 2021; Herrick et al. 2020; Pryde & Prichard 2022). Siksi onkin tärkeää, että käyttäjät näkevät sosiaalisessa mediassa monenlaisia kehoja ja ulkonäön muotoja.

Tämä tutkielma antaa oman osuutensa siis niin painostigman tutkimiseen kuin sosiaalisen median ja erityisesti vihapuheen tutkimiseenkin. Tämä tutkielma pyrkiikin vastaamaan kolmeen tutkimuskysymykseen, jotka ovat:

1) Millaisia eroja asennoitumisen suhteen löytyy normatiivista suurempien sisällöntuottajien kommenteista verrattuna normatiivisen kokoisiin sisällöntuottajiin?
2) Miten sukupuoli vaikuttaa painostigman ilmentymiseen sisällöntuottajien saamissa kommenteissa?
3) Millaisia teemoja voidaan muodostaa normatiivista suuremmista sisällöntuottajista puhuttaessa ja voivatko nämä teemat liittyä painostigmaan?

Nämä tutkimuskysymykset pyrkivät antamaan kokonaisvaltaisen kuvauksen painostigman ilmentymisestä sisällöntuottajien saamissa kommenteissa. Tämän tutkielman hypoteesit olettavat, että sekä normatiivista suuremmat sisällöntuottajat, että naispuoliset sisällöntuottajat saavat enemmän kriittisiä kommentteja, jotka on kohdennettu heidän ulkomuotoonsa tai luonteeseensa. Teemoittelun osalta hypoteesi olettaa, että muodostuvissa teemoissa korostetaan yksilönvastuuta ja esineellistämistä.

Materiaalien osalta tutkielmaa varten kerättiin 600 kommenttia aiemmin mainittujen sisällöntuottajien @stevensushi, @realnikocadoavocado, @keilapacheco ja @shirinjka kommenttikentistä. Jokaiselta sisällöntuottajalta kerättiin 150 kommenttia, 50 jokaisen kolmesta uusimmasta mukbang-videosta. Eli kokonaisuudessaan tarkastelussa oli 12 videota. Kommentit kategorisoitiin vihapuheen kategorisointimallin (Wotanis ja McMillan 2014) mukaisesti ja tämän prosessin jälkeen jäljellä oli 580 kommenttia eli 20 kommenttia poistettiin datasta, sillä niiden sanomaa ei voitu ymmärtää tai ne määriteltiin roskapostiksi.

Menetelmän puolesta tämä tutkielma käyttää sekä määrällisiä, että laadullisia menetelmiä. Määrällinen sisällönanalyysi valikoitui ensimmäiseksi menetelmäksi, sillä sisällönanalyysi on suosittu tapa tutkia tekstiä merkityksen ja kontekstin osalta (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Tämä tutkielma käyttää Wotaniksen ja McMillanin (2014) kehittelemää vihapuheen kategorisointimallia, jossa kommentit jaotellaan niiden *kannustavan* tai *kriittisen* asennoitumisen mukaisesti. Kolmantena kategoriana on *analyysista poistetut kommentit*, jotka jaotellaan *roskapostiksi* tai *kategorisoimattomaksi.* Sekä kannustavassa, että kriittisessä kategoriassa on alakategoriat: *sisältöön suuntautuva*, *luonteeseen tai käyttäytymiseen suuntautuva*, ja *ulkonäköön suuntautuva*. Tämän lisäksi kriittisessä kategoriassa on alakategoria *epäasiallinen huomautus: seksistinen tai rasistinen*. Tässä tutkielmassa kategorisointimallia muokattiin hieman lisäämällä *neutraali* kategoria, johon sisältyvät *neutraali huomautus tai kysymys videon sisällöstä* sekä *videon käyttäminen vitsailuun*. Myös kannustavaan kategoriaan lisättiin alakategoria *yleinen kannustava huomautus*, sillä analyysivaiheessa sille huomattiin tarve.

Sisällönanalyysin jälkeen data analysoitiin laadullisesti teemoittelun keinoin, jossa merkityksiä löydetään datassa toistuvista merkityskaavoista. Teeman muodostuksessa tärkeintä oli siis merkitysyksikön toisto ja tämän yksikön merkityksellisyys tutkielman aiheeseen liittyen. Yksittäisen teeman ei tarvinnut toistua jokaisen sisällöntuottajan tai jokaisen tiettyä muuttujaa edustavan sisällöntuottajan kommenteissa vaan ollakseen merkityksellinen sen tuli olla toistuva. Teemoittelun apuna käytettiin aiempaa tutkimustietoa painostigman ilmentymistä.

Eettisyys on isossa osassa, kun tutkitaan stigmatisoitunutta ilmiötä ja erityisesti kun tutkimusmateriaalina on sosiaalisesta mediasta kerätty aineisto. Tutkielman kirjoittajan on hyvä varmistaa, ettei tutkielma itsessään lisää stigman haitallisia vaikutuksia yhteiskunnassa. Sosiaalinen media voi myös aiheuttaa haasteita, sillä vaikka sieltä kerätty materiaali olisi

julkisesti saatavilla, voi se olla joko itse alustan tai sisällöntuottajan tekijänoikeuden alainen. Myös esimerkiksi kommentteja tutkiessa olisi hyvä varmistaa, ettei yksittäisiä kommentoijia voi tunnistaa tutkielmasta. Tässä tutkielmassa käytettiin Ravn ym. (2019) lähestymistapaa, jossa tärkeää oli sisällöntuottajan informointi sekä kommenttien anonymisointi. Jokaiselle sisällöntuottajalle lähetettiin viesti tutkielman toteuttamisesta ja annettiin mahdollisuus jättäytyä pois. Kommenttien anonymisoinnin osalta taas tutkielmassa varmistettiin, ettei yksittäisiä datassa olevia kommentteja käytetty tutkielmassa vaan, jos ilmiöstä kaivattiin esimerkkiä, se oli pro-gradu -tutkielman kirjoittajan keinotekoisesti luoma olemassa olevan aineiston pohjalta.

Analyysin tulokset osoittavat, että aineistossa esiintyy painostigmaa molemmat muuttujat huomioon ottaen. Sekä molemmat miespuoliset sisällöntuottajat että normatiivista suurempi naispuolinen sisällöntuottaja saivat kokonaisuudessaan valtaosan kriittisiä kommentteja. Naispuolinen normatiivista kehoa edustava sisällöntuottaja taas sai valtaosan kannustavia kommentteja. Normatiivista suurempaa miespuolista sisällöntuottajaa edustanut @realnikocadoavocado sai kaikista vähiten kannustavia kommentteja ja toisaalta hän myös sai kaikista eniten neutraaleja kommentteja. Yleisesti ottaen normatiivista suuremmat sisällöntuottajat saivat enemmän kriittisiä kommentteja ja vähemmän kannustavia kommentteja kuin normatiivista kehoa edustaneet sisällöntuottajat. Kun muuttuja vaihdettiin sukupuoleksi, tulokset kertoivat, että naispuoliset sisällöntuottajat saivat enemmän kannustavia kommentteja kuin miespuoliset sisällöntuottajat. Kun yksittäisiä sisällöntuottajien tuloksia tarkasteltiin, kävi kuitenkin ilmi, että erot naispuolisten sisällöntuottajien tuloksissa olivat suuria.

Teemoittelu nosti datasta esiin kaksi yleisteemaa, *ruoan arvostus* ja *metakommentointi*, jotka olivat läsnä kaikkien sisällöntuottajien kommenteissa, kolme normatiivista suurempien sisällöntuottajien teemaa, *neuvon anto*, *yksilönvastuu ja pettymys* sekä *huumori* ja kolme normatiivista kehoa edustavien sisällöntuottajien teemaa *epäusko*, *suorituksen ihailu* ja *epäasialliset huomautukset*. Aineistosta nousevat teemat osaltaan noudattelivat aiempaa tutkimusta, joka näkee esimerkiksi yksilönvastuun ja pyytämättömien neuvojen annon painostigman muotona. Huumorin laajuus osaltaan myös korosti painostigmaa kokevien esineellistämistä. Myös kontrasti teemojen välillä osoitti painostigmaa. Normatiivista kehoa edustavien sisällöntuottajien käytöstä ihailtiin, kun suurempia sisällöntuottajia tuomittiin. Epäasiallisia huomautuksia löytyi vain @stevensushi kommenteista, mikä oli mielenkiintoista, sillä yleensä naispuoliset sisällöntuottajat kärsivät enemmän tämän tyyppisistä huomautuksista

(Wotanis & McMillan 2023). Tuottajan @stevensushi saamien kommenttien läheisempi tarkastelu kuitenkin osoittaa, että ne voivat johtua hänen esiintymisestään, joka on heteronormatiivisten normien ulkopuolella, mikä osaltaan nostaa kiinnostavan pointin muiden vähemmistöryhmien esiintymisestä sosiaalisessa mediassa.

Tulokset noudattelivat aiempaa tutkimusta ja esittivät kehon koon yksilön vastuuta korostavana asiana. Kommenteissa muodostunut käsitys kehosta myös vaikuttaa siihen, miten sallittua tietynlainen somekäyttäytyminen on ja toisaalta kenellä on mahdollisuudet menestyä tietyn ilmiön puitteissa. Kommenttien metakommentointi myös osoittaa, miten painostigmasta kärsivien puolustus on nykyajan somekulttuurin ilmiö ja se voi osaltaan olla hyödyllistä, sillä se tekee näkyväksi haitalliset yhteiskunnan rakenteet mutta toisaalta voi olla myös haitallinen, sillä se asettaa normatiivista suuremmat yksilöt uhrin asemaan ja näin ollen toiseuttaa heidän identiteettinsä ja tekee valta-asetelmasta epätasapuolisen.

Vihapuheen osalta normatiivista suurempien sisällöntuottajien kommenteissa korostui puheen aggressiivisuus. Kommenteista kävi ilmi esimerkiksi toistuva viittaus sairauksiin tai jopa kuolemaan. Tässä suhteessa myös sisällöntuottajien performatiivinen luonne tuotiin esiin, @realnikocadoavocado tuottaa usein videoita provosoivalla tyylillä, jolloin myös kommenttien luonne voi saada tästä vaikutteita. Kommenttien aggressiivisuus ei kuitenkaan muuttunut @shirinjka tarkastellessa, mikä osoittaa ilmiön sukupuolittuneisuuden, sillä hänen tyylinsä ei ole lainkaan provosoiva. Myös vihapuheen kohdistuminen hänen ulkonäköönsä voi olla erityisen ongelmallinen, sillä ulkonäön arvo korostuu enemmän naispuolisten yhteiskunnallisissa ulottuvuuksissa.

Kaiken kaikkiaan on tärkeä huomata, miten painostigma ei useinkaan tule esiin painoon liittyvissä sanoissa kuten *fat* tai *obese* vaan siinä, miten painosta ja erilaisista kehoista puhutaan. Terveyden jatkuva korostaminen nähdään usein painostigman osana, sillä usein yksilön terveydentilaa ei voi tietää pelkästään hänen ulkomuotonsa perusteella. Myös neuvojen anto antaa kuvan siitä, että henkilö tietää suurempikokoista ihmistä paremmin, mitä hänen keholleen tulisi tehdä. Myös kommenttien asennoituminen ja kohde viestivät siitä, miten painostigma ilmentyy yhteiskunnassa, kannustavat kommentit keskittyivät sisältöön, kun taas kriittiset kommentit keskittyivät henkilöön itseensä. Suuri ero naispuolisten sisällöntuottajien välillä viestii myös siitä, miten paljon vahvempaa tai haitallisempaa painostigma voi olla naisia kohtaan.

Tulevaisuudessa painostigmaa tulisi tutkia lisää, sillä se on yhteiskunnallisesti merkittävä ongelma. Tämä tutkielma käsitteli vain neljää eri muuttujia edustavaa sisällöntuottajaa, jolloin yksittäinenkin sisällöntuottaja voi vääristää tuloksia johonkin suuntaan. Suurempi aineisto voisikin tuottaa tutkimustuloksia, joita voitaisiin käyttää yhteiskunnallisten uudistusten suunnitteluun tai erilaisten vihapuhetunnistusmenetelmien kehittelyyn sosiaalisessa mediassa. Painostigmaa on kuitenkin tutkittu lähivuosina runsaasti, joten tulevaisuuden näkymät stigmatisoinnin vähentämiseen sekä hyvinvoinnin lisäämiseen ovat lupaavat. Sillä tavalla voimme tehdä yksilöistämme hyvinvoivempia sekä yhteiskunnastamme paremman paikan elää.